



**A Study on the “Coupling” Phenomenon in the Chinese Fandom  
of English Cultural Products and Intercultural Imagination of  
Fan Creation**

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## **Abstract**

This doctoral thesis examines the emerging CP fan culture in Chinese cyberspace and explores its representation in the Chinese fandom of English-language cultural products such as Harry Potter and Fantastic Beasts. As a cultural category initiated by predominantly female participants for imagining intimate relationships between 2-dimensional characters and 3-dimensional real people, CP fan culture shares some cultural homologies and proximities with Japanese Boy's Love (BL) culture and Western slash fan culture. However, existing research has focused almost exclusively on these two cultural subsets, which have a long history and transcultural influence beyond their geographical boundaries, and scholars have usually analysed them from the perspectives of feminism and queer theory, whereas there is a serious lack of systematic academic discussion of the distinctive connotations and local cultural characteristics of CP culture, which has become the centre of public opinion and the core of the cultural industry in China. Even the few English-language studies of CP fan culture tend to confuse it with BL culture and slash fan culture, and tend to discuss negative features such as the CP fan struggle and the censorship of homoerotic literature in China from a critical perspective.

The present research uses the mixed methods approach consisting of aca-fan, online questionnaire (N = 136), textual analysis, feminism with 'only daughter' as a generational characteristic, postmodern culturalism, and intercultural fandom to construct a new theoretical system, which is committed to analysing how CP fans of English-language cultural products, as a transcultural fandom, engage in transmedia CP activities compared to early Chinese media fans and CP fans of Chinese-language cultural products based on the following five perspectives: 1. the genesis of CP fan culture; 2. the 'setting supremacy' that serves as a guiding principle in the creative approach of CP fan culture on two levels; 3. the preference of some CP fans for English-language cultural products; 4. the original La Lang CP created by CP fans of English-language cultural products; and 5. the fandom nationalism that caused the termination of transnational CP activities.

Within this context, the present research defines for the first time a series of important concepts in CP fan culture, including the sense of CP, the intimacy of CP, the top/bottom character configuration of CP, La Lang CP, and the fandom nationalism of CP fans of English-language cultural products. Moreover, the present research reveals that CP fan creations abide by the rule of 'setting supremacy', dissecting the '2.5-dimensional setting' which is the fundamental component of CP fan culture, and

setting it apart from the ‘moe element’ put forth by Japanese ACGN culture researcher Azuma Hiroki and frequently misconstrued by Chinese fan culture scholars. Based on this, the present research uniquely proposes that the essence of CP fan culture is the creation and consumption of a ‘dynamic 2.5-dimensional settings database’. As a result, the present research focuses on the CP fan culture of English-language cultural products with both localised and intercultural characteristics, which not only reveals the cultural innovation capacity of female CP fans in the context of the grand narrative collapsing, as well as their willingness to question and transform the imbalanced gender-rights operating mechanism, but also effectively removes the cultural misinterpretation and stigmatisation attached to CP fans of English-language cultural products that are less visible.

**Keywords:** CP fans of English-language cultural products, personal settings, worldview settings, setting supremacy, 2.5-dimensional settings database, only daughter, intimate relationship

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## Appendix I. Glossary of CP Fandom

**2-dimensional and 3-dimensional:** Generalised fictional parallel worlds based on the formation of Japanese ACGNs, which can also refer to fans of fictional ACGN works, and thus 2-dimensional CPs also refer to character-derivative CPs. In contrast, the 3-dimensional can be seen as the real world, 3-dimensional CPs can also be equated with CPs consisting of real-life people.

**ABO:** A tri-sexual society consisting of Alpha, Omega, and Beta, and a sub-genre of Omegaverse fan fiction, the first ABO text is a male/male fanfiction from Jensen Ackles and Jared Padalecki, two main characters in the TV series *Supernatural*. This type of world setting superimposes canine traits on people, including group hierarchy, pheromones, and the ‘knotting’ of sexuality. The ABO world setting is extremely popular in the Chinese ACGN fandom because it breaks down the existing concept of gender and allows the fan creator to freely manipulate the gender of the protagonists their relationship patterns, thus providing a high degree of freedom in fan creation, also, because it is well suited to sexual description and provides a systematic worldview setting for male pregnancy. It is also gradually being used in heterosexual and female/female CP’s fan fictions.

**ACGN:** Animation, Comic, Game, Light Novel, which are the most iconic cultural products of Japan’s 2-dimensional culture.

**Bilibili.com:** A cultural community and video site for China’s young generation, featuring real-time bulletin comments, and is the most popular site for CP fans to post and watch videos.

**BL:** An abbreviation for Boy’s Love, also known as Yaoi, which is a fictional love story written by a woman depicting a male/male relationship in an aesthetic style, similar to the description of a romance novel. The characters are basically beautiful teenage boys, but not in the traditionally masculine sense, they are ‘girlishly beautiful men’ with feminine qualities. The BL works do not exclusively portray homosexuality, but rather the creators attempt to apply the model of heterosexuality to the understanding of homosexual love.

**BL-adapted web dramas:** A TV series based on original BL novels and manga, where the core of the adaptation is to adapt the explicitly male/male homosexual romance of the source material into a bromance.

**Bullet comment:** It originally referred to a web of fire formed by dense bullets or shells on a battlefield, now, refers to a website interaction mechanism in ACGN culture. When a user makes a comment on a video, the comment flies through the video as a flowing caption to be seen by other users.

**Canon CP:** The origin of the word canon is a reference to texts that were derived from the biblical texts and hence are accepted as scripture. Amongst fans, canon is something that is an official part of the source material. This includes anything that is acknowledged by the creators to be true, so, canon CP is two roles who are recognised by the author as having an intimate relationship in the original book.

**Character-derivative CP:** A kind of CP made of fictional characters played by actors in TV series, films, and so on.

**Comment control:** The practice of manipulating comments by liking and replying to positive comments on social media platforms to make them appear in the top of the comments, and ignoring or reporting bad comments to avoid them appearing in the top of the comments. It is often used to describe fans controlling the comments on celebrity-related news.

**Cotton Dolls:** Dolls made in the image of a real person or character, usually made to look like a cute child, with relatively uniform size specifications, with matching clothes, shoes, and other related accessories. The earliest cotton dolls appeared in Korea in the form of celebrity merchandise and then gradually developed in China through promotion by Korean idol fans in China. For cotton dolls with CP attributes, profitability and breakdown of income and expenditure are of great concern to fans, as the buyer is usually CP fans of the prototype, they hate the practice of profiteering with the doll. When posting for sale, sellers are required to prove their fan status.

**CP:** It refers to the pairing of two (mostly two, but also a significant number of three and more figures) as a couple of lovers in fans' romantic fantasies. CP can be consisted by real people, characters, or even animals or any symbolic objects in any sexual configuration (not limited to male/male, male/female, female/female). Fans (mostly female) of CPs are called as 'CP fans', and CP fans' activity of showing a high level of commitment to CP is 'coupling'.

**Danmei:** from the Japanese word tanbi, originally meaning aestheticism, an alternative style of literary writing presented in opposition to naturalistic literature. Danmei was initially meant to be a naturalism that was primarily a reaction to the exposure of the ugly side of human nature, and a

desire to find out the meaning of the functional beauty and intoxication in the pursuit of literature. Later, through various cultural interpretations, it gradually became a concept resembling love between beautiful men, but not equivalent to BL. BL is indeed a major and significant genre of danmei, and very often the two can even be used interchangeably, however, danmei also includes martial arts, mystery, history, etc, therefore, BL is only a part of danmei.

**Data traffic star:** Traffic is the number of users' visiting and following which can be monetized by social media, so, data traffic is an important basis for measuring the value of products or celebrities in the Internet era. The popularity and value of China's data traffic stars are measured in terms of web traffic, so they also tend to refer to a category of stars who are good-looking and have a large number of rabid fans, but who do not have a high level of competence in performance and art. The resulting 'traffic fans' are equivalent to real-person CP fans in CP fan culture, who spontaneously participate in data campaigns for the sake of their favourite data traffic stars' popularity on the Internet, thus contributing user traffic to media platforms.

**Fa Tang (发糖) and Cha Dao (插刀):** The direct translation of these two phrases in Chinese is 'to deliver candies' and 'to insert the knife' separately. According to the usage of CP fans, it refers to the effect of a work's plot or a pair of CP's behaviour on the fans, in which the sweet and smooth ones are called Fa Tang, which can make the fans cheerful, and the twisted and painful ones are called Cha Dao, which can make the fans suffer.

**Face-judgers:** The degree of appearance is known as facial attractiveness, so this group of people among CP fans refers to fans who is attracted to a CP's outstanding appearance.

**Fandom nationalism:** Nationalist actions initiated by young fans on the Internet in defence of national dignity, but also refers to fan struggles in the name of nationalism by different categories of fans.

**Fujoshi:** BL fan, 'fu' means rotten, irredeemable, and is used to refer to male/male romance in a way that does not have a serious and aesthetic connotation, 'fujoshi' is therefore more neutral and casual, as well as self-deprecating and defensive in nature.

**GGAD:** Gellert Grindelwald / Albus Dumbledore

**House collapse:** apparently meaning house collapsed, but in the context of fandom, it mainly refers to the collapse of the image of the idols in the minds of their fans. If there is some negative news about the idols (or if the idols are in love), it means that the 'house' has collapsed in the fans' mind.

**Idol (aidoru):** A type of profession that distinguishes Japanese and Korean pop culture from actors and singers, these young people specialise mainly in singing and dancing and are highly dependent on the packaging and marketing of the entertainment industry.

**La Lang:** a fan practice of combining characters from the original work who have no emotional relationship or even crossover to form a couple, the characters can come from any texts without any restrictions.

**Language cosplay:** ACGN enthusiasts in chat platforms such as QQ group chats, choose their own characters to role-play under certain rules. As this interactive role-playing activity is restricted to the chat platform, players present their characters mainly through textual descriptions of actions and descriptions of scenarios, etc., the story is completed with one or more people playing each character at the same time, by means of text exchanges in closed online groups CP fans can play a CP.

**Lin Daiyu:** The heroine of the Chinese classic *Dream of the Red Chamber*, a classic Chinese female figure in ancient literature, whose personal setting is set to be beautiful, thin, intelligent, aloof, and melancholy. Lin Daiyu has been assembled a cross-cultural, cross-textual, cross-dimensional La Lang CP with Voldemort who is a villain in *Harry Potter*.

**Male mother:** A personal setting which can be regarded as male omega in the ABO world, it is used to describe a male who is gentle and virtuous and has a sense of being a wife. On the other hand, it is mainly used in the context of interpersonal relationships, where the character is jokingly referred to as a male mother because of the interpersonal relationships or interactions with others that resemble or are like those of a mother and child.

**Moe elements:** Moe is used to express the strong affection that 2-dimensional fans have for characters or things in ACGN, or to describe the endearing qualities of characters.

**One-Child Policy:** A contemporary Chinese policy on population from 1980 to 2016, which promotes the birth of one child to a couple to adapt population growth to economic and social development plans. This policy has resulted in a large number of families raising only one daughter, which is unprecedented in China's past history.

**Only-fans:** Distinguished from fans who like a pair CP, only-fans refers to fans who only like one of the two people who make up the CP, they can be separated as only-fans of top, and only-fans of bottom, this kind of fans are prone to conflict with each other.

**Otaku:** Fans (mostly men) of Japanese manga, anime, video games, light novels, and other subcultures.

**OOC:** An abbreviation of Out Of (one's) Character, it can be used to refer to unexpected changes in a character that are out of character or different from the stereotypical image of the character. OOC often found in cosplay and fan literature of animations, comics, games.

**Pensioner's fandom:** Fans of the English-language culture call themselves pensioner fans, with two specific meanings, one being that the earliest fans who entered the fandom are now no longer teenagers (mostly post-1980s), and the other being a description of the peaceful and friendly ethos within the fandom.

**Personal setting:** The settings that make up a complete character include elements such as personality, occupation, appearance, family, etc. In particular, personal settings are central to determining a character's appeal, and have fictional 2-dimensional attributes in Japanese ACGNs, while transcending virtuality to hook up with reflections on reality in CP fan culture.

**Qing Lang Movement (清朗行动):** In 2016, the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) launched a series of campaigns on the Chinese Internet called Qing Lang Movements. Initially, the campaign aimed to combat the spread of illegal information on the internet, but its focus has changed from year to year. In July 2020, the CAC said it would 'pay close attention to fans' blind worship of celebrities and fan conflicts', and this movement also regulated fan behaviour and formally banned 'bottomless inducement of young people to follow stars', ordering bans on a range of behaviours, such as inducing fans to effort on Ranking Chart of CP Super Topic, manipulation of comments, and over-consumption, as well as prohibits the deliberate hype of CPs by stars and production organisations.

**QQ groups:** A public platform for multi-person chatting and communication launched by Tencent. After creating a group, group owners can invite friends or people with common interests to chat in a group.

**Queerbaiting:** In the context of the popularity of CP culture, behaviours that represent male/male homosexuality in order to attract female fans and create attention, using the conventions and tropes used in the CP fandom for assembling and creating CPs. The perpetrators of these acts may be creators of media works such as TV dramas, films, and anime, celebrities and idols, or sometimes friends in their lives. Yet while Queerbaiting, almost no one will admit the possibility of their

implied same-sex sentiment falling into place. For example, in some BL-adapted web dramas, there will be two male characters acting like CP with unspecified relationships (e.g., gazing at each other, physically touching each other in a seemingly natural but slightly evasive way, saying warm and fuzzy words that resemble displays of affection, etc.), but these characters never actually come out of the closet, and some get married and have kids.

**Ranking Chart of CP Super Topic:** A list released by Weibo that ranks CPs based on their data performance. Incentivising fans to chart their CPs is the operational strategy that Weibo has put in place to manipulate this quasi-social relationship and make it more explicit, and ultimately to realise the traffic monetization. The higher a pair of CPs ranks in the ranking list, the more intensive the digital labour invested by CP fans (e.g., CP fans take turns retweeting and commenting on a particular Weibo tweet sent by a real- person CP), and as a result, the greater the sense of achievement it will make the fans feel. While this feature seems to deepen the relationship between CP fans and CPs, it actually strengthens the symbiotic relationship between CP fans and Weibo.

**Real-person CP:** A term borrowed from English language real person slash (RPS) fan culture. It refers to the CP discourses about real-life persons instead of fictional characters.

**Reverse top/bottom:** The act of interchanging the default sexual roles in a CP, top is conventionally defined as the masculine, and bottom as the feminine. Fan discourses that changeover this default division are then defined as ‘reverse’ in the fandom, however, minor fans of the reverse CP may also consider the majority as reverse.

**Sexual tension:** It is a strong sense of conflict brought about by the collision of various sexual elements as settings.

**Strike back anti-fans:** A way for fans to collate and refute comments on the internet that tarnish the image of a celebrity, as well as malicious comments about the celebrity. This includes reporting and deleting negative comments, and sending the appropriate number of fans to the comments and support them according to the level of activity of the anti-fans in the comments section, to maximise the efficiency of anti-hacking and improve the social image of the celebrity.

**The dynamic 2.5-dimensional settings database:** The settings database, consisting of personal settings, worldview settings, and intimate relationship settings, is in a state of flux at all times based on the separation, combination, and recirculation of settings by CP fans in popular culture, and is in a 2.5-dimensional space due to its simultaneous fictionality and reality.



**Top/Bottom and Seme/Uke:** Seme/Uke is a feature of Japanese BL culture used to differentiate a male/male couple into a dominant role and a submissive role in the traditional schematic characterisation the one with masculinity is Seme and uke usually with femininity, and while the temperament divisions can be fluid, the two roles are generally irreversible in BL fandom. Chinese CP fans follow this convention of dividing the two characters that make up a CP into offensive top who penetrates and defensive bottom who is penetrated during the intercourse, to a certain extent, top/bottom is a rule that cannot be broken in the Chinese fandoms, but the implementation of this rule is more varied and flexible than that of Japanese BL fans.

**Tsundere:** A contrasting personal setting that is outwardly cold or arrogant to people/strangers they like, i.e., showing a ‘tsun’ side, while inwardly they are actually shy and full of emotion, i.e., showing a ‘dere’ side when the CP’s relationship breaks through a certain level of goodwill or at a certain opportune moment.

**Weibo CP Super Topic:** An interest community based on CP, gathering fans with common interests together to form a circle, everything CP related can be published here. It is a topic function with strict screening rules, as well as a series of strict Super Topic management rules to ensure the harmony of the social circle. There are countless CP Super Topics formed based on different CPs and they have different rules governing them, but adhering to them is mandatory for CP fans.

**Worldview setting:** The settings that make up a complete and logical fictional world, contain description and construction s of society, gender, race, history, geography, politics, and language, etc. The inspiration for constructing worldview settings often comes from the real world that CP fans themselves live in, while at the same time carrying their desire for an ideal equal world, so the worldview settings in CP fan works are in the 2.5-dimensional realm.

## **Chapter One. Introduction**

### **1. Research Background**

#### **1.1 Intercultural CP Fan in China under the Wave of Postmodernity**

After the epidemic of coronavirus since 2020, the social relationships of Chinese youth in the public sphere were broken, and a large number of young people transformed their lonely state of life into an interest-oriented online revelry, and the development of online subculture entered the post-epidemic era in the context of post-modernised society, and the slogan “I can be single, my CP must get married”, they started showing a high level of commitment to CP on the internet.

As a cultural consumption phenomenon, CP initially refers to the thought experiment of fans pairing up characters as couples in films, novels, and other literary works, and then CP moved from fiction to real life, giving rise to the distinctions between ‘character-derivative CP’ and ‘real-person CP’. Currently, the concept of CP continues to expand, and any two objects that are considered to be capable of forming an intimate relationship, regardless of differences in gender, nationality, species, etc., can be formed into a CP. The wave of CP culture even goes beyond the sphere of women’s culture and radiates to the whole Chinese society, even real political figures, as well as fictional characters in Chinese Communist Party anti-corruption dramas and political dramas featuring national crackdowns on gang crimes, have become the objects of fantasies for CP fans. Even official organizations have joined the CP culture, such as the official account of the China Aerospace Culture, which launched a poll on social media Weibo to collect CP names for the Mars rover and landing platform.

In the flourishing CP culture, especially male characters have become the mainstay of CP, with words like ‘heterosexuals only reproduce offspring, homosexuals are the only true love’ claimed by fangirls filling the public’s ears frequently, even though mainstream cultural regulators have never ceased to censor depictions involving homosexuality (Tian, 2020; Lin, 2021), CP fans are able to talk about the possibilities of various male CPs in a serious manner as if no one else is around.

CP can be a young girl’s game, but it contains their sincerity and purity, CP fans with enthusiasm and spoofing creativity, as well as the subversive force without scruples, making the Chinese Internet context formed in the pan-CP cultural atmosphere with ‘everything can be CP’ as the

symbol. CP has become the ‘social currency’ of the new generation of Chinese young people, and CP enthusiasts have gone out of the niche showbiz to become a public event, constantly interacting, clashing, and integrating with mainstream ideologies and capital forces. The trend of pan-CP shows a huge turnaround in the way Chinese young people currently interpret texts, in which the macroscopic significance of seriousness and authority is dissolved by CP. Therefore, the motivation of the ‘only daughters’ born under the One-Child Policy to become CP fans, and their intercultural activities in CP culture, which reflect their ideology in a post-modern society, is a complex issue involving transnational cultural mobility, generational turnover of fans, socio-cultural ethos, and gender-power relations.

Tracing back to the history of CP culture, it entered China from Japan and South Korea. For the part of CP fans who only like male homosexual CP, they can be partially equated with Japanese ‘fujoshi’, a group of young women who imagine unintended romance between male characters (Galbraith, 2011); in China, these group of girls are more known as ‘BL (Boy’s Love) fans’. At the end of the 20th century, numerous Japanese BL anime, manga and novels were introduced to China via Taiwan and Hong Kong through underground channels, forming a group of women who loved male romantic relationships, who became the prototype of today’s CP fangirls, and the complex terminology and norms of the early BL fandom are still partly used by CP fans today. However, it is important to note that, In Japan, ‘fujoshi’ is used as a self-deprecating term for fans whose identities are underground and associated with the stereotype of the unsociable girls (Hemmann, 2020); in China, CP fans has an elitist connotation from the outset, and many of them are proud to be part of a group that is friendly to sexual minorities and has a more cosmopolitan perspective.

In the 2008, Korean reality show *Let’s Get Married* which imagined marriage life composed of a male idol and a female idol has expanded the influence of CP culture into the realm of hypothetical real-person CPs. Many CP fans have begun to be active in online chatting rooms (Tencent QQ) and Baidu post bars, since then, CP culture has grown savagely in China. In 2012, with the popularity of Korean-pop idol groups in China, the trend of CPs composed of male idols began to prevail, initially, under-aged fans published CP fan fiction in female-oriented magazines, and as the internet grew, China’s largest online fan community, ‘CP Super Topic’, was established by social media platform Sina Weibo, CP culture are starting to step into the digital era, they can easily access to most digitised fan materials including fictions, comics, posters via Weibo (Cinque, 2016).

The initial fans were relatively restrained in their behaviour at the CP Super Topic, they record the daily information about two idols without strong CP awareness for the purpose of intimacy imagination. Since Weibo found CP's huge potential to attract active users and fans' ability to create economic benefits, it launched the 'Ranking Chart of CP Super Topic'<sup>1</sup> (Yin, 2020; Ma et al., 2021), CP fan culture then moved into the phase of organised affective-digital integrated fandom. CP fans have been trained to be regular female data labourers in the daily use of Weibo by engaging in the immaterial labour that generates traffic data in online activities to make data contribution to CP (Yin, 2020). The imagined fan-CP intimacy that was once largely mediated by fandom materials is now also constructed by immaterial 'data traffic stars', or 'online traffic data' itself (Click et al., 2013; Geraghty, 2014; Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

This is a natural advantage for fangirls who are familiar with the operation of Korean idol mechanism, as they are familiar with the digital collective fan activities, such as such as 'comment control' and 'strike back anti-fans'. Capital interests represented by online media platforms and celebrity agencies were quick to realise that such a large and organised group of people with enormous economic potential, therefore, under their acquiescence, full-time fans <sup>2</sup>(professional bloggers with many fans) with professional operation teams as the background have been cultivated deliberately. So far, the CP culture wrapped by systematic media rules has begun to move towards its peak stage.

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<sup>1</sup> Weibo set up a CP Super Topic Ranking by the number of check-ins, posts, and interactions, guiding fans to engage in a series of activities to keep their CPs high on the list, thus turning Weibo's CP Super Topic into the most important place for fans to engage in digital labour.

<sup>2</sup> Professional bloggers who are followed by a large number of CP fans on Weibo, are not there just to provide CP-related messages to fans, but are there to assist agencies in guiding and controlling fans, so that CP fans can maintain their loyalty to their CPs, or to sell CP-related products, such as photographs, CP's itineraries, etc., to their fans for financial gain.

CP culture has also been influenced by Western slash<sup>3</sup> culture, and many of the rules and terminology of CP fanfiction in English-language cultural products are now inherited from slash fandom, as opposed to CP fanfiction in local Chinese cultural products which learnt more rules from the Japanese BL fandom. Slash fanfiction refers to female-oriented queer love stories using characters from popular texts, it is marked by the appearance of ‘/’, when two characters are separated by a ‘/’back and forth it indicates that there is an intimate relationship between them. This practice was initially mostly used for male same-sex couples, but now it is also used for heterosexual couples (Elliott, 2016; Lothian et al., 2007; Coppa, 2006), and this convention is currently followed in Chinese CP fandom as well. In addition, some currently popular settings in CP fandom, such as the worldview setting of ‘Alpha - Omega -Beta’ (ABO) are derived from slash fan culture.

However, the influence of slash culture in the Chinese-speaking region is weaker than that of Japanese BL, slash did not become well-known in China before the early 21st century, although there are also European and American film and television fan forums such as MTSLASH<sup>4</sup> and Lucifer-club<sup>5</sup>. Slash culture’s influence gradually began to increase since the works represented by slash fanfiction of *Harry Potter* became famous in Western fandom (Elliott, 2016), transmitted to China through folk translations, and provoke a large-scale response in Chinese *Harry Potter* fandom. Therefore, as the arrival of slash culture in mainland China coincided with the rise of the Internet, the formation of the CP fandom of English-language cultural products developed in response to the cultural globalisation spawned by the Internet.

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<sup>3</sup> Slash has its origins in the *StarTrek* fandom of the late 1960s, a community in which slash fans were primarily concerned with intimate male/male relationships, such as Kirk/Spock (Lothian et al., 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Registering for an account at MTSLASH requires answering verification questions: how to spell European and American BL fans in English, with the answer, slash, to block outsiders.

<sup>5</sup> Lucifer-club: In the early days when slash was introduced to China, Lucifer-club was full of fanfiction of anime or media works, as well as translated overseas slash fanfiction. In the era when copyright issues and content censorship are not strict, this site is richer in pornographic content, so the positioning of the site is a semi-closed BBS that serves Chinese slash fans with no taboos.

## 1.2 CP as a mode of production in the cultural and entertainment industry

Along with the gradual liberalisation of China's policy on BL-adapted web dramas<sup>6</sup> during 2014 - 2020, the large-scale and seamless switch from character-derivative CP to real-person CP has made the CP fandom a group that is expanding faster than any other fandom. The influence and consumption power of CP's fans has been valued like never before, which has led to a CP industry chain including original intellectual property of CP, professional CP fan-creators, CP videos, CP radio drama, CP games and so on, which directly pushed many BL-adapted web dramas with male CP as the selling point to be launched in 2020.

The current fact within the Chinese entertainment industry is that CP often brings more buzz than a single star or character. Most stars use the emotional investment of digital labourers on the Weibo platform to monetise their work into data traffic, and use CP to break out of the niche fandom and then move closer to mainstream cultural circles. The same is true for characters in intercultural media works, such as BKPP, the CP from the two male leads in the Thai TV series *I Told Sunset About You*, they can receive advertisements together as a CP; or, as found in the present research, the CP fans who revitalised *Harry Potter* with the perspective of a CP, promoting a variety of CP-oriented fan products and fan creations, which is what has allowed *Harry Potter* to continue to occupy an important position in the Chinese fan world compared to other Western popular texts also prevalent in China during the same period (e.g., *The Chronicles of Narnia*).

In general, CP culture has directly changed the ecology of China's film and television industry and cultural field, from the upstream content production link to the downstream publicity and marketing strategy, from the creator to the consumer, a set of operational CP-centred business and cultural logic has been formed around CP. Many literary, film and television works follow the guideline of 'first having a CP, then having a story' from the establishment of the project to the creation of the

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<sup>6</sup> BL-adapted web dramas: TV series adapted from original BL novels and comics, with the signature feature of adapting the male/male homosexual love explicitly present in the originals to 'socialist brotherhood' to serve the BL audience without offending China's censorship of queer content. It has now been classified as a type of banned TV series by The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People's Republic of China (SARFT), and those that have already aired have been 'taken off the air' by video websites.

content, namely, CP is the real logic of content creation, and all characterisation and dramatic conflicts revolve around whether they can lead to the development of CP.

### 1.3 CP as a target of criticism by Chinese cultural regulators

However, a period of disorderly and frantic expansion has seen CP fan culture, which started out as a movement of gender openness and cultural liberation, eventually degenerate into the queerbaiting<sup>7</sup> used by capital to monetize CP's Internet traffic. Clusters of organised CP fans, deliberately fuelled by media platforms and capital, can easily fall into a state of group frenzy, resulting in a constant stream of CP conflicts across cultural circles, destroying the boundaries between the CP subculture and the mainstream culture, and arousing the discontent from the Internet's cultural and public opinion regulators. In particular, the large proportion of male homosexuality in CP culture is feared to affect Chinese women's willingness to marry and give birth to children, and even two male students who are close to each other on a real campus may become CP in the eyes of female students. In fact, the attitude of mainstream Chinese culture towards CP fan culture has never been positive (Song, 2021; Zuo, 2022). This series of events eventually led to CP culture being accused of being a pan-liberal ideology cloaked in niche culture, and subsequently categorised as a typical undesirable fandom culture, which led to rectification by authorities (Cyberspace Administration of China, 2021), and the boom on CP all came to a screeching halt with *Qing Lang Movement*<sup>8</sup> (清朗, clear and bright). In 2021, the Central Internet Information Office issued a notice requiring the

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<sup>7</sup> Queerbaiting in CP culture refers to the use of hype and deliberate direction to show male homosexuality to appeal to a female audience. Queerbaiting can be perpetrated by the creators of media productions, actors, and celebrities. For example, in some BL-adapted web dramas the two male leads make ambiguous eye contact and physical gestures like a couple, or the two actors during the promotional period with deliberate clues of words and actions suggesting their real homosexual relationship, but these male actors never actually come out of the closet.

<sup>8</sup> In June 2021, the Chinese government launched a campaign called 'Qing Lang (清朗)', aimed at removing 'harmful information' that had caused conflict among fans (China National Internet Information Office, 2021), and three months later an official notice from the Central Propaganda Department (CPCD) listed 'BL-adapted web dramas' and 'fans of male/male CP' as problems to be solved in the entertainment industry (Zuo, 2022).

cancellation of lists involving celebrities, and Weibo's Super Topic celebrity lists and CP lists were shut down (Zhang & Negus, 2020), and TV dramas featuring male/male CPs have been banned from broadcasting completely ever since. This is the first time that the Chinese government has prioritised fan conflict as a cultural regulatory priority, and it is notable that this operation was initiated and implemented as a result of an unprecedented CP fan conflict in the early 2020s: the 227 incidents<sup>9</sup> (Tang, 2023; Zhuang et al., 2023).

When the public nature of CP impacts on the mainstream culture, it is difficult to find a place for it in the Chinese online media space controlled by the predominant ideology, at least on the surface. This makes CP one of the trendiest and most controversial terms on the Chinese Internet, on the one hand, the freedom of 'everything can be a CP' still pervades the world of fans, but on the other hand, CP is invisible in traditional media controlled by the Communist Party (e.g., TV programmes), with all mentions of CP being subtitled as 'partner', and everyone from regulators, producers, and fans have a tacit understanding that 'CP' and 'partner' are far apart.

#### **1.4 Internationalisation tendency of CP fans' interests**

Despite that the current cultural environment in China does not support CP culture, fans' passion for coupling has not been suppressed, part of the CP fan's attention has been transferred to international cultural works, such as *BKPP The Series* (Thailand), *Young Royals* (Norwegian), and *Heartstopper* (UK). In addition, with the gradual exit of the early generation among fans of the integrated Anglo-American cultural products, the CP culture led by the younger generation has become the mainstream of the current fandom of English-language cultural products, with *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* being the most representative, and CPs made by CP fans such as Draco/Harry and GGAD (Gellert Grindelwald / Albus Dumbledore).

First, the Internet has brought cultural globalisation to Chinese fans, and since then, geography and language are no longer barriers to fan enthusiasm, thus promoting intercultural coupling activities

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<sup>9</sup> A fanfic *下坠 (The Fall)* posted by a CP fan writer of the real-person CP Wang Yibo/Xiao Zhan that was posted on AO3, which positioned actor Xiao Zhan as a hair salon girl with gender dysphoria and illustrated portraits of Xiao Zhan in women's clothing, triggered a massive report by his only-fans as well as a melee between only-fans and CP fans, which ultimately led to the banning of access to AO3 in mainland China.



(there are more than 30 CP Super Topics about *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* can be found on Weibo). Second, BL-adapted web dramas have adapted CP romance into a kind of ‘socialist bromance’ (Wong, 2020) in order to cope with censorship, which has also forced away a group of fans to turn to English-language cultural products that can fully express CP romance; moreover, there is to some extent a less vicious fan struggle within the CP fandom of English-language cultural products, so some fans choose to transfer their CP activities to this fandom, which is known as the pensioner’s fandom.<sup>10</sup>

But in the early days, Chinese fans of integrated Anglo-American cultural products were mainly confined to interest-oriented platforms that were hidden from public view, such as MTSLASH and Archive of Our Own (AO3), while nowadays, CP fans have to a certain extent broken through the scope of the internal fandom, to carry out CP activities on public social media platforms such as Weibo and Bilibili.com. The undifferentiated media environment has resulted in the rules of fan activities in CP fandom of English-language cultural products and local Chinese CP fandom sticking together, neither being completely assimilated nor absolutely demarcated.

To sum up, the emergence of CP culture in China cannot be separated from the influence of cultural globalisation, such as Japanese BL culture, Korean idol culture, and Western slash fan culture, but what prompted the localisation of the CP fandom of English-language cultural products in China was the change of government-led cultural policies and the cultural orientation of Chinese young women. Therefore, the CP fandom of English-language cultural products and the CP fandom of Chinese local cultural products coexist in terms of similarities and differences in characteristics and nature, consequently, exploring how these similarities and differences are manifested in concrete terms, as well as the endogeneity of fans’ choices of this fandom for coupling, is directly linked to the localisation of fan culture in the context of globalisation.

