

BEYOND THE TEXT:  
A STUDY OF ONLINE COMMUNICATION WITHIN SLASH COMMUNITY IN  
CHINA

A Thesis by

Congyao Liu

Bachelor of Arts, Beijing Normal University, 2012

Submitted to the Department of Anthropology  
and the faculty of the Graduate School of  
Wichita State University  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

May 2017

© Copyright 2017 by Congyao Liu

All Rights Reserved

BEYOND THE TEXT:  
A STUDY OF ONLINE COMMUNICATION WITHIN SLASH COMMUNITY IN  
CHINA

The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in anthropology.

---

Peer Moore-Jansen, Committee Chair

---

David Hughes, Committee Member

---

Jodie Simon, Committee Member

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Peer Moore-Jansen, for his constant guidance and support. I also want to thank the members of my committee, David Hughes, who shows more patience than I deserve, and Jodie Simon, a magic woman who edited this thing in a day (she is probably born to save the world). Thanks are also due to my informants from Chinese slash community. Without their generous participation, this paper would never be completed.

## ABSTRACT

This research explores the online communication within slash fandom community in China. Data collecting of daily practices covers SNS using, instant chat, and participation on an anonymous forum. Analysis of the data shows how did Chinese slash community establish through these practices on different online platforms. In this process, its capital system based on contribution has been developed, resisted, and revised. Chinese slash girls acquire social connections, and experience of power by participant in this system. Under the circumstance of current China, such experience might carry more importance than the text of slash fandom does.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 Introduction .....	1
1.2 Basic Terms.....	2
1.3 Theoretical Framework .....	3
2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	7
2.1 Chinese fandom culture.....	7
2.2 Social networking sites and virtual community .....	9
2.3 Chinese women’s studies .....	10
3. METHODOLOGY .....	12
3.1 Sites .....	12
3.2 Participant Observation .....	13
3.3 Questionnaire Survey .....	14
3.4 Interviews .....	14
3.5 Screenshots and Chatlogs.....	15
3.6 Data Analysis .....	16
4. MATERIALS.....	17
4.1 Participants.....	17
4.2 Fandom Activities .....	20
5. DISCUSSIONS.....	24
5.1 From forums to SNS: a shift in the community .....	24
5.2 The “Circle”: Capital and Self-presentation.....	31
5.2.1 A Capital System Based on Community Contribution.....	31
5.2.2. Social Networks Among Slash Girls .....	33
5.2.3 A Case Study: A Sampan .....	40
5.2.4 Power and Status: “Dada” Vs. “Xiaotouming” .....	45
5.2.5 “I am agrestal.” .....	49

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

Chapter	Page
5.2.6 Introspection: From Weibo to LOFTER .....	51
5.3 Anonymous BBS Vs. SNS: Status, and Power of Discourse.....	53
5.3.1 XIANQING: A Revolt to the “Contribution-Status” Capital System .....	53
5.3.2 Daijiezou: Power of Discourse in Anonymous Environment .....	56
5.3.3 Proof of Fan Identity.....	56
5.3.4 Constant Majia: Limited Identity, and Authority Based on It.....	59
5.3.5 “Baifumei” in XIANQING: Increasing Influence from Real World and Classes .....	61
5.3.6 Division of fields: The things people seek .....	63
5.4 Feminism of Slash Community, in Current China.....	66
5.4.1 Chinese women today: Higher education, Fewer political participation.....	66
5.4.2 Is Slash Fandom Feminism?.....	67
5.5 Conclusions .....	70
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	73

## LIST OF GRAPHS

Graph	Page
4-1 Sex/Gender Percentage.....	18
4-2 Age Distribution .....	18
4-3 Highest Acquired Degree .....	19
4-4 Occupation.....	19
5-1 Social Networking on Different Platforms.....	34
5-2 The Distribution of Different Platforms on a Coordinate System.....	65



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
5-1 Screenshot of Mtslash.org .....	25
5-2 Screenshot of XIANQING .....	70

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

Slash fandom is a subculture of fan-created same sex romance, based on existing works, such as movies, novels, and games. The word "slash" comes from the format of romantic fan-fictions. Gay fan fiction writers and artists put the pairing their present at the beginning of their works as Character A/Character B, and "/" became a symbol of gay fandom. As an imported term in China, "slash" originally represents only fandoms of Western-originated works, for example, "Sherlock." Since the show was released in 2010, the scale of slash population in China experienced a significant increase, and the term "slash" has been introduced to Chinese. Now this term is much wider used, and can be seen as an equal to the Chinese term "耽美同人 (Danmei Tongren) ." For concision, I will use the term "slash" to represent the whole secondary created same sex fandom. Participants of this sub-culture are primarily young females, like other gay romance fandom communities in East Asia. These females are called slash girls. As a part of the existing Chinese fandom community, slash community shows some unique features and independence. The happening and growing process of the Chinese slash community can be seen as an epitome of the history of the whole Chinese same sex romance fandom.

In this paper, I will explore the communicating tools and online platforms used by the community members, and demonstrate the role of such online interactions in the establishment and development of Chinese slash community. I will also discuss how

does this process change slash girls' life beyond the fandom and text itself, and help them construct and celebrate their identities in the increasing stressful Chinese society. By working with the community, this project aims at not only improve the self-understanding of the members, but also show an insider's view of daily practice, thus help the general public to have a better understanding of this "deviant" subculture and decrease prejudice.

## 1.2 Basic Terms

Since the research subject is a sub-cultural community, it is necessary to introduce some key terms before any discussion. Some of these terms has similar meanings; they are usually alternatives in different languages. There are plenty of researches on female oriented gay romance literatures, and it is common that some terms are mixed, and misused.

Tanbi/Danmei: 耽美 is a Japanese term, which originally means aestheticism. It is a school of literature which is featured with an extreme pursuit of beauty. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, some Japanese female writers and artists started to embrace this approach, and created love stories between males (usually a man and an Adonis). When introduced into Chinese, the meaning of term 耽美(tanbi) has been narrowed to this derived class. 耽美 in Chinese is pronounced as “danmei.” In Japanese, there is a later term “Boy’s love” representing the same concept.

Fujyoshi/Funv: 腐女子(Fujyoshi) is another Japanese word that has been adopted by Chinese (pronounced as Funv). This term stands for females who love Tanbi/Danmei.

Today the character “腐” (Fu) has become an icon for the whole female oriented gay romance subculture.

Slash: As described in the introduction, the term "slash" comes from the format Character A/Character B in gay romance fan-works. Started with Star Treks, slash fandom draws materials from novels, TV programs, movies, cartoons, comic books, and many other forms of origins. The use of “slash” in China was limited to imported English fandoms at first, yet with the slash fans’ migration within the whole Danmei community, this term shows an expanding tendency. In this paper, the term "slash" will be used to represent all same sex romance fan works in China.

Slash girl: Slash girls are females who adore slash fandom. It can be seen as a sub-category of “Fujyoshi/Funv.” Based on the interest of gay romance, slash girls particularly pay attention to create stories of existing characters.

Ship: A fandom. Sometimes it can be a fandom of a story, an example would be the Harry Potter series. In more cases, a ship represents the fandom of a particular pairing. For example, S/R paring from movie Inception is called “ghost ship”, because after the movie there is few official interaction between the two characters, and sailors (slash girls) on the ship are never fed again. When attracted to a new fandom, one may announce herself “on board” of this ship.

### **1.3 Theoretical Framework**

Due to the nature of this online subcultural community, I primarily follow two theoretical approaches in this research.

The first one is Bourdieu's division of capitals. Differing from traditional economical concept of capital, he focuses on the potential value of social networks, prestige, and other non-material perspectives of resources that build and reinforce different social statuses and groups (Bourdieu, 1986). Symbolic capital can be only gained and kept by one who not only knows how to appropriately behave in a cultural context, but also understand the value of doing so. In the context of Chinese society, this approach can be applied better through a combination with Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. He claims that people have a series of natural needs, which are major source of human motivation (Maslow, 1954). These needs were categorized as "physiological," "safety", "belongingness and love", "esteem", "and self-actualization" (Maslow, 1943). Putting oneself in a female dominated online community can be an important way for Chinese young women to achieve those higher goals in the high-pressure environment of current China. Using instant chatting program and social networking sites, these young women gather in a community of their own kind, in which their creation and networks can be turned into symbolic and social capital. Fan literatures have been viewed as contribution to the community and can bring prestige to the authors. Through chatting about a mutual interest and receiving feedbacks, fan-girls gain positive connections with other people, and meet the need of their self-maintaining and development. In this process, different statuses and groups occur. Fan girls spontaneously divide themselves into sub-communities based on interests and different standards of value, and major authors gain much more symbolic capital than ordinary members do. The network within the community intensifies this gap, for it is

a crucial factor in spreading any piece of fan literature. Dominant members and groups have more power in their discourse which can result in conflicts within relationships. These conflicts can be seen as evidence of symbolic violence.

The second theory utilized in my research is Jenkin's theory of fandom. In his first book of fandom study, Jenkins describes fans as “textual poachers” who appropriate, remix, and interpret materials (in a way they want) from TV series and other sources. In this creative process, fans not only expand the size of the story, but also rethink their own identity (Jenkins, 1992). He later develops a theory of “participatory culture” based on his fan studies. He defines “participatory culture” as one:

1. With relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement
2. With strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations with others
3. With some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices
4. Where members believe that their contributions matter
5. Where members feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created).

(Jenkins, 2006, p.7)

All of these criteria can be found in the communities that I studied. He also describes four features of participatory culture: affiliations, expressions, collaborative problem-solving, and circulations (shaping the flow of media) (Jenkins, 2006, p. 8). Slash community has naturally fit into the category of “participatory culture,” and Chinese slash community is featured with massive, tight social connections. Such

connections might be more important than text, or the “text poaching” behavior in the light of this project.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous researches that are relevant to this project can be mainly divided into three themes: Chinese fandom culture, social networking sites and virtual community, and Chinese women's studies.

#### **2.1 Chinese fandom culture**

Like all the subculture communities, the Slash Fandom community is a closed group, to which it is hard for etic researchers to get access. When searching for related studies, I found that many of them are done by members in this population. There are several interesting case studies, basically about specific forums or sub-communities. They provide good comparisons to the websites that I am studying, and there are mutual characteristics that can be found through these different sub-communities.

One of them entitled "The Virtual-community-based Utopia of Fans: A Study of a Harry Potter Fanfiction-fan Virtual Community" (Sun 2013), is an emic research of a particular Slash Fandom community. This community, while also developing upon a BBS, maintains the ties through fan-fictions and derived interactions proceeded by named members. Sun introduces the code-mixing language on this forum, and infers it as a "natural gate keeper," which provides a delicate comparison to the discussions on XIANQING.

Another related study is "A Research of Fujyoshi Group" by Tang Leshui in 2014.



Translated from the Japanese term “Fujyoshi,” “Funv” represents Chinese females who are interested in gay romance literatures. The research is a case study of Baidu Funv Tieba, which is a Danmei forum based on the largest online community in China. Through analysis of the assimilation within the forum and the excluding of outsiders, the author interprets how the individuals in this group construct their identities.

Yi reviews the dilemma of Chinese Funv population. The image of Funv in media has been negative. Chinese psychologists openly view them as people who “need psychiatric help.” Tanbi writers are arrested for posting “homoerotic content.” The bond and friendship between community members is strong, and sometimes is misunderstood as lesbian relationship (Yi, 2013).

Zhang in her paper “An Anthropological Study on the Tanbi Culture and Fujyoshi” discusses Fujyoshi population through a pop cultural point of view. She mentions the gap between “Funv” and “others”, and interprets the construction of “Funv” identity based on this awareness. In this paper, she describes the “Funv” group as an opposite to homophobes (Zhang, 2013).

Nevertheless, Zhao refutes this idea in paper “Imagined Political Field: The Online BL Fiction Fans and Feminism, Gay Politics.” She states that Funv only enjoy BL (Boy’s Love) literatures as a leisure, and seldom pay any attention to gay in reality. In addition, she claims that feminism tendency in Fujyoshi group is created by scholars by “selective interpretation”, and “discourse of binary opposition.” (Zhao, 2014) This issue will be discussed intensively in Chapter 5.

## 2.2 Social networking sites and virtual community

Since a lot of Chinese slash fandom activities happen on social networking sites, SNS should be seen as an important factor in study of this sub-cultural community.

These websites have become a necessary part of our life, and studies about user behaviors, even if not particularly about slash girls, show meaning full patterns.

Several studies demonstrate that there exists a correlation between SNS usage and the tendency for self-disclosure. In their 2013 article, Trepte and Reinecke examine this relationship. They argue that SNS encourages people to self-disclose more frequently, because such behavior promotes their social capital gain in this environment (Trepte, Reinecke, 2013).

A similar research that focuses on Chinese college students conducted in 2014, by Liu and Brown also examined self-disclosure. They furtherly state that people who are socially skilled will receive more positive feedback and social capital on SNS, which reinforces their wish to self-disclose (Liu, Brown, 2014).

Schwammlein and Wodzicka defined online communities on SNS as “common-bond” communities that based on interpersonal connection, and “common-identity” communities that based on mutual interests. They conclude that members of common-bond communities tend to present themselves “in an individualizing manner,” while members of the later emphasize their shared characteristics (Schwammlein, Wodzicka, 2012).

