



THE YAOI OBSESSION: BL WORLD AND FUJOSHI CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

People, who are into Japanese manga, would instantaneously understand that the term ‘Yaoi’ has something to do with the Japanese literature. Yaoi is fiction-manga, which narrates the stories of two (sometimes more), men in love. It is sometimes classified as Boys’ Love (BL), which is not completely correct. The fandom of this genre are called Fujoshis and Fudanshis. The Fujoshis mostly use the accounts, which do not reveal their identity. This is because of the stigma that Fujoshis face from the fans of Non-Yaoi, Shoujo and Shonen manga. In spite of its popularity, Yaoi is still considered restricted literature by some Asian countries and the websites are inaccessible. Yet the websites that capitalize on this genre make huge money due to rapidly spreading Fujoshi culture. This paper shall explain the evolution of Yaoi and the cause of its huge popularity in Manga realm and the stigma associated with it, by looking into the situation of the Fujoshi culture, which is rampant on social media. This paper gives a fair idea about this genre of manga to the people who are not aware of the existence this Yaoi and BL. This discusses the stigma associated to Yaoi and Fujoshis. Most of the information in this paper come from personal experience, personal study of fan accounts on social media and discussions with my fellow Fujoshis and Fudanshis, their blog posts and rare research done on this topic.

Keywords: Yaoi, Boys’ Love (BL), Manga, Fujoshi, fandom, genre

WHAT ARE YAOI & BL AND WHY ARE THEY FAMOUS?

The fame this genre got in last seven years is because of the internet and the content being made available to the female audience all over the world. Though the audience did not find this acceptable, found it weird that they like such literature, they developed keen interest in this genre. I, being one of such people who did not accept that I like such stories, am now addicted (that is the proper word, I guess) to Yaoi and BL. Yaoi is not targeted at the homosexual audience. It is said that Shoujo is targeted at female audience mainly, but that is a misapprehension. This

misconception comes from the idea that girls enjoy soft romance and boys don't. In fact, this fallacy persists and most of the male audience do not reveal their identity on their social media accounts or do not openly admit that they read Yaoi. This stigma is also in female readers because they fear shame and insults. Until recently, I was not very comfortable with admitting that I read Yaoi and watch BL. During its initial times, Yaoi was particularly controversial because, in a male dominated manga world with masculine discourses and themes, for the first time, female authors were writing about the topics and fantasies that are forbidden in the self-styled modern society. Till initial 2000s, Yaoi was considered a sub-genre under Shounen-ai. However, due to its huge popularity after 2003, it was categorized as a separate genre in Manga. While Yaoi is targeted at the readers looking for some sexually explicit scenes, portraying various kinds of kinks, Shounen-ai is written for the readers who look for interesting story with intricate characterizations.¹ Shounen-ai is for the people who would want to read good story with gay romance, mostly restricted to subtle kisses.

ARE YAOI AND BL DIFFERENT?

The Yaoi manga is spun around the two male protagonists. Yaoi is basically, the stories told through drawings. This is a genre of manga, graphic novels or just cartoons, to understand it very easily. Not to be confused with anime. To oversimplify, for better understanding, anime is animated shows or films and manga is, as mentioned earlier, graphic novels or comic books.² Boys' Love (BL) is often used synonymously to Yaoi. But, in recent years (from 2015 to 2020), the non-animated serials of gay romance have become exceptionally celebrated. The actors in those series are known as BL actors, however, they do not prefer to be referred like that. Audience have started to use BL specifically for such non-animated series and Yaoi is being restricted to manga and anime. This is one of the significant changes.



(Source: Tumblr)

¹ WHAT IS BL/YAOI ? [DEFINITION, MEANING] HONEY'S ANIME, <https://honeysanime.com/what-is-blyaoi-definition-meaning/> (last visited Apr 8, 2020).

² ANIME VS. MANGA – WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE? - WRITING EXPLAINED, <https://writingexplained.org/anime-vs-manga-difference> (last visited Apr 8, 2020).