## **2. Specificity of CP in global fan culture terminology**

The term ‘CP’ is a loanword in Chinese, and its origin is controversial, with some discussions tending to suggest that it is an abbreviation of the English term ‘character pairing’; others trace its

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<sup>10</sup> CP fans of English-language cultural products are neither keen to digitally labour around real-person CPs nor get involved in engaging in fan fighting, hence the self-proclaimed ‘unmotivated’ pensioner fans.

origin to 'Kappuringu (カップリング)', a phonetic translation of the English term 'coupling' in Japanese ACGN culture (Lindström, 2017). Moreover, in the much older Euro-American slash fan culture and the Japanese BL culture, there are similar patterns of fan acceptance as CP, and Zhang (2019) argues that these primitive Western and Japanese terms can fit the meaning of CP in the Chinese context, i.e., a pair of celebrities or fictional characters who have a romantic relationship in the audience's imagination. There is no need to deny that the most direct interpretation of CP is women's imaginations of fictional intimate relationships between characters (male/male accounts for a large proportion, but also includes male/female and female/female); however, although Chinese CP culture is a hybrid of Japanese BL and Western slash, it carries more genes of indigenous Chinese youth subcultures.

Therefore, the definition of CP culture should not be a choice between the two fields of 'slash studies' in the West and 'BL studies' in Japan, but rather a clear and differentiated definition of it using specialised terminology. Zheng (2016) in her research on Chinese fandom, takes the opposite view, she believes that if the definition is too strict it will become obsolete sooner or later, however, terminology is a serious issue about research paradigm, in the terminology that a cultural group chooses to use, we can clearly observe the process of culture being spread and translated, at the same time, the terminology, in its original context, carries cultural and historical meanings that are not entirely applicable in the new context. Therefore, the present research uses the term 'CP' which is closest to the usage habits of Chinese fans to describe a culture that is their own.

## **2.1 CP fan culture differentiated from Japanese BL culture**

CP fan culture is not equivalent to Japanese BL culture. Firstly, BL does not strictly fall into the category of fan creation as defined by English-speaking academics, as it originated from original comics rather than secondary creations. Second, the relationships of characters in BL exclusively pin two pretty boys (bishōnen) (Turner, 2016), whereas Chinese CPs, although dominated by male homosexual erotica, are extremely diverse in their gender composition, with both heterosexual and female/feminine CPs, such as Hermione/Luna, Draco x Hermione, and Voldemort x Lin Daiyu, distinct from same-sex characters whose names are linked by a slash, opposite-sex CPs are often signalled by the symbol 'x' to represent the presence of intimacy. The third point is that Japanese BL tends to show a tendency to be relatively self-absorbed, with its discussion confined within a specific cultural group, whereas CP has to some extent spread from the realm of youth subcultures

to the realm of mass cultures, where even ordinary people in their daily lives can say that they form a CP relationship with someone. Therefore, using BL culture to refer to CP culture is not able to generalise its whole picture.

## **2.2 CP fan culture differentiated from Western slash culture**

Further, CP is not a replica of Western slash in China. Although CP emphasizes romantic interactions between characters in a manner comparable to slash (Bothe, 2014) in which focuses on homosexual relationships (Keft-Kennedy, 2008), CP culture differs from slash due to the blending of Chinese and Western traditions, and the key point that makes CP fans different from slash fans is in the way they engage in their activities. Specifically, CP culture is closely aligned with fan culture around real-life celebrities, and the boundaries between character and real-life CPs are often extremely blurred, resulting in a representative core component of coupling activities beyond secondary creation, a series of organised ‘data labour<sup>11</sup>’ carried out by CP fans on media platforms, and economic contributions made by fans to the CPs. However, this highly regulated and commercial approach to fan activities cannot be observed frequently in slash, which is a fan activity that revolves around the secondary creation of fans. There are also frequent struggles in CP fandom between CP fans and ‘only-fans (who only support one party in the CP)’, so CP fans are adept at using systematic means to fight online, e.g., CP fans use political tactics to ‘make reports’ (Wang & Ge, 2023), but these are less of a focus of the slash fan movements.

In addition to this, CP fans generally demand that the two characters in a CP be classified as top/bottom (dominant role / subordinate role) under the influence of Japanese BL fandom, believing that the position of the characters’ names before and after the slash represents the order of the penetrator / penetrated in the sexual act, whereas Western slash does not have this practice and does not have a sense of clarifying the position of a couple in the sexual act (Enriquez & Lippert, 2022). Cultural distinctions between China and the West are what underlie this discrepancy, hence CP fan

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<sup>11</sup> For example, by raising funds to buy the products endorsed by the actors playing the CP, and then having the fans post the purchase data on the media platform, the signal is sent to the fandoms, the media and the film production sector that the CP is very popular and their CP fans have a strong purchasing power, thus the data generated by the combination of the fans’ economic input and digital labour becomes the source of the CP’s traffic, and consequently, the CP gains more opportunities and exposure, and also raises the status of their fans.

culture and slash cultures cannot be viewed as divisions of the same cultural expression in the two civilizations.

In summary, CP culture has commonalities with other similar cultures around the world within the scope of female-initiated imaginings of male intimacy, but there are endogenous and indigenous cultural features in CP culture that are difficult to transplant from other cultures. To be precise, Chinese CP culture should be defined as an imagined intimate relationship, initiated by Chinese women, between any number of (mostly two, but also a significant number of three and more) symbolic objects (which can be real people, characters, or even animals or artificial intelligences) in any sexual configuration (not limited to male/male) through original or secondary creation. Furthermore, the specific way in which fans form CPs is through configuration experiments based on various settings in a ‘dynamic 2.5-dimensional setting database’, which is related to another important phenomenon that occurs in creative mode of CP culture — ‘setting supremacy’.

### **3. The phenomenon of ‘setting supremacy’ in the ecosystem of fandom**

After the emergence of CP culture, the approach and essence of fan creation was changed to a CP-centred system, accompanied by the phenomenon of ‘setting supremacy’. Fans who were not satisfied with being ‘fed’ began to ‘assemble’ CPs, write CP novels, cut CP-oriented videos, and play CP role-playing games on their own. These creations not only satisfy the imagination and projection of their own emotions, but more importantly, give fans the initiative to create CP. Unlike fanfiction before the CP era, which tended to project emotions onto the progression of the protagonist’s intimate relationship, CP-centred fanfiction has been transformed from the characters themselves to an exploration of the setting’s configuration. In other words, the centre of CP fanfic creation is no longer characters poached from the original works, but experiments with various configurations of personal settings from the ‘2.5-dimensional settings database’, as well as the rule of dividing the attributes of ‘top/bottom’ in a CP by ‘personal settings’. At the same time, fan enthusiasm for different worldview settings has also reached an unprecedented level, leading fanfic writers to break away from the intimacy-centred narrative framework and start exploring more possibilities of ‘worldview settings’ in their fan works.

As a result, large-scale fan works have been created around CPs, signalling that the character’s setting has become a CP with post-narrative that can exist independently of the text. Since then, the search function and classification function of fanfiction websites have been changed, so that

nowadays, when searching for a fanfiction of a certain intellectual property, the text in the input box has been changed into the name of the CP with a clear target, and the tag of the novel has been changed from the name of the original novel to the name of the CP as well. It can be said that CP-oriented fan fiction is one of the most influential forms of Chinese online literature at present.

Further on, while CP fanfiction under the guidelines of ‘setting supremacy’ manifests independence from the meta-narrative, fans are not content to work on canon CPs, but activated classic texts before the birth of CP culture with their keen recognition of ‘2.5-dimensional personal settings’, and incorporated them into the scope of CP, which included re-exploiting the narrative potential of CPs from English-language cultural products. In the case of famous CPs from *Harry Potter* (e.g., Draco/Harry), CP fanfic authors have created ‘fandom masterpieces’ that are regarded as classics by their fans. Since then, there has been a growing trend in the English-language cultural products fandom towards ‘personal setting creation’, resulting in the unexpected birth of a kind of cross-cultural, cross-textual, and cross-dimensional La Lang CP<sup>12</sup>. Especially ‘Voldemort Lin Daiyu’ who topped the list of famous La Lang CPs published by Bilibili.com, this reveals the nature of CP as an experiment in pairing different ‘personal settings’.

As the phenomenon of ‘setting supremacy’ spreads further, a kind of role-playing game called language cosplay has become popular within the CP fandom. Players take on the roles of different characters in an online chat room and form virtual CP relationships, and the essence of the language cosplay is the performance of ‘personal settings’.

In summary, CP culture and the phenomenon of ‘setting supremacy’ prevail in the fandom of Chinese English-language cultural products at present, and the most attractive part of CP fan activities is the free manipulation of various settings according to fans’ own preferences, from ‘a dynamic 2.5-dimensional setting database’ which include ‘personal settings’ and ‘worldview settings’.

#### **4. Showing a high level of commitment to CP - affections of CP fans**

CP fans regard coupling as an important part of their online life and develop an ‘affect’ towards CP that they self-deprecatingly refer to as ‘being addicted to CP (沉迷于嗑 CP 不可自拔)’ or ‘being intensely obsessed with CP (对嗑 CP 上头)’. Their ‘affect’ comes from four typical actions: ‘Fa

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<sup>12</sup> La Lang means pull two unrelated characters together to form a CP.

Tang (发糖) / Cha Dao (插刀)', 'Kou Tang (扣糖)', 'Combing the timeline' and 'Strike back anti-fans'. 'Fa Tang/Cha Dao' refers to the emotional development of the CP in the work or the behaviour of the CP in reality that has an impact on the fans, in which 'Tang' means sugar and refers to a sweet story where the CP's emotional development is going well, 'Dao' means 'knife' is a sadistic story in which the CP suffers physically, mentally and emotionally. 'Kou Tang' is the act of fans discovering evidence from the plot or the CP's words and actions that can prove the authenticity of the CP's relationship, and attaching their own interpretation of the CP's emotional relationship in order to gain a sense of sweetness from it. CP fans also spend a great deal of time rationalising the CP's relationship through the act of 'combing the timeline', for example, CP fans of Voldemort x Lin Daiyu have intentionally edited the plot of Voldemort in *Harry Potter* and the plot of Lin Daiyu in *Dream of the Red Chamber* to extend the new storyline in order to integrate these two characters, who come from different texts, dimensions, and cultures, into a self-consistent CP relationship. 'Strike back anti-fans' is one of the most emotionally concentrated and intense fan activities in the whole CP activities, it refers to fans like patrolling guards constantly monitoring the news about their own CP on the Internet, they adopt systematic attacking and defending tactics and as soon as there is any negative news.

These affective actions are collectively called 'Ke (嗑)', the behaviour of fans around CP is called '嗑 CP', and because these actions have become a set of collective emotional empowerment activities with a complete process, coupling has even been jokingly referred to as a discipline of learning (coupling science), and CP fans are known as coupling scientists. The verb 'Ke (嗑)' is derived from 'eat', which itself has the verb meaning of 'to bite something with a shell with one's upper and lower incisors', it is often used in the construction of 'to take drugs (嗑药)', which means an addictive behaviour towards drugs.

When fans refer to the actions around CP as 'Ke (嗑) CP', it suggests that their 'intense affect' is similar to that of 'take drugs', making CP fans who are 'obsessed with CP' somewhat similar to 'drug addicts'. The 'affect' of CP fans bordering on 'obsession', however, is incomprehensible and unusual to outsiders, and the intensity of Chinese CP fans' affect is difficult to correspond to in the Western fandom fully. This is due to differences in the cultural, cognitive, and behavioural patterns of the two fandoms in different socio-cultural contexts. Actually, it is not difficult to understand the 'affect' of CP fans in the context of the unique era, and cultural and social environment in which

they live.

For the discussion of CP culture, which has entered a newly cycle of youth culture, there is a social structural factor that has been neglected, that is, ‘only daughters’ as the mainstay of CP fans have grown up in an environment close to the Western-style ‘atomic family’ (Roy et al., 2017), characterised by remoteness from the nuclear family, libertarianism, individualism, and virtual dependence (Rahman & Zhang, 2017). Therefore, Chinese young people in the post-modern society, represented by CP fans, show a posture of ‘warming up’ in a group in the Internet world, and they have an addictive emotional concentration on abstract interests. Therefore, the CP fans’ ‘affect’ of ‘being addicted to CP’ is characterised by indigenous cultural features and the characteristics of the times.

However, the straightforward use of ‘being addicted to CP’ to refer to fans’ affect is uncritical. This formulation may have introduced CP fans into the realm of cults, risking the misinterpretation and demonisation of CP fans’ practices and group beliefs, thus being considered as ‘obsessive fanatic’ defined by mainstream culture (Fremaux, 2016). Moreover, not all CPs are strongly affected, especially for CP fans of English-language cultural products, whose level of affect is different from that of native Chinese CP fans. Therefore, the present research uses ‘show a high level of commitment to CP’ to refer to the degree of affective engagement of CP fans, as this more cautious approach can avoid causing harm to CP fans.

## **5. Literature review**

### **5.1 Research on CP fan culture**

CP culture is not only the most striking fan phenomenon in the current Chinese Internet scene, but also the embodiment of the unique existential and cultural experiences of contemporary young Chinese women. However, as a relatively young term, CP is still less frequently mentioned in fan studies than other international female-oriented fan cultures such as slash and BL. Indeed, female-oriented CP culture is heavily influenced by slash and BL in both practice and theory, especially the part about male homoerotic romance, and much of the terminology and rules in Chinese CP fandom derive from both of these fandoms, as Meijidai Bai (2022), Anna Madill (2020), Mark McLelland (2015), Maud Lavin et al (2017) observe that queer-themed fan culture in the Chinese context incorporates many of the art forms and conventions found in slash and BL. However, once CP is misinterpreted as male slash and BL, it means that the local Chinese cultural genes carried by CP

culture are blurred, but the status quo is that scholars in most English-language studies discuss some of the phenomena of CP fandom under the rubric of slash or BL fan culture.

These scholars include Erika Junhui (2013) and Zhou Shuyan (2017), who include the real-life CP of Chinese singer Wang Lihong and pianist Li Yundi in their studies of Chinese BL fans; Tian Xiaofei (2015), who translates CP as slash in his discussion of the CP fans of historical figures from the Three Kingdoms period in China; Anna Madill, Zhao Yao, and Fan Liheng (2018) refer to Chinese CP novels as BL novels to compare cross-culturally with English slash fiction; as well, Jack Lipei Tang (2023) translates the real-life CP derived from the character-derivative CP formed by actors Wang and Xiao as shipping. In these typical case studies fan scholars refer to CP culture in terms of slash or BL, ignoring the fact that the connotations of CP cannot be fully isomorphised into slash and BL. Despite the proximity of CP culture to slash and BL in terms of theoretical frameworks and fan practices, CP deserves more academic scrutiny, with Gong (2017, p. 167) noting that “Western scholars have largely ignored the transnational influences of China’s BL communities”.

As the influence of CP fans expands further into a cultural phenomenon that is impossible to ignore, the economic power of CP fangirls and their impact on the film and culture industry has come under scrutiny. Liu (2023) locates the economic benefits generated around male/male CP as the ‘pink economy’. This study found that in patriarchal China, gay marketing is influenced by different cultural perceptions of same-sex intimacy between male consumers and female consumers, resulting in different images of homosexual CPs, and as a result some gay and lesbian adverts have capitalised on the boom in CP culture.

Ye (2023)’s study, on the other hand, frames the CP fan industry as a ‘she-economy’, this study explores authoritarian regulation of consumer-citizenship through an examination of *Word of Honor*, a landmark BL-adapted web drama in CP culture. Firstly, this research demonstrates how the IP of male/male CP with potentiator for promoting homosexuality fits in with the demands of the neoliberal and authoritarian state. Secondly, this research finds that even though the state explicitly censors queer commodities, CP economisation can find ‘opaque’ ways of making a profit through the management of risk. Similarly, Huang (2022) explores the creation of IPs with male CPs and argues that the effective promotion and dissemination are also integral to making BL-adapted web dramas, such as *The Untamed* and *Word of Honor*, stand out from their contemporaries. Overall, studies on the CP fan economy have recognised the economic potential of CP fans and have argued



that it thrives in a dynamic relationship comprising a combination of state power, socio-cultural norms, cultural trends, and the queerbaiting of IP marketing.

As film and television production organizations proliferate DanGai TV dramas with male CPs as a selling point, some scholars such as Qiuyan Guo (2022) have begun to focus on real-person CPs. Guo suggests that form a CP with two male celebrities has become an important way for Chinese fans to consume celebrities in the last decade. After first analysing and judging celebrities' potential homosexual relationships in the real world as 'not real', 'real but over' and 'real and ongoing', CP fans generated further imaginative creations and reality-based discussions for taking comfort from CP's experiences. In contrast to the Western RPS which focuses on purely fictional homosexuality, Chinese CP fans exhibit an increasingly prevalent change in reality-centred CP consumption, which has been criticised by the mainstream culture but has been catered to by the entertainment industry for financial benefit. This classification of fans regarding real-person CP and character-derivative CP is also captured in this study and is seen as a key feature that distinguishes CP fans of English-language cultural products from CP fans of indigenous cultures.

In the study of real-person CP, Kaixuan Zhang (2019) takes the fans of male/male CP formed by Chinese actors Chen Weiting and Li Yifeng as object, and examines the sign system, sign production of CP fans with a semiotic approach. Zhang argues that CP fans do not merely transform individual source materials into fan discourse, but systematically construct an online discursive space with its own semiotic resources and grammar, and that this discursive space changes according to the surrounding political and economic environment. She also points to the power of the state embodied in censorship, legal action, and media policy to not only remove specific fan discourses deemed obscene, but also to eliminate key elements of fan symbolic production, such as promotion by commercial forces.

As character-derivative CPs and real-person CPs sparked almost out-of-control disputes in public opinion, the Chinese government implemented *Qing Lang* Operation in 2018 to control and scrutinise CP fans, especially CP fans of homosexual CP, thus, numerous trending studies have been conducted in the wider social and political conditions in China to examine the moral-political directives involving sex, gender and the state in CP. For example, Eve Ng & Xiaomeng Li (2020) as well as Ming Xingling (2018), use *Guardian*, which is a BL-adapted web drama to examine the practices and discourses of Chinese cultural product producers, audiences and the state in relation

to the reproduction and reading of male/male CP. Their research reveals that in China the media is regulated not only for sexual content but also for socio-political principles.

In such a fan ecology full of contradictions and conflicts, it is difficult for CP fans themselves to remain independent in the state-controlled mainstream cultural arena. Erika Ningxin Wang & Liang Ge's (2023) digital ethnographical research about the large-scale CP fan conflict around another famous Danmei-adapted TV series *The Untamed*, reveals a complex picture of two-way exploitation between fans and state power. Their study partially disproves some scholars' previous assumptions that fan culture resists or negotiates with mainstream culture, and found that by perpetuating heteronormativity and censorship, fans internalised 'reporting' as a norm of legitimacy in consumer culture. However, the power gained by these fanatic 'fan police' is illusory, as their practices are used by the state as a tool to censor media users' speech and cultural production, ultimately perpetuating censorship and heteronormativity. The present research found in the pre-participant observation that, in contrast to the egregious mode of operation that is characterised by 'abusive reporting', the CP fandom of English-language cultural products behaved much more encouragingly, and their fans can maintain a relatively moderate and healthy atmosphere, which is why some CP fans prefer to operate coupling within the fandom of English-language cultural products.

Although the present research advocates the compartmentalisation of CP as a formal term in order to highlight its logic and meaning as distinct from BL and slash. However, there are still many constructive components of Slash and BL research that are relevant to CP, especially as CP culture moves into the intercultural academic arena, and it is informative to touch upon the findings of female fans' consumption of male homosexual pornographic genres of cultural products from an intercultural perspective. For example, Chin and Morimoto (2013) describe the ways in which transnational film cultures and local reading practices are combined to produce an iteration of *Harry Potter* fan works that is both Japanese and cross-cultural. As well, the study by Yanrui Xu and Ling Yang (2017) reveals not only the Japanese influence on BL fans in China, but also how BL enters into a relationship with traditional ethics in the Chinese context (Xu & Yang, 2013). These studies, i.e., focusing on fan cultures of intercultural media circulation and consumption, can also shed light on how and why media texts are adopted and absorbed across cultures.

Especially for the Japanese BL culture, which has been able to achieve internationalization, there are many contents that can be used for reference to CP culture. Alan Williams (2015) rethinking BL

on the regional and global scale, he argues that in the context of national cultural struggle for soft power, BL engage in a particular kind of emotional which is the 'queer stylization', this has contributed to the formation what Koichi Iwabuchi (2010) calls 'brand nationalism'. In Azuma Hiroki's (2009) view, BL as a profitable technique is to alleviate the feeling of 'stuckness' stimulated by heteropatriarchy through 'moe (an animalistic emotion)'. Azuma's study of 'moe elements' in Japanese ACGN culture opens the way for this present research to understand CP culture in terms of the 'setting database'.

For the localisation of Japan BL fan culture in China, Chunyu Zhang (2016) proposed a theory of cultural arena to explain it. She argues that BL fandom is a cultural arena in which Chinese women can create unique meanings through their interactions with female-centric texts and peers. BL mania enables female readers to turn their subversive voyeuristic gaze on men, which brings the pleasure of escaping 'ugly reality' and clichéd heterosexual romances through alternative aesthetics and plot lines. In doing so, international BL materials helped to satisfy young women's curiosity about male/male homoerotic CPs; moreover, they provided a new competitive forum for fans to negotiate hegemonic norms about sex, gender, and love.

Anna Madill and Zhao Yao (2022) worked on some comparisons between English-speaking fans and Chinese-speaking fans for the male/male material. These two scholars and Liheng Fan (2018) have conducted a comparative study on depictions of same-sex marriage in English-language slash fiction and Chinese-language CP fiction (which they call Danmei fiction). Based on comparative analysis, the researchers contend that Chinese-language fiction is more inclined to traditional family values. Their approach to the research design provides a useful reference for the ideas of the present study, and therefore, in illustrating the uniqueness of CP fans of English-language cultural products, this study also adopts this approach to compare CP fans of English-language cultural products with CP fans of Chinese cultural products.

Yuan Gong (2017) studies the Chinese CP fandom of European football stars with the concept of slash by focusing on social media platforms (Weibo and Baidu Tieba), drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of distinction, Gong critically analyses how these fans internalize existing norms of race and gender, and how they, therefore, regard appreciating European players as symbols of their high tastes. This self-perception of having high taste is also present in examination of CP fans of English-language cultural products.

To sum up, according to the research methodology of the humanities and social sciences, and drawing on the research perspectives of BL and Slash, existing studies have discussed some aspects of CP fan culture. Firstly, organised CP fans have formed a force on the Internet that is hard to ignore, and fans and scholars have classified them as a type of fans that is different from other attributes according to the ‘dual-object’ characteristic of CP fans’ emotional goals. Secondly, the commercial value of CP fans has been captured by scholars, which has influenced the development trend of the film and media industry, and made the fan economy grow into a new growth pole in China’s digital economy since Web 2.0. Whether critiquing the commercial attributes of CP fans or praising the rise of civic power, scholars have affirmed the position of CP fans in the new media arena. Third, scholars and the media have generally acknowledged the gendered political representations and connotations of CP fan culture, especially regarding the construction, projection, and consumption of male/male homosexual CP by heterosexual women. Fourth, a large number of scholars have continued to dig into the relationship between CP battle events and the larger socio-political context, such as the systematic means used by fans, as well as, the points of conflict that occur between fans and state-level ideologies.

In particular, the significance of the study of BL-adapted web dramas for CP culture is that it demonstrates the new relationship of ‘socialist brotherhood’ for Chinese male same-sex CPs. This is a concept developed from ‘brotherhood’ and reflecting deliberate and covert efforts by CP fans to ensure that their activities are in line with those permitted by the state. Instead of inhibiting the development of CP culture, this last resort of portraying the core relationship between the two male protagonists as not romantic has inspired fans to portray and consume homosexual CPs in hypertextual content, and even more indirectly, led to a significant rise in CPs of English-language cultural products.

## **5.2 Innovative research aims based on research gap**

However, existing studies have not been able to adequately capture the complexity and academic potential of CP culture due to its short academic history and limited number of studies. Based on this, the present research proposes five original research aims.

### **5.2.1 Gap one and countermeasure**

Firstly, fewer existing studies address the CP phenomenon, English-language studies in the terminology of CP fans are virtually non-existent, and most of the studies reviewed above analysed

a single CP fandom within the space of a single paper; in this way, the scarcity of extensive research makes it difficult to gain a dialectical understanding of the detailed workings of intercultural CP fannishness. Secondly, the practice of defining CP fans as BL fans or shippers in most of the existing studies fixes the content of the research on the scrutiny of gender politics regarding women's consumption of male homoerotic romance, which can lead to a simplification or misunderstanding of CP fans' motivations. In fact, CP fandom is distinct from BL and slash fandom in several notable ways, and thus newer studies are needed to understand the practices, affections, and dilemmas of CP fans under specific political and social conditions.

Beyond this, there is an even more serious imbalance when fans are viewed from the perspective of intercultural communication. Most of the research on *Harry Potter* in China conducted in the intercultural communication discipline extrapolates intercultural communication techniques from its international success (e.g., Lathey, 2005; Erni, 2013) and cross-cultural comparison (e.g., Henningsen, 2006; Deng, 2017). In addition to Madill et al (2018)'s cultural comparisons of *Harry Potter*'s male marriages in Chinese BL and Western slash, there is no research that focuses on the iterative changes in fandom that can lead to differentiation in the way transnational audiences interpret them.

Based on the imbalance that exists in the above studies, the present research for the first time explicitly examines the use of a set of specialised terminology to refer to CP culture, thus the first question answered by the present research is *Question One — What are the reasons for the emergence of CP culture?*

As Chin & Morimoto (2013) point out, current fan scholarship needs to produce a more effective approach to explaining social and cultural differences in fan practices across geographical and cultural boundaries. Therefore, the present research focuses on CP fans of English-language cultural products not only because this fandom is different from other similar fan cultures around the world, but also in order to highlight the specific cultural environment and contemporary context in which CP fans live; second, most of the previous studies confuse CP culture with slash culture or BL culture, and the present research advocates a distinguishing and precise definition for CP culture; meanwhile, the present research takes the CP fans, who are a new fan population, as an object, and digs deeper into the underlying logic starting from the demographic characteristics of the CP fans, and takes the 'only daughter' in the postmodern society as the core theory to understand the

phenomenon of CP, so as to provide an effective and comprehensive theoretical framework for the CP culture.

### **5.2.2 Gap two and countermeasure**

Secondly, current research on CP focuses on the economic effects of real-life CP fans in BL-adapted web dramas and BL novels in the Chinese-speaking world and the offence that this mode of cultural production can cause to mainstream culture; however, few studies have delved deeper into the production mode of CP culture, and the implied intercultural imaginative power of CP culture has yet to be explored. Based on this research gap, the present research explores the *Question Two* — *Why is there a phenomenon of ‘setting supremacy’ in CP fan creation?*

Taking the phenomenon of ‘setting supremacy’ in the production of CP fan culture as the core, the present research explicitly analyses the mode of production of CP, and creatively makes a clarification of the concept of ‘setting’. Thus, the obvious localised characteristics of CP fan culture are highlighted, making it free from the path dependence of previous CP fan culture studies on Japanese BL culture studies. Moreover, the present research introduces language cosplay, a fan game of playing CP, into the academic field for the first time using the aca-fan approach, which not only contributes to a comprehensive and in-depth interpretation of the ‘setting supremacy’ phenomenon, but also enriches the diversity of global fan activities.

### **5.2.3 Gap three and countermeasure**

Thirdly, despite the progressive increase in intercultural fan studies, no attention has been paid to the CP phenomenon that occurs in the Chinese English-language cultural fanbase, which has led to the serious neglect of the intercultural differences among CP fans within their own ethnic groups. Based on this research gap, the present research introduces *Question Three* — *Why are some CP fans attracted to CPs from English-language cultural products instead of CPs from native cultural products?*

The present research takes CP fans of English-language cultural products, which are hardly mentioned in CP culture, as a special category of fans to analyse the fans’ intercultural imaginings of heterogeneous cultures, as well as the similarities and differences in the characteristics presented by them and CP fans of local Chinese cultural products, moreover, the present research considers intercultural fan identity as a factor that influences Chinese CP fans’ support for CP.

### **5.2.4 Gap four and countermeasure**

Fourth, based on the three research shortcomings mentioned above, research on the hidden meanings of the most unique category of CP fans of English-language cultural products, which is also the category that best demonstrates the postmodern attributes of this cultural paradigm, i.e., inter-textual, inter-dimensional, and inter-cultural CPs (e.g., Voldemort × Lin Daiyu), has been largely vacant. Based on this research gap, the present research proposes *Question Four — What is the cross-cultural, cross-textual, and cross-dimensional Lalang CP that appears in the CP fandom of English-language cultural products?* The study of this question is important for enriching the diversity of global fan culture categories, and moreover, it helps to increase the visibility of Chinese fans in the world.

### **5.2.5 Gap five and countermeasure**

The fifth point is that most studies focus on how CP fans congregate and have struggles, specially by focusing on the struggle between fans and state policy, but do not take into account how their fan behaviour will come to an end. For example, Tang (2023) takes the notion of an unstable shipper specifically in the context of the Wang/Xiao CP, whereby it is suggested that the radical and disruptive practices of CP fans in China are the result of shippers' hedonistically-driven tactical and calculative negotiation against the social, technological and political risks involved. When research gathers too much on the political and cultural struggles of CP, it instead hides the fans themselves and draws attention to the critique of a certain form of consciousness and political and cultural milieu.

Besides, there is no rich theoretical output on the politics of CP fans who are typically young Chinese women. While the intersection of fan culture and politics has become a trend in studies such as fan activism, including letter-writing campaigns and boycotts that attempt to influence media decisions (Jenkins & Shresthova, 2012; Hinck, 2020), as well as, political fervour around public figures (De Kosnik, 2008; Davisson, 2016), and, Liesbet Van Zoonen's (2005) and Jonathan Dean's (2017) seminal research on the correlation between fans and politics. Although some studies state that fans strategically use nationalism as a weapon in fan struggles (Wang & Ge, 2023), they do not take into account that the choice between fan identity and national identity also occurs in fans, as well as, that different groups of fans may have different attitudes and practices towards nationalism.

According to these limitations, *Question Five — Why do some CP fans of English-language cultural products choose to terminate their support for a particular CP?* has been proposed. The original study of the termination of transnational CP activism behaviours will not only clarify the concept of CP fans' nationalism, but more meaningfully, shed light on the uniqueness of the ways in which CP fans of English-language cultural products use online fandom nationalism, which will not only help them to get rid of some of the stigmatisation that they suffer from due to the object of their cultural interest being an exotic culture, but even more so, it will help to clarify the misconception of Chinese fans as 'nationalist fighting machines' as they are perceived in the world sphere.

## **6. Methodological Framework**

To answer the above five key questions for CP fans of English-language cultural products, two types of data are needed, either triggering primary data (from online questionnaire and language cosplay) or relying on existing source (from fanfictions and fan videos), which are not mutually exclusive (Cristofari & Guitton, 2017). But when these five questions need to be integrated into a single study, the combined results of fan actions cannot be analysed using only qualitative data, and similarly, when researchers only use computers to develop questionnaires, it is easy to lose touch with the world of the fans being investigated. In contrast, for the transmedia CP fan culture, the mixed methods approach can yield a more complete picture than independent quantitative or qualitative research (Creswell & Clark, 2017; George, 2023), as the results of statistical analyses indicate what actions social actors typically take, while qualitative data analyses help to answer the question of why they do so (Kelle, 2006). To sum, aca-fan, online questionnaires, and textual analyses have their own responsibilities in answering the research on the CP phenomenon, and only by using them in an integrated way that the present research can be refined.

### **6.1 Components of mixed methods approach**

#### **6.1.1 Aca-Fan**

Aca-fan was chosen as the first method in the mixed methods approach for two reasons: the validity that comes with the position, the ease of access to primary data. Firstly, fan culture is a culture built on collective emotions whereby the validity of the results may be questioned if the researcher is unfamiliar with the fans (Turner, 2018), so the researchers are required to give assurances of their identity as insiders, and the rich and insightful findings derived from aca-fan illustrate that fan/researcher thematic positions are not mutually exclusive and that their overlap can be productive



(Cristofari & Guitton, 2017). With this in mind, the requirement of aca-fan for researchers to be “deeply immersed in a culture or community” (Evans & Stasi, 2014) can give assurance of validity. Secondly, the present study needs a manner in which primary data can be obtained in the CP fandom, which includes two aspects of information, the first is the real behaviours and perceptions of CP fans towards CP culture, as well as, the way in which online language cosplayers employ CP’s personal settings. Aca-fan as a method of netnography in the field of fan studies is precisely one of the most effective ways to collect primary data (Lamerichs, 2018). Firstly, aca-fan enabled us to observe the phenomenon of CP in Chinese fandom and the phenomenon of ‘setting supremacy’ in CP fan creation, thus laying the cornerstone of this study; more importantly, this study used aca-fan to hypothesise five motives for the rise of CP culture. Second, the need for information about the inner workings of the online language cosplay group was a decisive factor in the choice of the aca-fan, as in cases where the data consists of simultaneous observations or recordings, such as role-playing games, the presence of the researcher as a fan may be less intimidating or embarrassing than that of a transcendent observer (Cristofari & Guitton, 2017).

