

Investigating the Psychological Mechanisms Underlying Chinese BL Culture and the Analyzing Associated Subjects

Jiaen Pang^{1,a,*}

¹*Goldsmiths, University of London, London, United Kingdom*

a. jpang001@campus.goldsmiths.ac.uk

**corresponding author*

Abstract: This research explores the complexity of the BL industry, its origin, its evolution, and the psychological mechanisms behind its popularity among women. Since the introduction of Japanese BL culture into China in the 1990s and has developed rapidly, which formed a strong female ideology and a mode of network as the main communication space in the process of localization and contributed to the emergence of the Fujoshi group. However, behind BL's seemingly powerful narrative lurks unconscious misogyny and anti-feminism. The article will use Lacan's mirror stage theory, Freud's castration complex theory, and Ueno Chizuko's 'Misogyny' to intensely discuss the psychological mechanism and the problems existing in the epidemic process of BL and the attraction of Fujoshi culture, which reveals the BL provides a fantasy world where women can project their desire and seek an idealized, egalitarian model of love. At the same time, binary gender expectations are also prevalent in BL culture, reflecting traditional gender stereotypes. It suggests that some BL creators may harbor self-loathing towards their own gender and envy towards men.

Keywords: BL, Misogyny, Mirror Stage Theory, Penis Envy

1. Introduction

In contemporary subculture trends, a variety of niche hobby types are emerging, and BL culture is one of them. BL culture, as a cultural phenomenon, its racialized and gendered effects, and trans nationalization are evident. As a foreign product, was introduced into China and began to develop and grow. In the early 1990s, it was mainly in the forms of comics, animation, movies, novels, and TV Series and spread widely in the media, which attracted plenty of young female groups, thus gradually forming the culture of Fujoshi. Traditionally, BL has been portrayed as a genre crafted by women, intended primarily for female audiences, and full of superficial male consumption content. However, it is hard to deny that there are still serious and unconscious symbols of misogyny and anti-feminism in the BL industry. This essay will use Lacan's mirror stage theory, Freud's penis envy theory, castration complex theory, and Ueno's Chikako's 'Misogyny' to reveal the psychological mechanism behind BL culture and fan Fujoshi popularity as well as the gender problems existing from the perspective of BL, to give targeted suggestions on binary gender and the situation of women.

2. The Origin, Evolution, Pattern of BL

2.1. Origin

The word Tanbi originated from the bourgeois literary trend of aestheticism popular in Western Europe at the end of the 19th century and was introduced into Japan in the 1930s to 1940s. In modern Japanese literature, the definition of 'Tanbi' was first used as a writing method throughout to counter the naturalistic literature. Additionally, the original intention of the establishment was to believe that literature should dissociate from reality and pursue the nature of beauty [1]. After the 1960s, 'Tanbi' gradually from its essence of referring to a literary genre and derived a new definition to refer exclusively to a genre term for a class of derivative comics category [2]. The term Tanbi was expanded in the 1960s to describe all types of beautiful men and male-male relationships that do not involve reproduction, which is Boys Love. Besides, Japanese Tanbi comics have enlightening significance to the invitation and development of Chinese Tanbi culture. The emergence of Tanbi as a subculture in mainland China can be traced back to the early 1990s, during the period, the popular BL literature and culture in mainland China were mainly based on the translation of Japanese Tanbi manga and novels [2].

2.2. Evolution and Pattern

After 2000, with the development of the Internet and the popularity of mobile terminals, it not only provided a material basis for the emergence of large-scale commercial websites and network literature, but also provided a rare opportunity for the expansion, and the scope of its cultural influence gradually expanded in China [2]. Meanwhile, the network literature industry in China has generated a substantial body of Tanbi works, many of which have subsequently been adapted into visual media, such as the immensely prevalent Chinese drama 'Addicted', which premiered in 2016. Survey data illustrates that among the top 100 BL authors in Jinjiang Literature (a famous romance novel website in China), the proportion of female authors is more than 90% and that of male authors is only 5% [3]. In the same survey, statistics show that women also make up most readers, it can be concluded that the mainstream of BL novels in China, both in terms of writers and readers are women, it is the products are written by and consumed by women [3]. However, those creators, viewers, and readers are mostly heterosexual [4]. And women who indulge in BL are called Fujoshi, which means 'rotten girl', referring to a deviation in taste. Originally it was a derogatory term, but over the years women have appropriated it and now use it as a badge of honor to some extent. In the BL novels created by women, the main object of description is beautiful and feminized men, and there is an obvious male consumption content, which is undoubtedly standing in the opposite of the male gaze, forming a female gaze on the male. Although it can be considered as the embodiment of feminist consciousness, the core is still shrouded in the shadow of unconscious misogyny and anti-feminism.