FUJOSHIS AND FUDANDHIS

The fandom of Yaoi is referred to as Fujoshis and Fudanshis. This term refers to female fans alone, and the literal meaning of the word is ‘rotten girls’ and it is used in a way of self-mockery.³ This term is used because the female fans are immensely attracted to not only the male protagonists but also incredibly excited about those male protagonists (mostly two) being attracted to each other. Fudanshi is the male counterpart of the fandom and not mostly used term to refer to the fandom because of the majority in the fandom being females. Again, Fudanshi means ‘rotten boy’. Fujoshi is used as a blanket term to refer to the fandom. The Fujoshis write huge amount of fan fictions. We pick our favourite Yaoi or choose our favourite characters in mainstream media and create ‘ships’. We Fujoshis refer to ourselves as ‘*Women of Culture*’. It can be said that the fan fictions trend has started with the Fujoshis writing fan fictions about Black Butler, which is a super natural fantasy manga. Sebastian and Ciel are the two main characters in this manga and Sebastian is portrayed as the protector of Ciel. The women of culture weren’t very satisfied with just that portrayal and created their own Yaoi and BL based on Black Butler. The homoeroticism which is portrayed extraordinarily well in this manga has laid foundation stone for the explicit expression of the BL fantasies of young female authors.



(Source: <https://imgur.com/gallery/AmmKlGh>)

WHY IS THIS LITERATURE, FORBIDDEN?

Yaoi, when it started appearing on internet, on the easily accessible websites, it caused a major uproar among the netizens (citizens of internet and participate in political society through internet)⁴. One of the main reasons is the stigma associated with homosexuality in men. During its initial times, Yaoi was controversial because, in a male-

³ WHAT IS A FUJOSHI? ANIME NEWS NETWORK, <https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/feature/2016-12-21/what-is-a-fujoshi/.109594> (last visited Apr 8, 2020).

⁴ WHAT IS NETIZEN? - DEFINITION FROM WHATIS.COM WHATIS.COM, <https://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/netizen> (last visited Apr 8, 2020).

dominated manga world, with masculine discourses and themes, for the first time, female authors were writing about the topics and fantasies that are forbidden in the self-styled modern society.⁵

Fujoshis are the main reason for the making anime and non-animated series inspired from Yaoi. Some Yaoi are changed to suit the television audience, mostly by deleting the explicitly sexual parts and turning it into a sweet romantic and feel-good series. It looks as if they were inspired from Shounen-ai. China has a strict unwritten censorship rules for the television series and the movies made in the country. China is famous for making all the BL novels into bromance serials. Bromance series are those, in which the protagonists are shown to be best friends and nothing more than that. Sometimes they are also showed to be in relationship with females. China has even banned its first super hit BL series, which was an adaption of an even more famous novel written by Ms. Chai Jidan, titled Addicted (Heroin/ Shangyin), got banned by the authorities in China and the reason given was that the novel has rape in it and thus, justification of the ban. However, the makers of the show assured that they did not plan to have that scene in the series and they would also delete the kissing scenes between the protagonists. In spite of all these, the ban sustained and the protagonists were also prohibited from making public appearances together. This comes from the Chinese Government's inherent homophobia. China has been silent about their laws on same-sex marriage and they follow their 'do not support-do not restrict'⁶ policy. This happens often with the Chinese series.



Addicted (Shangyin)

(Source: Google)

⁵ YAOI: HISTORY, APPEAL, AND MISCONCEPTIONS JAPAN POWERED, <https://www.japanpowered.com/anime-articles/a-brief-history-of-yaoi> (last visited Apr 7, 2020).

⁶ CHINESE CENSORS TAKE A POPULAR GAY DRAMA OFFLINE TIME, <https://time.com/4236864/china-gay-drama-homosexuality/> (last visited Apr 8, 2020).



(Source: Facebook)

Some of the BL Chinese novels are made into bromance series. Some of such famous bromance series are The Guardian, Beloved Enemy, Nirvana in Fire, Till death tear us apart and S.C.I-Mystery.⁷ Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation (Mo Dao Zu Shi) is a manga written by Mo Xiang Tong Xiu.⁸ This is a sensational BL manga, which was made into anime (BL) and in turn was made into a non-animated Chinese series titled The Untamed. This series is strictly restricted to portraying the protagonists as best friends. One can easily infer that there is much more than friendship between the protagonists from their actions and expressions. Yet, none of the pcast would openly accept that fact. Even the promotions of such series are attended by large number of Fujoshis and the promotions are designed to attract them. The interaction between the protagonists is scripted in such a way that it indicates more than friendship of the characters they play in the series. Another way in which they deal with these series is to change the happy-ending in the novel to a tragic ending in the series, considering it would act as a deterrent for people opting to get into same-sex relation. While thinking this way, they often forget that it is not a choice.