However, Larsen and Zubernis (2012) noted that adopting aca-fan as the sole research methodology may give rise to an overrepresentation of academic-identified fans to other fans, thus providing a skewed picture of what is happening in the fan community. For example, when *Harry Potter* slash being brought to the attention of the academia, Catherine Tosenberger (2008) admitted that her own research on slash in the *Harry Potter* fanworld was only about male/male slash, to the point where Jennifer Duggan’s (2017) study ignores the existence of *Harry Potter* female slash and directly parallels the study of slash and masculinity. This is precisely the limitation of research horizons due to aca-fan’s own interest preferences, what is compromised is the balance of representation in the field of fan studies (Larsen & Zubernis, 2012), resulting in a number of other types of fans being unknowingly encompassed within the male slash fandom.

### **6.1.2 Online questionnaire**

Interviews and questionnaires are the main methods of data collection in humanities and social sciences research, among which questionnaire is a method that takes a quantitative approach to understanding social phenomena based on objective validation, which is distinctly different from qualitative analysis that relies on subject insights and analyses to understand social phenomena (McKenna et al., 2011), it is therefore often used to probe the attitudes of fans (e.g. Madill & Zhao,

2022; Lozano et al, 2018). Interview is also a good method for qualitative research and had been considered in the design phase of the study, however the reality is that this present study was carried out at a peculiar time, firstly because the data collection took place during the epidemic, secondly because most of the interviewees were in the middle of their semester.

Firstly, the policy of home quarantine in China for epidemics has resulted in the inability of the face-to-face interviews. For this barrier to access, the use of online survey research can take advantage of the Internet to access to groups and individuals that are difficult to reach through offline channels (Wright, 2005). Secondly, the authors found that the majority of fans willing to participate in the study were high school or college students who did not have much time to conduct online one-on-one interviews because the collection of materials coincided with the middle of the semester, and therefore an efficient and fast method of data collection was urgently required. Online questionnaires solve this problem well by allowing researchers to reach a large number of people with common characteristics in a short period of time (Andrews et al., 2007; Yun & Trumbo, 2000). Whereas the interview is slower to collect data because the interviewer has to interview the participants and record the session, especially in unstructured interviews where both parties enjoy a greater degree of freedom (Faryadi, 2019).

In addition to this, CP fans are in an awkward position within the Chinese pop-culture scene, through aca-fan it can be found that mainstream culture and even other fandom are not all friendly towards CP fans and fans of English-language cultural products, so it is difficult to predict how many people would be willing to participate in the interviews. Besides, the interview is still a social act in which the possible performative behaviours of the interviewees can cause errors in data, for example, some interviewees may avoid conflict by using careful wording and a moderated tone on sensitive topics during the interview. But in the questionnaire, these topics are presented in the form of open-ended questions that give participants ample mental space to express their true thoughts and thus less likely to modify the emotions in these answers, which greatly helps the researcher to obtain authentic and valid primary data.

Taken together, the advantages of the online questionnaire, including its timeliness, wider coverage, and greater reliability (Regmi et al., 2016; Saleh & Bista, 2017; Rahman, 2020), matched well with the realities of the present study, and was the most likely method to quickly collect the highly representative and comparable data during the special and stressful epidemic period.

However, the use of standardised questionnaires for studying CP fans may lead to information bias, omitted variable bias, sampling bias in the findings (Streefkerk, 2019). Even stable questionnaires that have been validated cross-culturally may miss important variables (Niemiec, 2013), especially after converting cultural contexts, some well-established scales are difficult to fully generalise, e.g., motivations derived for Chinese BL fans by Zhou et al (2021) and investigations into motivations of Hungarian for consuming BL by Zsila et al (2018) have additional factors beyond the common ones. In general, the lack of ethnography may over-objectify fans (Evans & Stasi, 2014), the pure rationality of numbers makes it problematic to encapsulate the full range of emotional characteristics of fans. Furthermore, an overly rational academic identity prevents researchers from accessing the most central fans to sample.

### **6.1.3 Textual analysis**

The reason for using textual Analysis rather than other content-specific research methods, especially content analysis, is to place CP fans prior to fanfiction for examination. The advantages and disadvantages of text analysis and content analysis are opposite, although both of them use materials such as text, images, video as research objects. Specifically, content analysis belongs to the category of quantitative research, which uses meta-text as the main object of study quantitatively analyses and describes the content of the information by means of mathematical statistic (Zhang & Cassany, 2019, 2020).

On the contrary, the analysis of CP fanfiction in this study is intended to be about placing CP fans at the centre prior to fanfiction and deciphering how they use certain settings, rather than examining what mathematical features these settings have in themselves as specific content. Textual analysis is therefore a method more in line with the main thrust of the present study, which aims to analyse the structure and meaning of the text, exploring the authors' diverse ways of interpreting meaning and their hidden consciousness within the text (Popping, 2012).

However, it is easy for researchers to get bogged down in close readings of similar themes once they use only textual analysis to examine CP fanfiction in isolation, thereby making the fans subordinate. Textual analysis understands the power to 'process texts' as diffused within a system of meaning (Booth, 2013; Guitton, 2012), which indeed creates an interpretative space of 'fan-determination' for the study of CP fanfiction. But, from another perspective, the decentring of power can also lead to fans becoming an illusion of the text (Hartley, 1987, p. 105). Consequently, analyses of CP fan-

created texts that consider the text as a stand-alone text removed from the specific context of the fandom can hardly avoid the actual fans being ‘pushed too far’ (Press & Livingstone, 2006).

## **6.2 Reflections on the use of the mixed methods approach in fan studies**

Recent studies on fan study have been carried out in mixed methods approach to combine the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods (George, 2023), of course, there are some general operational problems in the use of mixed methods approach by researchers.

Tang (2023) Despite naming CP as shipping, the subject of her study, Wang/Xiao CP, is in fact one of the most recognisable CPs in China. Tang used a mixed methods approach to understand the negotiation of precariousness and normativity in the Wang/Xiao CP fandom. Her path into CP research was different, i.e., she was not a fan per se, but learnt to be a fan because of her interest in the cultural phenomenon that this CP triggered. Her claim that she did not start interviewing “until I felt I could understand the shippers” lays uncertainty on her manipulation of interview sampling, where she used convenience sampling to ask friends and acquaintances if they were Wang/Xiao CP fans, whereas it seems difficult to ascertain whether they really qualify as representative research subjects.

Like Tang, Stever (2019)’s controversy over the use of mixed methods stems from the fact that she enters the fandom differently than aca-fans. Many aca-fans like Cristofari and Guitton (2017) start out as fans, and they subsequently use academic theoretical frameworks to conceptualise the knowledge gained through the experience within the fan community. Stever, on the contrary, describes some of the fandom she has not yet been involved in (Duffett, 2013), it is difficult to judge whether the information they obtained was biased or not.

The study by Yim et al. (2021) used a mixed methods approach (literature review, focus group and survey) to identify consumer characteristics that may influence the behaviour of Millennial sports fans. But, they derived hypotheses through a literature review, which relies heavily on prior research experience and ignores the fact that Millennials are in a constant state of unstable change, and thus the speculations they derived about fan motivations are likely to be inaccurate. Secondly, their questionnaire predominantly used the Likert scale and therefore lacked participatory observation of fan behaviour, thus affecting the validity of the findings.

Agostinho’s use of mixed methods approach (2023) makes a significant step forward in relation to what other researchers have done, i.e., this research did not stop at analysing and validating the

qualitative data from the previous phase in a quantitative way, but rather incorporated ethnography, albeit in a small part, she positions herself as a feminist researcher and applies the feminist paradigm. But Agostinho also spends a great deal of space on literature research, while quantitative analysis only serves as a reference to complement qualitative research. Besides, she also uses well-established scales developed and validated by other scholars, which, like most previous scale questionnaires, fans can only give guided answers in a limited space.

In summary, the problems with the use of mixed methods approach in fan studies are divided into three main areas: (1) there may be errors in the information collected in the first stage, and the reliability of the results, whether obtained by meta-fan, or aca-fan, has yet to be verified, or, if the literature survey method is used, the result relies heavily on previous research experience; (2) the questionnaire design did not combine qualitative and quantitative, which could potentially affect the validity of the research data; (3) one method is over-represented in mixed methods approach, making the other methods less useful, thus affecting the objectivity of the research results.

### **6.3 Operational procedures for adapted mixed methods approach**

Aiming to avoid these problems, the present study firstly used aca-fan for long-term multiple participant observation of multidimensional CP fan communities; secondly, the questionnaire was a revised design combining qualitative and quantitative; and importantly, the order of mixed methods approach was a modification of the conventional sequential exploratory design. In general, sequential exploratory design in fan study (e.g. , the comparative study of fandom/non-fandom by McInroy & Craigs, 2018) first explores the initial problem, collects and analyses qualitative data, and develops hypotheses; then collects and analyses quantitative data to test or confirm qualitative findings; and finally combines the results of the first two steps in the interpretation section, so the purpose of this type of design is to use quantitative analysis to bring the elements found in the qualitative to a more generalised scale. However, not all qualitative results obtained in the first stage could be tested through the quantitative questionnaire (Yardley & Bishop, 2017).

The present study did not stop after the quantitative analysis, but reverted to another qualitative method, textual analysis, to test another hypothesis derived in the first stage, thus creating a qualitative-quantitative-qualitative loop. This combination thus both supplements some of the information that could not be obtained in the previous two phases, while avoiding an over-representation of the findings relying on one method. Following the adapted sequential exploratory

design, this study divides the mixed methods approach into three stages.

### **6.3.1 Phase I: aca-fan**

As the first stage of the mixed methods approach, the use of the aca-fan method was divided into two parts, the first being the observation of the daily media activities of the CP fans and the second being the participation in the language Cosplay.

In the first step, the authors targeted CP fans on Weibo and Bilibili to keep daily records of their typical behaviours and discourses about CPs of English-language cultural products in cyberspace, as well as the perceptions about English-language cultural products by other opinion groups and the dominant culture, and for this purpose, the authors created a private e-favourite dedicated to the storage of the observed material.

In the second step, the authors participated and observed as aca-fans in exclusionary language cosplay groups, and collected the linguistic expressions of fan cosplayers when they used CP's personal settings. Guided by the aca-fan methodology, firstly, by virtue of being a fan and having expertise, the author passed the identity and skills checks that the members of the panel had to complete, whereas researchers would not have been able to even answer these questions if they were not fans, as only fans familiar with language cosplay as well as *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* would have known the answers.

In addition, the present study proposes a localised innovation of 'moderately lowering the stance' in the way aca-fan is used. The experience of being excluded from the membership list due to non-compliance with the rules of language cosplay at the beginning of the research using aca-fan led the present research to conclude that the authority of the academic fan should be placed below that of the CP fan being observed, i.e., firstly, respecting the rules of the CP fan, and then observing it with an academic gaze. The post-modernised adolescents are no longer superstitious and in awe of the authoritative overtones carried by academics' identities. the tripartite power construction of fans-academics-authors has fundamentally changed in China's media environment (Cristofari & Guitton, 2017). In China's unique CP fan ecology, where fans enjoy a greater voice than ever before, and where CP fandoms are subject to strict hierarchies and management norms, research exported by self-perceived orthodox academic fans may hamper the collection of primary source material due to a lack of respect and obedience to the rules.

### **6.3.2 Phase II: online questionnaire**

After drawing inferences about CP fans' motives for becoming fans and speculations about the reasons for CP fans' bias towards the fandom of English-language cultural products through the use of aca-fan in the first stage, the next step required the operationalisation of an online questionnaire. Through the questionnaire, in addition to collecting first-hand data from the fans to validate the reasonableness and accuracy of the motives and assumptions in the previous step, it is also necessary to collect direct data on the attitudes and thoughts of the CP fans, which could not be obtained in the first stage.

#### (1) Questionnaire design

The present questionnaire was purposely designed with nine open-ended questions. First, for some phenomena or some conventional rules in CP fandom, the difference and diversity of fans' views are hard to predict, then it is not suitable to set up closed questions in an exhaustive way. Instead, open-ended questions can address the shortcomings caused by the researcher's limitations because they cannot be answered with a simple yes or no, respondents are asked to make a response in their own words and express it verbally or in writing (Faryadi, 2019), and open-ended questions in data collection can help researchers to be more focused on precise topics (Hanson et al., 2011).

Secondly, open-ended questions allow the researcher's evaluative logic and reasoning skills to be exercised in ways that multiple choice does not, thus avoids leading the respondent in a particular direction predetermined by the researcher (Züll, 2016) and therefore reflects the respondent's true preferences or opinions (Porst, 2011). This advantage of the open-ended questions helped to rectify an error that existed at the beginning of this study, namely that, empirically in aca-fan's experience, there was a clear masculine/feminine discrepancy in CP fans' descriptions of the physical appearance of the two parties in the CP, however, the actual answers obtained through the open-ended questions reversed this perception, and this problem was difficult to be discovered with the closed-ended question.

The final questionnaire presented was divided into five main sections. The first part is questions 1 to 7, which contains 6 factors of participants' age, gender, sexual orientation, education, overseas education experience, and only-child family, thus contributing to this study to obtain a comprehensive profiling of CP fans of English-language cultural products. The second part is questions 8 to 10, which are mainly used to explore the reasons for the rise of CP fan culture. The third section, questions 11 to 22, focuses on the participants' preference for the personal setting of

CP and the top/bottom division pattern in CP, thus facilitating the answer to another important question of the study, namely the phenomenon of 'setting supremacy'. The fourth section, questions 23 to 29, is where the questionnaire moves into the second category of this study, namely, to explore why the fans in this study prefer CP in English-language cultural products. This is followed by the final section of the questionnaire, questions 30 to 32, which further refines the CP fans of English-language cultural products, uncovering and examining one of the unique cross-cultural, cross-textual, cross-dimensional Lalang CP cultures, as well as the factors that contribute to the end of CP fandom behaviour.

## (2) Questionnaire Delivery

Given that the present study has a high limitation on the time of information collection, as well as, the qualification of the participants (they have to be CP fans of *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts*), the platform for questionnaire delivery should be carefully selected to ensure accurate sampling. Instead of the larger the sample, the more accurate the results, the accuracy of the target population is the core factor that determines the effectiveness of the results (Faryadi, 2019). Therefore, after considering the activity of online fan communities and their relevance to the research topic, the questionnaire was placed on the most frequent online fan communities used by CP fans, as well as the most influential and observable public social platforms, the Douban group, the QQ group, and Weibo to gather participants.

The three platforms behaved differently during the specific questionnaire delivery process. For Weibo, a dedicated account was registered to post the link to the questionnaire, Weibo was expected to be the platform that would gather the most participants because it is the platform that has the largest concentration of fans, however, surprisingly, fans of Weibo hardly responded to the dedicated link to the questionnaire. In response, the present study hypothesises that Weibo, as China's largest public information platform, is flooded with information that is updated incredibly fast, thus compromising the ability of fans to engage in in-depth thinking, moreover, considering that Weibo's hostile fan ecosystem, which is dominated by fans' collective fights and data labours, also prevents fans from conducting actions on Weibo that require personal reflection.

In contrast to Weibo, this study reaped the largest number of participants in Douban's *Harry Potter* fan group, Draco/Harry CP group, and Euro-American film and television group. They showed a strong interest in academic research, and were more than willing to spend time experiencing a



dialogue with researchers, which was inseparable from Douban's ethos building. Douban has been deliberate in maintaining its text-only forum function, thus providing the most ideal platform for any research in the fan culture that wishes to touch on serious topics, and compared to Weibo, Douban pays close attention to a harmonious discussion environment.

QQ groups, conversely, are completely closed compared to Douban and Weibo, and thus their members care more about maintaining social relationships with fellow members and emphasise the harmonious and mutually supportive atmosphere within the group. As Wright (2005) points out that some participants in Internet communities actually welcome researchers' studies, especially when members are interested in how others perceive their community. I therefore sought permission from the QQ group leaders of *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* to present my aca-fan identity to them, as well as the content and purpose of the study, and eventually obtained permission to release the questionnaire with relative ease.

The questionnaire was distributed online and powered by [www.wjx.cn](http://www.wjx.cn). To prevent unqualified respondents from completing the questionnaire, it was set to be closed to the public and restricted to one response from the same IP address. Data collection took place between May and August 2021. The final number of valid online questionnaires was 136 (N = 136). The questionnaires are translated into Chinese because Chinese is the common language of the respondents and the CP fan culture occurs in the Chinese context, then the questionnaires were transcribed into English for further research.

### (3) Data analysis

SPSS data processing was used in this study. The advantages of using qualitative data analysis software include increased rigour of analysis (Rahman, 2021), and SPSS is the most suitable software for data analysis with questionnaires (Regmi et al., 2016), as it provides the ability to export responses to a compatible database to eliminate transcription errors and prevent survey participants from modifying the survey.

In accordance with the design of this questionnaire, specific data analysis was applied according to the type of question, firstly, for questions 1-7 using descriptive analysis. In the second category (questions: 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 19, 23, 25, 26, 31, 33), a chi-square goodness-of-fit test was used to analyse whether the proportion of choices for each multiple-choice question was evenly distributed. And whether there is a significant difference in the proportion of choices combined with a chi-

square goodness-of-fit test (when the p-value is less than 0.05, there is a significant difference in the proportion of choices, and vice versa, there is no significant difference in the proportion of choices). In the third category (questions 13, 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32), to analyse the answers to the open-ended questions more rigorously, the answers were first classified into categories and then frequency analysis was used to examine the distribution of the data in the categories. The last category is reliability and validity analysis, for the matrix scale questions 18 and 20.

This research project conducted with full compliance of research ethics norms, and more specifically the codes and practices established in the 1998 Data Protection Act and the University of East Anglia Research Data Management Policy (2013). This research achieves the ethical approval issued by the University of East Anglia's Faculty of Arts and Humanities Research Ethics Sub-Committee (HUM S-REC), reference: SREC 20-012

### **6.3.3 Phase III: Textual analysis**

As the final stage of the mixed methods approach, textual analysis was used to analyse the second and fourth questions, i.e., interpreting the 'setting supremacy' phenomenon through the pairing of fanfiction and plot of language cosplay, and interpreting La Lang CP through the storylines of the La Lang CP fan video.

Specifically, based on the feedback of fans on favourite worldview setting from the questionnaire in the second stage, ABO is one of the most popular worldview settings in the CP fandom of English-language cultural products, so in the third stage, open-source CP fanfiction CP from online platforms were analysed using textual analyses. After referencing the favourite CP fanfiction left by fans in an online questionnaire, three ABO fanfictions from the most iconic CPs Draco Malfoy/Harry Potter and Severus Snape x Lily Evans have been chosen, as well as two short texts published on Weibo about Theseus Scamander / Newt Scamander, were selected as the research materials. Secondly, in the second section using textual analysis, the present research chose the videos with the highest number of plays on Bilibili, and the highest visibility within CP fandom of Voldemort x Lin Daiyu, and intercepted their introductions of the video content to analyse the narrativity of La Lang CP.

## **7. Scope of the study: research cases and research space**

### **7.1 Meaning of English-language cultural products**

The object of the present research is CP fans of English-language cultural products, so it is necessary to clarify the meaning of ‘English’ first. Chinese fans are accustomed to dividing the international fandom into the integrated Anglo-American, Korean, Japanese, and Thai fandoms, etc. This division is for the convenience of fan creation, and emphasises the ‘fusion of worldview’ rather than ideological divisions and geo-cultural characteristics in fan creation. Despite the prominence of the United Kingdom and the United States in the integrated Anglo-American, virtually all other Western stories (works in languages other than English) are included, so in short, the integrated Anglo-American fanfiction is fiction based on characters from Western film and television culture represented by British and American dramas, with *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beats*, being some of the most popular films in the integrated Anglo-American cultural products.

However, considering the geographical, linguistic, and cultural hybridity of the integrated Anglo-American division, which may lead to over-referencing and over-generalisation of works in other languages. At the same time, given that the production teams of these two productions were not exclusively made up of English speakers, the use of ‘English’ which highlights British attributes, to emphasise common linguistic features from script formation to visual presentation simplifies the conceptual conflation. Taken together, the present study uses ‘English-language cultural products’ to refer to *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* created by English-speakers, thereby emphasising the creation of a derivative Western worldview in fan productions. In addition to this, the term ‘English-language cultural products’ carries less of the political critique of the Western/Eastern ideological division than the term ‘Western media products’.

## **7.2 Research Cases: *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts***

The present study chose two film series, *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts*, to examine CP fans of English-language cultural products in China because of two reasons.

The first reason is the richness of the research material. *Harry Potter* has been popular in China for a much longer period of time and has the largest fan base; therefore, as early as the beginning of the success of *Harry Potter*’s cross-cultural communication in China, the majority of terms, ideas, clichés and subgenres within the Western *Harry Potter* fandom entered the Chinese *Harry Potter* fandom through spontaneous translations and introductions by fans, which laid a solid foundation for *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* to become a pool of CP material. For example, Draco/Harry is not only the most popular ship in English-language *Harry Potter* slash (Chin & Morimoto, 2013),

but also a favourite CP within the CP fandom of English-language cultural products, at present, Weibo's CP Super Topic has a whopping 178,000 Draco/Harry CP fans, as well as 28,000 posts, and at Bilibili.com, the highest number of Draco/Harry CP fan videos had 1,514,000 views and 12,000 bullet-screen comments. Thus, the CP fans of *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* provide the study with the most active subjects to examine and extremely sufficient research material.

In particular, the CP of Voldemort x Lin Daiyu has an unrivalled position among all cross-cultural, cross-textual, and cross-dimensional La Lang CPs. Thus, although other English-language cultural products, such as *Marvel*, have a wide variety of CPs, no other CPs can be compared to Voldemort x Lin Daiyu in terms of number of fans, fan output, and public influence as far as the subgenre of La Lang CPs is concerned. Therefore, *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* can provide the most diverse and representative model for the study of CP fan culture of English-language cultural products.

The second reason is that the unique generational iteration among *Harry Potter* fans is more intuitive and persuasive than the fandom of other English-language cultural products. As the active fans of the online interest-oriented community have shifted from the post-80s and post-90s to the post-95s and post-00s, they are bound to interpret the text differently than previous generations of fans. Compared to *Sherlock* (2010), *Marvel* (2011), *Good Omens* (2019), *Heartstopper* (2022), etc., which entered the Chinese market after *Harry Potter* (2001), their late introduction into the market determined that their popularity could not witness the iteration of the fans, but only *Harry Potter* has managed to form fan cultures with different characteristics in the context of different cultural eras. Now, younger fans are re-treating the classic texts of the wizarding world in a fresher way combining Japanese BL and English slash based on their own cultural experiences. In sum, the series of behaviours performed by CP fans of *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* provide the most intuitive and representative material for exploring the iterative development of fan culture in China, and the most appropriate space for interpretation of CP culture happened in the fandom of English-language cultural products.

### **7.3 Research Spaces - Weibo and Bilibili**

This study's research space is the online media platform. Specifically, when choosing 'Weibo' and 'Bilibili.com' as the main venues for observing CP culture, two main dimensions were taken into account, one related to the richness of available research materials, and the other related to the

observability of fan behaviours.

**Weibo:**

As the most prominent virtual venue for Chinese fans' daily activities, Weibo plays the most central role in the media forces that can influence the entire Chinese fandom, and thus most scholars in current studies on fan culture (e.g., Zhang, 2019) use Weibo as an observation space. Nowadays, Weibo has become the longest-established media platform in Chinese fandom, where we can find the largest number of CP fans, and a variety of active CP fan groups, which is due to Weibo's business strategy<sup>13</sup>.

The emergence of Weibo has profoundly changed the way CP fans operate, and it has established many representative rules for CP fans, to a certain extent, the prosperity of CP culture in China is fuelled by Weibo, and it is therefore the best online space for observing CP fan culture. Especially through the development of the 'CP Super Topic' function, Weibo has become an inseparable part of the fandom ecosystem.

Therefore, under the guidance of Weibo as a commercial media platform, and, with the complicity of capital forces represented by television production companies and performance agencies, for fans, almost all relevant activities, such as information access, daily interactions, organisation and information disclosure of key events, fan creations, idol-fan interactions, advertisement endorsements and commercialisation activities of idols, need to rely on the Super Topic to be obtain. In particular, the platform on which the struggle of CP fans of English-language cultural products for fandom nationalism takes place is Weibo.

In sum, Weibo Super Topic makes CP fans typical and representative in terms of emotional bonding, identity belonging, cultural production, organisational mobilization and regulations, etc. Therefore, it is necessary to choose Weibo as a specific space to examine in depth the activity mode and cultural connotations of CP fans in *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts*.

**Bilibili.com:**

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<sup>13</sup> Weibo's marketing strategy is to sign massive agreements with celebrities on a resource-for resource basis, whereby celebrities need to remain active on Weibo in order to receive monetary and non-monetary benefits (e.g., media exposure) from Weibo, and thus Weibo is quickly replacing other online platforms as the main locus of fan culture in recent years.

Bilibili.com, affectionately known as the ‘little broken website’ by fans, is a cultural community and video platform dominated by and highly aggregated with China’s young generation. As to why Bilibili has become the second media platform for observing CP culture, firstly because it possessed the richest source of CP fan-made videos for the present study to observe. In particular La Lang CP, which is a cross-cultural, cross-textual, cross-dimensional CP unique to Chinese CP fans, which was born on Bilibili and developed and eventually became a stable category of CPs with the help of Bilibili.

Secondly, Bilibili has a unique participatory community culture marked by ‘bullet-screen comments’, in which viewers post real-time comments flying across the screen like bullets while watching videos (Zhou & Zhang, 2022). As a result, Bilibili provides a first-hand source for observing the emotional resonance of CP fans towards a particular CP as demonstrated during video production and viewing.

## **8. Outline of Chapters**

The present research is divided into eight chapters in order to address the five questions related to the core research on CP fan culture of English-language cultural products.

Whilst the primary focus of the present research is on CP fans of English-language cultural products, it is necessary to begin the first part by placing it in a wider social, cultural, and economic context. Therefore, the first chapter provides the cultural origins of CP culture and setting supremacy, and outlines the relevant scholarship on CP fan culture, as well as explaining the choice of research methodology and the three specific implementation steps of the present research, as well as, providing a clear delineation of the object of study and the scope of the present research. In a broad sense, this chapter clarifies the widespread role of Chinese CP culture in contemporary popular culture, and the affirmed status of CP fans as the main actors of the fan economy, as well as, the ‘unsupportive’ attitude of the national mainstream cultural policy towards CP fan culture. Thus, this chapter argues that this macro-environment congenitally determines the shift of Chinese CP fans’ attention to the sphere of English-language cultural products, which gives rise to a special mode of fan culture operation that is distinct from the CP fans of local Chinese cultural products. Subsequent chapters will build on this foundation.

After setting up the cultural, political, and economic framework for CP culture, the present study moves on to Chapter 2, which begins to look at the first question to explore the reasons for the

emergence of CP culture. Through an online questionnaire, the present research first profiles CP fans as a whole to capture the presence of intergenerational and gender differences, and second, classifies the reasons for the popularity of CP culture according to these intervals into the following categories: the interpersonal segregation in the era of epidemics as well as the contradictions of intergenerational loneliness and emotional needs of Chinese youths in the postmodern society, the CP fans' status as 'only daughters', the impulse to read pornography, the pursuit of aesthetics, and facilitation by the external communication medias, these five points are discussed in turn.

Chapters 3 and 4 explore two aspects of how CP fan literature is created, which is the second question of the present research: why is there a phenomenon of 'setting supremacy' in CP fan creation? Chapter 3 interprets this phenomenon in terms of fans' concerns about CP's personal settings and the worldview settings of CP fanfiction, while Chapter 4 focuses on how fans use CP's personal settings to create virtual CP relationships with other players in language-cosplaying games. Chapter 3 is divided into three parts. Firstly, with reference to the conception of 'moe-element database' proposed by Azuma Hiroki, the present research proposes the concept of a 'dynamic 2.5-dimensional settings database' for interpreting the specific meaning of 'settings' in CP culture, and then analyse how fans manipulate 'personal settings' to form CPs. In the second part, the study focuses on the rise of CP fans' attention to diverse worldview settings. Finally, it discusses the meaning of gender-switching settings, which are particularly favoured by Chinese CP fans.

Chapter 4 serves as an extension of Chapter 3, allowing the present research to provide an integrated reading of both manifestations of the phenomenon of 'setting supremacy'. By means of the method of aca-fan, the present research found that CP fans engage in online language cosplay to play CPs, so this approach is taken in this 3o access this closed online game group and explore how CP fans combine the CP's 'personal setting' with their self-persona to form a '2.5-dimensional personal setting' and 'worldview setting' by typing, and to form inter-player CP relationships in the name of the character.

Starting from Chapter 5, the present research goes on to be more specific to the CP fandom of English-language cultural products, especially by comparing this intercultural CP fandom with the CP fandom of native Chinese cultural products to answer the question about why they were attracted to CPs from English-language cultural products instead of CPs from native cultural products? This chapter begins by analysing the identity construction that distinguishes CP fans of English-language

cultural products from CP fans of local Chinese cultural products; subsequently, it explains the distinguishing operation rule of CP fandom of English-language cultural products; and, finally, it elucidates the ways in which they perceive and implement the law of ‘top/bottom’ circulating within the Chinese CP fan culture, which is different from that of the local CP fans.

Chapter 6 continues to focus on ‘La Lang (拉郎) CP’ fans after the subdividing of CP fans of English-language cultural products, using ‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’ as a representative to examine the most rebellious CP fans in this intercultural CP fandom. Firstly, the concept of ‘La Lang’ will be illustrated. Secondly, the complex attributes of La Lang will be analysed on the basis of both, the spoof-driven youth culture movement, and the experiments in ‘personal settings’ that return to the essence of CP. Then, the most important part of the La Lang CP culture, the La Lang videos, will be used to specifically examine the ways in which fans process the ‘personal settings’ of La Lang CP with the help of the ‘2.5-dimensional settings database’. Finally, two misconceptions about La Lang CP will be clarified, i.e., the existence of La Lang CP does not require a story, and the formation of La Lang CP is completely unrestricted.

Chapter 7 takes a case study of a conflict between CP fans that occurred between the old and new versions of the GGAD CP to answer the fifth question of the present research, i.e., why do some CP fans of English-language cultural products choose to terminate their support for a particular CP, thus completing the examination of the last aspect of their intercultural CP fan activities. Firstly, the chapter addresses the fact that fandom nationalism is responsible for the disengagement of some CP fans. Secondly, this chapter clarifies the specific meaning of fandom nationalism, and accordingly, identifies how CP fans of English-language cultural products engage in the game of national identity versus fan identity. Finally, from their dual identities, the ways in which CP fans of English-language cultural products use fandom nationalism differently from Chinese fans are suggested.

Chapter 8, which serves as the final chapter of this thesis, is divided into three parts. Firstly, provides a review of the findings of the present research. Secondly, describes the contribution of the present research to, transnational fan culture, postmodernist theory, social impact, methodology application. Finally, discusses the three limitations of the present research and provide recommendations for future research on CP fan culture respectively.



## Chapter Two. Reasons For the Emergence of CP Culture

Since the beginning of 2019, due to the influence of the explosion of BL-adapted web dramas, the concept of CP has gradually spread from the narrow space of female-oriented subculture communities to the field of Chinese mass pop culture, and has become a high-profile cultural phenomenon. And from the cultural roots, the birth of CP fan culture was influenced by Japanese BL culture and Western slash fan culture, so there are some common features in the reasons for the popularity of the three cultures, and due to the longer history of development and greater world influence of BL culture and slash culture, there have been some well-established studies that have explored their attraction to cultural participants.

Pagliassotti (2008) conducted one of the earliest surveys on BL viewing motives of Anglophone BL consumers outside of Japan, according to the results of her qualitative research, ten distinct motivations could be identified: the first motivation is to view/read romantic contents in which gender differences are not present; the second motivation is to view/read materials that portray a positive picture of homosexual men; the third reason is for understanding girls' own feelings and dilemmas; fourthly, for experiencing intense emotions; fifthly, they apt to avoid heterosexual romance stories due to one-dimensional female characters and 'boring' narratives; sixth and seven reasons, BL as a female-oriented genre caters to women's narrative preferences; the seventh reason is *they want to* escape daily life, as well as seeking relaxation and entertainment; besides, they have a desire to view/read distinctive graphic style in BL; finally, *they want to read* arousing/sexually titillating content present by homoerotic. Similarly, Zhang (2016) investigated young female Chinese BL enthusiasts' motives and found that challenging traditional gender constructs, escapism, voyeurism, and aesthetics are the most attractive features of BL media for women.

The slash fan as a subgenre in fandom has received a great deal of academic attention since its inception (Hansen, 2010). Slash fanfiction refers to a predominantly female literary practice born in the 1970s (Penley, 1991; Bacon-Smith, 1992), whereby fans eroticise relationships between (usually male) protagonists in popular culture (Keft-Kennedy, 2008; Hansen, 2010; Neville, 2018). There are various reasons why fans may write slash fan fiction, media studies tend to explain it in terms

of the erotic aspects of slash, and cultural studies emphasise the romantic aspects of slash (Salmon & Symons, 2003, p. 74).