Furthermore, the influence on behaviors from online platform may not be limited to SNS. Boellstorff’s “Coming of Age in Second Life” is a classic example of

ethnography of internet population. Through the discussion of their “building the community” and interpersonal relationship within the game, Boellstorff shows how technique shape people’s interactions, and how online population construct their community through making virtual artifacts (Boellstorff, 2008). This process is similar to the establishment of Chinese Slash community, though the latter is based on text rather than virtual items.

### **2.3 Chinese women’s studies**

Although this research focuses on the online communication of slash community, it will only make sense when putting the population in a larger social context. Since it is a female dominated population, Chinese women’s studies provide important background information. Chinese female’s position in both political and industrial areas experienced huge backlash during the past 30 years, especially in the past 10 years.

Song reviews the four waves of debate about “women-going-home” in China since 1980s. She suggests that this phenomenon is led by “gradual separation of public and private spheres,” which is a liberalism trend increasingly emerging in China’s marketization (Song, 2011). As both governors and the labor market start to promote “women-going-home,” females are institutionally pushed back to private fields. The report “Gender Equality in China’s Economic Transition” (Liu, Li, Yang, 2014) published by United Nations System in China addresses the same issue: women are participating less in the labor force as the process of market-oriented economic reform develops.

Studies of media and pop culture tell the same story from another angle. In her book, *Gendering China*, Dai analyzes the transition of female image in modern Chinese movies. From 1949 to 1980, gender representations in movies are repressed by the Marxism political practice; women's identities are defined by their classes, not their sex. With the beginning of marketization, women's image as social subject in movies quickly replaced by "object of desire" of men (Dai, 2006, p. 88).

The articles chosen here discuss the absence of women in state level decision-making, and their retreat from labor market. China has not been long transformed from a patrilineal society, and the interest of neo-liberalism does not benefit most of the Chinese women. When young, educated, but not privileged females enter such society, they will naturally seek a way to celebrate their sense of power.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

For data collection, the main methods chosen are participant observation, interview, questionnaire survey, and literature research. The main sites are Weibo, XIANQING, LOFTER, and QQ.

#### 3.1 Sites

**Weibo:** Sina Weibo is the leading social networking website in China. It has become a major online platform for Chinese slash girls to communicate with each other. Quite a few members use Weibo as a public platform to share their works and look for interesting information, such as official news and others' fan-arts.

**XIANQING:** The complete name of this forum is Danmei XIANQING, which is usually referred as XIANQING for short. This anonymous Bulletin Board System (BBS) was created as a part of the discussion board of a Chinese literary website, Jinjiang. Established in 2003, Jinjiang has been the largest female fiction website in China. XIANQING has always focused on Danmei, including both original and fan works. Now it is over 10 years old, and has become an icon of Chinese Danmei subculture.

**LOFTER:** While Weibo can be seen as a parallel of Twitter, LOFTER is more similar to Tumblr. This light blogger website is developed by NetEase for people to share their photographs. Nevertheless, it is now an important platform of fan-works, especially fan fictions posting.

**QQ:** QQ is the most widely used instant chat program in China, with functions like

group chat, private chat, voice and video chat. In 2014, the peak concurrent users reached 200,000,000 (Tencent, 2014). A QQ chat group is a stable chat room for up to 2000 users at the same time, which has a permanent ID with it. One can find the chat group by the group ID, or they can simple search for keywords in the name of the group (which can be changed at any time) or search for an interested category for a chat group. This function benefits all kinds of usages, from business to Slash fandom. All the interviews in this project are conducted through QQ private chat.

### **3.2 Participant Observation**

This approach, first practiced by Malinowski, aims at gaining the native perspective of the population in research (Malinowski 1928). Since I am a member of Chinese Slash community, participant observation is a method that I am applying constantly. The main sites of my observation are Weibo, XIANQING, and several QQ chat groups. Weibo and XIANQING are open platforms, so it is easy to take part in the daily practice. At the beginning of the project, I announced my research in my personal profile on Weibo, and posted a new thread on XIANQING with basic information explaining my intended project. The things I see on these platforms contains various resources and forms of activities. On the other hand, in the QQ chat groups, I deliberately chose two groups of a mutual fandom and asked for permission to do my research. Such experience is a very common occurrence among Chinese slash girls: receive information from multiple fandoms, but focus in one or two ships in one period.

### **3.3 Questionnaire Survey**

A questionnaire survey has been a significant addition to this research. Like many previous research studies seen in other fields; such as: anthropology, but also in psychology, sociology and other sciences, the survey is a very useful tool. With the development of online questionnaire tools, the cost has been minimized, while the coverage allows the researcher to reach an unbelievable level of interaction. In this project, I use Sojump, a most common online survey platform in China. I posted the questionnaire on my Weibo account, and it was spread through my Weibo network, and reached those community members who I might never have known. It follows the basic model of snowball sampling.

Online questionnaire survey is also a method that can reduce the subjects' concerns about privacy to a minimum. For many members in Chinese Slash community, fandom is a secret from their families and peers. Since the subjects of online questionnaire are anonymous, they will not have any risk of being recognized by others. A large part of the Slash fandom community is made up of college students and people whole have just recently graduated. They are pretty used to the structure of a questionnaire survey, and a lot of them also use Weibo as a platform to do their own studies.

### **3.4 Interviews**

Interviewing those fan-girls who are active members of multiple communities has given valuable data to the time distributing analysis, and since most of them have experienced quitting a fandom or even a fandom community's extinction, through

tracing back through these shared experiences, the interviewer can also uncover some details about the recession process. Slash population in China is featured with much variety, and there might be different perspectives in the understanding of the online interactions based on participants' identities in the community. In this research, I conducted 15 interviews. I followed a judgmental sampling method in the choice of my interviewees. The participants included fan writers, fan artists, and ordinary readers from Weibo and XIANQING. Some of them were my friends whom I had known for a while. The others were XIANQING members who replied to my thread, and came with a large fund of knowledge about history of the forum.

### **3.5 Screenshots and Chatlogs**

The majority of the data is in the form of screenshots and chatlogs capturing. The information on Weibo, XIANQING and LOFTER was easy to gain access to but hard to choose which to use. I used screenshots to collect important discussions, posts, and threads, and marked the reasons the screenshots were selected so that they would be easier to analyze afterward. For data collecting on QQ, the automatic chatlogs storing function of QQ allowed me to fully participate when a discussion was on-going, and collect the chatlogs when needed. The chatlogs are stored with date and time information, which is helpful for me to link the discussions to relevant events on other platforms. I chose to do the interviews through typing and chatlogs collection instead of Skype, because it is the natural part of Chinese slash girls' daily online practice. The custom-made emoji function on QQ provides a chance for every individual to create



their own emoji, which often relates to their fandoms, and some of them carry special shared memories of this community. Using screenshots and chatlogs, the natural interactions between group members can be best maintained.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

There will be two forms of data analysis in this paper. Statistical analysis will be applied to demographic information of this population, usage habit of different platforms, and degree of participation in slash community. Qualitative interpretation such as identifications and descriptions will be made based on observation and interviews. Some results will be compared to show different responses to the same question. Upon these analysis and interpretation, I shall draw my conclusion for this paper.

The methods I apply call for tight cooperation with other members in this population. This added both fun and challenging conditions to the study, but everything was worth the effort. By working with the community, the project will not only improve the self-understanding of the members, but also show an insider's view of daily practice, thus helping the general public to have a better understanding of this "deviant" subculture and decrease prejudice.

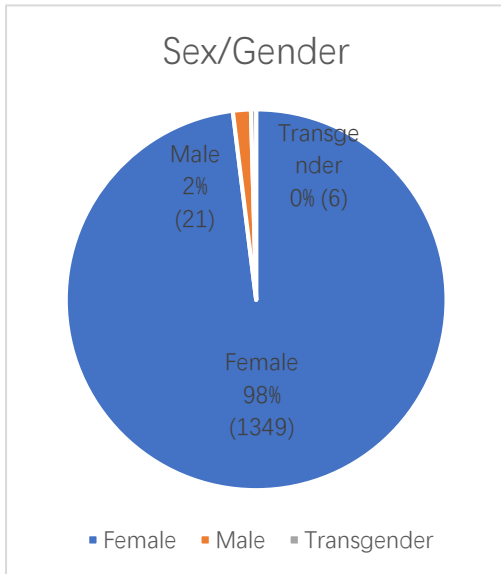
## CHAPTER 4

### MATERIALS

#### 4.1 Participants

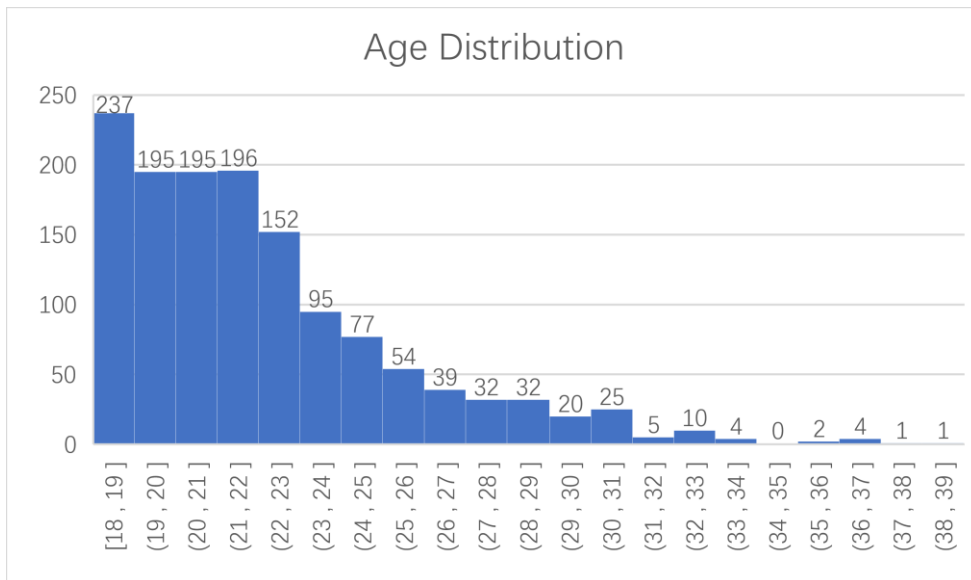
The direct participants of this project consisted of three sources: interviewees, group members of my participant observation chat groups, and questionnaire survey takers. There were 15 interviewees, 53 members in the first chat group, and 67 members in the second chat group. According to chatlogs, all of these participants are female. Most of them are between 20-30 years old, although at least one of them is as young as 18 years old, and there are several girls who are between 30-35.

The community members who take part in the questionnaire survey present a more complicated cohort. There were originally over 1600 answers, yet on the second morning after the survey posted on Weibo, a famous account unexpectedly reposted my research. This fortunate event immediately attracted unwanted participants. This resulted in all of the responses having to be discarded. After cleaning up the data, there were 1376 valid answers. Demographic situations are presented below.



As the graph 4-1 shows, Chinese slash community is a female dominated population. Among the 6 participants who answer “transgender,” 3 of them clearly express that their biological sex is woman. Based on such facts, the results will be focused on a female oriented research.