3. Reason and Psychological Mechanism of Epidemic

3.1. Psychological Mechanism

BL novels are about romance between homosexual men, but they are relatively different from real homosexual literature. As a result, the homosexual world in their perspective of view reflects the depressed and passive living conditions and painful emotional life of the homosexual group. The readers of them are mostly homosexuals or homosexual researchers [5]. But in China, love and sex are the only themes of BL, the kind of love is not an artistic writing in the real homosexual world, but a female author's love for gay men's imagination. A lot of people tend to pathology the Fujoshi group and make their behavior seem like some mental illness [6] because female is addicted to watching

men in a vulnerable, submissive position in relationships that involve not only sex but also the emotional pleasure of electric subversion. But in fact, the prevalence of BL is a byproduct of women's oppression.

Nevertheless, the reason why Fujoshi is addicted to BL can be traced back to the yearning for an equal love model, which is also the part that most women are missing in their heterosexual relationships. According to the study of Lacan's mirror stage theory, the scene of the audience at the screen is essentially very similar to the scene of the baby seeking their confirmation in the mirror, the audience is ostensibly staring at the screen image with its own eyes, but from a perceptual level, the viewer is staring at a new kind of mirror, a shadow, an illusion, or a replica of themselves [7]. Lacan considers that the eye is an 'organ of desire', and people can derive pleasure from the act of seeing because they also approve of what they desire or need, or can be accepted, which means that they project their own desire into the image [7]. The gaze takes the viewer out of the order of the symbolic world and into the imaginary world [8]. At the same time, Lacan brought out another concept, which is an imaginary situation, and the protagonist of the scene is the subject. Fantasy does not refer to the satisfaction of needs, but to unsatisfied desires, the function of fantasy is to maintain desires rather than to satisfy them [8]. Thus, staring is a projection of desire, a process of being satisfied with desire [8].

'Seme' and 'Uke' are slang terms used to refer to the more active and passive participants in homosexual relationships depicted in BL series, anime, or manga [9]. According to the stereotypes under the binary gender, 'Seme' is taller, stronger, and usually represents masculinity, the 'Uke' represents femininity and is generally given traditionally feminine attributes. Predominantly, it not only reinforces the social demands and expectations of the traditional binary gender given by society standards but also helps women find more similarities between themselves and 'Uke' and can bring them into the fantasy more conveniently.

3.2. Expectations, Rules of Binary Gender

Secondly, the BL culture is predominately female-oriented, creating a unique space for them to share collective fantasies, in which they can separate their gender construction from society. BL world is a typical 'allotropic culture space' constructed by female writers with the help of the Internet, which is the intersection of reality and fantasy, not an ideal, distant, fictional space that needs to reply on various functions and mechanisms of the real society or be touched by the thoughts and imaginations of social members [10]. For female BL writers, the love in social reality is disappointing, and the mediocre and boring life has killed the purity and transcendence of the essence of love. BL love model does not need to consider the responsibility of gender reproduction, because women have always been unable to escape the duty of reproduction under the traditional society. Most of BL is Fujoshi's fantasy, romance novels strengthen the pursuit and insatiable greed between heterosexual couples, and BL is an idealized representation of romance and loyalty, a love and noble purity that it transcends the boundaries of gender. According to a study [11], BL's fantasy world can let women act as equal human beings, unaffected by pre-set gender expectations.

4. Issues and Causes in BL Culture

4.1. Development of Female Consciousness Based on Gender Inequality

Although BL reflects the social plight of women and gives a utopian world belonging to women. But in a world full of male consumption and female gaze, there is still a lot of unconscious anti-feminist and misogynistic content. In fact, the BL construction is a heterosexual romance re-creation. The dilemma is itself a product of the patriarchal structure, and some of the BL creators have instinctively repeated it. They wish to pursue an equal relationship between the sexes that does not exist in the

heterosexual model, and the second reason is that they despise femineity and wish they were born to be a male instead of female, which stems from women's self-loathing of their own gender and emphasizes the superiority of men. The theoretical interpretation of women's misogyny can be traced back to Freud's Castration Complex and Penis Envy. Both theories aim to convey the awareness that women recognize the existence of male genitalia, which they lack, and thus consider themselves as castrated creatures [12]. The latter concept is consistent with De Beauvoir's study of 'The Second Sex', in which female gender indemnity is constructed after or beneath male gender identity [13], the construction involves a profound desire for attributes associated with masculinity, but also a deep-seated gender inferiority complex. Under such complicated conditions, female BL writer authors unconsciously fall into the negative competition, hostility, criticism, and rejection among women. This is due to social and cultural stereotypes and gender role shaping and expectations, as well as the emphasis on female competition. Women's previous competition is mainly divided into historical legacy reasons and social gender inequality reasons.