Firstly, the popularity of slash has benefited from sexual liberation. McNair (2013) argues that sexual liberation, particularly the acceptance of feminism and queer rights, generated a social demand for more sexualised cultural modes and expressions, including challenging or undermining traditional non-normative forms of patriarchy. Thus, in that zeitgeist, early scholars such as Joanna Russ (1985) and Constance Penley (1991) have argued that women who write male/male slash have a feminist agenda, where fans blended traditional codes of masculinity and femininity in order to avoid the heroine and subordinate characters in passive romances, whereby they seek to challenge the gender inequalities inherent in heterosexuality in traditional romance literature. Furthermore, Keft-Kennedy (2008) argues that women explore socially forbidden pleasures by gazing at male homosexual bodies, particularly drawing on aggressive homoerotic sex behavior to construct a hegemonic discourse of sexuality, thus providing women with a subversive instrumental desire for sexual pleasure. Overall, researchers have argued that slash fiction enables women to revisit patriarchal notions of gender in traditional society by subverting male characters, and that this caters to the feminist ideology of Western society at the time.

Secondly, the internet has taken slash out of the niche category. Until the rise of the Internet in the mid-1990s (Hansen, 2010), slash fanfiction had never been published in mainstream media, although they were published widely in small press or fanzines (Jenkins, 1992, p. 187). As the Internet provided a means of wide distribution for uncensored self-publishing, enabling women to realise shared sexual fantasies, the slash fan was no longer marginalised but became a pervasive aspect of the media fans (Jenkins, 1992), and the slash developed a plethora of new pairings that transcended male homosexuality and various sub-genres. In this sense, the internet has provided women with spaces where slash fanfiction can flow freely (Jacobs, 2012; Neville, 2018; Attwood, 2010).

Another important context for slash was the rise of queer culture. Slash had previously been categorised as a 'queer space' (Lothian et al., 2007; Rambukkana, 2007) because it was 'an approach that challenged the explicitly heterosexual/queer dichotomy' (Busse, 2005, p. 122), men in slash fiction often behave in ways that go beyond traditional gender roles, Hoad (2017) also found young women queer the masculinity of male/male performers so that they can renegotiate hegemonic

norms beyond heteronormative masculinity. However, not only do they develop male intimacy, but these male characters also actively renounce stereotypical social conventions, thus, Neville (2018) claims that the convergence of female and queer desires in cyberspace is most evident in the realm of slash fiction.

However, these findings do not fully address the reasons for the popularity of CP culture in China. Firstly, these research models were not developed in China, so these reasons do not fully apply to Chinese fans who are in a different state of cultural environment from that of Europe, America and Japan. Secondly, the fan samples used in studies of BL (even those of Chinese BL fans) and male slash do not encompass all types of CP fans, as the gender configuration of CP is not limited to male/male, but rather a wide variety of homosexual and heterosexual patterns. Lastly and most importantly, the previously derived reasons that have been used to examine the causes of heterosexual women's stirrings towards male homosexual category fail to take into account the fact that the mass popularity of CP culture lagged behind that of Japanese BL and Western slash, which results in the uniqueness that prompted the creation of CP culture being overlooked, both in terms of the context of the era, the technological features, and, in particular, the key generational factor, i.e., the upbringing and gender confusion of CP fans who are 'only daughters', the consequence of which is that CP culture has lost its identity.

Based on these research flaws, this chapter validates, supplements, and discusses the reasons about the rise of CP culture derived from the 'aca-fan' method in the first stage through the results of the online questionnaire survey, and uniquely derives six reasons that contribute to the emergence of CP culture among young women in China. They are, firstly, the postmodern situation of CP fans; secondly, the loneliness and emotional needs of contemporary youth; thirdly, the stumbling of CP fans as 'only daughters'; fourthly, the safe female erotic imagery; fifthly, the pursuit of aestheticism by CP fans; and sixthly, the fuelling of the external communication media.

### **1. Reason 1: The Zeitgeist of Postmodern Chinese Youth**

Different generations of fans face different issues of the times, resulting in unique cultural expressions that bear the imprint of the times. Speaking about one of the Harry Potter fanfiction sites, Jenkins (2004) says: "*Harry Potter* fanfiction has produced countless stories about youth, empowering characters as they rebel against their injustices, and writers encountered every day at school (p. 2)". Angela Thomas (2006), on the other hand, argues that "young people respond

critically to the texts that tell about their lives by weaving these stories, and the ways in which they deal with the complexities of the stories, into the characters and plots of their fanfiction”. So, for young fans, they are not just responding critically to the source material within the spaces comprising various fan creations, but exploring their own identities. Then, as Chinese society enters the post-modern era, young people in it are bound to need a new cultural model to cope with the current situation of life and thought, and among these all-encompassing waves of youth culture, CP culture reflects the cultural choices of some young women in particular.

**Table 1 Demographic Sociological Information of CP Fans**

Items	Project	N of samples	%
Age	Post-2005s	12	9.1
	Post-2000s	73	55.3
	Post-1995s	31	23.5
	Post-1990s	14	10.6
	Post-1980s	1	0.8
	Other	1	0.8
	Gender	Cis Female	125
Cis Male		3	2.3
Transwoman		0	0
Transman		1	0.8
Non-binary gender		2	1.5
Other		1	0.8
Sexual orientation		Heterosexual	46
	Homosexual	14	10.6
	Bisexual	29	22
	Pansexual	10	7.6
	Asexual	5	3.8
	Fluid	16	12.1
	Unknown/Prefer not to say	12	9.1
Degree	High school and the following degree	34	25.8

	Bachelor's degree and undergraduate	68	51.5
	Master's degree and postgraduate	25	18.9
	Doctor degree and Ph.D. candidate	1	0.8
	Office worker	4	3
Overseas education experience	No, Mainland China	106	80.3
	Yes, English-speaking countries	21	15.9
	Yes, Non-English-speaking countries	5	3.8
Single child	Yes	74	56.1
	No	50	37.9
	Other	8	6.1

According to Table 1, first, the age of CP fans was dominated by post-2000s (N = 73, 55.3%) and post-1995 (N = 31, 23.5%). In contrast, fans of post-1980s, who were the earliest exposed to HP, are not a major component of the CP fanbase, and the differences in the age structure of CP fans illustrate the obvious generational differences that occur in the fandom of *Harry Potter*.

Second, the majority of CP fans were cisgender females (N = 46, 34.8%), suggesting that CP culture is typically female-oriented and that fans engage in this activity through a heteronormative lens, which is commensurate with the strong heteronormative hegemony and traditionalism in Chinese culture (Junren, 2013). For BL fans, who present the same gender and sexuality characteristics as CP fans, it has been suggested that Chinese women who participate in BL culture may be disproportionately inclined to identify themselves as heterosexual for fear of being accused by the public that BL alienates them from their roles as wives and mothers (Zhao, 2016), however, this 'pseudo' presumption of heterosexual identity is not entirely applicable to CP fans, as CPs are not exclusively composed of two males; their gender configurations take a variety of forms, and in particular, heterosexual CPs occupy a great deal of attention in their own right.

Third, the largest number of CP fans had a bachelor's degree in education (N=34, 25.8%), which on the one hand indicates that a certain level of literacy and language proficiency is required to carry out CP activities on English-language cultural products, but moreover, it shows that CP culture is an activity dominated by well-educated youths who possess more cultural capital. At the same time, the majority of CP fans did not have overseas educational backgrounds as predicted (N=106, 80.3%),

which suggests that CP culture is a domesticated fan activity generated by fans' localised interpretations of intercultural texts.

Fourthly, most CP fans come from one-child families (N=74, 56.1%), which determines to a certain extent that they have endowed economic and cultural resources, which also brands CP fan culture with epochal cultural characteristics, and determines that CP culture has more postmodern youth characteristics than fan activities in the previous period.

After considering these attributes together, CP fans belong to Generation Z and Generation Y in China, they are the Internet 'natives' in the age of global culture (Cervi, 2021) whose quality of life and cultural capital are relatively superior, and who have received good education, and they pursue unique cultural tastes (Kim et al., 2020), these characteristics imprint CP culture as a postmodern culture.

In China, postmodernism is more often reflected in the field of cultural and literary creation. Initially, in the 1980s, Western scholars of postmodernism, such as Douwe Fokkema and Linda Hutcheon, asserted that it was impossible for postmodernism to take hold in China (Xu, 1993), Chinese postmodernist scholar Wang Ning (2013) also points out that, "postmodernism itself arose in Western societies, and it is generally speaking unlikely to have arisen in economically underdeveloped Eastern and Third World countries that are still in the process of modernization". However, in the early 1990s a group of Chinese pioneering novelists rapidly produced a large amount of postmodernist literature, disproving the assertion that postmodernism is not compatible with Chinese society.

As a developing country whose economy has begun to take off in the late 20th century, China is in a historical situation of cultural pluralism between tradition and modernity, which makes postmodernism find a realistic soil for its survival. As one of the most powerful and penetrating cultural trends in contemporary times, postmodernism can easily arouse the interest of contemporary Chinese youth. Meanwhile, the intercultural communication brought about by the Internet has created greater intra-ethnic cultural differences among Chinese citizens, who are already in the midst of a huge gap between the rich and the poor and the information gap, making it easier for the cultural factors of the postmodern society to germinate in the cities that are connected to the international community, which explains why we observe the cultural phenomenon of the postmodern CP in the urban youths who are part of the Generation Z and Generation Y.

Therefore, intercultural CP fan culture is a typical example of postmodernity in China. Chinese youths (mostly women) who have innate cultural and economic capitals are creating CP-ised secondary production of film and television from the English-speaking cultural world, giving this cultural form a multicultural fusion from its source, which is the result of the direct influence of postmodernism on China's contemporary society and culture. In particular, cultural expressions of CP fans of English-language cultural products are full of all kinds of banter, grassrootsness, spoofing, and rebellion, and they have launched a multi-layered attack and deconstruction of Chinese conventional culture and society, especially the dissolution of grand narratives.

**Table 2 Reasons to Show a High Level of Commitment to CP**

Categories	Response		Popularity rate ( <i>n</i> =135)
	<i>n</i>	Response rate	
To satisfy the imagination of intimate relationship	81	19.80%	60.00%
Out of preference for a personal setting or worldview setting	79	19.32%	58.52%
To make up for regrets or revise dissatisfaction with an original work	56	13.69%	41.48%
To escape the pressures of reality	43	10.51%	31.85%
To read flesh fanfiction	37	9.05%	27.41%
To imagine intimate relationships of between real people who play the CP	32	7.82%	23.70%
I like CPs consisting of beautiful looking people	31	7.58%	22.96%
The CP I indulge in is under my control and never disappoint me	30	7.33%	22.22%
I like the atmosphere of coupling with other fans	16	3.91%	11.85%
To socialise, because CP is a common phenomenon	4	0.98%	2.96%
Total	409	100%	302.96%

Goodness of fit:  $\chi^2=136.550$   $p=0.000$

This postmodern approach to cultural consumption is represented as the first reason why fans show a high level of commitment of CP. According to the results of *Question 10— Why are you showing a high level of commitment to CP fan culture* (see Table 2), the second most popular option being ‘out of preference for a personal setting or worldview setting’ (N = 79, 58.52%), and the reason in third place was ‘to make up for regrets or revise dissatisfaction with an original work’ (N = 56, 41.48%). These two responses are representative of the way in which fans’ preoccupation with fragmented narratives has replaced some kind of grand and noble intention, with the ‘personal setting’ abstracted from the overall storytelling, and the haunting interactions of the actors in moments outside of their roles, being the material for fragmented narratives.

Azuma (2009) argues that the need for databasification in the postmodern condition where ‘people come to use cultural products for the immediate satisfaction of needs without searching for or desiring profound underlying meaning’. This means that ‘grand narrative’ loses attractiveness, ‘small narrative’ takes their place until finally a database or architecture in the shape of Baudrillardian simulacra emerges (Baudrillard, 1994), Azuma refers to this algorithm-based database as ‘grand non-narrative’. According to this definition, CP culture is the expression of dispelling grand narratives adopted by Chinese youth in response to postmodern culture.

Take the CP fans of GGAD (Gellert Grindelwald/ Albus Dumbledore) as example, *Fantastic Beasts* as a political fairy-tale themed film revolving around factional rivalries is dedicated to building a grander magical world, the subject of the film’s narrative is a battle against wizard populism to preserve peace, it is also a projection of the real social order in a grand unified wizarding world, so, what underpins the *Fantastic Beasts* series is an ambitious for creating a grand worldview narrative. What CP fans of GGAD do, however, is to deliberately dissolve the grand narrative and move away from a reliance on ‘length’ to structure the novel, instead, they turned to a daily ‘small narrative’ that revolves around the CP. They occasionally retain the ‘grand narrative’ of the original centred on destiny, country, etc. but only as a backdrop for the CP small narrative, more often than not they tell the ‘small narrative’ of GGAD such as their delicate daily lives and emotional interactions within the ‘grand narrative’, i.e., the ‘grand narrative’ is cleverly fused into the ‘small narrative’ which forms a CP-ised narrative.

Thus, the postmodern situation of CP fans leads them to turn their attention to a CP narrative that overrides the grandiose implications. CP fans dabble in CP culture both out of a private interest in



particular characters or worldviews, and to adapt ‘fragmented and incoherent episodes’ from the originals. This essentially means that CP fans have the ability to avert their gaze from grand meanings and focus on fragmented CP-centred narratives, which also suggests that coupling is an acquired ability that is not innately possessed by female fans, but rather a gradually acquired and repeatedly practiced ability rooted in a specific social situation, that is to say, the postmodern social situation in which CP fans live determines the paradigm of CP culture to a certain extent.

## **2. Reason 2: Contradictions between zeitgeist loneliness and emotional needs**

Following the analysis of the culturally postmodern environment in which CP fans live, the specific context of the era is the second important reason for the emergence of CP culture. Specifically, based on the a priori experience of aca-fans, the present study puts forward two hypotheses about the reasons for the rise of CP culture: first, fans show a high level of commitment of CP in order to engage in social interaction to bridge the loneliness caused by the segregated interpersonal relationships during the epidemic; and second, fans show a high level of commitment of CP out of emotional needs and to escape reality. The validity of these two hypotheses related to the background of the times was confirmed in online questionnaire.

### **2.1 Loneliness and Interest-related Socialization in the Age of the Epidemic**

According to the results of *Question 10* (see Table 2), The 9th ranked reason for participating in coupling was ‘I like the atmosphere when coupling with other fans’ (N = 16, 11.85%); the 10th ranked answer was ‘to socialise, because coupling is a common phenomenon’ (N = 4, 2.96%). From these two answers, it appears that fans are inclined to participating in coupling to ward off feelings of isolation, and this exemplifies their desire for group socialisation and their fear of being isolated from the group. In examining the reasons for shipping in Western fandoms, Bence Nanay argues that shipping reflects the loneliness felt by many in modern society (Nanay, 2018). Chinese CP fans also show a high level of commitment with CP out of the need for ‘close social relationships’, namely, loneliness vicariously fuels the need to experience romance and love.

But the fact remains not all young people are able to have that special relationship when they need it the most. Especially during the chaotic periods of quarantine with the pandemic of Covid-19, the social relations of the public arena were broken after the epidemic of corona virus in 2020, thereupon, many young people transformed their solitary living status into an online one-person orgy of CP. The relationship between the interpersonal isolation caused by the epidemic and the

carnival-like coupling activities of CP fans of English-language cultural products can be confirmed by the release of *Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore* in 2022. As a result of the quarantine policy, the film did not perform well at the Chinese box office, in stark contrast to this, the internet has been abuzz with CP discussions. Audiences have been particularly heated about GGAD's emotional development and discussions about the film's deleted footage, especially, GGAD's CP fans have taken to Weibo and other social media to berate Warner officials due to their dissatisfaction with the censoring of lines emotionally relevant to GGAD in the version released in China.

At the same time, segregated offline socialising has spawned a range of online CP economic behaviours. In terms of the main scenarios of coupling, it can be divided into content consumption and economic consumption: content consumption mainly includes activities that cost less money such as reading and watching CP fan creations and participating in interaction and discussions on Weibo's CP Super Topic; economic consumption, on the other hand, focuses on consuming merchandises endorsed by celebrities as part of their commercial value.

There are many online shops on Taobao.com that specialise in selling fan-made accessories of various CPs, selling products such as mobile phone cases, wax seals stamp, cotton dolls, metal badges and so on, and a well-established industry chain has formed to customize these products. At the same time, there are numerous posts on social media recommending and comparing the merits of products made by different sellers, and the level of knowledge that fans have about the intricate manufacturing process is considered professional. Most amateur fan-sellers produce CP products based on the number of people who are scheduled to buy them in a crowd-funded group buy. Moreover, in CP Super Topic, there are many fans posting to buy or trade for fan-made merchandises, CP fans have also founded online chat groups for exchanging information on merchandises to keep abreast of the latest news.

There are a large number of online shops on Taobao.com that specialise in selling fan-made accessories of various CPs, with the number of subscribers for a single shop reaching up to 6,500,000, selling products such as mobile phone cases, wax seals stamp, cotton dolls, metal badges, laser tickets and so on, which are even more exquisite than those officially sold. These are basically the merchandise that any circle of CP fans would purchase, and a well-established industry chain has formed on Taobao.com to customize these products. At the same time, there are numerous posts

on social media recommending and comparing the merits of products made by different sellers, and the level of knowledge that fans have about the intricate manufacturing process is considered professional. Most amateur fansellers produce CP products based on the number of people who are scheduled to buy them in a crowd-funded group buy. Moreover, at Xianyu.com, there are many fans offering to buy or exchange for GGAD fan-made merchandises, fans have also founded online chat groups for exchanging information on merchandises to keep abreast of the latest news.

This mature fan economic system that has been in operation for a long time in the CP fandom suggests the isolation of physical space caused by the COVID-19 has to some extent contributed to making Chinese CP culture the fiercest carnival, and a means of online entertainment for singles to release their feelings of loneliness. With the uncertainty brought about by the epidemic to the post-epidemic era in China's public activity space, the physical socialisation of people is in a precarious state, and keen to coupling has undoubtedly become an act of empathy for young people living alone in the online world, thus counteracting the loneliness brought about by self-isolation.

## **2.2 Escape from reality and imagine intimacy**

Another hypothesis based on the context of the era is that CP fans' participation in CP culture is related to escaping from reality and imagining intimacy, and the questionnaire confirms the validity of this preconceived view. According to the results of *Question 10* (see Table 2), the first and most agreed upon option by participants was, 'to satisfy the imagination of an ideal intimate relationship' (N=81, 60.00%); and the sixth reason was 'to imagine intimate relationships between real people who play the CP' (N=32, 23.70%). What these two responses suggest is the fact that coupling is about satisfying fans' imaginations of intimacy, which may stem from the relationship between the characters themselves or from the actors' interactions outside of their roles.

So why are young women not getting into real relationships instead of coupling to fulfil their need for intimacy? One CP fan pointed out the embarrassing realities behind this in a sharp way, participant 123 felt that she was "reluctant to enter into intimate relationships, believing that the reality of intimacy can easily lead to unstable and bad effects, so watching other people's love through cp reduces the desire for a relationship or marriage". A straightforward logic of this part of the fans is that coupling costs nothing to satisfy the thrill, while returning to reality and starting a real intimate relationship costs time and money, which makes coupling the best choice.

Coupling as a cultural activity with a strong internet gene has become a strategy for cotemporary women to resolve the conflict between the survival pressure and the demands of intimacy. Since 2000, Chinese women have been shrouded in a social climate of ‘leftover women’ fear due to the fact that the urban gender gap in labour force participation, unemployment, and income has widened significantly over the past three decades, despite narrowing gender gaps in education (Wu & Dong, 2019). At the same time, women face increasing pressure to marry as the legal reform of the Marriage Law (2011), which raised expectations of legal equality while establishing private property rights in a way that restricts women’s access to real estate and other property in the event of a divorce, in turn reinforces the traditional institution of marriage. As a result, this has led to an increasingly ambivalent attitude towards marriage among young Chinese women, who are thus forced to engage in illusory CP to compensate for the need for intimacy.

The idealisation of intimacy also occurs when fans escape from the unpleasant reality of their lives to the world of CP. Chang & Tian (2021) also propose a similar opinion in their analysis of Chinese BL fans, in which they argue that the ‘purification’ of homosexual relationships in BL novels is an essential source of narrative pleasure. Authors often give the heroes elite family and professional backgrounds (e.g., movie stars, entrepreneurs, political leaders, etc.) to shape their romantic relationship as a love between powerful people, and emancipate them from socio-economic constraints in the name of ‘purification’, this purification can result in part a glorified intimacy.

However, unlike original BL fiction, CP fan productions are secondary labour in that the ‘glorification’ by them is specific to the ‘intimacy’ of the CP, rather than the ‘purification’ of the socio-economic background of the characters, after all, they recognise the original settings of the characters’ backgrounds given by the authors, so there are not left with much room for CP fans to engage in purification tactics in this regard. Their inclination of ‘glorification’ is thus placed on the intimacy of CPs, which is the part of the original that is heavily left blank. But in sum, CP fans do not have the means to manipulate any real-life person to develop love in the direction and manner they envision, so the ‘glorification’ of the virtual CP’s intimacy becomes an effective behaviour to satisfy emotional needs.

Based on this, another reason why coupling activities appeal to fans is that ‘The world of fan creation is controlled by myself, virtual house of CP will not collapse’ (N=30, 22.22%). The literal meaning of ‘house collapse’ is the breakdown of the house, which refers to the collapse of the image of CP

in fans' mind. The reason for this fan terminology is that the CP is a sacred and beautiful house in fans' mind, and if one of the parties in CP betrays the relationship or is exposed to some negative news, it means that this 'perfect and unreal house about CP' has collapsed. Thus, the so-called collapse of the house is precisely the belief that fans have built up in their hearts about the existence of the 'intimate relationship' of the CP. If CP fans can differentiate between character-derivative CPs and real-life CPs, the lower the risk of them being harmed when they experience perfect intimacy through manipulation of CPs.

Thus, when the dominant models of consumption life increase the costs and financial expectations of intimacy, coupling can remedy the emotional deficit of young CP fans and provide an outlet for them to escape the pressures of survival. As Valenti (2005) argues, women prefer slash, at least in part, for sexual recreation without pregnancy anxiety, and for CP fans, who face economic and gender pressures that are much harsher. The emergence of CP culture in this context allows them to not have to worry about a range of embarrassing problems associated with matrimony, such as affecting career advancement, the sacrificing personal energy, fertility problems, etc., they can simply satisfy all kinds of imaginations of intimate relationships through a pair of fictional CPs. This makes coupling a fan-initiated virtual relationship that can be controlled by fans, and thus it is no wonder that the famous declaration of 'I can stay out of a relationship, but my CP must be together' has been claimed by CP fans as a spiritual guide.

Therefore, a comprehensive consideration of the background of CP fans in the era of the epidemic in which real interpersonal relationships are isolated, and the background of the times in which real marriage and love put pressure on material and spiritual backgrounds, the rise of CP culture is because it allows CP fans to use CP-centric online socialize to resist loneliness, and let CP fans escape the pressure of real marriage and love by imagining beautiful intimate relationship.

### **3. Reason 3: Dilemma of the 'only daughter'**

CP fans are part of the postmodern Chinese youth, but what needs to be further mentioned is another unique feature of their identity, the 'only daughters'. The 'One-Child Policy'<sup>14</sup>, which has been in

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<sup>14</sup> In 1982, the One-Child Policy was formally enshrined in the Constitution and became a basic state policy of the People's Republic of China, the main content of which is to advocate the birth of one child per couple, i.e., to have children according to the population policy and in a planned manner. In 2016, the One-Child Policy, which had been in force in China for nearly 36 years, was

place for thirty-eight years, has given China, as a patriarchal country, an era in which half of the families have only girls, which has never been seen before in its history. The differentiated gender education and the logic of completely undifferentiated competition have given this generation of women an unparalleled experience of survival, and have created a special cultural expression. Therefore, the present research considers this generational factor as the most central reason for answering the emergence of CP culture.

### **3.1 The empowered ‘only daughter’**

The first thing to recognise is that the One-Child Policy has not been terrible for girls in one-child families, and can even be said to have contributed to the development of women’s rights in urban China to a certain extent. Since 1979, the One-Child Policy has banned the birth of a second child in almost all urban families, resulting in no male heirs to compete with the only daughter for family resources, which is a major change after centuries of patriarchal traditions, resulting in a significant improvement in the status of women. In particular, women’s education levels are as high as they have ever been, and in urban China, daughters of one-child families have become the most educated generation of women in Chinese history (Greenhalgh & Winckler, 2005). Today, parents in urban China see daughters, like boys, as their family’s only hope for the future and endeavour to help them receive a better education.

However, interpretation of the One-Child Policy do need to be mindful of its less-than-ideal aspects, not least because, as the toughest family planning policy, the One-Child Movement in urban China has spawned discourses of ‘nurturing the most intelligent child’ by reinforcing motherhood (Greenhalgh & Winckler, 2005). All of this resonates with the call by male public intellectuals for married women to ‘return home’ to fulfil their long-neglected family responsibilities (Song, 2011; Yan, 2008). The result is that contemporary only daughters’ interest in marital procreation has also hit rock bottom.

For the traditional Chinese, the notion that marriage means procreation is embedded in traditional Chinese family ethics (Zhang, 2001), and it is an important aspect of filial piety for people to maintain their families by creating the next generation (Gu, 2015). However, this concept of

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terminated to adapt to the new population development strategy and to address the problem of an ageing population.

marriage in a patriarchal society is no longer something that can be accepted passively and without thought by young women who are now strongly awakened to feminist consciousness and who, to a certain extent, are in the midst of ‘anti-marriage’ and ‘anti-parenthood’ ideologies, and whose experience of being an only child has led them to question men’s position as the ruler and beneficiary of the marriage. Therefore, many fan girls express their love for the male/male CP by saying something like, “homosexuality is the true love, heterosexuality is only for reproducing offspring.”

Within this personal mood and context of the times, CP culture encompassed the rebellion and defiance of women from one-child families against the traditional logic of literary narratives between marriage and offspring reproduction as prescribed in Confucianism. As the keyword refinement of the term ‘marriage and childbirth’ in the *Question 29— In your experience of showing a high level of commitment to CP of English-language cultural products, has your orientation or taboos changed in any way*, the opposite answers of two participants were representative. Participant No. 57 said, “I’ve never been a big fan of childbirth-themed fanfiction, I don’t really like children in the first place, and a CP doesn’t need a child to prove their relationship.” This participant thought that with the current anti-marriage and anti-fertility trend, it is more important to focus on the intimacy between two people and that getting married and having children is a negative factor that would affect the CP’s relationship. Participant No. 58 offered the opposite view, “I used to dislike reading ABO fanfictions and thought how men could conceive baby, now I feel more open-minded and tolerant with the concept of men giving birth to children.” While the former believes that procreation is a negative factor for the emotional and career development of CP, the latter believes that the right to procreate exists freely within the marriage relationship (a freedom that transcends the law and, indeed, biological structures), nevertheless, whether for or against, the logic of CP fans’ language is embedded in a rethinking of the traditional marriage-procreation paradigm.

The capacity to monitor and control CP to build intimate connections without being personally involved in marriage and motherhood has been seized control of by CP fans, who have assumed unprecedented control of their lives as ‘only daughter’. Wherease, the emergence of CP culture provides them with a compromise best-of-both-worlds strategy that allows them to establish infinitely perfect intimacy without having to take on the pressures of marriage and childbearing.

### **3.2 Gender confusion for the ‘only daughter’**

Pagliassotti (2008) conducted one of the earliest investigations into the viewing/reading motivations of English-speaking BL consumers outside of Japan, and this study pointed out that women actively watch/read materials that depict positive images of homosexual males, and for BL fans in China, Zhang's (2016) survey also found that challenging traditional gender constructions is BL's most attractive feature for women. CP fans are no exception, as they have a great interest in male homoerotic pornography of CP, according to the analysis based on a chi-square goodness-of-fit test for *Question 11. Do you have a preference for genre while reading CP fanfictions* (see Table 3), fans' enthusiasm for 'male/male CP' (N = 71, 52.59%) is higher than that for 'male/female CP' (N = 51, 37.78%). Therefore, CP fans' enthusiasm for male/male CP has somewhat contributed to the rise of CP culture.

**Table 3 Preferred Genres of CP Fanfiction**

Categories	Response		Popularity rate ( <i>n</i> =135)
	<i>n</i>	Response rate	
male/male CP	71	17.62%	52.59%
omnivorous fans	52	12.90%	38.52%
male/female CP	51	12.66%	37.78%
ABO	41	10.17%	30.37%
female/female CP	34	8.44%	25.19%
sex description	31	7.69%	22.96%
no flirtation and focus on career	28	6.95%	20.74%
one bottom/female character with many tops/male characters	22	5.46%	16.30%
otome (Character x me)	21	5.21%	15.56%
bisexuality	20	4.96%	14.81%
BDSM	18	4.47%	13.33%
time travel into the originals	8	1.99%	5.93%
one top/male character with many bottoms/female characters	6	1.49%	4.44%
Total	403	100%	298.52%



**Table 3 Preferred Genres of CP Fanfiction**

Categories	Response		Popularity rate ( <i>n</i> =135)
	<i>n</i>	Response rate	

Goodness of fit:  $\chi^2=134.968$   $p=0.000$

It would seem that heterosexual women should be drawn to heterosexual CP, and their enthusiasm for homosexual CP appears to defy the conventional matching model of sexual orientation and attractiveness. In actuality, the only daughter's misunderstanding regarding gender roles has its origins in the household, which is also the source of this unusual curiosity. Gladys Pak Lei Chong (2013) points out that unlike in the West, in China, the family (lineage unit) has been the primary site of gender formation for a considerable period of time, where women are defined as mothers, wives and daughters; however, it is also at home that the only daughter receives her initial non-gender-specific education for success. So, the upbringing of 'only daughter' is fundamental to understanding heterosexual women's passion for male/male CP at all.

Superficially, as the only child in the family, the only daughter receives all of her parents' emotional attention and financial investment, as well as educational resources from society, but this does not mean that the only daughter has been given the same social status as a boy, because this is only the positive effect that the One-Child Policy might ideally have had on the daughters of One-Child families. With the deep-rooted patriarchal ideology of thousands of years of traditional Chinese culture, parents of one-child families may not be able to help but raise their daughters as sons, and from a very young age, these girls may be encouraged to compete as well as their male counterparts, in a manner that seems to deviate from the traditional Chinese cultural requirement of gentleness, consideration and obedience for women.

Girls are caught in a paradox when the personal traits they have developed under the One-Child Policy and the principle of equity in education clash with the stereotypical image of traditional femininity. On the one hand feeling overwhelmed by the logic of real gender and confused by the differences in social status caused by gender, and on the other hand the subordinate status of women in heterosexual narratives can no longer satisfy their ambitions. So, the only daughters set their sights on male/male CPs to place their desires and resentments through the bodies of fictional male

characters to resolve the contradiction between a gender homogenised and educated gender-differentiated society.

In this context, CP culture is an effort by a generation of women born under the One-Child Policy to dispel gender stereotypes and to correct the social and cultural status of women, this makes the popularity of CP culture an inevitable result. After all, CP provides an eclectic body, one that is physically and psychologically indistinguishable from a male and female body, for them to put their uncertain gender perceptions to rest. The one-child model of education has produced the strongest contingent of CP culture in generations of fans, and in turn, CP as a method and strategy has provided an adjustable resting place for the gender confusion of only daughters.

#### **4. Reason 4: Safe erotic cultural activities**

Having discriminated the socio-cultural identity of post-modern youth and the ‘only daughter’, furthermore, the causes of CP culture should be concretized on the gender identity of CP fans as heterosexual young women. From this gender-related perspective, CP culture was born out of the desire of women to develop an erotic imagination driven by ‘non-physical stimuli’ that belongs exclusively to women. Female-oriented erotica has been one of the largest female subcultural phenomena globally (Levi et al., 2014), and Pagliassotti (2008) points out that the female-oriented romance/erotica genre refers to the motivation to consume BL, whereas at the beginning of the slash culture, scholars such as Patricia Frazier Lamb and Dianna L. Veith (1986), Joanna Russ (1985), and Constance Penley (1991), even categorised the slash fanfic as erotica written by women and for women readers.

According to the results of *Question 10* (see Table 2), the reason why fans participating in coupling in the fifth order, ‘to read flesh<sup>15</sup> (pornographic) fan works’ (N = 37, 27.41%), indicating that purpose of reading pornographic content is likewise captured in CP fans. In addition to the links where fans made a cause-and-effect relationship between coupling and reading pornography, the answers that ranked 5th out of 9 in the *Question 9: Platforms that you read or watch CP fan works*

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Flesh’ in Chinese is written as ‘rou (肉)’, meaning meat or sexual desire according to contexts.

The intensity of sex depiction in ‘flesh’ works is oftentimes comparable to that of pornography (Chang & Tian, 2021), the flesh fans, attaches great importance to the bold description of CP’s sexual intercourse.

*most frequently* were hidden sites within the fan community (N = 56, 41.48%), such as ‘Lovehtbooks’ and ‘ifuwen’, which are hidden because they are all fan sites that contain portrayal of pornographic material, this data corroborates from fans’ usage habits that CP fans show a high level of commitment to CP partly for female pornography.