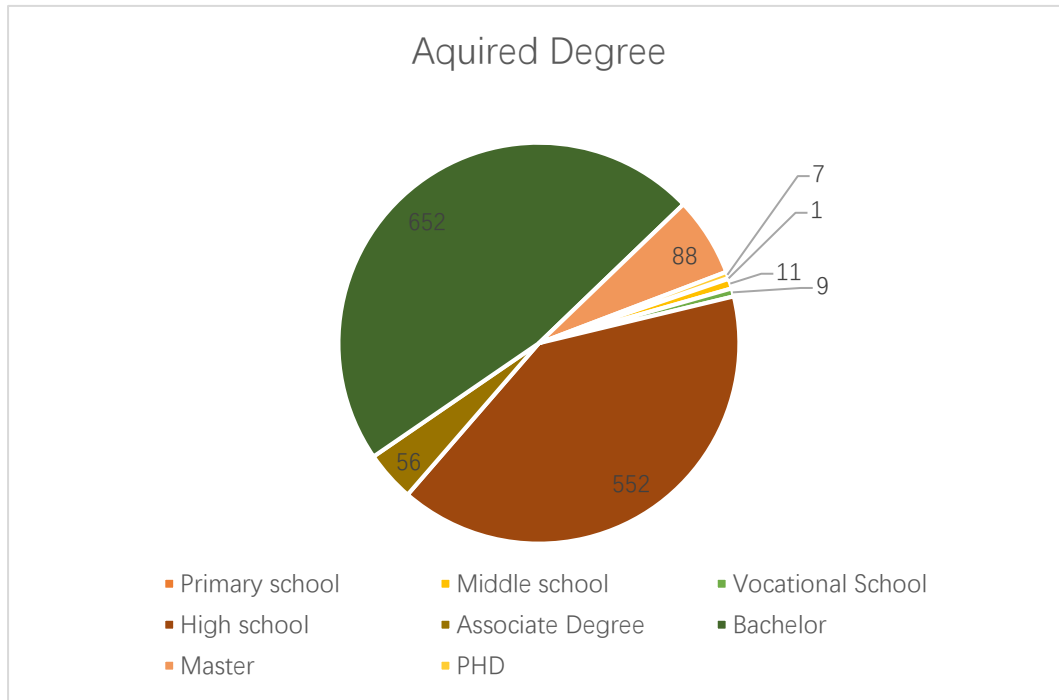
Graph 4-1



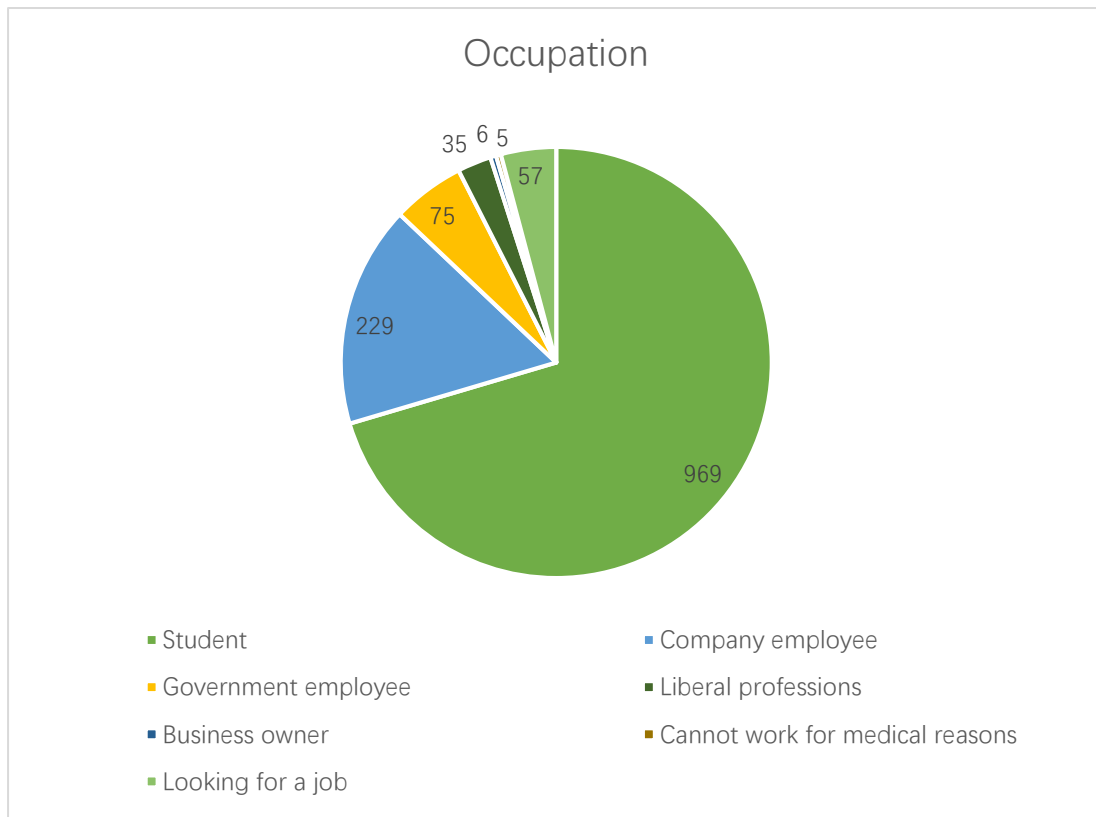
Graph 4-2

On graph 4-2, we can see the age distribution of the participants. The average age is 21.6, and median is 21. Youngest participants are 18 years old (which is also the mode of the population), while oldest participant is 38 years old. To avoid any possible harm to vulnerable populations (children, in this case), it is required that one must be at least 18 years old to take part in this research. Thus, the age distribution of slash community members under 18 is unclear. Although the graph clearly skews to right, it might be a

part of a binomial distribution.



Graph 4-3



Graph 4-4

Among the 1376 adult participants, 40.12% acquired high school degree, and

51.45% acquired college level (bachelor or associate degree). Since 70.42% of all the participants are still students, it can be speculated that they are mostly college and graduate school students. Many of the others are young employees with a college level degree.

Most of these participants distribute in well-developed regions. 8.58% of them locate in other countries, majorly at North America, Japan, and Britain. Among the 91.42% participants who live in China, the top 5 slash-girl-dense regions are Beijing (14.12%), Guangdong (12.52%), Shanghai (10.41%), Jiangsu (8.8%), and Zhejiang (6.19%). These 5 highly developed regions have over 50% percent of the participants, and those ones who locate in other regions are also concentrated in urban areas.

With the demographic data, we can now give a portrait to this community: a young adult female, who has received, or is still receiving, college education, seeking her future.

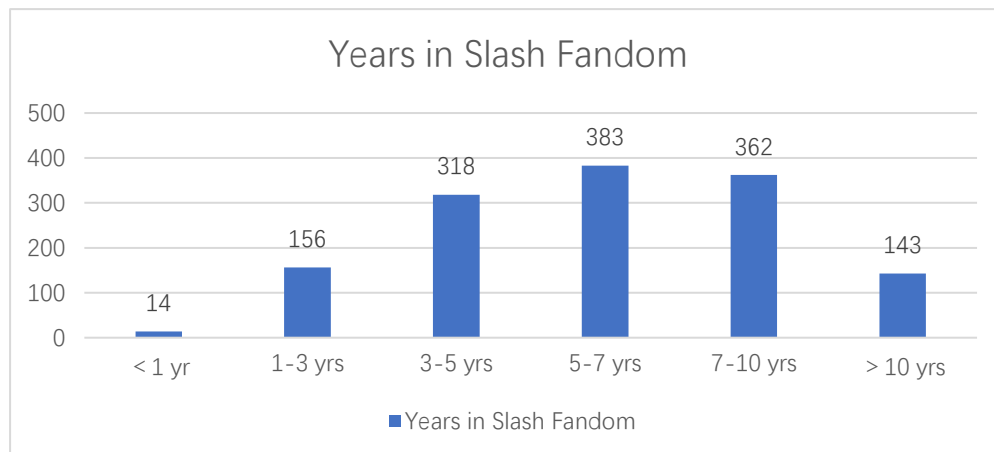
## **4.2 Fandom Activities**

*1*  
*How much spare time do you spend on slash fandom?*

*12*  
*All of them? Besides eating, sleeping, and bathing*

During my interviews, slash girls show amazing attachment to their subculture. 13 of the 15 interviewees would spend more than a half of their spare time on slash fandom. 03 and 12 express that it is the only thing they really do after work. This led to considering the following questions: Is it because the interviewees are hardcore members? Would the results be the same among a larger population?

Let us start with some basic information.



Graph 4-5

Graph 4-5 shows how long have the participants interested in slash fandom. 27.83% people fall into the 5-7 years' range, and majority of these participants are 3-10 years long slash girls. Several individuals even have a 20-year-history with this subculture. Combining with the age of participants, obviously that it is common for slash girls to enter the community at their teenage. Thus, there is no surprise that they get used, and attached to slash fandom.

In the 1376 participants, 46.66% are currently on Western originated ships. 32.7% of them are on Japanese originated ships. 16.57% of them are on Chinese originated ships. Since the spread of this questionnaire is through my Weibo account, this does not reflect the real composing of Chinese online slash community, but rather a normal result of snowball sampling, and I pay majority of my attention to Western originated pairings.

When asked how did they get to know their current ship, the top answer is "Weibo front page" (76.6%). Although 62.28% of them also found information when surfing the internet, if we add "QQ chat" (21.08%) and "LOFTER front page" (32.92%) on the scale, we will find that online interpersonal communication is undoubtedly the critical

factor for slash girls to get on a new ship. Here are some detailed usage habits of these three tools.

TABLE 4-1

	Coverage	Length of Using Per Day	Top 3 Purposes of Using	Most Important Functions for Slash Activities
Weibo	1374/1376 (99.85%)	1-3 hrs. (41.19%) 3-5 hrs. (28.09%) 5-7 hrs. (13.97%)	Acquire fandom information (88.43%) Acquire official information of the original work (of your fandom) (82.02%) A record of daily life (63.25%)	Repost (76.2%) Comment (66.23%) Tag (55.39%)
LOFTER	1114/1376 (80.96%)	Less than 1 hr. (68.31%) 1-3 hrs. (24.96%) 3-5 hrs. (3.68%)	Acquire fandom information (90.04%) Post fan works (53.77%) Acquire official information of the original work (of your fandom) (82.02%)	Tag search (92.46%) Tag subscription (58.53%) ID search (53.32%)
QQ	1306/1376 (94.91%)	Less than 1 hr. (35.91%) 1-3 hrs. (22.82%) 3-5 hrs. (14.78%)	Daily contact (93.03%) Acquire/discuss fandom information (44.1%) Acquire/discuss information of the original work (of your fandom) (30.55%)	QQ group chat (84%) QQ private chat (66%) Chatlog (59.65) Custom emoji (59.11) Screenshot (58.58%)

Through this table, we can see that the online communication platforms – Weibo, QQ, and LOFTER, have played an important role in slash girls’ daily fandom activities.

The online platforms are not only limited to shaping behaviors and opinions regarding fandom but also to attitudes and beliefs regarding a whole host of other areas of life. Since Weibo and QQ are general platforms, slash girls also share parts of their life that are originally irrelevant to fandom. 63% of the informants use Weibo as a record of daily life, and 93% of them use QQ for daily contact. This greatly extends the time they spend on these platforms, and since it is hard to exclude fandom information and interaction, they unconsciously spend more time on Slash fandom, and mix these two parts of life together. This encourages them to really embrace their identities as "slash girls". Most of the informants in interviews see this identity as a natural side of them that extends to all parts of their lives and would never be excluded. There are certainly differences between the usage habits of these tools, which will be analyzed in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSIONS

#### 5.1 From Forums To SNS: A Shift in The Community

When talking about their memory of slash community, a lot of slash girls mentioned forums. For those participants whom have been attracted to slash for ten years or more, most of their memories in the community started with slash forums. Differing from XIANQING, the forums examined in this study are fan-works oriented. If you open a slash forum, the most significant block will always be the fan-works block; to be exact, the fan-fictions block. On the screenshot, Figure 5-1, there is the front page of Mtslash, a typical slash forum which is still active today.

The most popular block is “Movie slash fiction,” with 50,000 threads and 2,270,000 posts in total; the second one is “TV series slash fiction,” with 20,000 threads and 1,110,000 posts. Both of them have numbers of discussion more than the sum of other blocks’ discussions.

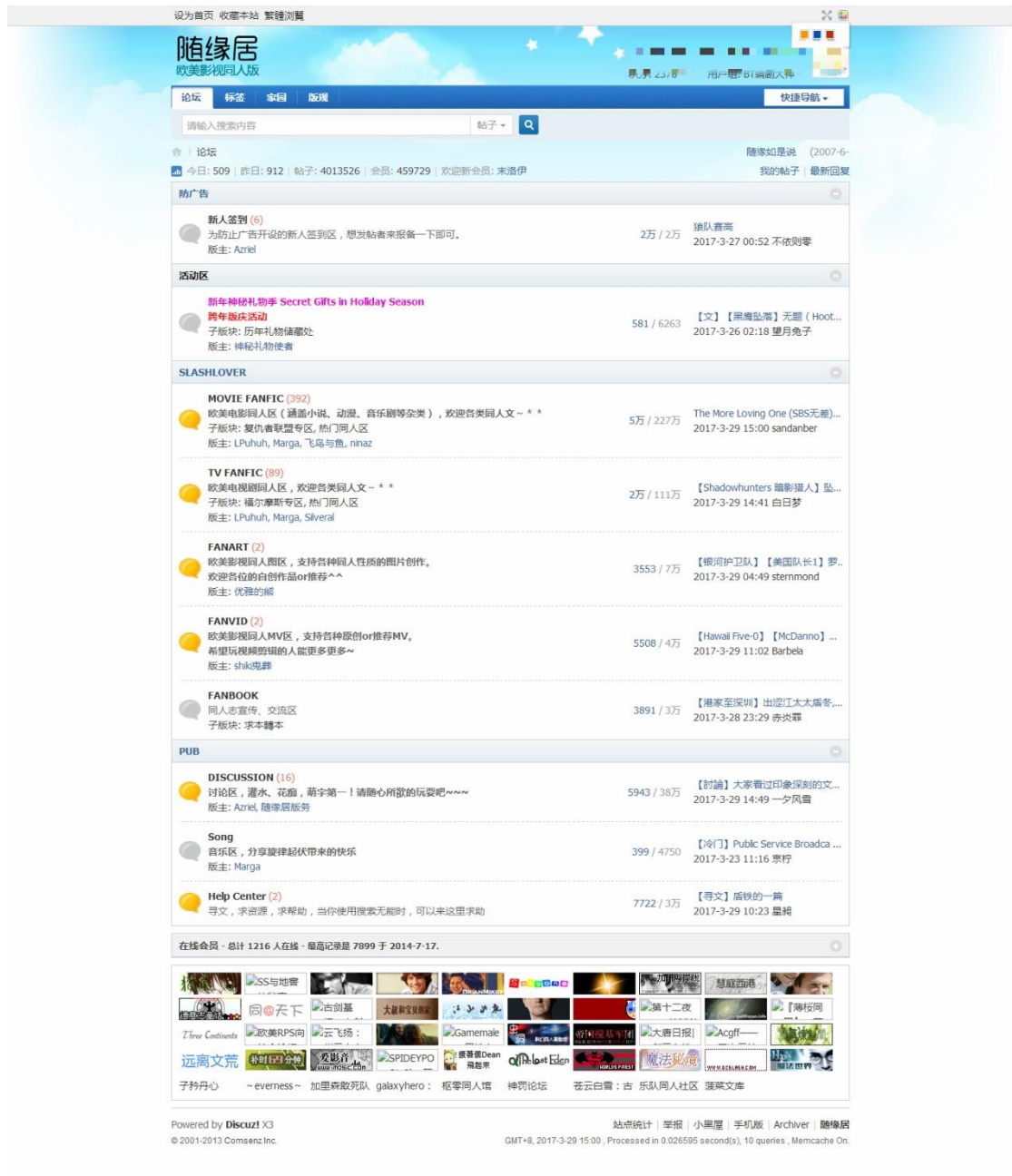


Figure 5-1 Mtslash.org

These forums are mostly built on the Discuz! System, which is a Chinese internet forums software. It is free for private use. This is critical: most slash communities were small at the beginning, and their forums were run by several people who worked voluntarily. One of my interviewees, 03, has worked for two slash forums for years. For confidentiality, I replaced the forums' names.