4.2. Historical Legacy Factors

Firstly, in the feudal period, China always followed the concept of male superiority and female inferiority under Confucianism, and women's survival mainly depended on their fathers and husbands. They are not financially independent, barely educated, and have a disadvantaged social status. In the feudal times under the polygamous, men had the right to have concubines, so to compete for limited survival resources, they had to fight against women in the same deep inferior position. Subsequently, in the struggle of a patriarchal society, men prefer to be approved by other men to strengthen their own gender, while women are the spoils of success tools of self-identity [14]. Therefore, men can maintain their own identity based on the possession of women, they are extremely content that women's jealousy can be directed at other women and satisfied with the fierce competition around them because jealousy is a struggle to conserve self-esteem. The reasons left over by history have been retained until now, and the rules of the patriarchal society have subtly hegemonic the entire BL industry.

4.3. Negative, Stereotypical Depictions of Female

Moreover, female characters will inevitably be reduced to supporting roles in BL, and the 'Uke' takes the place of the heterosexual women, starting a female competition with supporting female characters. In Chinese BL fiction, one of the most obvious and frequent appearances is the female supporting role as an intervention. In fact, that is also very similar to the female supporting roles in heterosexual romance novels, most of them are extremely stereotyped, to compete for a man unscrupulously, but the core is still a story about two women competing for one subject. For example, in the TV series 'Addicted', the author has been stigmatizing the female characters, including a harsh evaluation of Uke's stepmother: there is no merit except youth and beauty, she smiles and acts like a peasant woman. This is all about judging women from a man's point of view.

BL becomes a manifestation of inner misogyny. The idea of having a man so ideal that the only person who can match is another man is shocking. It reinforces the hegemonic notion that women are inferior to men [15]. In contrast, there are nasty third-party female characters, usually as the former lover or fiancé of one of the male protagonists, they have undoubtedly become immoral characters who destroy their noble love. Shi Hui, the former girlfriend of 'uke' Bai Luoyin in 'Addiction' is a typical example, she was born into a wealthy family and was a spoiled princess who broke up with Bai Luoyin to study abroad. And this has become a fatal reason for the author to attack her because she puts herself first in love, she does not have the traditional female characteristics of giving everything and sacrificing everything for love.

In the general romance model, these abandoned women should be sympathized with and understood, because the image of 'abandoned women' in traditional Chinese history has always been worthy of compassion [16], primarily because they are weak in gender powers and filled with a sense of powerlessness about their fate. But BL author usually give such supporting characters powerful and wealthy backgrounds, so they lose the status of underdog, the author does not show any empathy for them but demonizes them to the limit, because, in their values, women are inferior and dominated, which once again recognized the stereotype and expectation of women in misogyny.

However, under the binary gender society, the social gender attribute and the sexual object's biological sex are determined by their natural biological gender. The patriarchal society strengthens the gender attribute, its purpose is to serve the social and political function, and the intrinsic quality is to conform to the gender system. Encourage women to express their desires and mental needs, reproductive freedom, and equal power in relationships without reinforcing gender stereotypes or misogyny.

5. Conclusion

The BL industry has grown from its origins in Japan to an important cultural phenomenon, especially among Chinese women. While BL provides a space for women to explore their desires and fantasies. The consumption of male sexuality in BL presents men as sex objects and portrays lust between men, which is significant because it promotes a silent resistance to the male gaze. It is also a solution to negotiate and challenge gender inequality and patriarchal gender norms. However, the existence of unconscious misogyny and anti-feminism in this culture must be acknowledged. Reading or watching BL products are functions to satisfy Fushijo's unsatisfied needs. The psychological mechanism behind BL's popularity includes the desire for an idealized and egalitarian love model, but it reinforces traditional gender stereotypes, as well as aversion and hostility to their own gender, including envy, yearning, and worship of the male gender.

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