Confucianism has been used to maintain China’s patriarchal society, so although Chinese women’s sexual attitudes and behaviours have changed drastically from previous generations, many traditional ideas still prevail (Jeffreys, 2006), and Chinese women are considered to be sexually conservative. Chinese literature is also traditionally ascetic literature that follows the Neo-Confucianism, so to those outside the Chinese fandom community, it might be assumed that fans would not involve themselves in too many erotic depictions when deconstructing meta-texts, either, for example, McLelland and Yoo’s (2007) study mentioned that “Chinese BL is said to be considerably less sexualized than either Japanese or English BL”. Indeed, since the sexual revolution in China first began amongst the well-educated population in urban areas (Xiao et al., 2011), attitudes towards sexuality amongst young Chinese have become similar to those in the West, with some young Chinese having abandoned traditional values and become more open-minded than in the West (Huang, 2017). In consequence, the same trend of active erotic enjoyment through coupling has been captured in Chinese CP fans.

However, anti-pornography censorship campaigns remain prevalent in Chinese literature, and CP culture is subject to strict moral and cultural censorship in China due to its dual association with homosexuality and pornography. Weibo is extremely sensitive to the policy shifts and anti-pornography campaigns conducted by the Chinese government, and thus enforces strict self-censorship standards, including automatic detection of transgressive keywords and multiple rounds of manual censorship (Wang, 2020). If fans use sensitive sexual-related words on Weibo or post pornographic drawings of CP, their postings are immediately harmonised (i.e., deleted) by Weibo’s administrators on the grounds of the self-regulatory norms of “prohibiting the dissemination of obscenity, pornography information on Internet websites”. As a result, fans adopted various evasive strategies by using ‘drive a car (kai che, 开车)’ to allude to pornographic creations, including harmonic, metaphorical, picture inversion, code-switching, and satirical tactics to defend their rights in reading pornographic depictions in CP culture. Therefore, while the only conservative part is the

censorship that prohibits openly talking about sex, CP fans have been covertly unleashing their sexual imaginations through CPs in a variety of ways in secondary works.

Hence, while the appeal of CP to fans is varied, as heterosexual women they intuitively appreciate male/male erotica in CP works. However, it is important to be clear that whilst the creation and viewing of male homoerotic pornography provides an outlet for exploring female sexuality and pleasure (Zhang, 2016), the experience and imagining of pornography in CP is not for the purpose of fulfilling a physical need for sexual gratification, but rather a provocative form of pleasure that serves the ideology of femininity. Disentangling the logic of women's erotic appreciation of male homosexual CP, in positioning men as objects of female desire, male homosexual CP can be read as a means of using the male gaze for the enjoyment of female voyeurs (Hemmann, 2015; Noh, 2001; Wang, 2011). But as Meyer (2013) argues, the structure of the female gaze in male homoerotic CP pornography and the structure of the male gaze in the visual culture of patriarchal voyeurism as proposed and criticised by Mulvey et al (2015) differ in the mechanisms by which pleasure is produced, despite following similar patterns. Specifically, in appreciating male/male CP's erotic depictions female fans are actually 'enjoying the subversive pleasure of watching men in vulnerable, submissive positions (Kee, 2010, p. 140)', not just sexually, but more mentally and emotionally.

Lönnroth (2017) suggests that one of the reasons women read and appreciate pornographic homoerotic fanfiction is that they do not have to compare themselves to the female characters, instead, instead women can spectate and objectify the men in porn. Under this scenario of the spectator's perspective, it seems that female fans would no longer have a desire for heterosexual CP porn, however, CP fans' proactive behaviour of chasing erotic enjoyment is not limited to male/male CPs with the ostensible 'absence of the female body', fans of heterosexual CP also have a compelling urge for erotic imagery. As point out by Archer & Jockers (2017), and Deller & Smith (2013), explicit depictions of sexuality in contemporary heteronormative novels are crucial and indispensable to the storyline. In short, female CP fans experience pornographic content in a variety of gender configurations of CP, and the erotic space in CP culture gives them a safe haven from moral judgement.

Women reading CP's pornography, apart from getting mentally provocative pleasure from being CP fans against the gender demands of Confucian patriarchal society, moreover, return to the narrative logic of CP culture as a database-guided secondary creation, i.e., CP pornography is

centred on the configuration of 'sexuality' as a setting with narrative potential. In *Question 17—Which is your favourite CP? Can you explain the reason, and how would you define the personal settings of them*, participant No. 57 defined the personal settings of 'Severus Snape x Bellatrix Lestrange' as 'calm and introverted x outgoing and wild' following the model of the personal setting. In this CP, Snape and Bellatrix are like two sides of the same coin, and their simultaneous competition for power creates a natural dichotomy, this fan went on to explain that these rivalries and conflicts would be particularly 'sexually tension' if the two grew to love each other in the form of 'physical seduction' to gain information. Similarly, participant No. 23, a CP fan of 'Draco/Harry' also explained her enthusiasm for this CP as the personal setting of this CP is 'a Death Eater who is strong in appearance but weak in reality / a saviour who is seemingly fragile but tough', and that there is a 'sexual tension' in their interactions.

That is to say, 'sex' as a setting that carries dramatic conflict is internalised into the interaction of the CP's personal settings, and then these fragmented elements collide to produce the sexual tension that thrills fans. Sexual tension frequently mentioned by CP fans is a state in which one or both parties in a CP develop sexual desires during their interactions, but the consummation is postponed or never happens. However, firstly, it should be clarified that sexual tension is not the same as sexual attraction, it requires at least two forces to work simultaneously, for example, in the case of the pairing of Severus Snape x Bellatrix Lestrange, Severus Snape's personal setting is 'calm and introverted', which for CP fans means that he is assumed to be sexy but has a set of normative behavioural frameworks and identities that define him and prevent him from easily expressing his desires and emotions, whereas his inhibitions are only released and perceived when Bellatrix Lestrange, whose personal setting is 'outgoing and wild', shows up. Thus, sexual tension has been created between this CP, and generate the source for CP fans to see how the two cross taboos by using 'sex' as a personal setting.

Secondly, CP's sexual tension is a strong sense of conflict brought about by the collision of sexual settings, not the same as libido. In psychology, Libido is psychological drive or energy (Levine, 2002), it is often described as a form of psychic energy (internal drive) generally related to sexual drive/instincts, with access to libido being based on physiological instincts. Whereas the sexual tension of CP has to be created by the fans themselves, or in other words, libido is the driving force, whereas the creation and reading of pornography in CP by female fans is a dynamic process.

In a nutshell, CP fans create and enjoy the pleasure of sexual tension by reading the erotic parts of CP, and the sexual tension itself is the conflict that CP fans create between CPs by manipulating 'sex' as one of the personal settings that make up CPs. CP fans use sex to confine the other settings carried by the CP to a confined scene, and to unite their desires in the sexual tension created in this scene, thus creating a sexual tension to make CP fans feel the attraction of vitality.

The key point of internalising sex as a personal setting interaction for CPs distinguishes CP fans' erotic imaginings of male CPs from studies such as Chang & Tian (2021), Zhang (2016), Madill and Zhao (2022) that define the social significance of women's reading of male homoerotic pornography exclusively as an anti-masculinity activity. That is to say, that the grand significance of such is not that important to CP fans, at least not for the whole purpose of their participation in CP culture, and the utmost purpose of the CP fan's erotic reading impulse is not to overthrow masculinity, but to dismantle masculinity and femininity into fragmented sexual elements, to view and try to match the ways in which they collide. Meanwhile the inclusion of sexual elements in the CP fan's setting database shows that reading pornography as one of the key attractions of getting high level of commitment to CP is not directly equivalent to the desire to watch men having homosexual sex.

Overall, reading pornography as one of the major reasons for coupling occurs in various CP fandoms with diverse gender configuration. In traditional Chinese culture, sexual puritanism still dominates contemporary Chinese social norms and values, and depictions of sexuality have traditionally been characterised as obscene and taboo; therefore, the erotic descriptions in CP fanfictions offers the possibility for female fans to 'play with sexuality' (Fujimoto, 2015, p. 87) in which they can enjoy spiritual sexual entertainment in a non-threatening way. In addition to this, female CP fans' appreciation of pornographic CP, whether they get a kind of spiritual provocative pleasure against the gender norms in Confucian society, or whether they get pleasure by using sex as an element to experiment with the various possibilities of 'colliding' personal setting configurations, is motivated by specific and personal meanings, rather than by 'grand meanings'.

##### **5. Reason 5: The pursuit of aestheticism**

There is a group of 'face-judgers (颜粉)' among CP fans, and the factor that determines how much they like CP is 'facial attractiveness', i.e. how good-looking a person is, which can be used to describe both men and women. In Chinese, 'Yan(颜)' means 'appearance', but it is rarely used on

its own in modern Chinese, after the introduction of the ancient Chinese language into Japan, the Japanese language used the single word ‘顔(かお)’ to mean face and appearance, with the importation of Japanese anime and manga, the use of the Chinese character, ‘Yan(颜)’, began to converge with Japanese 2-dimensional culture, and CP fandom followed the practice of transforming character traits into parameter settings in video games, especially role playing games, and also cultivated the thinking of ‘personal setting’, which led to the formation of ‘face-judgers’ among CP fans who believe that ‘appearance is power’. As a result, ‘face-judgers’ have formed among CP fans, who can become fans if a CP’s appearance matches their aesthetic, so they are not loyal to a particular CP, but rather to the facial attractiveness of the CP.

Thus, CP’s facial attractiveness is precisely the fourth reason why some fans enjoy coupling (see Table 2), their original intention was to enjoy the story ‘between the good-looking characters, it has nothing to do with gender’ (N=31, 22.96%), as the visual enjoyment and psychological stirring brought about by CP’s superior facial attractiveness creates in them a pure and unburdened appreciation of aesthetic beauty. Specifically, according to the frequency analysis after categorising the data of *Question 27— What is the appearance (appearance, body type, dress style) of your favourite CP of English-language cultural product*, CP fans’ perceptions of the CPs’ facial attractiveness were divided into three categories (see Table 4):

**Table 4 Appearance of CP of English-language cultural products**

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Both sides of CP need to be good looking	32	20.00%	20.00%
No need to conform to a certain style	14	8.75%	28.75%
Consistent with the image of the character in the film	19	11.88%	40.63%
Elegant top / Energetic bottom	1	0.63%	41.25%
Tall, healthy, and muscular	22	13.75%	55.00%
Both sides must be muscular, the top is taller and more robust than the bottom	10	6.25%	61.25%
Both sides must be muscular, with no obvious difference in appearance	12	7.50%	68.75%

**Table 4 Appearance of CP of English-language cultural products**

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Young	3	1.88%	70.63%
Sexy and voluptuous	2	1.25%	71.88%
Mature	2	1.25%	73.13%
Gentle and casual male x athletic and competent female	3	1.88%	75.00%
More towards 2-dimensional images in fan art	3	1.88%	76.88%
Slim	6	3.75%	80.63%
Cold and collected top/Energetic bottom	4	2.50%	83.13%
Sophisticated and elegant (Hogwarts school uniform, suit, trench coat)	17	10.63%	93.75%
Noble and sophisticated male x Cute and petite female	2	1.25%	95.00%
Noble and sophisticated male x athletic and competent female	1	0.63%	95.63%
Blonde sophisticated top/Lovely petite bottom	1	0.63%	96.25%
Blonde sophisticated top/brunette casual Bottom	6	3.75%	100.00%
Total	160	100.0%	

One is that the appearance of the CP is not important, thus it is ‘No need to conform to a certain style’ (N = 14, 28.75%). For instance, participant No. 60, No. 107, No. 108, and No.118 pointed out that “appearance is not important, what I care more is the collision of their souls”.

The second category of opinion was that the appearance of the CP was ‘consistent with the image of the character in the film’ (N=19, 40.63%). This category of participants gave positive comments on the appearance of the actors who played the CP, especially the CP fans of GGAD and Draco/Harry, because the appearance of the actors themselves and the costumes and make-up in the movie had already contributed to a superior appearance. For example, participant No.13 thought that for her “the picture of Dumbledore and Grindelwald together in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* is the most compatible look for this CP”.

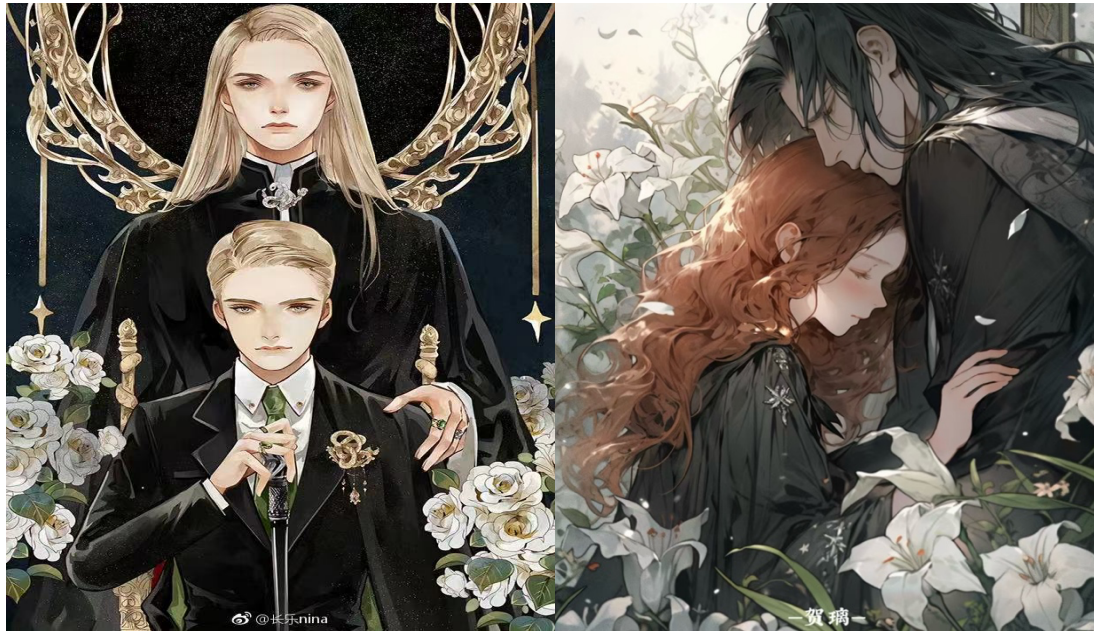




(Stills of Toby Regbo as Young Dumbledore and Jamie Campbell Bower as Young Grindelwald)  
But that does not mean that their portrayal of CP's appearance is completely subservient to the source material, but rather that they have performed cosmetic surgery on the character within the brain. For example, participant No. 43, a CP fan of Harry Potter/ Severus Snape, thought that "Harry is the way he grew to 185+cm in the movie, but compared to Snape in the movie, the image of Alan Rickman when he was younger would be more in line with Snape", and the 'handsome man' is in accordance with her expectations of Harry Potter/ Severus Snape.

Similarly, No. 57 is a fan of the CP Severus Snape x Bellatrix Lestrange, also gave her opinion on Snape's appearance as opposed to the original: "I think Alan Rickman's portrayal of Snape is fantastic, but in my mind, Snape should be thinner, and Bella, Helena Bonham Carter's performance is great, but maybe Eva Green's portrayal in *Penny Dreadful* would be more better." Obviously, the second type of CP fans still have higher expectations for the facial attractiveness of their CPs despite partially recognising the actors playing them in the film.

Participant No. 61 even introduced the CP appearance from the 3-dimensional to the fictional aesthetics of the 2-dimensional in the form of fanart. These kinds of fans imagined that the appearance of the CP is basically in line with the original work, but more inclined to the image in the 2-dimensional style of illustration. The prominent feature of the 2-dimensional style of illustration is unreal aesthetic and romance (Pagliassotti et al., 2013), which is inherited from the *shōjo* manga (manga specifically directed at girls/women) created by Japanese manga artists known as the 24nen gumi (the Fabulous 49ers) in the 1970s (Shamoon, 2012).



(The left picture is a 2-dimensional fanart of Lucius Malfoy/Draco Malfoy by 长乐 nina, and the right picture is an AI drawing of Severus Snape /Lily Evans by 贺璃 using midjourney<sup>16</sup>)

The third type of CP fan makes explicit, indisputable, detailed, and demanding requirements for CPs' facial attractiveness, which was also the most frequent item in the statistics of fans' views on the appearance of CPs, they believed that "both sides of CP need to be good looking" (N=32, 20.00%)", then, they had a very clear portrayal in their minds of the appearance and dress style of CP. For example, the participant No. 99 as a CP fan of GGAD, her aestheticism has been portrayed to a remarkably specific degree, "Grindelwald: dazzling as a statue of Panini in his youth, a healthy, sturdy boy, dazzling even in a t-shirt and jeans, with messy but reckless hair; Dumbledore: in his youth was the look of the good student, his shirt always buttoned to the top, his neat red ponytail, a little thin but tough looking, his waistcoat tucked in nicely". Hence, for the second category of participants, whether the appearance of the actors in the film is taken as the standard or the appearance is retouched based on this, these appearances must be aesthetically beautiful, even a kind of aesthetic beauty that is actively embellished and detached from reality.

However, the present research found that the aesthetics of CP fans of English-language cultural products in China differed from the aesthetics of Japanese BL fans for boys, but underwent a

<sup>16</sup> Midjourney: An artificial intelligence (AI) application that automatically draws an image from the user's textual descriptions.

Westernised shift to the use of ‘muscle’ as an imagery, and that ‘muscular’ ranked first in the extraction of the word frequency of fans’ idealisation of CP’s appearance, even though they had different demands for ‘muscular’, respectively, ‘tall, healthy and muscular’(Frequency = 22, 55.00%), ‘both sides must be muscular, the top is taller and more robust than the bottom’ (Frequency = 10, 61.25%), and ‘both sides of CP must be muscular, with no obvious difference in appearance’ (Frequency = 12, 68.75%).

This finding is a bit surprising, because it seems that according to the aesthetics of Chinese women towards men in recent years, they do not appreciate a muscular and fit male body. In reference to the appearance of the male idols chosen by the female audience in the show, Chinese women prefer a slim, non-aggressive, cute, or even feminine image of men. John Wei (2014) considers that the “deep-rooted traditional preference for youthful male delicacy in China is intermingled with the kawaii (a term from Japan 2-dimensional culture which means cute) aesthetics.” However, the present research found that fans of *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* moved away from Japanese cuteness to a modern Western aesthetic, although CP fans of the English product suggested ‘muscular’ in part to differentiate the appearance of the ‘top/bottom’ in the CP, for example, from No. 98’s description: “Top: tall, strong, and muscular; Bottom: thin but not overly slender with muscular lines”. But at least the emphasis on muscle shows that the CP fans have a modern aesthetic that is outside the realm of the Japanese kawaii aesthetic, although no matter how this aesthetic is presented, it is more or less ‘unrealistically aesthetic’.

Simultaneously, the aesthetic pursuit for ‘facial attractiveness’ is also present in the minds of fans of heterosexual CPs, in particular, the actors’ outstanding looks have contributed considerably to making Draco and Hermione one of the most popular BG CPs in English cultural productions. Many fans became CP fans of Draco x Hermione because of their good looks, for example participant No. 20 revealed in her answer to *Question 17* that she show a high level of commitment to CP because she likes to see the stories between these characters with facial attractiveness, as she said: “Draco x Hermione is a CP based entirely on their beautiful face, and no one would have put them together in the original”, but she believes that Tom Felton (the actor who played Draco) and Emma Watson (the actress who played Hermione) are so good looking that “everything in the original can be made up into another story”. That is to say, the CP fans of Draco x Hermione were inspired by the superior appearance of the two actors, and are therefore partly a kind of real-person CP.

Overall, the aesthetic pleasure derived from consuming and imagining interactions between characters with better facial attractiveness is the fourth reason for the rise of CP culture among women. CP fans who pursue the facial attractiveness of CPs crave for a romanticised aesthetic, they either beautify the facial attractiveness of CPs on the basis of the original story, or have a set of strict aesthetic standards down to the details of their bodies, dresses, and temperament, etc., and no matter which kind of aesthetic standards they have, their aesthetic of CPs tends to be a kind of aestheticist fantasy.

At the same time, the existence of face-judgers among CP fans confirms that facial attractiveness, like sexuality, has been used as personal settings to assemble a CP. Behind the birth of the face-judger is the post-modern society's anti-grandeur trend, and the CP culture's illogical logic of 'as long as the facial attractiveness is good, any character can be formed into a CP' allows fans to avoid the serious issue of value judgement in an extremely nonsensical way. This means that the younger generation neither cares about grand narratives nor is willing to make serious value judgements, so they use 'facial attractiveness' as an arbitrary evaluation criterion to complete the deconstruction of the existing serious order, and deconstruct complex CP into the simple and crude 'facial attractiveness' metric.

In particular, the agenda of male/male CP fans to use facial attractiveness as a driving force connects with the spiritual essence of the pursuit of 'non-utilitarian aesthetics' of Danmei culture<sup>17</sup>. Danmei in Chinese refers to the same content as BL which is a female-oriented male homosexual love story with its literal meaning aesthetic indulgence/beauty intoxication (Williams, 2015), emphasising female fans' admiration and pursuit of aesthetic male homosexual love. Danmei as an antinaturalistic literary movement encouraged aesthetic representations of sensory impressions, it was born in Japan in the early 20th century (Feng, 2009). But this quest for aesthetics can be traced

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<sup>17</sup> Danmei culture points to women's opposition to naturalism and their attempts to find literary meaning in indulging in functional beauty, CP fandom is hardly separable from Danmei (Feng 2009; 2013; Chao 2016), which together point to feminist male homosexual romance, except that Danmei encompasses both fanfic and original storytelling, so CP fanfiction centred around the male homosexuality of Harry Potter and Fantastic Beasts can be categorised as Danmei fanfiction.

back to an aesthetic movement that was launched in England in the late 19th century, this was an art movement which privileged the aesthetic value of literature, music, and the arts over their socio-political functions (Denny, 2000). According to Aestheticism, art should be produced to be beautiful, rather than to serve a moral, allegorical, or other didactic purpose, so it is a rebuttal to the 'materialistic' and 'profit-oriented' zeitgeist.

From this perspective, then, CP fans' enthusiasm for the facial attractiveness of both male/male CPs and male/female CPs, as well as CPs of any other gender configurations, can be viewed as an aesthetic movement initiated by female fans in contemporary China. On the one hand, because face-judger fans are chasing precisely a kind of pure aesthetic beauty characterised by CP facial attractiveness, which is often beauty detached from reality; on the other hand, in depicting idealised and transcendent appearance of CP fan works, fans can obtain a unique reading effect that distances themselves from the real world. Accordingly, it is a purely personalised obsession with surreal facial attractiveness that drives them to become CP fans, and their aesthetic indulgence is only for their own pleasure and not responsible for anything external, thus pushing CP culture to the level of aestheticism.

#### **6. Reason 6: Media Technology and Algorithms**

The epidemic of COVID-19 has made all offline fan gatherings in China impossible, so the main venues for CP are the major media platforms, in addition to the fact that the fan attributes and queer metaphors of CP culture have cut off the possibility of it appearing (at least not in a positive image) in state-controlled traditional media. In this context, the rapid development of social media platforms has provided new opportunities for the popularisation of CP culture, dramatically altering the dynamics of fan practice and spectatorship, thereby increasing voice and visibility within fan communities and the formation and consolidation of CP fan identities. In particular, for CP fans of English-language cultural products, the Internet provides an effective tool for accessing transnational cultural material, with most messages about *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* being accessed primarily online.

**Table 5 Platforms for Coupling Activities**

Categories	Response		Popularity rate (n=135)
	n	Response rate	
public social media -Weibo	115	24.11%	85.19%
female-demand channel of Literature website – Jinjiang	36	7.55%	26.67%
male-demand literature website – Qidian	5	1.05%	3.70%
hidden website in fandom - Lovehtbooks, ifuwen	56	11.74%	41.48%
ACGN video website – Bilibili.com	93	19.50%	68.89%
online fans’ forum -Douban	75	15.72%	55.56%
cloud storage – Baidu Cloud	31	6.50%	22.96%
overseas websites – AO3	64	13.42%	47.41%
Other	2	0.42%	1.48%
Total	477	100%	353.33%

Goodness of fit:  $\chi^2=221.434$   $p=0.000$

According to the results of *Question 9—Platforms that you read or watch fan works most frequently* (see Table 5), among the many public media platforms for CP fans’ activities and internal websites of fandom, public social media -Weibo (N = 115, 85.19%), ACGN video website- Bilibili.com (N = 93, 68.89%) are the most frequently used communication media for fans’ coupling activities, their role in fuelling prosperity of CP cultural is particularly striking.

### 6.1 Algorithmic platform —Weibo

Weibo, as the most powerful public social media in China, is the most important place for CP fans of *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* to carry out their daily series of activities, and fans participate in a series of CP activities on Weibo to get the ‘affective experience’. Zhang (2019), in her study of local CP in China, also notes the importance of Weibo in the CP fan community, pointing out that Weibo’s form, technological features, and content rules largely determine the way CP fans express themselves, but more important than the art form of CP fans’ discourse on Weibo is how its key functions and mechanisms contribute to the development of CP culture. Nevertheless, Weibo’s

mechanism of inducing CP fans to invest in emotional and digital labour is a double-edged sword for the development of CP culture.

CP fans are some of the most active users that might produce considerable traffic data to the platform, Weibo strategically quantified casual users into visible data, and ranked them in different patterns, therefore, CP fans are constrained to routinise their data labour in their daily use of Weibo, and more directly, their every move is calculated by Weibo. Yiyi Yin (2020) portray the data-ization of online fandom on Weibo, arguing that the traffic data has been dematerialized as new affective object in fan–object relations, while digital fan culture has been constructed into a type of algorithmic culture. With this in mind, there is no doubt that the traffic generated by CP as two people is greater than that of a single person, whether it is from the initial hype for the formation of CP, to encourage fans to enthusiastically discuss CP-related topics, and to initiate activities for the purpose of splitting up the CP (fans call it after-sales service), or even the subsequent struggle to break up a CP, the CP of two people provides Weibo with a great deal of potential to monetization the data traffic and increase users' attachment to Weibo, this is why Weibo is committed to providing online space for the existence and development of CP fans.

Weibo establishes the CP Super Topic as a quasi-social relationship, enabling the audience to develop an imagined interpersonal relationship with the media figure, prolonging and intensifying fans' enthusiasm and emotion for the virtual intimacy created by the CP, and deepening the parallel communication between CP fans, especially between the professional CP fans and the ordinary amateur fans. Professional fans are similar to 'big name fans' (Busse & Hellekson, 2006, p. 11) who post fanfiction, paintings, and other works requiring specialised skills within the CP Super Topic, which ordinary CP fans discover directly by searching for the CP's name in the Super Topic, and can then leave comments directly in the comment section of these professional fan to 'Pray for food (求粮)'. The so-called 'food' is CP products made by professional fans, whilst the professional CP fans who produce the food are regarded by the regular fans as the 'mothers' who feed them or are honoured as 'Da Da (大大)' or 'Ma'am (太太)'. Ordinary CP fans express their desire for CP products to professional CP fans in Weibo's CP Super Topic by using specialized fandom jargon such as 'Mummy! Hungry! Food!' to express their respect and gratitude to these professional CP fans, thus contributing to the prosperity of the overall Weibo CP fan community.



(Figure 1 CP Super Topic of GGAD)

Taking CP Super Topic of GGAD (Gellert Grindelwald / Albus Dumbledore) as an example, its boards are, in order, fan posting, CP videos, food produced by CP fans (i.e., CP fan works), information exchange of CP-derived products, water posting (i.e., CP fans posting content with no real meaning within a Super Topic to maintain the activity level of the Super Topic, e.g., good morning/good night), and CP photo albums.

While the various divisions of CP fans are the implementers of this quasi-social relationship, the real operator behind the scenes is Weibo's traffic operation strategy, which is one of the key factors that differentiate CP fans on Weibo from fans in other countries. Weibo's pivotal tactic in building a CP fan ecosystem is 'chart beating (打榜)' of CP Super Topic (超话)". 'Superstar power charts' have meant a lot to Chinese fans even before the fandom fully enters the era of data worship, fans actively participate in the consumption of idols' products (include cultural products and commercial products) and thus rank idols in various ranking lists by increasing the sales of endorsed products. Social media has amplified the importance of rankings, in 2017, Weibo officially set up a ranking of CPs in its recommendation list of 'Super Topic', which kept displaying the real-time top 200 popular CPs on Weibo, this provides ample online opportunities for 'chart beating' (Zhang & Negus, 2020), Weibo ranks CP superlatives in an influence chart format and directs fans to perform a series



of digital labours to keep their CPs high on the list. For example, adhere to the daily e-check-in on Weibo CP's Super Topic, increase Super Topic readership, and mutual likes and comments, the reading volume of Super Topic is the reading volume of original Weibo with Super Topic, and the reading volume of original Weibo with sub-Super Topic, plus the reading volume of retweeted Weibo with sub-topic.

At present, CP's Super Topic have been the most important place for interaction and communication among the fandom, for CP fans, if they want their supported CP to rank high in the list, then they need to post more posts according to the format of the Super Topic to increase the activity of the Super Topic. The fixed format of the CP Super Topic is as follows: CP name + emoji/space + sub-topic + more than 15 words of text + photos or videos (If you reproduce other people's works, you need to specify the source. The maximum number of topics related to CP is two, the two topics should be placed in front of the text, otherwise it is invalid, and the text should be on a separate line with more than 15 words, it is better to tick the box of 'Synchronise to Weibo' when posting, which helps to increase the reading volume of the post, otherwise it will not be counted. If fans failed to post according to the format then the points of CP's Super Topic will be automatically deducted and Super Topic heat will be lowered.

In fact, the practice of ranking the popularity of CPs is not unique to Weibo, AO3 also ranks the CPs with the number of fanfics each year, digital platforms and social media have amplified the importance of rankings and facilitated the proliferation of other charts (searches, trends, news, tweets) and expanded the idea of participation through opportunities for types of voting, comment and feedback. However, the purpose of Weibo's CP Super Topic ranking is not simply to rank the degree of popularity, but rather to expand the influence and commercial value of Weibo by exploiting fans' identification with CPs and encouraging them to invest a large amount of unpaid emotional and digital labour to form a cluster effect of digital labourers. Nevertheless, Weibo's algorithmic techniques for CP fans have attracted more CP fans to participate, and have indeed raised the visibility and influence of CP culture to new heights in China's public Internet arena.

But on the other hand, Weibo is a public platform where a series of fan actions which represents by 'chart beating' of 'CP Super Topic' actually extend to the public sphere. Especially under Weibo's traffic mechanism, some CP fans are determined to compete for visibility in the public space, so that the public can see my CP, this is a simple motive and logic, so CP fans continue to engage in

uninterrupted group friction on Weibo. In addition, fans also discuss CP on other internal fan media platforms, but many marketing accounts<sup>18</sup> on Weibo republish this content on Weibo, so Weibo becomes a public showcase for different discussions within the fandom, which is much more visible compared to other content and demographics, such as current news and serious content. The consequence of this inevitably leads to CP culture attracting widespread attention from society and triggering public criticism and discussion of its negativity.

Due to the growing controversy caused by CP fans on Weibo, on 27 August 2021, the Office of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission issued a notice calling for the cancellation of all charts involving individual celebrity artists or combinations, and strictly forbidding the addition or disguise of new individual charts and related products or features, allowing only music, film and TV works and other rankings to remain, Weibo had to abolish the CP Supra charts on the advice of the regulator. But the fact remains that fans can still view them through a more complicated path, the ‘chart beating’ does not cease either, but rather the hidden digital labour of ‘commenting’, ‘retweeting’ with a fixed format with CP name.

It is clear that Weibo reaps huge benefits from the digital labour of CP fans driven by affect, so it is unlikely to give up its functional setup of using algorithms to kidnap CP fans, whose high level of adhesion to Weibo traps them in a tripartite closed loop between platform-CP -fan. As Alaimo and Kallinikos (2017) put it, platform engagement is a ‘computational sociality’, a vertical dialogue between socio-cultural subjectivities and technological underpinnings, and this is how Weibo has used digital technology to drive a wave of CP culture, and then converted those CP fans into numbers in the daily activities of Weibo users, subsequently cementing Weibo’s position in the overall CP culture ecosystem.

## **6.2 Subculture video website — Bilibili**

ACGN video website - Bilibili.com is the second most popular media for CP fans to produce and consume CP videos after Weibo. Bilibili, as a subcultural site, provides CP fans with a social heterotopic space for self-expression and stress relief, and is one of the few civic spaces where

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<sup>18</sup> Marketing accounts: This type of self-media is mainly for the purpose of traffic or interest to carry out the creation of writing and publishing. As a producer and distributor of information on the internet, internet marketing accounts are an important force in the field of internet opinion.

Chinese Generation Z and Y youths, who have been labelled with the stereotypes of individualism, rebelliousness, and indifference in a postmodern society (Liboriussen, 2016), are able to freely create, disseminate, and discuss subcultural themes and works (Chen, 2021). CP fans watch, discuss, and produce a variety of CP videos on Bilibili, fostering a complex and vibrant participatory culture while making CP-oriented videos an important creative genre in the fandom, and giving CP a stronger ability to break through the cliques and step into the public communication landscape.