03

*I first started to write fan fics for Fullmetal Alchemist*

*I*

*When was that?*

03

2003

*I*

*Where did you post them?*

03

*SCJS, a forum*

*After that I have post other fictions on POM, and then Mtslash*

*I*

*What do you use these forums for?*

03

*As archives for my fictions. I also look for fictions and arts of minority pairings.*

*I*

*When did you work as administrator for SCJS and POM?*

03

*SCJS from 2003-2008*

*POM from 2013 to recent*

*I*

*Do you feel any differences between these two experiences?*

03

*Obviously. SCJS is a comprehensive one leading by Japanese ships. It was the best time for forums: a lot of users, frequent interactions.*

*POM is just an archive for our small ship*

*I*

*Have you ever social with other member on forums?*

03

*No*

*I*  
*Do you see others social with each other on these forums?*

*03*  
*I don't think it counts...they just know others' IDs, that's all*

*.....*  
*After the Weibo occurs, forums had a big flop. But I think people will finally get tired with such a fast food way of information feeding. Hopefully we can go back to the forum era*

*I*  
*What do you mean by "fast food"?*

*03*  
*You can see massive information on your front page, and take them in with screening or not*  
*But nothing left after a period of time*

*I*  
*What kind of information within the slash fandom do you think is more likely to be taken in?*

*03*  
*On forums, fictions*  
*On Weibo, fanarts*

As exhibited above, 03 is an early member of Chinese slash community. She worked for two forums for 13 years, and experienced the rise and fall of this platform. How did this happen?

An easy place to assign the blame for the end of this era would be the policies. Without an official rating system, the Chinese government has always listed explicit sexual content as illegal. Before 2010 there were already several strikes against online erotica. In 2011, Zhengzhou police department arrested more than 10 Tanbi writers who had posted their "homoerotic" works on a website (Yi, 2013). The incident shocked the whole Fujyoshi community. If my memory does not lie, by that time, some slash girls

were still confident that slash community would not be involved, since slash fandom is only a small part of Tanbi, and the size of each ship is rather low. However, in 2014 the government conducted a project called “净网行动” (Internet Purifying Action). Homoerotic was a highlighted target, and many websites, including slash forums, were shut down. Since then, this project has been an annual action. Slash forums are extremely risky under such circumstances. As a platform for gathering slash fan-works, they are easy targets by nature (comparing to SNS, on where slash girls post their works individually, and mix with irrelevant content). Using the Discuz! System, most of the data are stored in servers inside of China, and can easily be detected by police. While the police never really arrest anyone for slash fictions, losing the data is a fatal blow to this community.

Another reason might rise from the inner workings of the slash community. With the popularization of Tanbi fandom, the population of slash girls also increased. More and more people began to see this as a common leisure pastime, rather than a deviant lesbian expression of abnormal sexual preferences (which is a common stereotypical misconception). This brought about two problems. The first one was the capacity of free forums. Most of the slash forums have data saved in the administrator's private servers (usually their own computers). When the flow becomes too much, the administrator will face the choice between cutting down the users or renting a commercial server. The latter may cost over 1,000 dollars each year or more. Some forums will start a fundraising drive and ask for a donation. This usually creates the second issue. Due to the fact that the increasing number of community members who

viewed slash as a common leisure pastime they could simply shift their interest from one fandom to the next in quick and fickle fashion. To be powered by donation, a forum needs to have a stable size of users. Many administrators understand that new members come and go. When the ship gets “cold,” they will have to pay for the rent themselves, which directly leads to an end of the forum.

Only a few forums can survive such disadvantages; and they have some special features. A good example is [mtslash.org](http://mtslash.org): It is a comprehensive forum for all western originated pairings, so when there is a new fandom the administrator only needs to add a block instead of building a new forum. With the large population, it runs donation project 1-2 times a year. The administrators rent a server in the U.S, so the data, although still at risk for server errors, will at least not be hunted by police.

The concern of security is not limited to fan-works, servers, and policies. 65.79% of the questionnaire participants admit that they have tried to hide their slash activities on Weibo from their families and colleagues. Before Weibo occurs, the most popular SNS in China is XiaoNeiWang, which is an alternative of Facebook. The profile on it is based on one’s real name, and the basic network extends through classmates to students of the same school, then to students in the same region. It is the “common-bond” type of community (Schwa“mmlein, Wodzickia 2012). In this network, slash girls may suffer from discrimination if they openly express their interest. Meanwhile, just like 03 described in her interview, slash forum is not a platform for social lives. Only 7.01% participants of the questionnaire choose to communicate with other members on their ships through forums message. QQ has always been a useful tool, yet

it is not very efficient for finding other slash girls when people shift to a new ship; it is an instant chat program, and you need someone to chat with. At this point, Weibo stepped in. Anyone can register for a new account, and show any ID they want to represent their accounts. Separated from real life, slash girls can now post content that they were too afraid to post on XiaoNeiWang. The tag searching function allows them to find others who are interested in the same topic. Through the follow-refollow network (89.49% of the questionnaire participants use Weibo to stay in touch with other members), “common-identity” communities for slash girls are established.

The mass trend of Chinese internet using also increased membership and interest. According to a report from China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), the users of Weibo increased from 63,110,000 to 195,000,000 during the first two seasons of 2011 (Wu, 2011). The percentage of Weibo users among internet users rise from 13.8% to 40.2%. For people who get internet access through cellphones, the number shifted from 15.5% to 34.0%. Up to the end of 2010, the cellphone internet users reached 303,000,000 (CNNIC, 2011). The weight of both cellphone internet and Weibo experienced a rapid increase. With the popularization of smart phone, “the cellphone internet will step into an age of apps” (Shen, 2011). Examining all the online communication platforms (Weibo, LOFTER, QQ) that are still widely used by slash girls, a mutual feature is that they released apps that can smoothly work on any smartphone. On the contrary, forums heavily rely on PC; even they have a mobile version, it need to be opened in a browser.

The shift from forums to SNS brought about fundamental changes in the slash

community. The fan-works centered orientation on forums has been replaced by fans (individual) centered styles on Weibo. The most important form of fan-works leans to fanart instead of fan-fiction. The establishment of “common-identity” community catered slash girls’ increasing need of safety and belonging (Maslow, 1943). These factors fixed the community little by little, and finally presents it as the shape we see today.

## **5.2 The “Circle”: Capital and Self-presentation**

### **5.2.1 A Capital System Based on Community Contribution**

In Chinese, slash girls call their community a “圈 (circle).” In the circle, members have symbolic and social capital based on their contribution, which is primarily fan-works.

The very reason that a fandom community becomes a community is secondary creation. If people just enjoy a story, they do not need to know others who also love the story. Even if they do, after the story ends, their connections will fade. Nevertheless, from the point when the first thread of discussion is posted, the whole thing changes. Fans write essays to analyze the story, and then fan fictions, paintings, fan video, and so on. The fandom becomes a “participatory culture” that strongly supports its member’s creation of new content and encourages them to share their work with the whole community (Jenkins, 2006).

Such participation brings possibilities of continuity to a fandom. First, it adds information that can be consumed by fans, even after the original story ends. For



example, S/R is a popular pairing from the movie “Inception”. The original media is a movie, and there is no sequel to it. Someone has calculated the total length of interaction between the two characters: 8 minutes. An 8-minutes pairing from a 2010 movies really does not sound like something to still be remembered in 2017. However, searching the tag “S/R”, one will find 6653 fan works on AO3 (archiveofourown.org, one of the largest fanfic websites), and over 1000 on Mtslash. These extra creations expand the story to a much larger scope that continues to feed the community members and encourages them to stay invested. The original media are usually not about gay romance, but slash girls collect the interactions between the characters they like, and develop these into stories that are centrally focused on them. Such concentrated romance content often becomes the essence of a fandom, sometimes even more important than the original media. An example, a recent thread posted on XIANQING, revealed that the author had simply re-watched the movie and fell in love with it. Most of the replies were recommendations of slash fictions, and most of them were, unsurprisingly, S/R fictions. The thread soon turned into a discussion about “the best fictions” in the fandom. One of the replies screamed excitedly:

*“OMG! EA! There are still people on the ghost ship!”*

On the other hand, the participation lead to interactions between slash girls, and then relationships emerged. Jenkins describes that in such a culture, members will have a connection with one another, or at least “care what other people think about what they have created” (Jenkins, 2006). Discussions upon fan works allows opportunities for slash girls to get to know each other. As Liu and Brown state, positive feedback is

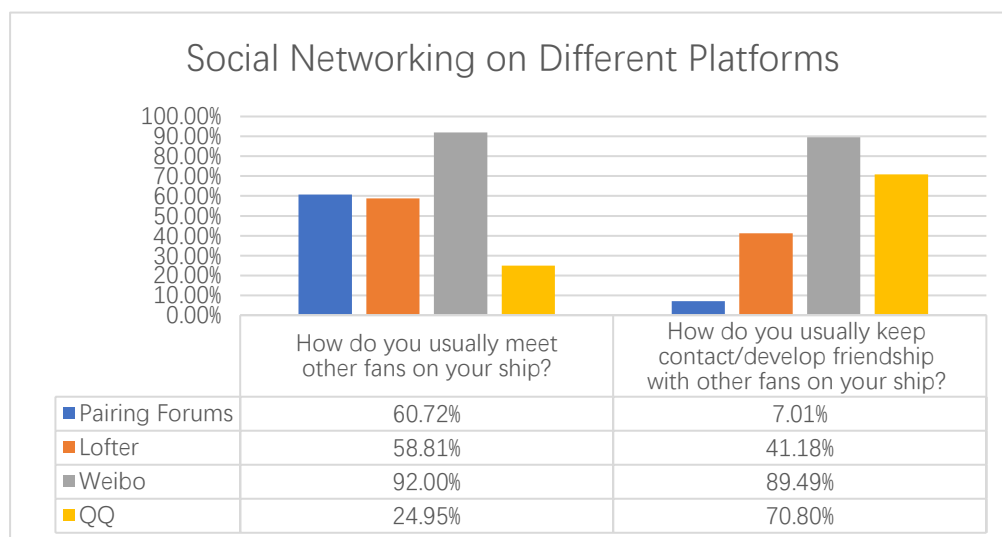
bonded with capital on SNS, and will promote self-disclosure (Liu, Brown, 2014). Slash girls who post fan works are often seen as the ones who make contributions to the community, and other members will tend to encourage such contributions. The positive feedback can even be bidirectional: the fan authors will often reply to the comments they get. In this process, both the members who create fan-works, and the members who get “fed” get experiences that reinforce their inter-personal communication in the community. Based on this relationship, slash girls build connections on their ships, which later may develop into friendships, and enhance their attachment to the community. With the “sailors” united, a ship can sail for a very long time.

Now that we know that fan-work is fundamental in the establishment of a circle, it is not hard to understand why such contributions work as capital in Chinese slash community. Members with fan works under their IDs, especially those popular ones, enjoy prestige as contributors. 78.56% participants of the questionnaire survey have at least created slash works once. The capital system upon fan works promotes participations, while it creates different statuses in the community. Under special circumstances, such as at XIANQING, the capital system does not follow this pattern, which will be discussed later.

### 5.2.2. Social Networks Among Slash Girls

Although the interpersonal connections among slash girls are primarily built on the foundation of fan-works, the networks, or to say the circle itself, do not necessarily occur on platforms that focus on fan-works.

As the graph 5-1 shows, about 60% slash girls meet other members on pairing forums or LOFTER, which are both fan-works oriented platforms. This situation fits the pattern in the last session: interactions between fan authors and their readers. However, only 7% participants will contact or develop friendship with one another on forums. Since LOFTER is a light blogger website and still keeps basic functions of an SNS, there are 41% slash girls who use it to socialize with others. When asked about the social lives on forums, 03 states that slash forums are not designed for that. 04 admits that her postings on slash forums are all about slash fictions, but on an SNS like Weibo, she will also talk about herself.



Graph 5-1

Most of the participants use Weibo as a major platform to build their community connections. Introduced in chapter 4, the top 3 purpose of Weibo use are acquiring fandom information, acquiring official information of the original media, and recording daily life. Since the coverage of Weibo among Chinese slash girls, these activities become a source of constant information exchange that anyone can participate in.

This information exchange is based on two functions of Weibo: searching and

hashtag. One can search keywords to find any content that they desire. The keyword can be the name of a character, a fandom, or a pairing, like “S/R.” A hashtag creates a hyperlink to a collection of all posts with this hashtag. It usually occurs after the searching keyword of one fandom or pairing is stable and publicly recognized within the slash community. Still using the example of “#S/R,” now it is the hashtag of this pairing. Sometimes they also give hints about post’s content, like “#BE” means “Bad Ending.” Such functions make it possible for slash girls to find news and fan-works of their interest, and other community members that are posting related content.