⁷ THESE 4 CHINESE BROMANCE DRAMAS WILL MAKE YOU A TOTAL FANGIRL GIRLSTYLE SINGAPORE 4, <https://girlstyle.com/sg/article/54194/these-4-chinese-bromance-dramas-will-make-you-a-total-fangirl> (last visited Apr 8, 2020).

⁸ GRANDMASTER OF DEMONIC CULTIVATION ADAPTATION THE UNTAMED AIRS TODAY CFENSI, <https://cfen.si/2019/06/27/grandmaster-of-demonic-cultivation-adaptation-the-untamed-airs-today/> (last visited Apr 10, 2020).



The Untamed

(Source: Weibo)



(A meme that depicts the perception of a Fujoshi)

(Source: Meme is made using Meme Generator App)

Another problem with this genre is that the fixed positions of *uke* (bottom) and *seme* (top) for the protagonists and the way the incidents lead to the 'romantic' movements is not very romantic. There is sometimes, force, stalking, obtaining consent by fraud or misrepresentation or undue influence. Even when the *uke* is crying because of such

encounters, some readers do not find a problem with it. The *seme* even tries to kiss and have sexual intercourse with the *uke*, when he is asleep or intoxicated or unconscious. In spite of all these problematic things, the *seme* and *uke* end up having a romantic relationship – the happy ending. The *uke*, in such Yaoi is showed to ‘miss’ the insane and problematic activities by the *seme*.⁹

There is another reason for the stigma associated with Yaoi or BL fictions. Though this list can continue, I have chosen main reasons. The fan fictions that come up in BL arena. The Fujoshis and Fudanshis choose famous characters from all kinds of literature and write fan fictions on those characters, involving them in same-sex relationships. Those characters are sometimes the symbols of masculinity in mainstream media and the fans reading these fan fictions cannot tolerate such portrayal of their idols. Best examples for this kind is Iron man & Captain America (Stony), Harry Potter & Draco Malfoy (Drarry/ Wizard boyfriends), Dumbledore & Grindelwald (Grindeldore) and Spiderman & Deadpool (Spideypool/ Red boyfriends) fan fictions. These fan fictions do not stop with these characters. It also extends to Gods, which attracts huge outrage towards Yaoi. Jesus & Judas and Vishnu & Shiva are one of the most viewed fan fictions of Gods on internet. These are not very easily available on surface web.



(Source:Facebook)

⁹ THE PROBLEMS WITH SEME AND UKE TROPES QUEER WRITING, <https://timeforwritingblog.wordpress.com/2018/06/19/the-problems-with-seme-and-uke-tropes/> (last visited Apr 8, 2020).

The answer that will literally take a man's soul from his body



(Source: Facebook)

It might come as a surprise, but the huge criticism that Yaoi gets is from the gay community. The community people claim that such literature send wrong message to the audience about the community and sets unrealistic standards to the teenagers who are not yet ready to embrace their queer identity. I think that the problem here, is the audience and not the literature. Readers need to understand that it is fiction and it portrays no one's life or interests of a community. Fantasy can never be equated with reality.

EVOLUTION FROM STRICTLY 'A'-RATED TO UNIVERSAL

The increased reading of Yaoi is a consequence of increase in the consumption of Japanese literature, precisely manga and anime.¹⁰ Readers across the world, who are interested in Japanese literature did not delay in finding Yaoi and soon the translations came out. Translations are done by paid translators, recruited by the publishers. But, due to unaffordable prices, the pirated websites have fan translations which are as good as the paid ones. This free availability is one of the reasons for the Yaoi's popularity and even I, with a touch of regret, admit that pirated websites' Yaoi used to be my source of happiness.

The audience who turn to reading the Yaoi after watching the series made based on that particular Yaoi has increased enormously. The parts of the Yaoi that did not make it to the series because of the explicit content is one of the reasons. This deletion is acting as an incentive for the audience to read Yaoi. An example is a Japanese Manga titled *Dakaretai Otoko 1-i ni Odosarete Imasu*.