The success of CP-oriented videos in gaining a foothold in CP fan culture is attributed to the interactive function of ‘bullet comment (弹幕)’ which is a signature feature of Bilibili, it is a real time commentary subtitle system that displays user comments as streams of moving subtitles overlaid on the video playback screen, visually resembling a shooter game. The essence of the ‘bullet comment’ function is attaching text to a specific playback time in the video; thus, it is generally used by users for feedback on or as annotations to the video, be it their instantaneous emotions and feelings (Chen et al., 2017, p. 732) or for the addition of their own phrases, codes and symbols (Wan et al., 2020, p. 15).

As Schneider’s study shows (2021), the vast majority of viewers, with the exception of the first commentators, never react only to the video itself, they are reacting to the visible reactions of others which can only be captured by the posting of ‘bullet comment’. To comment on-screen like shoot a bullet “introduces new possibilities for user involvement that allow for quick feedback, which fosters community formation and reciprocal collaboration (Xu, 2016, p. 444)”. Zheng (2017) contends that ‘bullet comment’ enable sub-culture communities to establish a sense of shared purpose and belonging. Li (2017, p.252) makes a similar observation on the emotional impact of these interactive function, contending that the pseudo-simultaneity of the ‘bullet comment’ interface fosters a sense of community by uniting viewers through a shared experience of simultaneous seeing, a sense of virtual time or aliveness and creating a highly immersive community. Therefore, the ‘bullet comment’ function launched by Bilibili creates an opportunity to bring together scattered CP enthusiasts through a CP-oriented video and participate in real-time discussions together.

Now, Bilibili has introduced the feature of viewing the number of co-watchers, which allows viewers to see the number of people who are watching ‘the same video’ as them simultaneously in the top left corner of the video playback page. This feature exacerbates the co-temporality and reduces the impact of geographic isolation on CP fans to a much lower level, thus revolutionizing

the intersection of fan engagement culture and online revelry. Anderson's (1991) ideal of an 'imagined community' is thus realised in Bilibili's CP fan community, where CP fans can gain a sense of companionship from other unfamiliar CP enthusiasts while watching videos. A series of interactive features on Bilibili coalesce the dispersed group of CP fans into a powerful 'imaginary community' with common interests, which in turn provides media technology support for CP culture to radiate its influence outward.

Moreover, Bilibili has a comprehensive 'reward mechanism' for creators to promote the creative aspirations of CP fan video makers, which adds an accelerant to the CP culture craze from another perspective relative to CP video viewers. Bilibili's signature function, in addition to the 'bullet system', is the 'Yi Jian San Lian (一键三连)' button where viewers press and hold the 'like(点赞)' button to simultaneously 'like (点赞)', 'give a reward/coin (投币)' and 'save(收藏)' videos to show their support for uploaders, which is a mechanism for uploaders and Bilibili realising 'content monetization'. Users can put in a maximum of two coins at a time, and the coins can be obtained by recharging the membership or completing the daily login tasks, in addition to this, Bilibili also has a 'recharge (充电)' function, which allows users to recharge for their favourite uploaders, but the recharge is not free, and the recharge amount corresponds to the money and experience value. Therefore, all these features can enhance fans' stickiness to Bilibili while allowing uploaders of CP videos and Bilibili to 'monetise CP-centric content'.

Based on this content-monetisation model, video uploader's creative rhythm, approach and content incorporate a certain degree of collective input from readers and viewers. After all, through the uploader's backend data they can clearly know which segment of the audience their videos are intended for, so that they can produce and submit more relevant videos based on the topics that perform best in the data. Schneider (2021) classifies this profitability of Bilibili as a problem in the realm of political economy, he believes that these are the platform's interlocking monetization mechanics. The logic behind this feature is that uploaders use backend data to grasp the interests of their fans, then they take action to create videos that cater to their fans, who would contribute more financially to the uploaders because of the thrill of this participatory culture. The cycle repeats itself, and the reward mechanism used by Bilibili to encourage creators thus contributes to the rapid growth of CP culture.

In short, since the pandemic of COVID-19, media platforms have made up for the lack of offline CP activities and have used technology and algorithms to push CP culture into a genuine cultural carnival. Weibo, a public media platform, has enhanced the influence of CP fans in the public cultural field by guiding their emotional and digital labour around their favourite CPs through the CP Super Topic mechanism, meanwhile, Bilibili.com, the largest subcultural video content production and marketing website, has also contributed to the process of breaking the boundaries of CP culture. The technologies used by media platforms for CP fans, such as ‘Super Topics’ and ‘bullet comments’, have given CP fans more ways to participate and more space for discourse, which has fuelled the fissile spread of participatory CP culture, making it one of the most influential fan genres in China.

### **7. Reflections on the reasons for the rise of CP culture**

To sum up, the emergence of CP culture is the result of six reasons: the postmodern situation of CP fans, contemporary youth’s loneliness and emotional needs of the times, the stumbling of CP fans as only daughters; the spiritual pornography of women; the pursuit of aestheticism by CP fans; and the external promotion from media platforms.

All of the above reasons driving the rise of CP culture remind researchers of the importance of capturing the emotional experience of CP fans. The majority of CP fans are heterosexual young women who live in cities, are well educated and mostly come from families with only one child. They remain sceptical and rebellious against the social norms of marriage and love and the social responsibilities that have been imposed on them, so they may refuse to complete the emotional experience of intimacy in person.

Thus, CP culture is a compensatory mechanism for solving the loneliness and pressure of the times, CP fans seems to be a bystander in an erotic intimacy that avoids the pain of the real relationship while they show a high level of commitment to CP, but in fact this process is a risk transfer in the self-defence mechanism. Although the rise of CP culture has been fuelled by the development of the One-Child Policy, it should not go unnoticed that the soil in which CP culture was born is full of women’s oppression and unrelieved emotional tensions.

Moreover, it seems that the technological development of media platforms such as Weibo and Bilibili, while promoting the fissile dissemination of participatory CP culture, has also given CP fans greater discursive space and rights, allowing them to directly influence CP fan culture through

CP Super Topic and bullet comments. But CP fans have lost a certain degree of autonomy under the calculus of algorithms, making CP culture a vehicle for digital labour.

### **Chapter Three. The Phenomenon of ‘Setting Supremacy’ in CP Fan Creations**

CP fans often define the success of a pair of CP’s portrayal in terms of their ‘sense of CP’, and the key to defining it is the compatibility of the CP’s personal settings. However, numerous studies on CP culture and Chinese fan culture have failed to clearly identify the specific meaning of setting, and often confuse CP’s ‘personal settings’ with the ‘moe elements’ proposed by Azuma Hiroki (2009), and have not delved deeper into the concept of ‘CP sense’. In fact, the present research finds that in the ‘setting supremacy’ phenomenon, the settings discussed by CP fans have a clear localisation between the fictional ‘2-dimension’ and the real ‘3-dimension’, and therefore, this present research is original in proposing the concept of a ‘dynamic 2.5-dimensional setting database’. These settings are influenced by the ‘2-dimensional’ culture on the one hand and therefore unreal, and on the other hand they come from the survival experience of CP fans in ‘3-dimensional’ reality and therefore respond to thoughts about reality.

In addition to this, the purpose of CP fans’ use of ‘setting supremacy’ in their creative approach has not been explored by the researcher. Even though most female-oriented literature lands on the imagery of intimacy, the present research found that the intimacy CP fans crave has distinct generational and geographical characteristics.

#### **1. Dynamic 2.5-dimensional settings database**

In China’s entertainment industry, where CP is a selling point, there is a saying, ‘the sense of CP is a metaphysics’, which means that it seems difficult for the producers to predict which CP consisting of which two actors or characters would hit the hearts of the fans at which moment and for which reasons. But the results of the frequency analysis of *Question. 13 How do you define the ‘sense of CP’* (see Table 6), more than 20% of the CP fans of *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* define ‘the sense of CP’ as ‘a sense of compatibility in the configuration of personal settings’ (N = 33, 54.24%). Thus, even if there is no uniform definition of ‘the sense of CP’, the exhibition and collocation of ‘2.5-dimensional personal settings’ is the core of determining the sense of CP, for example,

participant No. 104 directly stated that she likes Harry Potter/Severus Snape, because this CP is ‘a mix of two types of personal settings’ that she likes.

**Table 6 The Sense of CP**

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
A sense of fatalism	14	11.86%	11.86%
A sense of situationship	7	5.93%	17.80%
A sense of harmony resulting from complementary personal settings	10	8.47%	26.27%
A sense of compatibility in the configuration of personal settings	33	27.97%	54.24%
Evenly matched and two-way redemption	11	9.32%	63.56%
A strong sexual tension	18	15.25%	78.81%
The compatibility of the spiritual world	7	5.93%	84.75%
Empathic imagery	16	13.56%	98.31%
Matched attractive appearance	2	1.69%	100.00%
Total	118	100.0%	

### 1.1 Definition of ‘2-dimension’ and ‘3-dimension’

Before discussing the ‘2.5-dimensional settings database’ among CP fans, it is necessary to describe and define the concepts and categories of ‘2-dimension’ and ‘3-dimension’. ‘2-dimension’ originates from the Japanese word ‘nijigen (にじげん)’ which means ‘2-dimensional space/world’, it was originally a geometric term (Kinsella, 2020) that was later used by Japanese manga, anime, and video game fans to refer to the illusionary worlds created by these three forms of culture (Sekeroglu, 2012). In Chinese pop culture, the meaning of ‘2-dimension’ has gone beyond the scope of Japan, it can refer to both Japanese anime and video games, as well as surreal cultural works from various countries, such as *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts*, which are representative of magical films.

Since the 1990s, when Japanese ‘2-dimensional’ works flowed into the Chinese cultural market on a large scale and influenced the acceptance habits and aesthetic tastes of China’s new generation of

cultural consumers, the term used to refer to ACG fans (initially referring to the majority of male otaku) has also been accepted by Chinese youths and has been merged with female BL fans, collectively referred to as ‘2-dimensional’ fans, thus ‘2-dimension’ refers not only ACG cultural products, but also the identity of ACG fans assembled by interest-oriented social networking.

On the technical level, before the maturity of 3D kinescope technology, ACG were visually composed of ‘2-dimensional’ images, and even now, when 3D kinescope technology has become relatively mature, the aesthetic style established in the ‘2-dimensional’ era is still quite common in Japanese ACG products. In this sense, ‘2-dimensional’ is distinguished from ‘3-dimensional’, i.e., films and TV shows that create the illusion of ‘3-dimensionality’ by using real people and real things as their subjects. However, at the level of CP fans’ ‘setting supremacy’, the concept of ‘2-dimension’ emphasises the ‘virtual’ and ‘illusory’ nature of the world created by ACG, while ‘3-dimension’ refers to the real world in which real people live. Thus, ‘3-dimensional’ CP can be considered as real-person CP, refers to the CP formed by real actors and celebrities.

Therefore, if we make a division between ‘2-dimensional’ and ‘3-dimensional’ settings in CP fan culture, the ‘2-dimensional setting’ focuses on emphasising the aesthetic nature of fantasy, and CP fans use it to give aesthetic surrealistic qualities to CP, thus fulfilling their desire to detach themselves from reality; whereas the ‘3-dimensional setting’ is the part of the culture that is closely related to reality, and they are the true reflection and reenactment of the CP fans’ own living environment. And in the long run, the barrier between ‘2-dimension’ and ‘3-dimension’ is not solid in China; many concepts and terms from ‘2-dimensional’ works are widely circulated in ‘3-dimensional’ culture; for example, the practice of assigning ‘personal settings’ with ‘moe’ attributes to characters comes from Japanese ‘2-dimensional’ comics.

## **1.2 The definition of the ‘dynamic 2.5-dimensional settings database’**

The reason why ‘personal settings’ are the core and soul behind the sense of CP is that they have the ability to evoke an emotion known as ‘moe’. In Chinese, ‘moe (萌, pronounced as méng)’ was originally a noun referring to the buds of grass and trees, or a verb describing the beginning of something; in Japanese second-dimensional culture, however, ‘moe’ literally means adorable, desirable, or cute, and ‘moe’ as an emotional element is used by producers to stimulate fans’ feelings of affection and desire (Azuma, 2009) or, alternatively, it is used to describe the endearing trait/setting that a character possesses, this trait/setting is the ‘moe element’ proposed by Japanese



subculture scholar Azuma Hiroki (Azuma, 2009, p. 47), ‘furry’, ‘animal ear’ and ‘tail’ are classic ‘moe elements’, all these elements are designed to evoke the emotion of ‘moe’ which is the strong affection.

Specifically, ‘moe’ was initially used by Azuma to describe the fervent emotions that Japanese male otaku (male ACGN fans) felt towards beautiful girls (bishōjo) in anime and manga games, or to describe the cuteness and animalistic qualities that these two-dimensional girls (bishōjo) possessed, resulting in the notion of ‘moe elements database’ that serve the cultural consumption of Japanese male ACGN fans.

Nowadays, the concept of ‘moe elements’ has transcended subcultural circles, especially with the rise of BL culture flowing cross-culturally within Western slash culture (Galbraith, 2009), shippers cite Sirius Black’s Animagus form as a giant black dog referring to Sirius/Remus colloquially as ‘Wolfstar’ (Elliott, 2016). But, slash fanfic authors are not reproducing Japanese ‘moe elements’ either, Jessica Bauwens-Sugimoto (2011) argues that while characterisation in Japanese works is objectified to increase the appeal of cuteness, slash fans contrast the animal’s ears with the dynamics of animality. Thus, in contrast to the animalistic qualities of ‘moe elements’ in Japanese BL, slash fans use them for their attempts at inner (spiritual/biological) and social issues. Chinese CP fans also use ‘moe elements’, Sirius/Remus which Chinese CP name is ‘Puppy/Wolf’, animalised as a kind of ‘passionate puppy-like younger top’/ ‘distant, elegant and wolf-like elder bottom’.



(Figure 2 Fan Picture of Draco/Harry CP and Figure 3 Fan Picture of Sirius/Remus CP all by W\_Tail)

It seems that the personal settings used in Chinese pop culture can be classified as ‘moe elements’ in terms of their effectiveness, at least in the early days of fan culture, when it was heavily infiltrated by Japanese ACGN culture, but now, that the control of fan culture has been handed over to CP fans

of Generation Z and Generation Y, the personal settings used in CP fans' secondary creations are no longer copied from Japanese ACGN culture. Therefore, the present research is original in explaining the phenomenon of 'setting supremacy' in CP creation by proposing the concept of a 'dynamic 2.5-dimensional settings database'.

The first point is that the field and the way Chinese CP fans use 'moe elements' are different from the way Japanese otaku use them. Azuma Hiroki (2009) clarified that there are two of the hallmarks of post modernization in otaku <sup>19</sup>culture, the first one is the embracement of derivative works, another one is the substitution with fiction (for an earlier generation) or the complete letting go of grand narratives (for a newer generation). This generational shift is exemplified by the emergence of 'chara-moe', an emotional reaction felt by the consumers to characters and/or their specific elements, such as 'cat ear', 'animal tail', etc., then, a database for 'moe elements' that generates the characters has been established (Azuma, 2009, p. 47).

In terms of the postmodern characteristics of cultural representations, CP culture does belong to the same category as otaku culture, but CP fans make extensive use of 'personal settings' on all '2-dimensional' and '3-dimensional' CPs. Thus, as slash fans have transformed the nature of Japanese 'moe elements' from illusory to realistic (Lindström, 2017), the meaning of 'moe' in Chinese popular culture has been generalised to mean 'strong affection' for fictional or real characters/animals/things. This result is largely since China's subculture circles are not as strict as that of Japan, in other words, CP fans are free to travel through various genres without having to claim eternal loyalty to a particular cultural category, which leads to a diversity of sources for CP fans to acquire personal settings, rather than being confined to the realm of ACGN culture. Finally, they endow with the attribute of 'moe' to characters/things that originally seem to be 'moe-less' in both pure reality and virtual reality, and ultimately, CP fans equip all the objects both inside and outside of the '2-dimensional' cultural sphere with the potential to be established as a 'moe-ified' CP.

Consequently, the complexity of CP's 'personal settings' goes far beyond the realm of the second dimension, but is simultaneously influenced by various social events and thought waves in real life,

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<sup>19</sup> Otaku: (in Japan) a young person who is obsessed with computers or particular aspects of popular culture to the detriment of their social skills.

resulting in the formation of a fusion of composite personal settings between the two dimensions. The most typical of which are CP fans of GGAD, whose conception and understanding of the CP's personal settings includes not only personal settings taken from '2-dimensional' characters such as Grindelwald and Dumbledore, but also inspiration from real-life actors in the '3-dimensional' world such as Johnny Depp and Jude Law.

A veteran fan of Depp's version of GGAD said about the CP, "You can imagine Depp standing there in all his splendour", obviously, the fan is mixing Grindelwald's personal setting with Johnny Depp's personal setting. The reason why Depp's version of Grindelwald is the closest to the original in the minds of CP fans is precisely because Grindelwald's reserve and arrogance, elegance and cruelty are not only displayed vividly in Depp's body, but even more so coexisting with the actor's own temperament, so Grindelwald is simply tailor-made for Depp who also has the personal setting of crazy and tameless. On the contrary, for CP fans of Mikkelsen's version of GGAD, Grindelwald's personal setting is that of a 'straight politician-villain', thus eliminating the 'crazy' personal setting that Depp has attached to Grindelwald, therefore, Mikkelsen has given the character a stoic and restrained personal setting, which makes him a good match for Jude Law's Dumbledore, and fans believe that this is due to the actor's Danish accent when he speaks English and his mature appearance.



(Figure 5 Depp's version of GGAD, Figure 6 Mikkelsen's version of GGAD)

Secondly, while the 'moe elements database' is mostly character-related concepts, the 'setting supremacy' phenomenon in CP fandoms also includes the exploration of various worldview settings by fans. Usually, a complete and self-consistent worldview setting includes systematic contents such as history, geography, race, language, politics, language, and so on. and the sense of CPs is also related to the significance and value given to CP by the narrative and worldview settings. Therefore,

the connotation of the '2.5-dimensional settings database' in CP culture proposed in the present research is much more comprehensive than 'moe elements database'.

Thirdly, the erotic connotations carried by the 'moe elements database' do not constitute the entire purpose of the CP setting. Otsuka & Steinberg (2010) argue that "there is no correlation between erotic manga and the real female body", and points out that the female figures in Japanese manga illustrated by male artists are "bloodless and fleshless mannequins". The technique of creating manga is different from that of oil paintings or sketches, it is more inclined to use simple lines to outline the contour characteristics of characters or objects, thus, a large number of 'routine symbolic systems' have been accumulated over time, such as 'big eyes' and 'long straight black hair', which are the extremely programmed female appearance in Japanese manga. Therefore, the female body in Japanese manga has never been a 'realization' of the physical body in the real world, but rather a display of the female body as a symbol. In fact, when it comes to the depiction of male characters in BL manga created by female artists, there is a similar patterned symbolic system in the 'moe element database' utilised by them, such as the aforementioned 'animal ears'.

Thus, for both male otaku and female BL fans, the highly stereotypical 'moe elements' represent the result of a long-term selection bias by fans, and ultimately cuts off the relationship between the real-life body and the impulses triggered by that body. This is apparently in the same vein as the 'misogyny of lustful men' discussed by Chizuko Ueno (1996). Chizuko argues that lustful men appear to be interested in women, but in reality, their desires are not directed towards any living, breathing woman with an independent personality, but rather, they are obsessed with women's bodies, sexual organs, and certain symbols that signify women (Mondal, 2018). This same pattern of desire exists in BL manga, except that the artist's perspective changes from a male gaze to a female gaze, and the object of the gaze appears to change from a female body to a male body, but in reality, the way they portray the male body, especially the 'uke' who is at the bottom position in male homosexuality, still unfolds in the same way that they portray the female body, which is essentially still a symbolic manipulation that displaces the object of desire through a metonymic relationship.

Therefore, in Azuma Hiroki's discussion of the 'moe', it can be seen that the classic 'moe element', whether it is the 'sailor suit' of a woman in a male-oriented work or the 'animal ears' of a man in a female-oriented BL manga, is in fact a symbol used to represent the female body and female figures

in Japanese ACGN works, as well as a whole set of soft erotic symbols that have the function of sexual arousal. This means that only a portion of the settings that point to characterisation in the CP fanfic are ‘moe elements’, as CP’s settings do not only serve to arouse erotic desires, but are also responsible for reflecting on the real conditions of existence. The ‘moe element database’ which is mainly composed of eroticised and caricatured female body parts or personality traits cannot be copied into the creation and consumption patterns of Chinese CP culture.

Besides, the ‘2.5-dimensional settings database’ is in dynamic, which distinguishes it from the MBTI personality (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) that is currently popular in Chinese youth culture. The MBTI is a theoretical model of personality types developed by American author Isabel Briggs Myers and her mother, Catherine Cook Briggs (1962), based on the model of eight psychological types established by Swiss psychologist Carl Jung (Pittenger, 1993). This testing system classifies personality into 16 types according to four dimensions that helps a person to think, feel, judge, perceive, sense and deal with the world (Jafrani et al., 2017). MBTI was initially used by corporate recruitment to test the career potential of employees (Potgieter & Coetzee, 2013), but more recently it has been widely used by Chinese youth to determine their own personalities and to define patterns of human behaviour and interactions according to their personalities, and CP fans have started to use MBTI as well, e.g., fans of *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* classify characters according to their personality traits into the 16 personalities in MBTI.

However, MBTI relies on a fixed test system to unfold the way of personality division, and the result of being classified is only possible in these 16 types, even though a person may have more than one personality at the same time, it is still not possible to go beyond this framework, therefore, the personalities derived from MBTI is static, closed, and does not have the potential of mutation for a period of time until a new test method and theoretical system appear. In contrast, the ‘2.5-dimensional settings database’ is in a constant state of dynamism, where the variety of personal settings morphs and increases with the proliferation of stories, and where CP fans continue to accumulate cognitive experience with personal settings during their literary creation and reading activities, rather than relying on static psychometric test to identify static personalities.

Moreover, the ability to identify ‘personal setting’ also benefits from the concentrated exercise that fans undergo within the idol fan culture. Since 2014, when ‘flower boys<sup>20</sup>’ in Korean pop music started to become popular in China (Murell, 2019), CP fans have become familiar with identifying ‘personal settings’ and their ‘post-narrative’ after the ‘intensive training’ provided by the idol fan culture, and a ‘dynamic 2.5-dimensional personal setting database’ has been established. Characters from *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* has been included in this dynamic database, and they can be broken down into various types of personal settings, which can be recognised and used by fans as abstract material for creating CP.

For Zhen Troy Chen (2020), a ‘personal setting database’ is “a structure that relies on the memory and associations of fans”, although their associations and memories revolve around emotions rather than pure logic, and may therefore appear to be disorganised, however, the real significance of the crowdfunded ‘2.5-dimensional personal setting database’ is not to form a digital system that can be regulated, but rather to serve as a ‘virtual archive’ that exists in the minds of the fans to facilitate their CPs, so that they can acquire a collective identity as a specific CP fan through daily training and the accumulation of knowledge over time. More importantly, personal setting proposes a way of cultural activity for fan creation that can adapt to the reality of the collapse of grand narratives in the current postmodern society. This is because, in the logic of ‘setting supremacy’, CP fans focus their attention on the personal settings carried by the CPs that deliberately cater to their personal preferences, while the story is regarded as an accessory attached to the personal settings, which means that the personal settings are liberated from the story and are no longer subject to the logic of the reality or the text, and thus can freely roam around in the vast ‘2.5-dimensional personal setting databas’ until they are extracted by CP fans to combine with other settings to assemble new CPs.

### **1.3 Types of 2.5-dimensional settings**

According to the creative conventions of CP fans, 2.5-dimensional settings can be categorised into the following four types:

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<sup>20</sup> Flower boys is used to describe the ‘personal settings’ of young male celebrities (actors, singers, models) that involve delicate make-up, fine skin and exaggerated elegance (Zhang & Negus,2020).

One is settings like occupation and appearance that symbolise the identity-power division between two parties in the CP. For example, the top/bottom division in CP can be made by emphasising the difference in body size between the two roles in the CP; as well as, for example, Draco/Harry in a world setting where Voldemort is defeated, Harry's career setting is often that of a civil servant at the Ministry of Magic, and Draco's is that of a business heir to the House of Malfoy, or, in the case of GGAD, where Dumbledore is the Headmaster of Hogwarts and Grindelwald is the leader of Alliance, all of these career settings are symbolic of economic, political, and cultural capital.

The second type of setting is the one that revolves around the personalities of the two parties in the CP. This type of setting emphasises the possibility of collision and conflict between the two sets of settings (e.g., tsundere), and its purpose is to promote the formation of 'intimacy settings' by constructing differentiated personal settings between the two parties in the CP. In particular, 'love-hate' is the most commonly used 'intimacy setting' by CP fans of Draco/Harry and GGAD.

The third category is the worldview settings on which CP relies. The present research argues that the worldview settings are likewise highly database-orientated, there is a database of world settings accumulated from various cultural works and video games, as well as a structural mechanism based on the laws of the real world, resulting in a '2.5-dimensional settings database'. Therefore, the worldview settings in CP fan literature are also products of participatory culture, and their core features are also artificial 'modularity'. One of the most explicative among these is the worldview setting that develops in response to the flawed operational logic of power-gender in the real world (e.g., ABO).

The fourth type of setting is one that transforms the gender identity and physical characteristics of the CP. For example, the 'male mother' is a setting that gives a male character a female body as a vehicle to bring him closer to the traditional 'femininity' and to assume female responsibilities.

Of the four types of settings, the second type is the most frequently used and interpreted by fans, namely, 'intimacy setting' which is based on the divergent personal settings of the two parties in a CP. The best example is Draco Malfoy/Harry Potter, as the most popular CP among CP fandom of *Harry Potter* (N = 33, 67.26%), this CP is summarised as a romance between two 'tsundere', tsundere is one of the common examples of 'contrasting personal setting', with 'tsun' meaning a rough outer shell and 'dere' a soft inner core. To put it simply, 'tsundere' refers to a 'personal setting' in which the character pretends to be condescending in order to cover up his shyness and coyness,

which creates a particular attraction for Draco/Harry CP fans. For example, participant No.70 felt that Draco Malfoy/Harry Potter was attracted to her because she wanted to see “two tsundere people in a relationship”.

Furthermore, Draco Malfoy/Harry Potter has been described as a ‘love-hate’ CP because the ‘personal setting’ of ‘tsundere’ prevents them from showing weakness to each other despite that they love each other. Thus, participant 25 thought that the personal settings of Draco, “tsundere” and noble, and the personal settings of Potter, the kind and brave, were the real reason for its appeal. Similarly, the ‘personal setting’ of the CP GGAD (Gellert Grindelwald/Albus Dumbledore) is defined by the CP fans as ‘evenly matched’, ‘love-hate’, as participant No. 40 believes that the ‘intimacy setting’ of GGAD is ‘love-hate’.

Fans also identified the heterosexual CPs based on ‘contrasting personal settings’, participant No. 22 defined Severus Snape x Lily Evans as beautiful, powerful, and miserable hero x innocent and benevolent heroine. The ‘beautiful, powerful and miserable’ is currently one of the most popular personal settings in the Chinese pop culture context, a male protagonist with this type of personal setting is very appealing to fans. It refers to the sense of brokenness presented by an almost perfect person who has undergone a traumatic experience, whose ill-fate is not diverted by appearance, ability or status, and is therefore more likely to tug at the audience’s heartstrings.

The above four types of settings commonly found in CP fan culture are all part of the 2.5-dimensional settings database, and the way they are assembled is ‘modular’. CP is made up of different settings similar to modules in computer programme coding, and these settings, which contain initial values and algorithms, collide and interact with each other, constituting the CP fan text in motion. Whether each setting can carry out its own rule (for the worldview setting) and will (for the personal setting) to the end, and whether a sense of CP can be created through the collision of these settings becomes an important criterion for judging the attractiveness of CP.

## **2. The phenomenon of ‘setting supremacy’ in CP fan creatino**

### **2.1 The meaning of ‘setting supremacy’**

Simply put, the phenomenon of ‘setting supremacy’ is the consumption by CP fans of the ‘personal settings’ carried by the characters and the ‘worldview settings’ that support the existence of CP in the original and fanworks, which is essentially the consumption of a ‘dynamic 2.5-dimensional settings database’. The present research uniquely divides female fans into traditional fans in the pre-



fan era and CP fans in the post-modern era according to the One-Child Policy, and it is through the generational change of fans that the phenomenon of 'setting supremacy' in CP fan writing is revealed. In the pre-fan era, fan creation revolves around the original, which is a relatively closed fictional narrativist work with clearer boundaries in all aspects of its production mechanism. After entering the era of CP fans in the post-modern era, originality is no longer at the forefront, and even narrativity is not at the core, replaced by the concept of CP. Female CP fans have begun to take characters from their works, disassemble them into fragmented personal settings, and initiate experiments in 'setting supremacy'.

As a consequence, when the new generation of fans have mastered the techniques of using personal settings, they summarise the personal settings that come with the characters when they capture the characters in the original works, and consciously or unconsciously conceptualise the personal settings from the perspective of the CP when they shape the characters, in order to create more recognisable personal settings and stronger CP matches; at the same time, they interpreted any text in the direction of CP relationships according to their favourite configurations of personal settings. As a result, the relationship between characters in early fanfiction has changed from a grand narrative love myth to a collocation of two sets of personal settings, i.e., the combination and interaction of two characters and two logics of behaviour, forming a set of independent 'CP-centric' small narratives and emotional mode. In this shift, the various 2.5-dimensional settings that make up the CP are not only the core parameters of the intimacy experiment used to describe the object of the experiment (i.e., the CP), but it could even be argued that they are the object of the CP's intimacy experiment itself, and this is the connotation of the phenomenon of setting supremacy.

This way of generalising and defining CP in terms of 'personal settings' suggests that CP fans have acquired the ability to quickly identify and configure personal settings through their prolonged reading experience. For example, participant No. 20 defined Draco Malfoy x Hermione Granger as 'handsome and noble male protagonist x beautiful and strong female protagonist', she also noted that this is a common configuration of personal settings in romantic.

At the same time, the use of personal settings by CP fans is subjective, different people will recognise and understand the personal settings of the same character in different ways, thus giving rise to a wide range of CP combinations. For example, the CP of Draco Malfoy/Lucius Malfoy is named 'Platinum Father & Son' because they both have 'platinum blonde' hair and a noble status

and arrogant personal setting. While in Draco/Harry's CP fandom, these two characters compose a 'love-hate' CP because they have so many opposing personal settings but share a common personal setting – 'tsundere'. But this CP would become another type with different personal settings if they were transplanted to a different worldview setting. In short, personal settings can indeed be effective labels for identifying character traits and locating character types.

Moreover, the 'feelings of affection' triggered by 2.5-dimensional settings do not exist in the CPs themselves, but in the hearts of those who respond to these settings (Saito, 138). As Sun (2017) points out, "the process of generating strong, affectionate feelings for a fictional character is at the heart of moe", considering the phenomenon of 'setting supremacy' from this perspective, the logic behind it is to present symbolic 'personal settings' on top of the characters in order to evoke fans' affection for them. This is why fans sometimes find certain 'personal settings' far more fascinating than the characters they belong to, and as a result, CP fans put those '2.5-dimensional settings', which are close to reality yet far away from it, at the 'supreme place' of their specific creative process.

## **2.2 The goal of 'setting supremacy' - shaping love-hate intimacy**

In terms of the way conflicting setting sets are created, 'setting supremacy' is a response to the dissolution of grand narratives in postmodern cultural ideology, where setting configurations make intimacy a consumable cultural product, but in terms of the fans' drive in using settings, what they need in 'setting supremacy' is a virtual emotional experience of intimacy. Essentially, most studies of female-oriented culture, such as studies of early romantic novels and soap operas, BL culture studies, and CP culture studies, have found that emotion and intimacy are important elements of fan creation. For example, Christine Scodari and Jenna Felder (2000) have analysed female shippers' perceptions of emotions and romantic relationships based on material from their fan works and their interactions, meanwhile, some scholars such as Jennifer L. Barnes (2015) and Anne Kustritz (2015) have identified the strong motivational support provided by emotions in fanfiction and other fan cultural practices, as well as the importance of emotional and intimate imaginaries in the expression of fan desires and reflective gender processes. All of these studies can demonstrate that women engage in cultural activities to imagine intimacy, but that the connotations of intimacy vary greatly depending on the time and cultural context.