Through the functions of searching and hashtag, slash girls can find news and fan-works of associated with a multitude of interests. They are also able to connect with other community members. After getting a search result that they find interesting, slash girls usually choose to follow individuals who frequently post information they want, or who can post high quality content of a fandom or favorite pairing.

There are three types of community members who are tend to be followed by others: The first is fan-authors. 90.68% of the participants of questionnaire survey will make the decision on whether or not e to follow an account based on their fan-works. The forms of such creations can be various, including fan-fictions, fan-arts, and fan-videos, and so on. These secondary works are called “food” within the community, as they “feed” other slash girls. Fan authors are most often the ones who add hashtags on their own posts as a way to make their works easy to find and to increase their volume, but also as a way to announce their chosen pairing or special warnings and disclaimers about their works.

The second type of community member commonly found acts as a carrier or a translator. They are the people who daily check official news or foreign fan-authors' works, and post them on Weibo, sometimes with translation. This is outcome result of the national internet blocking in China. People who make efforts to use VPN, or personally stay in other countries have the access to content on Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, Deviant Art, and other blocked websites. What is more, these people are usually bilinguals who can translate English or Japanese into Chinese. For many slash girls, it is much easier to follow these accounts than searching and reading foreign posts themselves.

The most active participants on these sites are the third type of community members. While they might not produce any new foods, nor convey any news from outside, they follow all of the important accounts who do such things. They check out the posts on their front-page everyday (which can be a rather considerable amount of work when the fandom is popular), repost those ones they like, and make high quality comments (which are also secondary creations for the fandom). They work as filters of the content in particular fandoms of their choice. Many slash girls will choose to follow at least one or two such accounts, whose tastes are close to their own.

These "filters" also are the most likely to add hashtags on their posts more frequently which makes their posts the easiest to find and spread. The nature of SNS decides the process of posting information, which means contributions to the community and the acquirement of social capital, and the gaining of followers (popularity), is all openly displayed. Exposure is encouraged, and even required by

some members. There are cases from time to time of fan-artists complaining that people click “like” instead of reposting their works.

Another open display on Weibo is to show the following relationship when one checks out an account’s personal homepage. On the left side of the page, there is a section named “Weiguanxi” (Relationship on Weibo) with two particularly noticeable pieces of information. The first one is the accounts that both you and this individual follows. The second one is the people that you are following who also follow this individual. Such information clearly shows the connection between you and a possible strange community member, and often influences the decision-making process on whether or not to follow an account. When the fandom community is not very big, it is extremely common that these two lists of people are highly overlapped. Weibo has been used to create a loose friendship by following other members, and if one is careful with the people that are following each other, subtle shapes of small communities can become visible.

Another tool that plays an important role in the communication is QQ. QQ is an instant chat program that offers fast and direct communicating experience. Only 25% of the participants meet someone new on QQ, but 70% of them choose QQ to maintain their connections. It shows that many slash girls shift some of their social interactions from other platforms to QQ after meeting with ones they are interested in. 06 tells me:

*“Weibo and LOFTER are for people to get foods (fan works) and find new ships. Most of the real communications happen on QQ.”*

Slash Fandom community members use QQ to develop steady and advanced relationships to others who share the same interests with them. As closed and sometimes

rather private spaces, slash QQ chat groups are usually focusing on particular topics (a pairing or a fandom). Sometimes there are certain rituals and taboos in these chat groups.

For example, one of the two chat groups I am investigating is only for whom ship the pairing XY. A typical ritual that is going on every a few hours is:

*The creator of the group: Welcome, new comer!*

*The new comer: Hi!*

*The creator of the group: Please notice that there are a few rules. We do not accept XX, XX and XXX. Enjoy!*

*Other members: Welcome!*

These taboos--including taboos about pairing, particular plots, and other possible elements--are an important part of the Slash Fandom culture, and valued by its members. Following the norms in a slash chat group may bring cultural capital to its members. Famous authors on Weibo usually enjoy popularity in a QQ chat group of her ship, but under the instant, group chat circumstance, following the norms, and being friendly to other members can also contribute noticeably to one's position in the group.

Through QQ, a Slash shipper can develop friendships more than just about Slash fandom and pairing. When talking about the friends they make in slash community, most of the interviewees mention that they engage in private chats with those ones who are really close to them. During private chats, topics are shifted gradually from pairings to more personal areas. Here is a part of my interview with 09.

*09*

*The group chat is like a tea party. Everyone speaks in turn, but it won't go deep. I can do the deep conversations in private chats, and it will be more focused. Something that is too much about real life that I can't speak in the chat group. Usually I only talk about those with the a few ones I know very well. So, group chat is more common for me.*

*I*

*Do you know those ones with whom you can chat about real life in the slash circle?*

09

*Yep. Like M, and X, and several others from another circle. Most friends that I share my real life with are from the slash community, we just get close.*

*I*

*How did that happen?*

09

*Chat too much in the chat group...Wait. How did I get acquainted with M? I couldn't recall.....=, =probably because her image as a goddess goes bankrupt.*

*I*

*(laugh)*

09

*When you chat with someone a lot, and your taste are alike  
You will think, let's not bother the others in the group  
And talk in private!  
It usually begins like that*

Based on this conversation, we can see that during group chat, people may find individuals that match them well, and extend their discussion to each other's real life in private chats. Interviewee 15 has summarized the process as "chatting in a chatting group of the fandom; getting closed to some of the members by sharing opinions; opened a much smaller chatting group, with only those ones who really like each other; then becoming good friends, and sharing their real life."

The connections between slash girls in QQ may also create offline relationships. Mianji is the most typical activity of this stage of friendship. The ones who share a lot of feelings tend to meet each other offline, watch movies and eat together.

There is an intensive link between slash communities on QQ and Weibo. For instance, since the movie K has released in China, new fandom communities arose. One member of the pairing H/U summarized all the QQ chat groups of this pairing that had



been advertised on Weibo. Although differing in details, the idea of Weibo and QQ is shared between my participants. For most of them, Weibo is a public platform where she can get information of movies, shows and her favorite actors, and fandoms, while QQ is a place that they can communicate with friends. This is also the conclusion that I have received from participant observation, as well as the several years of experience in Chinese Slash community that I myself have experienced.

### 5.2.3 A Case Study: A Sampan

To clarify how do these factors mentioned above work in the process of the establishment of a circle, I will use the case of a pairing that I have shipped.

#### **The first step: A story**

Every ship comes from a story; a novel, a TV series, or something else that has been released to the public. This pairing, let us call it Tom/Ben, was born from a movie released in 2016.

#### **The second step: Secondary creations**

In the 9 weeks, the number of slash fictions of this movie on Archive of Our Own (AO3) reached 1000. Most of them are of another pairing, Jack/Dean from the movie. On Mtslash, there are over 700 slash fictions about this movie, yet about 1/3 of them are Tom/Ben. At the meantime, Tom/Ben fan arts have also been posted on Tumblr and Twitter. Slash girls from western countries were very confused, because both Tom and Ben are minor characters, totaling only 20s scenes in the movie. Common questions asked on Tumblr included: Who is Ben? What the hell is the Tom/Ben pairing?

One Chinese slash girl posted a screenshot on June 6th on Weibo, which got 120 reposts. In this picture, Ben is in a video meeting, and the topic is the announcement of Tom's death. This is the only scene in which these two characters occur at the same time. The promulgator says in excitement, "It turned out that this is not a 0-sec pairing."

It shows the most typical attitude of shippers to this pairing, which is a hybrid of self-defense and self-mocking. Due to the comments of this pairing, Tom/Ben, being a "0-sec pairing," which means the two characters have not shown up together at all, Tom/Ben shippers took this picture to prove that it is better than that, and they are not shipping this pairing for no reason. However, the fact that the only shared scene of the two characters is the death announcement of one of them is, apparently, not a convincing evidence for their romantic relationship. The promulgator perfectly realizes this, and feels both sad and funny about it. "No," She was actually saying, "this is not a 0-sec pairing. They do have, well, 1 second together on the screen."

This is a pairing which seems to have come from nowhere. However, this pairing shows unexpected activity on Weibo: 490 posts under the tag "Tom/Ben", 61 of them are actual fan-works, and I have not counted the cases that have more than one picture in a post.

After these broad discussions on SNS, and producing of fan-works, the ship is ready for the next step.

### **The third, and very step: QQ chat groups**

A chat group of this pairing was built on June 4th, with only 3 initial members. One of them told me that "there were so few of people, I mocked ourselves that we

were not on a ship, but a tiny SAMPAN.” By the time I joined it on June 7th, there were 29 members. On May 12th, the number reached 98.

When asked about if there is a sign when a circle is created, over a half of my interviewees suggest that there should be a QQ chat group for the pairing. A QQ chat group offer a space for the slash girls on the ship to exchange their ideas instantly, and in a group manner. It is a collection of active members of a pairing fandom. In another word, it is the ship.

In a chat group of a pairing, like this sampan chat group, the conversations are primarily about two topics: information in the original media, and fan-works of this fandom.

The most significant topic is fan-works discussion. This part includes discussion and comments of fan-fictions and arts on Weibo, Mtslash, Tumbler and Lofter, and members posting their ideas or outlines in the chat group for advices. Sometimes this can be the same thing: the author of the mentioned work is in the chat group, and talking about her thoughts with the others. There are both famous fan-authors and beginners, and the atmosphere is encouraging for the beginners. For example, in June 13th chatting, a girl asked about her new idea.

“What if,” she typed, “I just came up with this idea that Ben is the mentor for Tom?” Then she elaborated some plots that she would like to put in this frame. Very quickly there were two other girls who praised her. “That’s great!” They typed, “Write it out!”

This kind of encouragement is very common in this type of chat group as well as

most other chat groups I have seen. As stressed above, a participatory culture such as slash fandom has a tendency to encourage the sharing of creative works. In the whole Chinese Slash community, and the reason is comprehensive: an eagerness to make friends with authors, a generally accepted rule of being nice with co-shippers, a competitive wish to see the pairing successful with more works (than the others do), and most simply, a pleasure to have more reading materials.

Such interactions often promote the secondary creation in a community. In the interview, 08 admits that feedbacks can directly influence her production. “Many year ago, I have a reader who would leave very long comments under my every update. It excited me so much that I finished a super long slash fiction which took me two years.” For many fan authors, the award they expect to their contribution to the community is such positive feedbacks, and it is necessary for them to keep working. In a chat group, such feedback can be more direct, along with every stage in a piece of fan work’s creating process.

Sometimes this kind of discussion creates “Fanons,” which means clichés or settings in fan-works that are classic and influence others’ works. There is a writer who posted her fiction on June 12th. The next day, a painter in the chat group asked the writer, “can I use your setting that they’ve been married? It’s so sweet!” If the painter posts her picture, and attracts more people to think about the married status of the two characters are good, then it will become a fanon. The pairing image of Tom/Ben can be viewed as a fanon. A fan-artist in the chat group told me, that she found the images of this couple were uniform among all the shippers. Based on the lack of occurrence of

these two characters, especially Ben, the images and interactions of them in fan-works from different authors should be various. However, the fact is almost all the authors are following similar patterns.

*“How do you think about this?” I asked the other members in the chat group.*

*“Because there is no official pattern,” VVVV said.*

*“And we are too familiar to each other. Our tastes are the same.” DDDD said.*

*“And Tade is too influential.” XXXX said.*

*“And Tade is too influential +1.” ZZZZ said.*

*“And Tade is too influential +2.” WWWW said.*

From this conversation, we can see that besides the connections within Chinese Slash community, there is another critical factor: the influence from a foreign artist. When I asked “How did you get into this (pairing)?” The result is clear, and shows a high intercommunity. About half of the participants said they first saw the pictures posted on Tumblr a Thai (ID: Tade) fan-artists, while others said they saw these works on Weibo when they search the tag Tom/Ben. Actually, Tade has a Weibo account since 2014, so her works are shown on both sites. Most of the participants state that they were pulled into this ship by those amazing paintings, and a few girls said that mini fictions they saw on Tumblr and Weibo did the job.

Under such a circumstance, the images of Tom, Ben and this pairing is determined. It is not intended, but a natural and common process when there is an excellent fan author on the ship. When I ask about this kind of fan authors, interviewee 12 compares a circle to a house. “The original media is like a piece of land. Upon this land, those famous fan authors act like braces that support the whole structure, and their slash works are the walls.” Interviewee 10 admits that “I only want to be in a circle when there are famous authors who create good slash works.”

This is a rather extreme case that shows how powerful works of a few famous slash girls' can become through the online platforms. The pairing Tom/Ben hardly has any foundations in the original media. All the popularity it gains today, is due to two factors:

The first one is the power of discourse of “authorities”—those excellent fan-artists. They reconstructed the images of the two characters, which should have been difficult for others to accept but is not.

The second one is the network on online communicating tools. Through the intensive connections in Chinese Slash community, these images spread in an unthinkable speed, and lead to a wave of responses.

Thus, a circle is established. It is featured by shared interest for the pairing, intensive communication through a QQ chat group, and general approved images of the characters that influence all of the creations in this circle.

#### 5.2.4 Power and Status: “Dada” Vs. “Xiaotouming”

During the open display on Weibo, the difference between members who are contributing and others occur. Although 80% of the questionnaire survey participants have created fan works, less than 10% of them feel they are active in production. The number of slash girls who would be considered as “authors” in the community are limited. The “author” status has always been there since slash fandom existed, yet SNS has make the gap serious.