¹⁰ FUDANSHI: MEN AND THE CONSUMPTION OF GAY THEMES IN MANGA AND ANIME | YABAI - THE MODERN, VIBRANT FACE OF JAPAN YABAI, <http://yabai.com/p/2725> (last visited Apr 8, 2020).



(Poster of Dakaretai Otoko anime series)

(Source: Google)

The incest Yaoi was not very much supported till last decade. But with the increased portrayal of the incest in mainstream media, though as a taboo, it has increased the readership of incest Yaoi and BL. Mostly, this incest is portrayed between step-brothers (not related by blood) and cousins. Blood related brothers' incest and twins' incest (Twincest) is still not very welcome by the audience, openly.

However, false and fragile masculinity did not leave this genre too. Most of the readers do not like it when the *uke* is feminine. The readers want 'men' with 'masculinity' as per the societal standard. The *uke* is allowed to have some feminine interests like stitching, singing, fashion interest and office secretarial or assistant jobs. But the *seme* is strictly restricted to outdoor sports, gym, guitar and CEO of a company. Even if the *uke* character is a trans-man, then it does not come under Yaoi anymore. Yaoi restricts itself to typical *cis*-males, sometimes the *uke* with love for women's dresses or makeup or 'feminine' things.

In spite of all the hurdles that were thrown at Yaoi, including making it accessible to only adults, Yaoi emerged to be one of the most read genre in manga. Though a few sub-genre of Yaoi are written for adult audience, most of the Yaoi is written for adolescent and teenage audience. The accessibility of Yaoi and the increasing awareness about one's own self and one's own favourites and embracing them has increased exponentially in last few years. However, the most benefitted individuals from these are the capitalists who cash on the fantasies of young girls and boys.

CONCLUSION

This is a basic introduction to Yaoi as a genre. Yaoi has many sub-genre and all of them are not explicitly sexual. Hentai-Yaoi¹¹ is a sub-genre, which is literally porn. Other sub-genre are comparatively subtle. However, the homosexual men do not say that Yaoi is realistic. In fact, Yaoi is criticized by gay community for the misconceptions that it propagates. Yaoi is just for fun read and it is not in any way used as a tool to presume someone's sexuality or evaluate a community's sexual characteristics. Yaoi is fiction and fantasy. Most of Yaoi does not portray reality and is made for certain group of audience, who cherish certain kinds of themes and concepts. The taboo associated with Yaoi and BL is slowly fading, yet there are certain black spots that might still be considered forbidden, at least in the near future. There is no need to associate this literature with reality and form opinions. Fiction should be taken as such and not as a module to analyze a community.



(Source: Instagram)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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This article by Turner sums up the trends that are followed in studying the Yaoi manga. The paper involves various disciplines like queer theory, psychoanalysis and bisexuality studies and other disciplines that are implicitly mentioned in the Yaoi manga, sometimes unconsciously by the authors.

The paper does not just examine the isolated texts. It considers that impact that it has on the readers. Thus, it provides a series of events as to how the evolution of Yaoi from a remote concept to mainstream manga genre has happened.

¹¹ YAOI: HISTORY, APPEAL, AND MISCONCEPTIONS JAPAN POWERED, <https://www.japanpowered.com/anime-articles/a-brief-history-of-yaoi> (last visited Apr 10, 2020).

Zsila, Demetrovics. *The Boys' Love Phenomenon*, JPRS, 2017.

This paper considers the concealed literature that came out on boys' love and presents a view by evaluating all of them. It gives us an evaluation of the increasing fandom, mostly women and how different countries perceives Yaoi manga differently.

This paper makes a critical evaluation as to how the mainstream media portray the genre, Yaoi, at the same time, exploiting its craze across the countries and how the translations help in popularizing Yoai across the world.

Galbraith, Patrick. *Fujoshi: Transgressive Intimacy among "Rotten Girls"*, TUCP, 2014.

The paper uses the literature written on other fandoms, analyses those activities vis-à-vis Fujoshi fandom activity and tries to draw a comparison between the different fandoms. This tries to draw similarities between the fandoms of Japanese manga of different genre.

This paper builds up the narrative as how the common fantasy of Yaoi built the friendship and intimacy among the Fujoshis, the rotten girls. It studies the interactions of fandoms online and offline with respect to making their own favourite genre, famous.