For fans of early romance novels, Janice A. Radway (2009) argued that women read romance to get a compensatory fantasy that could help them take a break from reality, or as Forster (2021) suggests that fans experience ‘parasocial romantic relations’ by falling in love with media figures. For Chinese women who are fans of BL novels, Zheng (2016) argues that this reflects Chinese women’s desire for ‘pure love’, which emphasises the strong emotional bond between two free and equal individuals, and the high degree of attunement between the body and the mind, this spiritual love affair is characterised by the fact that the meaning of love is in the process of pursuing it, not in the outcome of marriage, as well as, that love is a communication of the heart that has nothing to do with sex. The imagination of either kind of intimacy is subject to the specific context of the times and the order in real life, so for the intimacy felt by CP fans in ‘setting supremacy’, it has a proximity to the connotations of the two aforementioned kinds of intimacy, but there are critical differences. Specifically, the present research found that CP fans constructed a love-hate duality model of intimacy setting by letting two sets of setting sets full of contradictory feelings collide with each other, in order to help them gain a unique emotional experience of coexisting pleasure and pain. The prototype of the love-hate intimacy setting can be found in the research of Laurie Rudman and Peter Glick (2008) research on how power and intimacy shape gender relations. These two scholars suggest that when two intelligent species in a society can be conceptualised as socialised archetypes the love-hate settings favoured by CP fans. Their personals settings are configured in a way that one species (male) is larger than the other (female) and dominates the powerful positions, wealth, and resources of civilisation, still the two species are willingness to maintain intimacy even as patriarchy continues to subject women to oppression and discrimination. This social situation can be seen as a socialised archetype of love-hate, and ‘enemy slash’, which has a similar connotation in *Harry Potter*’s English slash fandom, is also common (Tosenberger.2008), for example, Harry/ Draco. Thinking further about why CP fans want love-hate intimacy in ‘setting supremacy’, the answer first needs to be found by going back to the demographic characteristics of CP fans of English-language cultural products. Many of them are students and being the only child in the family, determine that CP fans face the pressure of high academic competition without gender differences, which means that, on the one hand, they feel constant ‘pain’ from the real world as women who are continually oppressed by the logic and stereotypes of patriarchal power; on the other hand, the education system of only-children has equipped them with the ability to resist gender repression,

and they spend spare moment reading, creating, and participating in CP culture to constantly refute the logic of heteronormative patriarchal narratives from multiple perspectives, and feel ‘happy’ when they manipulate the setting to act out the ideal intimate relationships.

When CP fans are freed from the constraints of serious social roles and emotional norms, and dissolve the meaning of grand narratives, a world related to the interpretation of intimacy arises in their individual sensory experience, and this virtual world of affects may seem chaotic and free, but in fact the affects embedded in it are, according to Spinoza’s summary of the two types of affects, joy and sadness (Steinberg, 2016), and these two affects are not static, they are both a process, thus, for conflictual personal settings, they interact for CP fans to watch the exchange of these two emotions, which is identified by Deleuze as the flux of ‘affect’ to against emotions (Stanley, 2017). According to this affective mobility, when the ‘personal settings’ in the CP that are conducive to promoting intimacy interact, e.g., the sub-setting contained in ‘tsundere’, the soft heart, comes into play the fans get the pleasure, and this pleasure evokes their good imaginations of intimacy; whereas, when another sub-setting in it, the arrogant appearance, comes into play, it causes the CP’s intimacy to develop to the point of retreating, consequently, fans feel the pain, and this pain evokes their unpleasant experiences in reality. So that when CP fans manipulate opposite personal settings to form a setting set to interact with another ambivalent setting set, ‘pleasure’ and ‘pain’ merge into one, and CP fans are thus provided with a kind of ‘self-enjoyment’ proposed by Deleuze (Bogue, 2017) that enables them to unburden themselves of the ‘pain’ they have suffered as the only child under the competition of a patriarchal society.

Thus, as Catherine Tosenberger (2008) argue, the pleasure of ‘enemy slash’ is in watching how two males as opposites overcome their differences, which is essentially about how female fans negotiate expectations of male intimacy (as opposed to friendship), and love-hate, as a setting for intimacy that occupies a dominant position, represents the CP fans, as young, only daughters, are in need of a new cultural paradigm that simultaneously allows for the experience of ‘pleasurable’ intimacy and provides feedback on the ‘painful’ reality of intimacy. In conclusion, experiencing virtual intimacy is the internal motivation for CP fans to advocate the phenomenon of ‘setting supremacy’.

### **3. The worldview setting**

#### **3.1 Increased attention to the ‘worldview setting’**

The phenomenon of ‘setting supremacy’ in CP fandom manifests itself not only in fans shifting the emphasis on storytelling from the previous generation of fanfiction to the manipulation of personal settings to create CPs, but also in a sharp increase in fan interest in ‘worldview settings’. According to the AHP Hierarchy analysis of five factors based on *Question 18 — To what extent do you think the following key elements can determine the quality of a CP fanfiction* (see Table 7) to analyse the weight of each indicator, the worldview setting ranked fourth (Weight = 18.41%) out of five factors affecting the quality of CP fan fiction. Namely, a truly successful CP build requires shaping the worldview setting in addition to the creative use of personal setting.

**Table 7 Elements Determine the Quality of CP Fanfiction**

Items	Eigenvectors	Weight	Maximum eigenvalue	CI
Personal Setting	1.057	21.146%		
Worldview Setting	0.920	18.408%		
Writing Style	1.059	21.182%	5.000	0.000
Narrative Logic	1.081	21.614%		
Adherence to the Original	0.883	17.651%		

The shift in literature towards ‘world building’ can be traced back to the fantasy novels written in the 1930s (Roine, 2016). Miéville (2009) appraised Tolkien’s role in the paradigm shift plot to worlds, for lifting the ‘invented world’ as the primary ingredient in creative writing. This shift represents an extraordinary inversion, where the order is reverse compared to Aristotle’s famous assertion that plot (mythos) and action (praxis) logically precede other elements of fiction. This inversion of tradition by giving priority or even separate consideration to worldviews coincides with the subversion of the original worldview and new world reconstruction by CP fans in their fanfiction, and, more importantly, their use of the worldview setting as an independently existing setting into which different CPs are lassoed for the creation of their work.

At about the same time, Eiji Ōtsuka (2003) similarly found in online entertainment novels (i.e., light novels), which have been popular among Japanese adolescents since 2000, that the purpose is not to depict reality but rather to imitate the fictional worlds represented by manga and anime, and thus, Ōtsuka defined light novels as character novels depicting fictional elements from the worlds of manga and anime (Sugimoto et al. 2019). According to Ōtsuka’s result, Azuma (2009) presents the

concept of artificial environments exemplified in Japanese character novels, he finds that the increase in the creation of character novels shows that the Japanese novel in a post-modernised environment came to rely on an artificial environment (a large database) that was different from modern nature (the grand narrative). Azuma argues that this artificial environment illustrates that male otaku “have learnt the skill of not connecting the consumption of ‘moe elements’ in the small narrative to the worldview”, because the removal of the grand narrative allows for the endless reproduction of moments of pleasure as mimesis.

But CP fans are different from these male ACGN enthusiasts in that, instead of abandoning their exploration of worldviews, they maintain a connection between constructing new worldviews and the real world, despite the significance of the grand narrative has been dissolved by them through coupling. That is to say, CP fanfiction as postmodern literature, where CP fanfiction authors do not create a worldview setting to fill a gap in the wizarding world in *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* or to elaborate on it (Samutina, 2016), but to create a ‘2.5-dimensional world’ linking reality to fantasy to provide a working system for their vision of a CP relationship.

And the worldview setting is no less important than the personal setting in constructing the CP, because identification and emotional response to the CP are not singular concepts. As Murray Smith (1994, p. 34) theorizes, the audience’s identification with characters is not just a matter of recognition and alignment of which traits make up the character, but comes from part of a larger structure. That is, CP fans’ fantasies and empathy for CPs do not stop at recognizing the personal setting that CP carries, but are linked to an overall context, which is the increasingly important worldview setting of CP fanfiction.

### **3.2 CP fans’ purpose behind the construction of the ABO world setting**

According to *Question 11* (see Table 3), ABO (N = 41, 30.37%) became the fourth most popular worldview setting among CP fans of English-language cultural products in China. ABO has been one of the three most popular worldview settings for Chinese fans since at least 2013, originating in the Western slash fandom, where it was already present in the fan community of the US TV series *The X-Files* in the 1990s, Chinese fans’ exposure to the ABO setting is often thought to be related to the Chinese translations of the fan fictions of the British TV series *Sherlock*.

Specifically, humans in the world of ABO are categorised into three classes, the dominant ‘alpha’, the submissive ‘omega’ and the stable ‘beta’ (Koehm, 2018), alpha grows a penis, the omega has a

uterus, and the beta possesses both male and female reproductive organs. Based on the different physical characteristics, their social roles differ as a result, with ‘alpha’ being dominant and masculine and ‘omega’ being submissive (Popova, 2018) and feminine. The detailed construction of sexual and reproductive details makes ABO appropriate as design material for erotic fanfictions, for example, how the Omega enters the periodic heat and needs to have sex, how Alpha and Omega lovers form pair-bonds (often involving mating bites) with a special connection (knotting) with telepathic or empathetic qualities.

However, the most meaningful way in which CP fans have used the ABO worldview setting is not simply by using the sexual elements of ABO to facilitate the development of intimate relationships, but by using ABO as a virtual constructive society to interrogate in reverse the role of the power structures of the real society in which the fan-authors live. ABO stories often take place in environments where gender inequality is polarized, so, fans are able to interpret and construct meaning from the similarities and differences between the sexual scripts of ABO stories and the sexual scripts that fans are familiar with in their everyday lives (Popova, 2018), the present research therefore asserts that the ABO world setting has the potential to study the mechanisms of gender-power operations in society.

### **(1) *With Stars in Their Eyes* —Omega rights struggle**

*With Stars in Their Eyes* is an interstellar ABO fanfic (Yixun 祗浔, AO3), Harry, as an omega, instead of graduating and marrying Malfoy as everyone thought he would, chose to join the expeditionary fleet, which led to a bitter conflict between the two, Harry gives birth alone and fight the evil forces of the War Department controlled by Voldemort, while Draco later becomes an undercover agent planted by Dumbledore, and the two subsequently reconcile in their fight to defend the good world.

This setting of Harry is the ‘omega rights struggle’ which has been an inescapable part of ABO texts, that is, the setting in which Omega fights for their rights through social movements. The way in which the omega rights struggle is portrayed has considerable similarities to the real historical struggle for women’s rights, showing CP fans’ concern for real-world gender politics in these fanfics that are usually thought of as being only in the realm of fantasy, and in doing so, allow for the ABO worldview setting to overthrow Lacan’s conception of the realm of the symbolic.

Jacques Lacan (2001) argues that “men, although dominant in the symbolic world, are impostors who cannot fully identify with the name of the father, and who go to great lengths to conceal the difference between their penis and the phallus as a symbol of patriarchal authority; by contrast, women are forced to subordinate themselves to men because they pose a threat to patriarchal authority, and they must wear masquerades in order to live normally, that is, to dress up in the femininity imposed on them by patriarchy (Luepnitz, 2003). However, unlike the traditional life course of Chinese women in the real world of ‘growing up, getting married, having children’, ABO world is set outside the fixed and unchanging human-ruled social system of the real world, and this imaginary world is ruled by women, thus the world construction of the ABO becomes the overthrow of the symbolic realm by the female author.

The fanfic author sets up Harry’s escape from marriage to join the Legion, thus subverting the reality of women being reduced to sex tools and reproductive instruments under patriarchy. Meanwhile, Malfoy, as an alpha, does not end up completely caught up in the logic of a patriarchal civilisation; he chooses to join hands with the omega, the symbol of female power, to destroy Voldemort’s (the spokesperson of patriarchal power) Horcruxes, which ultimately allows this CP to dismantle male-centrism in the worldview setting of ABO.

## **(2) *A beautiful summer night* — Female Alpha and Omega Male**

The ABO worldview setting does not make women disappear completely as Heggstad (2023) argues, in fact, heterosexual CPs are also placed in this world, such as Lily Evans x Severus Snape has been described as a heterosexual CP of ‘female alpha x male omega’ in *A beautiful summer night* (昏罗帐, Lofter), which refers to a female-dominated sexuality/interaction in which the female takes the place of the traditional male and the male takes the place of the traditional female, so it is also known as the ‘female top/ male bottom’. In the setting of ‘female alpha x male omega’, the female alpha has a female body with a penis, which is strong and dominant, while their partner is a male body with a womb, which is gentle, submissive and in a weak position.

In this fanfic, Lily Evans, who is a civilian, is Severus’s maid, but Lily is differentiated as an alpha with a penis, while Severus Snape split into an omega, and thus this CP is known to fans as Lily/Se Snape, according to the names before and after the ‘/’ represent the characters’ top/bottom. After the differentiation, the two have sex under the attraction of pheromones and impregnate Severus, so the hierarchy between the two changes from the order of wizards over commoners to



‘alpha in control of omeg’, and although the two have an equal emotional relationship, Lily is the one in control of the sexual relationship.

In real human societies, the reproductive organs are the foundation for physiological differentiation between male and female, and the power order between the two genders is also constructed on this basis, however, in ABO societies, hermaphroditism is the norm, and the difference in reproductive organs is mainly provided by the secondary gender, i.e., alpha, omega and beta. That is to say, the ABO setting means that the gender dichotomy of male and female is literally and completely emptied and erased, together with the setting of the reproductive cavity and pheromones, the naturalness and essentiality of the human bodily structure is completely subverted, and the ‘female alpha x male omega’ thus rationalises the female penis on a physiological level.

The ‘penis’ of the female alpha implies a degree of ‘penis envy’ proposed by *Sigmund Freud (1927)* on the part of the female fans who created this setting (Ruti, 2018), but a female body with a penis does not mean that female fans want to be male, let alone misogynistic. In fact, ‘female alpha x male omega’ reveal a complex mix of inferiority and narcissism about the ‘penis’, and thus the penis and the genital cavity are used as ‘abstract sexuality’ by CP fans, just as any other sexual settings in the ABO worldview. In other words, out of ‘penis envy’ and appreciation of the female body, fan writers give ‘female alpha’ a ‘penis’ and ‘male omega’ a ‘uterus’, and male and female bodily constructs are subverted, dismantled, and reshaped in the world setting of ABO, with the aim of shaping ‘female alpha x male omega’ to achieve the fusion of bisexual temperament settings, thus overturning the stereotypical perceptions of gender traits in the real world.

In explaining the gender dichotomy, sociologist Ann Oakley (1989) divided gender into biological sex and social gender (Delphy, 1993), of which social gender is a socio-cultural categorisation of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’. Throughout history, the division of gender temperament has formed a binary stereotype, in which masculinity is categorised as masculine, bold, independent and rational, while femininity is categorised as feminine, delicate, dependent and sensual. Therefore, gender stereotyping is an essential factor in creating gender differences as well as gender inequality, and women are always portrayed in heteronormative narratives as the weak ones who are sensual and extremely dependent on others, which undoubtedly stimulates the rebellious psychology of the ‘only daughter’. In this CP novel, Lily is the controlling one with stereotypical masculinity, she is brave, determined, and passionate, while Severus is the submissive one with stereotypical femininity, he

is, gentle, introspective, and jealous. Thus, by creating a ‘female alpha x male omega’ where gender traits are interchanged/intermingled, CP fans are attempting to correct gender stereotypes in the real world.

The ‘female alpha x male omega’ setting responds to CP fans’ questioning and restructuring of the stereotypical gender temperament, but it is not the only one; indeed, this setting also responds to women’s desire for power. This CP fan fiction features “Lily is a feminist, always at the forefront of equal rights for male and female wizards.” Though “the two are hand-in-hand in their quest for success,” in the workplace “all companies prefer alpha, and the company wouldn’t have accepted Severus as an omega if he weren’t a male.” This setting that is the opposite of reality indicates that ‘only daughters’, who have been educated to be competitors rather than to be wives, are more conscious of their own subjectivity and rebellious spirit than traditional women, they cannot bear to confine the value of their lives to marriage and family, and they are more eager to wield power. Thus, female CP fanfic writers employ the setting that in the world of the ABO women can, by virtue of their status as alpha with ‘penise’, make men the procreative party and thereby gain the opportunity to have supremacy over men in the workplace, thus, ‘female alpha’ expresses women’s desire for power.

### **(3) *My faith* — *Women’s sexual anxiety***

CP fans have made a noticeable effort to construct an ABO worldview, and in turn, the sex-based social framework of the ABO world in which the power and social roles of a person are determined by innate biological factors creates a facilitation for CP fans to read pornography. As a joking slogan circulates in CP fandom, “Any ABO story that has no porn is playing the hoodlum (一切不以炖肉为目的的 ABO 都是耍流氓)”. According to the search results for Draco/Harry ABO on Lofter, the most viewed novel is *My faith* (threezer, Lofter) where the author states directly in the profile that “Please fasten your seat belt before reading the article, I am driving for the sake of driving(看文前请系好安全带, 本司机为开车而开车)”, the term ‘driving’ in online language refers to engaging in topics involving sex and pornography, the elements that can be seen from the profile are pornography, rape and bundling.

In this fanfiction, Harry as an omega seems to be at the most vulnerable during the ‘rut’, whereas Draco as an Alpha remains decent and takes control of the omega’s lust from a superior position, with the symbol of the inhibitor in particular pushes the contrast in physical control to the extreme.

The 'heat and rut' connect to the second wave of feminist dystopia (Atayurt, 2014), where anxieties about the body and loss of control over it are a recurring source of conflict. And so, to avoid anxiety about being an active participant in sex, Harry's loss of control was blamed on the biology of the omega. Under such circumstance, all agency and responsibility of Omega's sexual desire are stripped away from the Omega and instead placed on the Alpha under such circumstance. This is in fact a dilemma, as Omega indulges in a physical sex that cannot be rationally controlled on the one hand, and on the other hand is clearly and rationally aware of the oppression imposed by class and gender hierarchies, but the result is a purely physiological mating process driven by the pheromones of abstracted rationality, whereby the omega does not have to suffer the 'slut-shaming' that comes with active courtship in the CP's sexual utopia.

Thus, the existence of the ABO setting actually fundamentally puts the utopia of equality, which early BL-related academic commentary endeavoured to promote, and the the animalistic physical sensuality of female eroticism by forcibly fitting them together, while forcibly pitting the two against each other. Since 1949, Chinese women's social status has significantly improved (Zhao, 2013). However, some worry that gender inequality is still prevalent in contemporary China (Evans, 1997; Hewitt, 2008), and even more violently than before (Fincher, 2023). Obviously, in a patriarchal society, female sexual desire is still governed by discourse dominated by men. Consequently, the series of physiological settings of the ABO worldview profoundly reflects the anxiety of Chinese female fan writers when confronted with sexual pleasure and sexual consent, as women are unable to fully vocalise their need for sex in a sexually conservative society, they take advantage of Omega's difficult-to-restrain physiological characteristics to transfer this sexual pressure to physiological factors, and even more so, through the intention of the inhibitor to have no scruples about handing over the right to initiate and control sex to Alpha, thus, completely setting aside their own desires.

Overall, the above three settings of the ABO worldview respond to the different ways in which CP fans think about world-building: firstly, signalled by omega's struggle for rights, transforming the real unequal gender rights through the portrayal of independent omegas and alphas capable of respecting them; second, marked by the CP consisting of 'female alpha x male omega', which overthrows stereotypes towards gender identities and expresses women's desire for power through the reshaping of male and female sexuality, and, third, by deflecting women's sexual anxiety

through the objective presence of inhibitors in the sexual behaviours of alpha and omega. All three kinds of feedback are ultimately fans' efforts to use CP to examine and transform the operating mechanisms of the society in which they live.

In particular, the gender equality constructed by CP fans in the ABO world aligns with their conception of a realistic model of intimacy. According to *Question 16: What does your ideal intimate relationship look like* (see Table 8), the highest percentage of fans for the ideal intimate relationship is 28.57% for 'equality and respect'.

**Table 8 CP fans' Ideal Intimate Relationship**

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No desire or need for intimate relationships	21	16.67%	16.67%
In need of each other but independent from each other	5	3.97%	20.63%
Supporting each other to progress together	15	11.90%	32.54%
Alignment of values	11	8.73%	41.27%
Trust	7	5.56%	46.83%
inclusiveness	5	3.97%	50.79%
Peaceful	2	1.59%	52.38%
Equality and respect	36	28.57%	80.95%
Love is the only condition	10	7.94%	88.89%
The man spoils the woman	1	0.79%	89.68%
Spiritual compatibility	9	7.14%	96.83%
freedom	4	3.17%	100.00%
Total	126	100.0%	

Therefore, when CP fans construct the ABO worldview setting based on their own life experiences, the meaning of the interpreted gender-power mechanism is not innate, but rather a '2.5-dimensional world' that is both connected to and distant from reality.

### **3.3 Reasons for CP fans' emphasis on 'worldview settings'**

The reason why the emphasis on worldview setting appears in 'setting supremacy' is threefold. The first reason is the situation of postmodern culture. Realism is undoubtedly the most efficient

narrative method when the grand narrative is working well, but once the creator is in an era when the grand meaning is gradually disintegrating, and the author and the reader no longer share a common reality, the solidity, absoluteness, and communality of the world structure based on realism is disappearing, thus leading to the birth of the '2.5-dimensional worldview setting', which serves as a system of vicarious communality to support the virtual intimacy of the CP.

This results in a second reason, namely, a generational turnover within the fandom. The formulation of cultural perceptions of CP fans as Generation Z and Generation Y accompanied by the gradually deepening influence of postmodernism in the Chinese cultural sphere. This not only means that the collapse of grand narratives has made CP fans less concerned about the narrative nature of fan fiction, it also means that CP fans are eager to show their unique literary demands and aesthetic preferences that distinguish them from the post-80s and post-90s who are the predecessors of fan culture.

The third reason is the educational mechanism of the only-child-policy. In the real context, the social requirements and value judgments for women are divided into two distinct parts in their life course, in school, they are expected to demonstrate academic competence that is not inferior to that of men; and when they start out in society, they are expected to demonstrate femininity like traditional women in order to take on the responsibility of caring for the family and raising children. Segregated existential experiences and gender education have given this generation of female fans a willingness to blur the lines between male and female literature, and they have begun to focus on issues of worldview architecture that are perceived to be of concern to male writers.

These three reasons are doomed to CP fans' inspiration for worldview setting comes from the construction of the real world but not a complete reproduction of reality, it is a positive reflection and transformation of the real imperfect gender-rights mechanism. Thus, the worldview setting is essentially a process of negotiation used by CP fans to negotiate the inequalities between men and women regarding the exchange of society, capital, culture, and rights, so as to achieve a balance between the crossing of the real social order and the communication of love in the virtual worlds constructed in CP fanfiction.

#### **4. Setting related to gender transformation — 'Male Mother'**

The emergence of the '2.5-dimensional setting database' was developed by CP fans based on the socio-cultural context in which they live, and its local attributes can be well illustrated especially by settings such as male mothers that make a switch in both the gender and social identity of their

characters. According to the descriptive analysis of *Question 20 — Please give your ‘acceptance index’ for the following 16 settings* (see Table 9), ‘male mother’ (mean = 2.630) is a popular setting among CP fans that makes changes to CP’s gender.

**Table 9 Acceptance of Different Settings**

Items	N of samples	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median
AU	135	-3.000	5.000	3.563	1.375	4.000
Female/female CP	135	-3.000	5.000	3.541	1.354	3.000
Bad Ending	135	-3.000	5.000	3.193	1.406	3.000
Bi-directional top/bottom	135	-3.000	5.000	3.156	1.486	3.000
Female top	135	-3.000	5.000	3.133	1.413	3.000
CP have a sexual relationship with another person	135	-3.000	5.000	2.815	1.345	3.000
Gender Switch	135	-3.000	5.000	2.756	1.395	3.000
Androgyne	135	-3.000	5.000	2.748	1.434	3.000
Forced Sexuality	135	-3.000	5.000	2.674	1.475	3.000
Male Mother	135	-3.000	5.000	2.630	1.386	3.000
Reversed top/bottom	135	-3.000	5.000	2.607	1.288	3.000
NTR	135	-3.000	5.000	2.163	1.311	2.000
Split CP	135	-3.000	5.000	2.096	1.171	2.000
Abusive top/Abused bottom	135	-3.000	5.000	2.067	1.339	2.000
Feminine/Weakly bottom	135	-3.000	5.000	1.904	1.263	2.000
OOC	135	-3.000	5.000	1.904	1.286	2.000

As a result of the male-female gender swap, ‘male mother’ can actually be found in other similar genres of literature, Turner (2018) points out that female fans of BL manga fans in Japan, due to the constraints placed on gender roles in patriarchal societies, create and occupy an ambiguous male

subjectivity, exploring gender identities without negatively affecting their real identities, similarly, a typical example of this ambiguous (McHarry, 2011) subjectivity in Western slash is a male character but with female body, sometimes even with female reproductive organs known as ‘mpreg (male pregnancy)’ (Bauwens-Sugimoto, 2011). However, the use of male mothers in CP fan culture is not just a shift in gender and sexuality; CP fans consider it more important to shift the social identity of the character, and thus it implies a reflection on specific local socio-cultural contexts.

Literally, the concept of ‘male mother’<sup>21</sup>, close to ‘male omega’ in the ABO world setting, it is used to describe a male who embodies a strong maternal nature in all respects, and sometimes used as a substitute for ‘Dammy (Daddy + Mammy = Dammy)’, and fans use it as a positive term. In terms of personal setting, male mother can be described as gentle, virtuous, and full of maternal glory, with a sense of the wife in traditional gender politics. Regarding interpersonal relationships, the interpersonal relationships that ‘male mother’ establishes with others are anomalous to the perceived father-son/father-daughter relationship, but instead form mother-son/mother-daughter interactive behaviours. Therefore, there are two main aspects that make ‘male mother’ a popular gender-switching setting; firstly, it is related to CP fans’ reflections on real-world fatherhood and motherhood, and secondly, it is the contrast that the male mother’s personal setting carries that inspires a strong affection and closeness to the character among the fans.

#### **4.1 The re-imagining of fatherhood**

The most famous male mother in the entire HP and FB CP fanbase is undoubtedly Newt Scamander, as the protagonist of *Fantastic Beasts*, Newt is known to CP fans as a male mother for his gentle and patient parenting of the fantastic beasts, as well as his ability to soothe his captive critters with the mantra “Mummy’s here”, all of which makes Newt look like a mother caring for her children.

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<sup>21</sup> Male Mother: it is originated in the e-sports fandom, where female fans of male players flocked to live competitions and started sending the bullet chat of “baby, mum loves you” to their favourite players, and soon clashed with other male fans, so in order to satirise this behaviour many male fans also brushed up on their “mum loves you”, and their “male mother” identity was discovered so there was a slogan saying “boycott male mother(不要男妈妈)”. Under the deconstruction of the Internet, part of the lexical meaning of “male mother” has been transformed by fan culture into a male with a maternal glow.

Newt's personal setting of male mother has led to him, and his brother Theseus Scamander being formed into the 'thesewt CP', and in their CP fanfiction, a creature (like Niffler, or Qilin) is bound to appear to act as the child in their intimate relationship.



*(Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them)*

For Chinese CP fangirls, the breakthrough and attractiveness of the 'male mother' stems first and foremost from fans' imagination of fatherhood, it is a psychological self-compensation for the lack of a gentle father from early childhood. In traditional Chinese family roles, 'a stern father and a compassionate mother' is a common portrayal of parents, fathers tend to be serious, masculine and symbolise the majesty of the family, while mothers are submissive, gentle, and kind. Guided by the traditional ideology of 'men dominating the outside world (a secular space outside the home) and women dominating the inside world (home)', the responsibilities of fathers and mothers have been clearly delineated as fathers are the breadwinners and authorities, while mothers are the ones who raise and care for the children, that is to say, being close to the children is not a responsibility, or at least not a primary one, that Chinese fathers are thought to fulfil. In the long run, children may develop a psychological lack of fatherly love and find it difficult to establish a good relationship with their fathers.

Excerpt edited from a short CP fanfiction about the CP Theseus Scamander/ Newt Scamander published by user 逃离 dusk:



*“Newt found a badly injured baby unicorn and took it home, he took good care of it and slept with it and Theseus in the same bed at night. After a long period of attentive care, the unicorn has already taken Newt as its mother and used to sleep in his arms.”*

Newt’s gentle, patient qualities allow the unicorn, who is acting as a child in this fanfiction, to think of him as a mother, which is a significant departure from the traditional Chinese father figure, and the message that fans are sending by presenting these qualities in the male role of Newt (who would normally be the father) is a re-imagining of fatherhood. Thus, the appearance of ‘male mother’ is to a certain extent not related to the pursuit of the ideal intimacy but implies the fans’ imagination of a gentle and caring father in their daughterhood, concealing a kind of expectation of a father that they are ashamed to talk about after a long time of not being satisfied as an adult.

#### **4.2 Re-conceptualisation of motherhood**

And the ‘male mother’ is a ‘mother’ because of the presence of the ‘child’, this is the second attraction set by the male mother. The child in this context is not necessarily an entity, or even close to the traditional concept of a child, such as the fantastic beasts raised by Newt, but rather is transformed into an abstract, inescapable, constraining presence for ‘male mother’. By transferring these social roles and responsibilities which are imposed on women in real society, to a male character, CP fans express their questioning of the notion of ‘natural motherhood’, therefore, “male mother” implies CP fans’ re-imagining of motherhood.

In CP fanfiction *From Confessions to Love* (Akita, Lofter), Newt and his brother Theseus have drunken sex in the old Scamander house, but in order to secure the Scamander family’s status of, Theseus chooses to marry Rita, and Newt goes to London alone to find a friend so as not to affect his brother by concealing his pregnancy. Newt realised that he had lost his magic because of the pregnancy, given the choice between aborting and holding on to his magic or keeping the baby and losing it, Newt chooses the latter and plans to raise the baby alone.

In terms of plot, this is an uninspired romantic novel, but the point of the piece is to give a clear statement of Newt’s dual identity as “a man, but a mother”. The author writes after Newt has successfully given birth to her baby: *The doctor said, “All is well with the baby’s father, and I have to say he is very brave.”* But then the author writes, *“Merlin, I’m going to be an 姑姑(Sisters of the Father) ! ... Sober up, Tina. tom obviously called you 姨姨(Sisters of the Mother), Queenie said in a slightly scolding way.*

In English expressions, both ‘the sisters of the father’ and ‘the sisters of the mother’ are referred to as ‘aunt’, but in Chinese they are called by two different names, ‘姑姑(Gugu)’ being the father’s sister and the mother’s sister being called ‘姨姨(Yiyi)’. Through the doctor’s mouth, the author first reminds the reader of the existence of Newt as a man, and through Queenie and Tina’s argument, highlights Newt’s social identity as the female role in his relationship with his brother, and as a ‘mother’ through the birth of a child. This is the significance of the personal setting of ‘male mother’, the duality of the social identity of ‘mother’ and the male gender identity. So why do CP fans have to make a man take on the role or responsibility of motherhood, this in fact implies an aversion and rebellion against the notion of the ‘natural motherhood’ imposed on women.

Patriarchal societies used the biological fact that women were capable of reproduction and breastfeeding as an excuse to impose a social maternity and a series of attendant oppressions on women, in the name of ‘nature’ they believe that women have no choice but to become mothers (McMahon, 1995; Meyers, 2001). But neoliberal and post-feminist launched a strong counter-attack against the ‘woman = mother’ dialectic, Nancy Chodorow (1999) arguing that social physiology fosters the habit of rationalising inequality and oppression in terms of biological gender or racial concepts, and that treating motherhood as a natural fact can obscure the historical oppression of women in male-dominated families (Donath, 2015).

Looking at ‘male mother’ from this perspective, first of all, this setting does not obey the image of natural motherhood that is deeply rooted in Chinese Confucianism, and to a certain extent, it has brought into play the ability of young female fans to revolutionise the inherent concepts of gender. Secondly, ‘male mother’ is an outlet created by women to vent their anger in the face of various gender pressures, such as the pressure of childbearing and unequal pay for equal work. Thus, the appearance of ‘male mother’ for CP fans is to shift these motherhood duties defined as rightfully shouldered onto male characters, and to parody the oppression of women’s motherhood by the patriarchal society.

However, Chinese society has many stigmas against childfree women, who are seen as heretics who do not follow biological rules and go against social conventions (Holvick, 2013), this means that it is difficult for women to completely resist the accusations made by the external society and the internal family, or to be fully aware of the problems of this deep-rooted ‘myth of motherhood’. Therefore, although the various feminist movements have accelerated the process of awakening

women's consciousness, yet it is difficult for women to avoid the perception that one party in a relationship must assume the role of a mother and perform the task of procreation. That is, CP fans still need a female to perform the role of mother, despite their own unwillingness to do so without complaint, from the perspective of the CP that consists of a 'top' and a 'bottom' (a top is a person who penetrates, a bottom is who receives penetration during the male homoerotic sexual activity), if this person is not a woman in the traditional sense, then it can only be the 'bottom', i.e. the 'male mother'.

When fan author deliberately emphasises Newt's status as 'wife' in the homoerotic CP and as 'mother' in the household through the difference between 'the sisters of the father' and 'the sisters of the mother', it implies that the consciousness of a clear claim to motherhood still remains. As Lamb and Veith (1986) discovered long ago, in an inherently sexist cultural context, it is difficult for women to write heterosexual romance as equal and unencumbered by dominant cultural discourses and power differentials, the setting that 'male mother' must have a 'child' makes CP fans much less revolutionary, so, for young female CP fans, it is the imperceptible impact of deeply rooted traditional Chinese gender role perceptions on their cultural expression.