The most direct outcome is the difference on the number of followers. Popular

members usually follow much less people than people who follow them. They have been given a lot of titles, the most common one is “Dada”, which means “big ones”. Ordinary members who are fed rather than those who engage in the creation of the food usually follow many people, and have fewer followers. They call themselves “Xiaotouming,” which means “little transparent ones” that are easily dismissed. Such a title with the obvious slight self-mockery shows the distinction of status.

The open display of gaining social capital leads to different positions in a conversation. When slash girls chat with individuals who have equal status to them in the community, they tend to use a typical “rapport” way of talking. The discussion is more likely to be in details, and easily extend to emotion exchange. When a Xiaotouming leaves a comment under a Dada’s post, their tone tends to be significantly more cautious, and mostly staying in the topic of the Dada’s work or at least the fandom itself. It is an unwritten rule among the slash community, that a Xiaotouming should not act like a friend of a Dada, but more like a fan, and following this rule will also bring social capital to the Xiaotouming. Those who fail to practice this pattern are often criticized and seen as rude and inappropriate; these individuals receive a special title called a “Zilaishu.” Dada who receive a lot of feedback on her works usually do not reply to all of them, but pick a small part that she feels like replying to, and it is her choice to extend the conversation to emotional, personal feelings. It is also common that Dada feel more comfortable to openly discuss their own life attitude and even political ideas on Weibo, because just like in the articles I have mentioned, they receive more positive feedback. It is also commonly realized that people do not really want to

read some of their personal posts, so as long as they limit such posts to a certain percentage, most slash girls will still keep following them so that they can be fed. If they keep attracting followers, there will be people who love everything they post. At this stage, the fans of the slash fandom have been turned into fans of the “Dada”.

On the contrary, when a Dada follows back a Xiaotouming, the Xiaotouming tends to experience panic. There are posts on XIANQING, from time to time, asking question like “My goddess followed me back! What should I do! I am such a boring person! I don’t dare to post anything anymore!”

One thing worth noticing is that this position is not absolute nor still. A fanfiction writer who has 2000 followers is a Dada to an ordinary slash girl who has 200 followers. However, she might follow a fan artist who has 200 thousand followers. In the latter relationship, the writer becomes the Xiaotouming. There are many slash girls who have this status in the middle of the community, and it is common for them to shift their position in different contexts. Most of them can naturally practice this one up to one down shifting in their daily online activities without any problems. The purpose of such shifting is probably also to gain social capital through following the rule.

Such displays of popularity are so powerful, that some slash girls even buy followers. These fake followers will not really interact with others, but the number of followers itself is a rather effective weapon.

The difference between statuses on Weibo is most clear when there is a conflict. If the conflict was between a Dada and a Xiaotouming, the Xiaotouming’s position can be dangerously weak. It is common that the Dada’s followers attack any who openly



criticized the Dada. When the other side is a Xiaotouming without many supporters, the incident can turn to internet violence. In worst case situation, the Xiaotouming has to change her ID or even give up her current account. When asked about the circle on Weibo, interviewee 02 complains to me.

02

*I don't have the skills for play in a circle...I can't produce a lot of slash works. I don't know how to social with the others.*

*There are celebrities...*

*Super good at networking, super good at producing (fan works), and have "(political) ideas" ....*

*I like LOFTER, people on LOFTER don't care about your political ideas. I like XIANQING, because I don't need to social on XIANQING.*

*I*

*So, the "celebrities" make you feel stressed in the circle*

02

*Yep. The "celebrities" fit most people's taste, and they are good at fighting I have been assaulted by some of them*

Another featured phenomenon on Weibo conflicts is "Zhuanfazhandui," which means to show one's attitude through reposting. 60% participants answered that they have shown attitude on Weibo through posting or reposting during community conflicts. Since the reposts on Weibo can contain previous reposts and the senders' IDs, what a slash girl often sees on her front page is an original post with a series of IDs that have close connection with her, showing opinions in the repost thread. These IDs can be the Dada she follows, or the friends she made in her fandom community. A thread on XIANQING that has 1562 replies is titled, "Since I played with Weibo, I found that those fan artists 'huddle' pretty badly." The host of the thread complains that when Dadas make mistakes they can simply speak for one another, and "there will not be a fair debate." Under such circumstance, one usually tends to stand with the people she

knows, or to keep silent if she really feels disagreement with them. Many posts during a conflict are the outcome of careful consideration. It serves to maintain social connection, which is also a part of a slash girl's social capital.

#### 5.2.5 "I am agrestal."

Although a lot of shippers want to make friends, I found that a circle is not always so attractive. When a member ships a pairing, but doesn't feel like joining the community of this fandom or interacting with other shippers, she calls herself "野生的 (agrestal)." An "agrestal" slash girl in a fandom will typically not join a QQ chat group for the ship, or try to get to know the other slash girls on the ship. She may use Weibo and LOFTER to receive new information, and even post fan works of the pairing, while completely ignoring the socializing aspects of the sites.

In the questionnaire survey answers, 31.47% participants showed that they never join any fandom circle. As addressed before, most people will only get into a circle for some of their ships. The reason for being "agrestal" can vary. Some interviewees say that being in a circle means doing a lot of socializing work, and they only put forth such efforts when they are very passionate about a ship. Another common answer was that the fandom is just too cold, and that there is no circle. For those ones who never join a circle, it is more like an attitude.

When I asked for the reasons, interviewee 15 told me that she doesn't like the "atmosphere" of the circle. 02 gave a straighter forward answer.

*"In the circle, people are fighting with each other all the time, over the tiniest*

*things. And they want you to side with them.”*

12 is even more upset about it; she thinks that there are “abnormal slash girls.” I was amused by the term, and asked her to define “abnormal slash girls.”

*“(Those ones who) circle like an idiot. They reject anyone out of their circle, and treat every advice like it is a censure. They value the circle more than their life, and do ridiculous things.”*

These comments express the fear of group polarization in a circle and the possible conflicts brought by it. These attacks and other negative feedback from squabbles reduce members’ feeling of safety and belonging, which in lot of cases is exactly what slash girls are seeking in the community.

On the other hand, for those ones who play within a circle, and unit during a conflict, the experience might be different. “I understand that those united acts like attacking the same target brings connection, and give people a sense of participation. They will love the circle better. It’s like they win a battle together, and on the next one there will still be people stand with you.” She admits, “I wish I can have more friends in the circle.”

Thus, members who receive such positive experience in the circle reinforce their “circling” behavior, while slash girls who have been attacked in one circle by ones with superiorities (“Dada”, “Celebrity”) tend to be “agrestal” on her next ship. “Agrestal” slash girls can still have friends on the ship, but they determine not to get involved in any circle incidents. Such attitudes are not unusual among slash girls, and are reflected on the platforms used by the population.

### 5.2.6 Introspection: From Weibo to LOFTER

LOFTER started with a light blogger website developed by NetEase, Inc. This website is originally designed for photographers. However, several functions of this platform perfectly fit the need of fandom practice. People can book a tag, and receive notices when there are new posts with this tag. This is not only convenient for slash girls to get fan-works without searching the tag every time, but offer a chance that they can “follow” a pairing instead of the authors. Additionally, the number of one’s followers will not be shown to public in the early versions of LOFTER. New works under a tag will automatically be presented in a chronological order. Famous authors and newcomers share the equal chance to be read by the community. One can easily read all the contents of a pairing, and not even notice the authors’ names.

07 is a typical “agrestal” reader in the community, and her use of LOFTER is very simple.

*I*  
*What do you do with LOFTER?*

*07*  
*Read slash fictions...that's all*

*I*  
*Do you follow anyone on LOFTER?*

*07*  
*No*

*I*  
*So like...you just book tags and check updates daily?*

*07*  
*Yep*

Readers who are agrestal are not the only ones who use LOFTER like this. 11, a fan artist who would join circles for her ships, also pays no attention to network on LOFTER.

“Ah lof...” She says, “Basically I throw my art works there, and walk away. I don’t communicate with people there, it’s not very handy for that.”

Her feeling about the platform might explain why slash girls favor this website. The feedback system on LOFTER is based on “kudos”. One can add a kudos to a piece of fan work by simply click on the button. The works under a tag can be sorted by the number of kudos they have in a descending order. Thus, to be “hot” in a fandom, a work only need to receive enough kudos, instead of being reposted and spread on Weibo. It not only reduces the communicating behaviors among authors and readers, but also weakens the influence of authors’ names and status, making the fan-works independent from the authors on some level. The migration of fan-works from Weibo to LOFTER may show an attempt of returning to a slash works oriented environment in the community.

Nevertheless, such migration has drawn attention from LOFTER developers. After failure at resisting this unexpected slash-girl-wave, the team apparently decided to make the most of the situation. In current versions of LOFTER, they now release a “hottest slash fandoms” ranking list monthly, and make every account’s number of followers visible to public. Such effort, although should count as a classic case of slash community’s influence and causes some community members’ concern.

*11*

*Ah...I think the “Dada” effect will be also obvious on lof, just like it on Weibo...*

*I'd rather it's not shown*

*09*

*I think it's a little bit weird. LOFTER is not like Weibo, it should've been an app that don't emphasize the following relationships and follower number  
And now suddenly it public your followers! It's just...*

*I*

*What (laugh*

*09*

*And some people choose to hide their numbers of followers immediately. So awkward.*

*I*

*Do you hide yours?*

*09*

*YES.*

Other slash girls seem not too concerned with this change. Interestingly enough, this is not because they welcome the Weibo mode, but rather of an ignorance of the authors on LOFTER. 04 admitted, "It doesn't matter, I won't check or follow their account anyway."

### **5.3 Anonymous BBS Vs. SNS: Status, and Power of Discourse**

#### **5.3.1 XIANQING: A Revolt to the "Contribution-Status" Capital System**

Popularization of LOFTER is not the only introspective act cast by the Chinese community. There has always been a website that featured resistance to the authority in slash community.

XIANQING was created as a part of the discussion board of a Chinese's largest female literary website, Jinjiang. It has been a secret board of Jinjiang for a long time, and people could not find a link on the Jinjiang discussion board of XIANQING. The

address of this BBS was only allowed to be spread among specific populations. The only purpose of this forum is to provide a platform for gay romance (Danmei) lovers to discuss related topics. Although it is not specifically for fan girls or slash fandoms, it offered a chance for the whole population to be gathered in one virtual space. All the members are able to see other groups' discussions, whether the participants were original Danmei fiction readers, or Japanese YAOI comics lovers, or fan girls of pairings between movie and TV show characters. Aware of the existence of other groups, all the members understand that they are a part of a larger population. Some old members of this community still remember that for a long time, XIANQING was called a "backyard" for all other forums.

In any named environment, it is common that slash girls express their negative attitude towards XIANQING. The sharp opposition between XIANQING and Weibo Slash girls is due to the confliction between their differed capital systems. Unlike LOFTER, where slash girls resist the status gaps in community in the sake of fan-works, XIANQING is a space that overturns the whole "contribution-status" capital system.

The most important feature of XIANQING is anonymity. Until 2016, XIANQING had been a BBS that did not require registration, and people can use any word as a temporal ID. Due to the anonymous feature of these temporal IDs, they are called Majia, which means a "mask." The most common Majia is "= =" This symbol stands for a pair of eyes, and this highly- simplified face has been the mask of thousands of members in this community in their everyday practice.

As a BBS for Danmei, XIANQING covers all the topics in slash fandom. It is very

common that the events on Weibo, other fandom forums, and even English platforms such as Tumblr and Twitter are being discussed on XIANQING in a couple of hours. However, the discussions on XIANQING usually end up with different conclusions from Weibo. This is partly because many fangirls do not use XIANQING daily, thus the voice on XIANQING is not representing the whole population. 72.67% of the participants do not use XIANQING. Fangirls who refuse to use XIANQING usually consider it as unfriendly and inauthentic, and criticize it openly.

The anonymity, though, can be an important factor. The attitude showed on Weibo is an outcome of multiple considerations, while on XIANQING it is majorly about personal feelings. Without the status and network on Weibo, all members need to offer proof or reasonable logic for their arguments, or they will be seen as troublemakers. 07 describes,

*I feel that people act more naturally in anonymous environment because there is no “past” for people to find. (At the beginning of) Each time people treat you equally. They won’t pre-judge you to be right or wrong for what have you done, or if you have quarreled with them, or if you are a “Dada.”*

Instead of status based on slash works, XIANQING practices a system that is primarily built on discourse. This leads to an interesting phenomenon: although many fangirls complained about the aggressive style on XIANQING, when there is something against the public morality in fandom community such as plagiarizing, XIANQING has always been the main battlefield of providing evidence, and the results of such arguments almost always appear shortly upon Weibo.



### 5.3.2 Daijiezou: Power of Discourse in Anonymous Environment

Under this anonymous circumstance, discourse strategies can greatly influence the trend of a discussion. There is a proverb in XIANQING: “The first three replies decide where it is going.” It shows a tendency in XIANQING, that if the content of the post does not fall in a clear zone of judgment among XIANQING members, the public is likely to be led by the first several opinions they see. Anyone who has access to this BBS could possibly claim to be members of particular groups, and of course, they can play different roles in a single discussion, and mislead the other participants. Such vicious behaviors usually leave a mess in the thread. 07 complains about the current chaos on XIANQING after the website owner fired most of the administrators.

“The ones that have ability to maintain the justice and order are gone,” She says. “People are less autonomic now, and they use the anonymity to play different roles, insult one another, and disturb the discussion.”

### 5.3.3 Proof of Fan Identity

The issue of honesty is intensified after the demission of administrators, but it has been there since the BBS was built.

To prevent people pretending to be members of a fandom group and intentionally misleading the discussion, XIANQING members have developed measures to safeguard against such behaviors. Common measures include IP detection, use of code-mixing language, and the requirement of posting pictures of items that can prove the participant is really within specific groups.

Administrators of XIANQING can conduct IP detection to check if the replies were made by the same IP address, so that others will know if anyone was shifting sides to disturb the discussion. Requiring someone to post pictures usually occurs during a debate inside of a circle. If anyone claims to be a member of a fandom group, and uses this identity in a serious debate, she is expected to show items she has bought about this fandom, like Blue-ray disks and figurines. Based on the situation, one may need to have goods of a pairing that value over 3,000 yuan (over 400 dollars) to be viewed as a “true” member of the circle.

The most common and convenient measure is using of codes. In her article in 2013, Sun talked about the code-mixing language used by the Harry Potter online community. To make sure their activities were undisturbed, the community members used special terms in their conversations as “a natural gate keeper” of their “Utopia.” (Sun, 2013) By applying code-mixing language, individuals who do not have any knowledge of the book will have difficulties in understanding any posts. Therefore, only insiders can get access to the discussions and resources created by the community.

Likewise, XIANQING has its own codes. However, in the context of the mixing of multiple groups in this BBS, the XIANQING code-mixing language is playing a more complicated role here.

When XIANQING was still a secret board of Jinjiang, the address of this BBS was only exchanged among specific populations. During this period, the linguistic gate keeper aims mainly at the individuals who are insiders but not very familiar with XIANQING community. New comers are supposed to not post anything, but observe

others' conversations so that they can understand all the written and unwritten rules in XIANQING, and adjust their styles to fit in. Through using codes in daily discussion, the indigenous members automatically reject newcomers from their discussion until the latter know enough about these terms.

Another function of using codes is to divide different groups within XIANQING. Although sharing a considerable amount of discussions, fan girls of each fandom tend to develop their own sets of special codes in their interactions. This is a secondary product of the anonymous context of XIANQING. There are fan girls who prank in other fandoms' posts for entertainment. As fan girls, they have basic understandings of these fandoms. However, only the "real" group members in a fandom would follow all the posts about it and know all the codes created in those conversations. Thus, it can avoid group members of other fandoms from pretending to be one of the "insiders" and disturbing some discussions. These kinds of codes are usually nicknames of characters or pairings. In a rather extreme case, fans of a Japanese comic code all the main characters in the book with numbers. One of my friends who didn't read that comic once told me "all their pairings look like phone numbers to me."

The third function of such practice is to memorize special events in the fandom or Danmei community. Key words of the events would be kept in the relevant group members' discussions as some kind of trophy and became codes. These codes are mostly mockeries, and the purpose of creating such codes is likely to remind their rivals of their mistakes and scandals.

A thread posted in 2016 titled "Do you experience any embarrassment when you

are new here, like misunderstood the terms?” has 319 replies. People shared their upsetting or funny stories with the codes on XIANQING.

*“The XIANQING terms are actually not that bad, I usually just ignore them, and the conversation won’t be confusing in context. Those codes of circles are the worst! Even if I ask, people will just tell me 新潜三 (“New comers should watch without say anything for 3 month”).*

*“I didn’t make any stupid mistakes. Before I come here, the girls who recommend this place tell me to keep silence for 6 months. I actually do that for several years.”*

Through such code creating practice, members of XIANQING and specific fandom groups in XIANQING develop a sense of identity. By using these codes in their daily posts and replies, they celebrate their shared experience and knowledge. Some of the experienced XIANQING members even developed a hobby of learning the codes of different circles. One replied to the mentioned thread,

*I feel like I am fully trained in this. I come here since the golden age of HB (a pairing), then play across countless circles. I love to find those ancient threads, and try to understand all those codes they use, and how the codes change through time.*

The popularity of code-mixing language also leads to an interesting secondary outcome: that not only the outsiders in XIANQING are excluded from discussions, but also the fan girls who do not use XIANQING have difficulties in understanding some conversations made by their own group members, because some fan girls bring the code-mixing language to Weibo or other identified platforms. It results in learning of these codes, which means a spreading of XIANQING originated terms.

#### 5.3.4 Constant Majia: Limited Identity, and Authority Based on It

These measures directly link to the identities of participants in a discussion. A proven honest identity, even if the proof is rather limited in this anonymous environment, is a powerful tool in debates. To keep this advantage, two kinds of “named

ID” are used in some threads. The first one is a temporal named Majia, which usually occurs in a long discussion. To be recognized, some participants will use a special name within the rest of this discussion. Such behavior will make people remember this temporal Majia, and treat the individual with some kind of trust that she is not playing multiple sides.

The second one is “Constant Majia,” which are IDs that have been used by some community members during a period, and across multiple discussions. Members who create these Majias are willing to be recognized by this community (usually they have unique speech styles or sharp opinions towards specific topics). Through using constant Majias, these individuals gain reputations in XIANQING community. Some of these individuals became famous in this BBS, though not all of them are welcome. Anyway, with their constant Majias, these individuals are presenting their standpoints automatically when they take part in a discussion. Thus, they have reserved power in their discourse from the beginning of a conversation.

My two interviewees who have used constant Majia recall their experiences. 09 says,

*“I didn’t think much by then. First, with a constant Majia it’s easy to find the thread that I have replied. Secondly, it’s convenient for communication. I mostly use the constant Majia in threads for one specific pairing, where participants are rather fixed. It’s just easier if I have an ensured identity to chat with them.”*

08, who built a little bit more on her constant Majia, says,

*“I used my constant Majia for any occasions except debates, especially in those threads of my favorite character...actually sometimes I also use the constant Majia in debates when I was too lazy to change it...and then someone will remember you. When I announced my birthday there, people would reply and say they remember me. I feel very satisfied for that. It’s just my small vanity of that period.”*

Through the interviews, we can see that the invention of constant Majia leads to

another way of gaining power other than posting fan arts on other platforms like Weibo. Instead of the public status based on contribution, the power on XIANQING is made through performance of community value in specific cases. Although it is limited in XIANQING, it still offers an opportunity for slash girls who might only be “Xiaotouming” to gain a sense of power of discourse, and construct their identity within the community.

### 5.3.5 “Baifumei” in XIANQING: Increasing Influence from Real World and Classes

In an earlier session, I mentioned that one of the measurements for identity checking is to ask members who are involved in debates to show photographs of items they bought for this fandom. If one claimed to be a fan of character A, she needs to have certain number of official products of A, such as figurines. If she claimed to be a fan of a pairing A/B, then the expected proof will usually be fan-books of this pairing. This identity checking measure has existed for years, yet recently, significant changes have taken place.

The first thing noticeable is the increasing value of products that is required by the community. A couple of years ago, one could post pictures that illustrated about 1,000 yuan valued goods of character A, and get the “qualification” of taking part in a circle’s debate. Today, the minimum value is 3,000 yuan (over 400 dollars); the more, the better. The members who can prove that they spend the most money for A now have the right to represent “fans of A” over the others. This shift suggests that such system has transformed from a measure for ensuring honest identity to a display of “objectified

cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1985).

Such display does not stop here. At the beginning of 2017, a new thread was posted on XIANQING. The title is “Let’s show our luxury articles.” The one who post this thread suggest that “if you want to add some thrill, you can reveal whose fan you are with the picture you post.” The first reply is in a mocking tongue. “At XIANQING? There are all students. You over estimate this place.”

Yet only 3 minutes later, the 4<sup>th</sup> responder posted a photograph of her Mercedes-Benz GLC SUV.

“I am a fan of Uchiha Itachi,” she said.

This thread soon went wild. With an amazing number of luxury articles displayed, and almost equal amounts of complaints, this thread ended up with 2506 responses. It directly led to another incident, which is a luxury match in a circle that has many active members involved in the first luxury-article-display-thread. From this point, the display of objectified cultural capital turned into display of pure capital. The logic “ones who have spent the most for a fandom have the right to speak in their community” is partially replaced by “ones who are the richest have the right to speak in their community.”

Along with such phenomenon, terms used in daily discussion also reflect a rising influence from real society. The mocking terms “Baifumei (Bright, Rich, Beautiful)” and “Changmei (Girls who work in factories)” are used to represent two kinds of community members from different social classes. Broader discussions about classes also increased. Searching the keyword “social class,” there are 9438 results in XIANQING.

The invasion of capital in fandom discussions is an outcome of social inequality in current China. Marketization brings wealth, but only to parts of the country. The gap between the rich and the poor keeps growing, and social classes has been fixed. Young females from poor family are facing the worst situation: their family offers no help for them (and they often need to support their male siblings), and the labor market leaves few opportunities for women. With the popularization of smartphone and SNS, people from all classes are linked together, and the gap is displayed unprecedentedly. Even those girls from upper classes are not so comfortable. “In the small environment of mine, things like domestic violence, human traffic of women and children, and murder of female infants, they all just exist in TV programs,” a girl says, “I have never known that they are all real.”

XIANQING, as an anonymous BBS, provides a space for all the Fujyoshi to share their feelings. The anxiety that slash girls do not want to share on SNS goes straight into the discussions on XIANQING. There is a thread titled, “Recently I realized a fact, that I am at the bottom of this society.” The display of capital is also a reflection of slash girls’ dilemma in actual life. A lot of girls who are born into rich families are gifted expensive vehicles and other luxury articles by their families. They usually have very high self-expectation. When they fail to gain the success from the society, they turn to fandom community to seek a substitute.

### 5.3.6 Division of fields: The things people seek

So far, the major platforms in the daily activities of Chinese slash girls have been

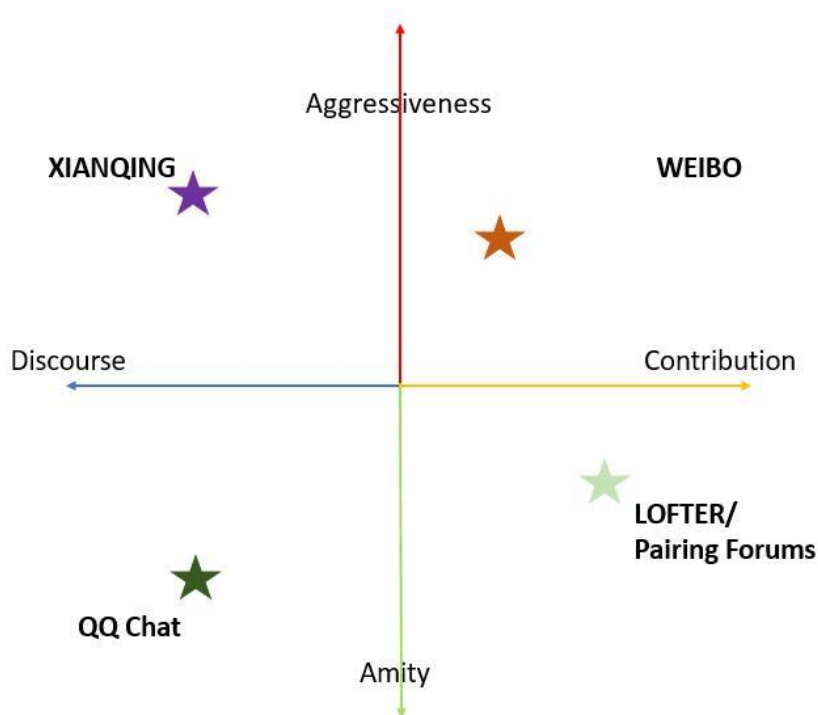


introduced. Besides them, there are other websites and applications that have been introduced into this subculture; these are only the most representative ones. The variety of platforms is probably the outcome of self-balancing in the community, so that the members' needs can be taken care of.

As we know, there are a couple of parallel capital systems working in this community: the system based on contribution, and the system based on discourse. In the age of forums, the influences from named community (pairing forums), and anonymous community (XIANQING) roughly match each other. Thus, no matter an author or a reader a member is, she would enjoy the community a lot.

However, when "DADA" on Weibo start to turn their followers into their fans, instead of fans of a pairing, the balance started to corrupt. The rising of LOFTER might be a response to this situation - it sends the capital system of named slash community back to fan-work based on some degree.

It is easy to understand that these interactions are made to meet slash girls' needs. A coordinate system with four Axis is made to show the platforms with their features. The first axis is contribution, it represents how much the interactions on a platform is based on community contribution. The opposite one is discourse, it shows how much it is based on discourse. The one up towards shows how much aggressiveness is involved in a platform's daily practice. The green one shows how much amity it needs to play on the platform.



Graph 5-2

As we can see in graph 5-2, the main platforms that are discussed in this paper fulfil the different needs of a slash girl. In a QQ chat group, people tend to avoid any direct conflict, and strong personal connections have been made most frequently. It meets the need of love and belonging. The interpersonal interaction is not very strong on LOFTER or pairing forums, where fan-work is the determinant in one's practice, and authors receive the feeling of achievement through feedback to their contributions.

A specific need to be stressed here is the need to attract. Slash girls on both XIANQING and Weibo show relatively high level of aggressiveness in their daily posts (though Weibo slash girls may try to deny this). This is probably because these two platforms are major fields of power practice in the community. Females are commonly socialized to be gentle, and aggressiveness and competitiveness are repressed in their daily life. The pure female environment offers an opportunity for slash girls to release

such repressed traits, even though many of them are not willing to admit this or simply do not recognize this for the outlet that it can become. This does not mean that people do not seek amity or belonging on XIANQING and Weibo. On the contrary, through siding with one another (especially in conflicts) slash girls often experience intense feelings of unity, and sometimes even leadership.

## **5.4 Feminism of Slash Community, in Current China**

### **5.4.1 Chinese women today: Higher education, Fewer political participation**

The rise of slash community will be better understood if we view this in the light of a broader social environment. In the past 10 years, China has become a rather unfriendly space for females. The reasons are too complicated to be fully elaborated here, but a basic summation reveals that this is an outcome of traditional cultural contexts, changes in governmental policy, and the influence of neoliberalism. According to the global gender gap report by the World Economic Forum, the gender equality in China fell from top 55% in 2006, to 63% in 2015. The major differences are concentrated in health, economy, and politics. Which means that there is an increasing cohort of well-educated young females, with frequently less access to economic resources, social standing and political recognition for them.

Under such circumstance, it is natural for these females to seek similar practices from other fields. Slash culture here plays an important role, for its participants create an extremely female dominated space. Without the gender gap, women start from a similar point as regular “textual poachers” (Jenkins, 1992), and develop skills on not

only secondary creating, but also on social and political strategies during the in-community interactions. It might be a subculture of leisure, yet the sense of self-esteem, of belonging, of achievements, of power, are all real and necessary for the participants, to help them construct healthy self-images in this relatively unfriendly society. Tang evaluates such behavior as “a proper supplement to their daily life rather than fleeing from it.” (Tang, 2013, p. 62)

As this culture grows, the need for related products also grows, which is reflected in the labor market. Female producers are equals, and even preferred in relative industry: 12.5% of the working informants in my study are engaged in media related industries. The fandom oriented market offers a way for slash girls to develop their careers in an environment where gender inequality is less severe.

#### 5.4.2 Is Slash Fandom Feminism?

Zhao describes the slash community in China as an “imagined political field” (Zhao, 2014). She criticizes the feminism interpretation of the population from previous research, and draws questions on the assumption that same sex romance audience can be allies of LGBT movements in China. The same sex romance content produced in China are twisted commercial works that do not really reflect realities of gay individuals, and most girls read these content for leisure, rather than for any political or socially active interest on gay rights. Besides, the preference for male characters among Chinese Fujyoshi arguably reflects an awareness of the weak position of female in the real society, yet Fujyoshi population has developed “a self-abasement of their sex rather

than active resistance to the inequality” (Zhao, 2014, p. 25). This is a typical example of the on-going debate in China between feminist and slash girls. Other feminist scholars criticize that the concentrated attention on romance between male characters lead to a massive ignorance of female among slash girls.

Slash community in China might not currently be openly feminist. However, it is undoubtedly practicing feminist thinking and promoting growing social awareness that many slash girls do not even realize that they are engaged in. Previous studies of this population often focus on texts, from the image of characters, to the popular worldview used in fictions. Since the objects in slash texts are mostly men, some would conclude that slash girls have a preference on male gender, and even perhaps practice a form of misogyny. Nevertheless, the “participatory culture” (Jenkins, 2006) nature of this fandom decides that the foundation of the whole community is the participation behavior. Tang stresses that “the consuming of texts has become a mean of identity construction and celebration” (Tang, 2013, p. 62). If there can be a seed of feminism, it must be in the population and their gathering, rather than in the text they read for fun.

The female dominated context not only provides a platform for women to practice power, but also serves to build connections between the members. Slash fandom itself is a rather affordable way of leisure activity. Anyone can watch a movie, and read hundreds of slash fictions posted online for free. This ensures an expanding size of this population with various backgrounds of the participants, which is vital because it breaks through social classes, and places young women, whether they are poor or rich, married or not, living in urban or rural regions, together. The instant communication, starts with

fandom topics, and will almost always develop to conversations about actual life, and for the first time, slash girls see other women's needs, hopes, happiness and misfortune and become cognizant of a variety of other possibilities of life, yet they all have shared desires and struggles in current China. In short, they begin to recognize that the personal is the political through a lens of intersectionality: A key element of feminism thought, theory and practice.

Based on such connections, explicit feminism expression also increases among the population. Female rights related news is frequently shared in the network, because the members have mutual concerns, and these concerns came from the hard fact that they are females. For example, when the famous case of the child bride in Wushan county, Chongqing was exposed on Weibo at the beginning of 2017, many of the slash girls I know showed clear rage and sympathy on their posts. As the incident developed, a series of discussions occurred on XIANQING. In the No.5 thread on figure 5-2, the host posts the article "Child Bride of Wushan, Chongqing: I was sold for 4000 yuan when I was 12" from a major press article in China. She changed her Majia to "This made my cry." A later thread (No.3 on 5-3) reports the victim's post on Weibo which indicated that she was captured by the local government and had limited access to the outside world. The two threads both attracted serious discussions, with over 500 replies for each thread. Other threads on figure 5-2 involve topics like the factors promoting child brides, questions about the Chinese judicial system, and feminism practice in China.

序号	主题	作者	发帖时间	最新回帖时间	回复数
1	(ID:1013521)不太懂，现在到底什么案子才能上达天听？	==	2017-03-26 10:11:30	2017-03-26 13:12:15	65
2	(ID:1006312)童养媳型cp和等郎媳型cp大家更能接受哪一种？	==	2017-03-14 17:47:51	2017-03-14 17:58:30	3
3	(ID:1004307)巫山事件新进展，马被囚禁，对外联络方式被控制	==	2017-03-11 02:25:36	2017-03-14 07:13:39	559
4	(ID:998135)童养媳xq，聘金这种卖女儿的传统陋习为何到现在还存 在，变相助长女性被自家人当作物品交易，同理男方家庭结婚被剥一层 皮，自然会抱持物尽其用跑不得的想法，很难单方面只指责一方吧	==	2017-03-01 19:55:21	2017-03-13 11:27:56	89
5	(ID:998026)新京报：重庆巫山童养媳:12岁那年 我被卖了4000元	看哭了	2017-03-01 16:46:51	2017-04-06 11:13:10	524
6	(ID:995072)我有一个问题.....为什么现在发生和被嘲的都是女权之声那 些田园女权什么的？真正该管事的妇联为什么毫无存在感？	==	2017-02-26 07:24:16	2017-02-26 13:22:49	8

Figure 5-2

The participants of these discussions may not speak in the ideological ways as feminist scholars like to, but inter-personal connection, and the natural empathy it brings is powerful enough to awaken the notion of issues within the domain of women. Slash community thus should be a potential ally or social location for feminists. With time, it may even take a more prominent role in Chinese political field.

One potential issue in the way of this process may be the closed feature of the community. As previously discussed, in an effort to secure the environment of slash fandom, code-mixing language and other measures have been applied. They enhanced the acknowledgement of slash girl identity, and segregate community members from “others.” For some of them, the identity of “slash girls” might override the identity of “feminists,” and limits their feminism expressions inside of the slash community.

## 5.5 Conclusions

Chinese slash community is always about fandom but has a much stronger reach and implication for society. Through using different online platforms, slash girls have developed complicated ways of communication. Starting with a capital system based on contribution, Weibo has intensified the status gap within Chinese slash community in the process of helping create it. The rise of LOFTER shows a trend in the community

that is against the individual oriented manner, and attempts to recover the fan-works oriented manner. XIANQING has been, and will always be a “deviant” part in this community. Yet this anonymous BBS shows another side of the process of power and identity construction in this field, and can be seen as an important addition to the whole online fandom environment in China. The capital systems of contribution and discourse interwork and achieve a balance in the slash community. The community makes it possible for slash girls to practice power, experience achievements, construct their identities, and expand their networks. Feminist thought and expressions have grown in this population and demonstrate that these communities are worth further observation from a gendered perspective

Due to the limitations on research time, space, and sample size, there are certain shortcomings in this paper. These include:

1. Lack of male samples in interviews. To make the structure of this paper clear, male members in the community are underrepresented in current study
2. Off line fandom practices not being included. Some of these activities have significant relations with online practices, yet a combined study will call for a trip to China
3. Missing parts of other Chinese Fujyoshi groups. Slash girl is a sub-category of Fujyoshi, and it would be helpful to expand the study to Fujyoshi. Nevertheless, a study of such a huge population will exceed the capacity of this paper

If I have opportunities to conduct further research on this topic, these are all



options to further expand my studies.

This project seeks to present the human side of slash fandom culture. Slash girls are not just consumers or “text poachers” of fan literatures, but individuals who try to enjoy their lives and find connection and belonging in their chosen subcultures. The detailed analysis of capital and statuses in Chinese slash community in this paper should be relatively fresh. As a member of this population, I wish this can benefit both the studies of related fields, and the community itself.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Boellstorff, Tom. *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.

Boellstorff, Tom, Nardi, Bonnie, Pearce, Celia, Taylor, T.L. *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Forms of Capital*. From Richardson, J., *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, Westport, CT: Greenwood, pp. 241–58. 1986.

China Internet Network Information Center. “2010 年中国手机上网行为研究报告 =2010 Chinese Cellphone Internet Usage Behavior Report.” URL: [http://www.cnnic.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/201108/t20110829\\_30708.htm](http://www.cnnic.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/201108/t20110829_30708.htm) [cited Apr.10<sup>th</sup>, 2017]

Dai, Jinhua. *Gendering China=性别/中国*. Taipei: Mai tian chu ban, 2006.

Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge. 1992.

Jenkins, Henry. Clinton, Katie. Purushotma, Ravi. Robison, Alice J. Weigel, Margaret. “Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century.” MacArthur, 2006. URL: [https://www.macfound.org/media/article\\_pdfs/JENKINS\\_WHITE\\_PAPER.PDF](https://www.macfound.org/media/article_pdfs/JENKINS_WHITE_PAPER.PDF) [Cited Apr 10th, 2017]

Kune, N. *The need to belong: rediscovering Maslow’s hierarchy of needs*. Paul H. Brookes Publishers, 2011.

Liu, Bohong. Li, Ling. Yang, Chunyu. “Gender Equality in China’s Economic Transition.” United Nations System in China, 2014. URL: [http://www.un.org.cn/uploads/kindeditor/file/20160311/20160311114613\\_1571.pdf](http://www.un.org.cn/uploads/kindeditor/file/20160311/20160311114613_1571.pdf) [cited Apr.10<sup>th</sup>, 2017]

Liu, Dong, Brown, B. Bradford. “Self-disclosure on social networking sites, positive feedback, and social capital among Chinese college students.” *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2014 Volume 38, pp. 213–219.

Maslow, Abraham H. “A theory of human motivation.” *Psychological Review*, 1943 Volume 50, pp. 370–96.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY (continued)

Maslow, Abraham H. *Motivation and Personality*. Harper & Row, 1954.

Shen, Shen. “微博用户数量井喷, 半年增加 1.3 亿=The number of Weibo users has increased by 130,000,000 during the past half-year.” China Internet Network Information Center, Jul 2011.

URL: [http://www.cnnic.cn/hlwfzyj/fxszl/fxswz/201107/t20110719\\_33463.htm](http://www.cnnic.cn/hlwfzyj/fxszl/fxswz/201107/t20110719_33463.htm) [cited Apr 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017]

Song, Shaopeng. “Retreating back Home Willingly or Being Unwillingly Sent Home? ——Debates on ‘Women-going-home’ and the Ideological Transformation in the Course of Marketization in China.” *Collection of Women’s Studies*, 2011 Volume 4, pp. 5-12, 26.

Stoner, James A. F. "Risky and cautious shifts in group decisions: the influence of widely held values." *Social Psychology*, 1968 4, pp. 442–459.

Sun, Shuoying. “The Virtual-community-based Utopia of Fans: A Study of a Harry Potter Fanfiction-fan Virtual Community.” Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2013.

Tang, Leshui. “A Research of Fujyoshi Group.” Chengdu: Southwest Jiaotong University Press, 2014.

Trepte, Sabine, Reinecke, Leonard. “The reciprocal effects of social network site use and the disposition for self-disclosure: A longitudinal study.” *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2013 Volume 29, Issue 3, Pages 1102–1112.

Wu, Dan. “手机上网将步入客户端时代=Internet Surfing on Smartphone Is Stepping into An Age of Applications.” China Internet Network Information Center, 2011 Jul. URL: [http://www.cnnic.cn/hlwfzyj/fxszl/fxswz/201107/t20110719\\_33456.htm](http://www.cnnic.cn/hlwfzyj/fxszl/fxswz/201107/t20110719_33456.htm) [Cited Apr 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017].

Yi, Erika Junhui. Reflection on Chinese boys' love fans: An insider's view. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, [online journal] 2013 Vol 12, URL: <http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/424/390>. [Cited Apr 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017].

Zhang, Qianru. “Study of Fan Fiction Communication.” Beijing: Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications Press, 2013.

Zhang, Weiting. “An Anthropological Study on the Slash Culture and Slash Girls.” Beijing: Minzu University of China Press, 2013.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY (continued)

Zhao, Tingting. "Imagined Political Field: The Online BL Fiction Fans and Feminism, Gay Politics." Nanjing: Nanjing University Press. 2014.