#### **4.3 Contrasting 'personal setting'**

In addition to defying the common sense of fatherhood and motherhood, constrained by the contradictions of gender and motherhood also endowed 'male mothers' with a 'contrasting personal setting', precisely because of contrasting personal setting, 'male mother' can distinguish from personal settings of other male characters. In terms of the 'contrasting personal settings' constituted by personal settings, Newt Scamander is set up as a shy, bashful male role with a mild social handicap, but he cares dangerous magical creatures with motherly tenderness and patience; on the other hand, Newt's personal setting has the bravery, composure, and steadiness that mark masculinity, as his act of releasing a curled-up winged demon to attack Grindelwald from behind at an underground station.

At its root, 'contrasting personal settings' still return to the operation of CP fans experimenting with configurations of different personas, where fans use conflicting personal settings to create contrasts, but then assemble them in a character to allow the opposite settings to set each other off, thus giving fans a sense of closeness that they are approaching the character.

Overall, the setting of making transitions in sexual and gender identities represented by the male mother, is a key setting that distinguishes the 2.5-dimensional setting database from the ‘moe element database’, as fans designed a setting such as ‘male mother’ to realise their re-imagining of traditional Chinese fatherhood and motherhood according to the cultural and social contexts in which they live, rather than to evoke ‘sexual impulses’ instead of reflecting on reality, as in the case of ‘moe elements’ in the ‘2-dimensional’ genre that have no connection to the real body. The division of social roles between father and mother remains feudal and male-friendly in a Confucian and patriarchal environment (Evans, 1997; Hewitt, 2008; Chou, 2011), thus, in CP fan culture that operates in setting configurations, CP fangirls devised a way in which they can gaze at male roles with an androgynous gaze by manipulating the gender of the CP, especially the social responsibilities of gender. Which means that on the one hand they need to retain that part of traditional masculinity that they admire (e.g., robustness, toughness); on the other hand, they ascribe to their characters the devotion of women as mothers, to counter the perception of a natural motherhood.

## **5. Reflections on the phenomenon of ‘setting supremacy’**

### **5.1 Defining the ‘sense of CP’ with ‘personal settings’**

Reviewing the statement at the beginning of this chapter - that the sense of CP is a ‘metaphysics’ that is difficult to capture, but the key to defining the sense of CP is the ‘degree of compatibility in the configuration of personal settings’ - after clarifying the connotation of ‘setting supremacy’ and the CP fans’ creation mode of ‘the dynamic 2.5-dimensional settings database’, the sense of CP can be defined as ‘Ji Ban (羁绊)’, i.e., the ‘bond of karma and emotion’. As a term specific to the CP fan culture, the ‘bond of karma and emotion’ exists both between the two parties in a CP and between the CP and CP fans. ‘Ji Ban (bond of karma and emotion)’ in Chinese traditionally has a negative connotation of binding, restraining, or hindering, while in CP fan culture, it is used to denote a precious and positive emotional bond which is difficult to be cut off.

CP fans constantly use CP as a vehicle to arrange and configure various settings to explore intimate relationships, allowing CP to confront the cruelty of the worldview setting with the logic of emotionalism. As the crisis in the worldview setting continues to deepen, the ‘bond of karma and emotion’ between the two parties in the CP is also constantly being threatened and tested, to maintain this bond, which is fragile but cannot be abandoned under extreme circumstances, the CP

must allow the ‘bond of karma and emotion’ to be transformed into a key to stimulate potential. In other words, the CP has to bring into play ‘personal settings’ that can withstand that can withstand the trials, tribulations, and experiences so that they can save the grand world while guarding their private ‘bond of karma and emotion’.

For CP fans, the ‘bond of karma and emotion’ also builds an emotional and fatalistic link between them and the CP. The emotional intensity of such a link is difficult for CP fans to experience in their mediocre third-dimensional lives, in this sense, CP’s bond has a considerable compensatory effect, which can deeply touch many CP fans who are in a lonely era but have strong emotional needs, and thus trigger a wide range of empathy among the entire generation of only-children. Furthermore, for them, the notion of ‘connection of karma and emotion’ may have an ethical value that cannot be ignored. In the aftershocks of interpersonal isolation generated during the epidemic and post-epidemic of COVID-19, people are trapped in the prison of loneliness, and ‘connection of karma and emotion’ precisely means the possibility of breaking out of this state of isolation.

In a nutshell, the direct definition of the ‘sense of CP’ is the ‘emotional and karmic bond’ between the characters, and more importantly, the elements that make up the ‘sense of CP’ are ‘personal settings’ with a degree of suitability. When ‘personal settings’ constitutes the main body of CP, it means that compared to the previous generation of fans, the attention of CP fans has changed from the characters in the story to the CP’s ‘personal setting’, and their fanfic has changed from the supplement/adaptation of the original text to a CP-centric small narrative. Namely, CP fans no longer simply consume the stories narrated given by the meta-texts, but sift through the huge database of ‘2.5-dimensional settings’ to make a collage of suitable settings, and experimenting with the possibilities of a certain setting configuration is the real driving force of CP fans. The production of a variety of setting-based CPs shows that they have completed the shift from ‘story supermacy’ to ‘setting supremacy, which reflects the enthusiasm for de-authoritarian cultural democracy and signals the post-modernity of CP fans.

## **5.2 Negativity of the ‘setting supremacy’**

However, CP fans’ push for ‘setting supremacy’ and reliance on ‘2.5-dimensional settings database’ in their creations can be highly controversial, with concerns directed at their pseudo-equal intimacy on the one hand, and digital intimacy on the other hand. Firstly, the highly gender-power imbalance inherent in the ABO worldview setting does not mean that the inter gender-power order is

extinguished in ABO societies; rather, it is simply shifted from men and women to alpha and omega. Male alpha appears to finally get past respecting male omega's personal will, as well as, female alpha and male omega seem subvert the traditional status of men and women, but, in this case, the alpha's position as the one in power has not disappeared in constructed reality. Whereas, omega may seem to take the place of alpha, or be equal to alpha, but they do not get full equality, nor do they make the oppression disappear, at best, they only make gender oppression spuriously shifted or weakened. Despite all the effort CP fans have put into the design of the worldview, it has not reversed the gender inequality behind gender oppression.

Secondly, 'setting supremacy' portrays CP fans' expectation of an ideal intimate relationship, but this kind of intimacy is characterised by the absence of physical contact, and therefore belongs to digital intimacy. Digital intimacy is an influential social trend since 'late modernity', which refers to the fact that after entering the digital age, intimacy mediated and bonded by digitisation has begun to replace real intimacy in the lives of contemporary people (Chambers, 2013). Therefore, for CP fans, digital intimacy means that they can develop CP culture with the convenience of the Internet and configure various CP settings to act out the imaginary intimate relationships, which makes the field of intimate relationships show unprecedented depth and breadth.

However, in digital intimacy, fans seem to be the masters of CP's intimacy, but in reality, they can only shape the intimacy within the scope allowed by the 2.5-dimensional settings database. If the generation of CP intimacy is completely manipulated by the guidelines of 'setting supremacy', the driving force and the sustaining mechanism behind it are merely digitised abstract settings, and therefore CP intimacy is artificial generative intimacy, then, CP fans are at best an operator or even a bystander, without really participating in the generative movement of intimacy, which results in the anxiety of fans about real intimacy seemingly being alleviated during COVID-19 pandemic (Banerjee & Rao, 2020), but not really resolved.

Furthermore, while fans have the ability to manipulate personal settings to form CPs, the '2.5-dimensional personal setting database' may also limit their creativity. Kacsuk (2021) proposes the hypothesis that characters become increasingly interconnected as they reference each other, so if the theory of the database is correct, characters would become more dependent on previous characters, and as a result, the proportion of new characters with common traits should increase. Based on this present research's observation of the phenomenon of 'setting supremacy' in the CP

fandom of *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts*, this hypothesis is correct; in fact, CP homogenisation is evident, simply put, CP's 'personal settings' in English-language cultural products can be found in CPs in domestic Chinese media productions, and despite fans' commitment to emphasising the specificity of their favourite CPs, virtually, all personal settings circulate within a database being used repeatedly, and it seems difficult to find innovative 'personal settings'.

## **Chapter Four. 'Setting Supremacy' in CP Fans' Language Cosplay**

In the setting supremacy, the attention of CP fans is shifted not only towards the CP's personal settings and worldview settings, but also towards to the construction of their own personal settings by appropriating the CP's personal settings. Out of admiration and interest in a particular the CP's personal settings, CP fans often use textual language to play the role of CP in closed online social networks exemplified by online language costume-play game (referred to as language cosplay), to carry out interactions and meaning production with personal settings as symbols, and in this virtual socialisation of CP fans, the personal settings have developed into a symbolic system in which the subject and the object are mutually constructed and balanced. Online fandom has the potential to facilitate self-reflection, identity construction among young people, especially for those who struggle with belonging and connectedness in primary (i.e., offline) social environments (Dennis, 2010; Seregina & Schouten, 2017; McInroy & Craig, 2018), and as such, through the use of the CP's personal settings in mediated interactions, CP fan's own personal setting is also gradually manifested, moulded and reconstructed.

### **1. Definition discernment of Language Costume-play Game**

As digital technology has evolved, the focus of many fan communities has shifted from small-scale, word-of-mouth real-life gatherings to online spaces (Cristofari & Guitton, 2017), particularly role-playing events in immersive virtual worlds (Guitton, 2012). In CP fandom a type of online language costume-play game play is similarly captured, it is an anonymous role-playing social game that combines elements of cosplay, fan culture and social interaction, where players use language to take on the role of a character, mimicking the tone of voice and habitual actions of the character being played. Language cosplay as a kind of fan secondary creative activity is different from traditional

cosplay, fanfiction creation, and as a kind of online anonymous interpretation of social it is also different from the traditional anonymous social activities.

Firstly, language cosplay is different from traditional cosplay. For the traditional cosplay, Nicolle Lamerichs (2011) lays out four key elements: “a narrative, a set of clothing, a play or performance before spectators, and a subject or player”, it was also found by Björn-Ole Kamm (2019) in Live-Action Role-Play (LARP) that participants ‘physically’ interacted as characters in a shared story. That is to say, for a specific character, the traditional cosplay that takes place offline is to recreate the character on a ‘physical level’ through the use of series embodied elements. However, language cosplay is text-centred to explore the character’s inner personal setting, and the core parts of the character’s costume and appearance which traditional cosplayers play, are described in words (typed) by language cosplayers.

Although traditional cosplay’s visualisation of the character’s self-representation takes the character out of the plane and makes it 3-dimensional, however, the over-emphasis on visual stimulation may lead to the cosplayers’ dispersive thinking being limited, as well as, the restrictions of objective factors such as the audit of the event venue also make the cosplayers only be able to recreate individual episodes of the original story in the form of fragmentation, which objectively restricts the cosplayer’s dispersive exhibition of personal settings. Language cosplay, however, makes use of the flexibility of the language to meet CP fans’ intense pursuit of personal settings, thereby leaving more room for subjective expression regarding the specific ways of interpreting personal settings. In particular for language cosplay in CP fandom, the player’s roleplay revolves around the CP relationship, which is a completely new, albeit limited, but continuous storyline, rather than a recreation of some brief fragment of the original.

Secondly, online language cosplayers serve a different purpose than offline cosplayers, despite they are all fans of their personal settings. Nicolle Lamerichs (2018) through her study of fan role-playing games for the TV series *Firefly*, found that although role-playing may require elements of productive play, such as dressing up as one’s character, the game itself is characterised by performance rather than creative production. In this respect, language cosplay instead shows fans’ textual creativity, and despite the fact that a cosplay event is often short (usually 1-3 hours), fans still use their imagination during the script discussion phase to create free scripts that are limited only by the players present. Her research further suggests that the focus of offline role-play games



is on characterisation, rather than character development. This means that fans in traditional cosplay emphasise maintaining character values and their character traits when playing characters in new environments, which is very different from how CP fans behave in online language cosplay. For language cosplayers, the important thing is to manipulate the character into the form of CP for the display of the personal setting. Whether or not the character's characteristics are fully maintained is not the most crucial factor in measuring how well a game is completed, but rather whether or not the player's use of the 'personal setting' empowers the character to take on a new lease of life.

Language cosplayers take on the roles of various characters from 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional works in textual interpretations, where they reinterpret some of the classic 'moments' from the original work in a defined story context, but more commonly, they extract the personal settings of the characters and rewrite the new storyline in a dynamic game. Thus, for language cosplayers, the role they play is called a '皮( skin/persona/role)', which can be understood as a layer of artificial skin over the player's body.

Thirdly, the parody of language cosplay is created differs from the manner in which fanfiction is written, in that the completion of the parody is done collaboratively in a kind of word chains. The script of language cosplay falls into the category of collaboration that Goffman (1959, 2016) finds in the theory of the theatre class, where there exists a conspiracy or agreement between the performers. The content of a specific particular performance is discussed collectively by the members and ultimately decided by initiating an in-group vote, where the members discuss the plausibility of the plot, as well as exactly what key characters need to appear and what scenes need to be included in the story to come up with a relatively complete outline of the story.

In addition to this, the plot of language cosplay is much smaller than the fanfiction and do not necessarily strive for structural integrity; it can be ended or paused at any moment by the participants. As a result, the plot of language cosplay is collaborative, provisional, fluid, and ephemeral. Based on this characteristic, the space for language cosplay is not enough for fans to complete a full role-play, but can only be accomplished within an extremely limited small narrative to act out certain typical personal settings of the CP; thus, in essence, language cosplay is a 'personal setting play' accomplished through text.

Overall, the purpose of CP fans' participation in language cosplay is to implement the 'setting supremacy' guideline in another way, and the main thrust of their activities is still the display and playing of personal settings rather than the reduction and literal recreation of the character.

## **2. Research status of language cosplay**

In terms of both development duration and user scale, language cosplay which is active in the QQ virtual chat rooms is a veritable niche fan activity. Meanwhile, the uncountable number of ACGN works still divides the language cosplay community into uncountable small groups, so the whole language cosplay has not yet formed an organised force. As a result, the volume of academic discussion is not the most concerned among all fan activities, and not proportional to the huge potential for academic interpretation.

And there is a gap in English academic output of language cosplay from a CP perspective, this is largely because language cosplay requires researcher expertise and a high degree of engagement in this activity, the cultural space of language cosplay has its own system of agreed rules and rituals, as well as some kind of technical barrier, also requires members to agree on an emotional identity, this clear boundary makes it difficult for the average viewer who is not an avid fan to enter the online activity space of language cosplay, and so objectively limits scholarly output.

The present research analyses the phenomenon of 'setting supremacy' in the creative approach of CP fans and finds that some CP fans participate in language cosplays, thus, enters *Harry Potter* language cosplay Group (108 group members), *Harry Potter* language cosplay interpretation Group (one of the largest language cosplay groups, with 1616 members) and Hogwarts Language Cosplay Group (128 group members) with an aca-fan approach and identity. By interpreting CP fans' cultural practices consisting of interpretive interactions and meaning production in Language Costume-play, the present research for the first time takes language cosplay as an important representation for examining the phenomenon of 'setting supremacy' in CP fan culture.

## **3. 2.5-dimensional language cosplay**

### **3.1 The playing of the '2.5-dimensional personal setting'**

Language cosplay begins with the selection of a '皮 (skin/persona/role)' and join a team, the player is referred to as 'under the skin' or 'ontology'. In language cosplay, the player selects the 'role' to be portrayed and treats it as a skin over the real self in order to find the ideal self as a facsimile. Then, they go on to complete the formation of role relationships, such as CP, 'master and apprentice',

etc. The ability of players to have the ability to perform ‘personal settings’ after being trained in language and behavioural regulations is the key to determining whether or not they can become a member of the language cosplay.

When players enter the theatre of textual performance, they need to learn the language norms and taboos of the language cosplay group. 10 general group rules have been summarized based on an examination of and participation in four language cosplay groups of *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* in order:

1. Change the title and name follow the title format: [Name of Character] + Generation+ Houses of Hogwarts School, for example, [First year] Harry Potter (Gryffindor).
2. When not speaking in character, players need to add a ‘. b’ or ‘/b’ at the end of each sentence (a variation of ‘robot’, which means the player’s own identity).
3. Complete the character selection within 24h refer to the announcement CP wishing wall.
4. It is forbidden to make the character’s words and actions during the language play seriously detract from their original ‘personal setting’.
5. It is forbidden to discuss things involving reality in the group, post emoji, voice messages, and 3-dimensional pictures.
6. It is forbidden to present characters in any of the following three ways: effeminate (娘娘腔, referring to male characters who act too feminine), little white (小白, referring to novices who do not learn properly and have a bad attitude), and Mary Sue (玛丽苏, referring to characters who are so perfect that they do not make sense)
7. Self-created personas should be submitted to the review group within one week with 300+ text drafts, painting will be rejected, self-created personas need to be filled out according to the personal setting form and uploaded to the group album after approval.
8. Please do not maliciously flirt with players who have CP.
9. Discussions of violence and sexually explicit content should be kept in moderation to avoid the banning of language cosplay groups by QQ officials.
10. It is prohibited to disclose the QR code/group number of the group without permission given by group leader or to add people/groups to the group without permission.

All of the rules in this set, except for 9 and 10, which are administrative rules, repeatedly emphasise the authority of ‘skin’, or ‘personal setting’ in language cosplay. And the fan’s awareness of this

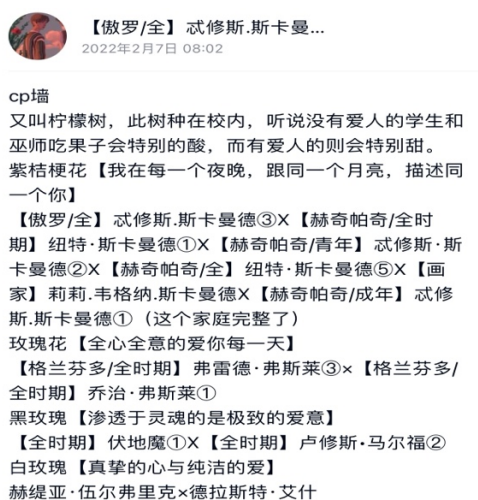
rule is not only achieved by formatting ‘.b’ or ‘/b’, but by using such symbols to announce that the player is entering the space from this moment on as a character, that they are expected to be very aware of the character’s personal setting , also including appearance setting, family background setting, etc., and that all language and verbal behaviour must be in line with the character’s ‘personal setting’.

Goffman (1959) in his conceptualisation of social interaction, suggested that the “as in theatrical performance, there is a front region where the performer takes the stage in front of the audience, where the actor emphasises the positive aspects of the self and the desired impression, there is also a backstage area where individuals can prepare or set aside their roles” (Ritzer, 2008, p. 372). For language cosplay, online chat rooms are virtual theatres where they play their respective roles, or to be precise, retouched roles, in a collaborative manner, and the material for the performances is the ‘personal settings’ of the original characters that have been abstracted from them. For example as a player in a piece of text theatre, my rival actor and other bystanders all commented in sync in another chat group that my personal setting as Riddle was ‘oppressively cute’, while my rival actor’s presentation of Malfoy’s personal setting was positioned as ‘tsundere’, obviously, this comment brought our pairing back to the combination of two sets of conflicting personal settings that CP fans are accustomed to when setting up the personal configurations of CP.

### **3.2 Establishment of inter-player CP relationship**

After players have chosen a ‘skin’ and demonstrated their full understanding of the ‘personal setting’ of their characters and their ability to perform, the multi-layered social relationships (including CP relationships) they establish with other players are the key to whether they can successfully complete language cosplay. Compared with general virtual socialisation and other interest-oriented socialisation, the two phases of ‘identity acquisition’ and ‘relationship establishment’ for language cosplayers have a stronger inherited relationship and intrinsic stickiness, and acquiring an identity means acquiring the relationship network attached to the identity. Simply put, CP fans are not only inheriting the personal setting of the CP in language cosplay, but they are also passing on the social relationship and intimacy of the CP to the roleplay. So that in Chapter 3 (see p. 123) the present research points out that ‘sense of CP’ not only exists between the two characters that make up the CP, but also connects the CP with CP fans, and in fact, this ‘bond of karma and emotion’ exist between CP fans.

Forming a CP under the skin of a character is the most common type of relationship, and CPs can refer to either a couple based on roleplaying or relatively regular playmates between players, so the CP relationships performed in language cosplay combine the fictional intimacy of 2-dimensional characters with the interpersonal interactions of 3-dimensional players. Although choosing a character is the first step in language cosplay, what kind of CP relationship players want to form affects their choice of character to play, and as the third rule requires, players need to ‘complete their personal setting choices within 24h, which can be referred to the announcement of the ‘CP Wishing Wall’.



(Figure 7 CP Wishing Wall)

The content of the ‘CP Wishing Wall’ is posted by a language cosplayer playing one of the CPs looking for another language cosplayer who plays the other character in the CP, it provides a range of options for relationship building for every member who enters the language cosplay online group, if there is no suitable player who can form a CP, then the player can submit the CP intention to the administrator, they will consolidate the player’s needs and then post them on the ‘CP wishing wall’. Using the CP wall in Hogwarts Harry Potter language cosplay group as an example photo, the person’s name to the left of the ‘X’ symbol represents the character the player is playing as top, and to the right as bottom. Using the CP wall in Hogwarts Harry Potter language cosplay group as an example photo, the person’s name to the left of the ‘X’ symbol represents the character the player is playing as top, and to the right as bottom.

The ‘bond of karma and emotion’ is the access point of CP fans’ ‘virtual presence’ in language cosplay, which brings them not only psychological immersion, but also temporal and spatial immersion, thus, allowing the player to obtain a simulated illusion of CP intimacy on screen by

creating a hyper-realistic ‘tele-existence’ in the form of words. In Sartre (1956)’s view, the body is the basis and condition of love and desire, but in language cosplay the absence of the construction of the CP relationship between the players is signalled by ‘disembodiment’, whereas the real objects that play a role in enabling the CP relationship to be established are the various ‘2.5-dimensional personal settings’. Therefore, the ‘bond of karma and emotion’ of inter-player CP is numerical, and this kind of textual CP is essentially a return to the ‘setting supremacy’ mode of operation. That is to say, it is a system of ‘personal setting input and CP output’ with a set of neat, precise and controllable universal scale, and as long as the players have mastered the ability of recognising and using the personal settings, they can present a desirable CP relationship in the name of their characters.

For language cosplayers, the process of playing CPs allowed them to become CPs to experience CP interactions and to create persuasive emotional bonds guided by ‘setting supremacy’, with the presentation of virtual CP relationships and the establishment of inter-player CP relationships occurring in an overlapping manner. In the literal role-playing of dual CP relationships formed by fans manipulating their own understanding of the CP’s 2.5-dimensional personal settings, they are well aware that the technical core of determining whether there is a ‘sense of CP’ between the two characters they play is the effective collision of ‘personal settings’.

### **3.3 Gamification of the 2.5-dimensional worldview setting**

Players in language cosplay experience and form virtual CP relationships in addition to relying on character’s 2.5-dimensional personal settings, while also building a 2.5-dimensional worldview in a scenario that is in flux and cannot be revisited. Most fan-made language cosplayers are extremely resistant to content involving the real world, especially CP fans of English-language cultural products who do not talk about things related to the real actors in their language cosplay groups. However, in the process of real language cosplay, this apparent division between reality and fantasy is questionable, for example, participants would greet each other as characters for a real-world holiday, as ‘Happy Mid-Autumn Festival/b’, which in itself is an occurrence of the overlap between virtual and real space.

Each language cosplay online group normally has a scheduled time for the event, before the launch of language cosplay, the group leader will summarise the theme and world setting of the game based on the results of the group’s discussion, and then initiate a vote in the group to decide on the

alternative universe and theme with the highest support rate for the event. Common game rules include ABO, fursona (furry setting), and 'What If', etc. Either of these worldviews needs to be refined by the players as the language game progresses, in real time, and is therefore a collective work in progress. Either of these worldviews needs to be refined by the players collaboratively in real time as the language game progresses, so it is a kind of relay collective creation (Cruz et al., 2021; Jenkins, 2004). Therefore, subject to different players' specific understanding of a particular worldview, language cosplay's worldview settings are highly open-ended and unstable, with the 'What If' worldview settings in particular reflecting this the most.

The worldview setting structured by 'What If' is a combination of the original base and the original characters, where the original characters can persuade the original characters and then the original characters can have new choices. Referring to the manifesto of a language cosplay group built on *Harry Potter*: (this) group is divided into two parts, the player's original and the author's original; in the player's original worldview, you (the player) will put on the sorting hat and start your life at Hogwarts, and you can choose your favourite job in your adulthood; whereas in the author's original worldview, you will have a new life that differs from the one that has been fixed, perhaps under the persuasion of some new friends. Players can choose to place their characters in any of the worldviews, and then come together to enact a textual drama within a merged 'What If' worldview. In this case, the context of the language cosplay, i.e., the worldview setting of a particular scene, constitutes a kind of mirror world that is both real and unreal.

In other words, for language cosplayers, the boundary between the imaginary and the real has begun to loosen, and the two heterogeneous spaces, cyberspace and physical space, are able to overlap or become entangled with each other, while players are able to get rid of the limitations of the mono-dimensional worldview and travel freely between the 'carbon-based world' and 'cyberspace' through the interface in the language cosplay. In short, the CP relationship between players is established in the 2.5-dimensional space, and the worldview setting of the language cosplay also has obvious 2.5-dimensional attributes.

#### **4. CP fans' sense of detachment in 2.5-dimensional language cosplay**

Online language cosplay allows players to use multiple personal settings to form multiple CP relationships. However, as a manifestation of 'setting supremacy' in CP fan culture working in the other direction, there are similar pitfalls, including exacerbating the confusion of self-perceptions

of young CP players and, the pseudo-digital intimacy experienced by CP fans in inter-player CP relationships. This is a common problem in games where female fans play male characters, Amal et al. (2021) saw on social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, etc.) that BL fans find a partner based on the desired idol pairing when they play as a male Korean-pop idol and usually date through the timeline, however, this is not really a relationship, but rather a relationship status between role players given that one of the rules of roleplaying is that the player must hide their identity.

#### **4.1 Contradictions in CP play and self-perception**

For those players in 2.5-dimensional language cosplay, they construct and refine their ‘personal settings’ by stealing and transcoding media texts through online role-playing, but such personal setting performances are ephemeral because the performance is supported by randomly-created and fleeting texts as well as by its adoption of specific plots in specific ‘situations (worldview setting)’. Moreover, language cosplay places great emphasis on the ‘sense of immersion’ and ‘realism in personal settings’, so younger players may have confusion about their own personal settings.

First of all, language cosplayers’ performances of their personal settings can occur in multiple ways simultaneously, which makes their self-identification path of ‘consuming the CP’s personal settings and positioning the self’s personal settings’ is not a single-line occurrence, but has a mixed, co-temporal, and multiple nature. Therefore, almost every player has experienced confusion and disorientation between ‘multiple personal setting’ and ‘single ontology’.

This fragmentation is secondarily manifested in the gender inversion of the language cosplayers. Language cosplayers are predominantly female, continuing using the ‘*Harry Potter* Language Cosplay Interpretation Group’ as an example, the total number of members in its group is 1616, the ratio of male to female is 39%: 58%, the other 3% members’ gender is unknown. But under the shuttle of ontology and multiple shells of character, the boundaries between males and females break away, there are a large proportion of these players have a penchant for homoerotic male CPs, by choosing a male character they prefer and playing him, then agreeing with the other participant to form a CP, thus creates the potential for the female CP fans to experience self-fulfilment through the double transition of gender and the thrill of a spiritual love affair. Moreover, their communication while playing male/male CPs may involves sexual topics, combined with a strong sense of group isolation and group affiliation, their perceptions of their gender identity, gender



attitudes and sexual orientation may be in disarray, with the extremes even manifesting in gender inversion and self-loathing.

#### **4.2 The discrepancy between the virtual CP relationship and the real emotional engagement**

Language cosplay helps fans acquire diverse social experiences and preview multi-level social relationships, but unstable CP relationships point to concerns about pseudo-intimacy, whose potential crisis manifests itself as a misalignment of emotional distance with actual distance.

During the participation and observation, it can be found that players almost always joined multiple language groups, choosing different 'skins(roles)' depending on their persona preferences and CPs, this results in a 'role-set', there is theoretically no limit to the simultaneous playing of such multiple CP relationships. But this kind of open-ended multiple CP relationship network determines that the emotions of language cosplay's fanbase present the characteristics of 'short, multiple, and fast', and there is a time interval.

In order to maintain CP relationship, language cosplayers may be caught in the pain of constantly befriending new players but not being able to engage in sustainable, in-depth communication. However, when transient psychological satisfaction is replaced by the loss of a long-lasting relationship, players often experience a double crisis of relationship and emotion. For example, I joined a Harry Potter language cosplay group in the summer holiday, playing as Tom Riddle, and formed a CP with another player playing as Malfoy, and when I logged in again in less than a week, I had already been removed by the administrators from the group because of missing an event, and the leader of this group was the my rival player who had originally formed a CP relationship with me.

Thus, this inter-player 'bond of karma and emotion' uses the virtual presence of the player as an access point. When the bystander's perspective of CP's love becomes the first-person perspective in the CP-playing game, allowing the player's virtual gaze to merge with the embodied gaze emanating from the player's point of view, at which point the CP fan and the CP share a common set of central nerves, this hyper-realistic CP relationship exacerbates the player's sense of 'presence' and 'immersion'. In other words, the embodied CP relationship infuses the CP player's own nature into the player's dynamic, perceptual, and emotional corporeality, thereby constructing the 'bond of karma and emotion' that virtually intersects between the individual and the character into a

doubly nested and complex structure: the player CP — digital CP relationship — character-derivative CP.

Considering ‘player CP — digital CP relationship’ as a whole, then the player can indeed traverse virtual and real, and construct free multiple virtual CP relationships in the vast and boundless digital world, but if we consider the ‘digital CP relationship — character-derivative CP’ as a whole, then the screen of the mobile digital terminal always stretches between the player’s physical body and the digital body, and once the player quits the language cosplay for various reasons, the connection between the player’s physical body and the digital CP relationship is blocked. Therefore, to maintain a certain CP relationship, young players who are keen on playing CPs in language cosplays keep travelling in various language cosplay online groups, and searching for a flattened, typecast CP after choosing their favourite personal settings like ‘nomads’. This ultimately led to the eventual abstraction and disembodiment of the CP relationship between players, thus proving that language cosplay is still essentially a ‘database-consuming’ behaviour of CP fans.

In summary, based on the game rules and player interactions of language cosplay, the present research argues that language cosplay is the gamification of a ‘2.5-dimensional database’, which is a typical fan behaviour that unites consumers of ‘personal settings’ and CP producers. In this virtual theatre, CP fans produce miniature texts about CPs by relaying together to build a worldview setting situated in the 2.5-dimensional space. Subsequently they can manipulate 2.5-dimensional personal settings to form CP relationships, which, again, not only play off the original CPs, but also establish CP relationships between players.

## **Chapter Five. CP Fans of English-language Cultural Products**

Analysing CP fandom holistically does bring to the surface the problems that are prevalent in this culture, but ignoring the fact of audience segmentation within CP fandom, as well as avoiding the intersection of globalisation and localisation that is at the root of CP culture, can lead to a mistake of interpreting the culture in terms of a homogeneous nationalism, which results in the CP fandom of the English language cultural productions being encompassed in the wider Chinese CP fandom in its entirety, which also undermines the possibility of attending to its cultural specificity. At the same time, the CP-ised decoding and reconstruction of *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* by

Chinese fans is a kind of cross-cultural imagination, which results in neither cultural misinterpretation as criticised by fans of the originals who hold themselves to be orthodox, nor the self-perceived superiority of fans of the CP of English-language cultural products who can ‘despise’ other CP fandoms. Both stereotypes, if not analysed in detail, may increase misinterpretation of the intercultural CP fandom.

Therefore, the question of ‘why are some CP fans attracted to CPs from English-language cultural products instead of CPs from native cultural products’ requires a comprehensive analysis according to the three aspects that make up fan culture. First of all, it needs to be developed based on the fact that CP fans of English-language cultural products have compartmentalised perceptions of their own fan identities, and then it needs to be followed by the differences in the rules of operation between the CP fandom of English-language cultural products and that of local Chinese cultural products, and the third aspect is the differences in the implementation of the common practice of dividing a clear ‘top/bottom’ order between two parties in a CP by the two fandoms.

### **1. Intercultural CP imagination**

In trying to clarify the validity of the assumption that there is a specificity to fans of English-language cultural products, the results of *Question 23— Do you prefer CP fandom for English-language cultural products to CP fandom for Chinese-language cultural products* (see Table 10), show that ‘Yes, the genre of English-language cultural products fits my imagination and affection for Euro-American culture’ (N = 30, 22.22%) is one of the reasons why some fans prefer to be active in the CP fandom of English cultural product rather than join in the CP fandom of Chinese cultural product. This reason suggests that there are indeed peculiarities in the CP of English-language cultural products, and it also intuitively explained that the coupling activity of CP fans of *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* is an intercultural imagination initiated by the CP fandom of English-cultural products as an ‘imaginary community’ to another cultural community.

**Table 10 Preference for CP Fandoms of English-language Cultural Products**

Categories	Response		Popularity rate ( <i>n</i> =135)
	<i>n</i>	Response rate	
Yes, the fandom of English-language cultural products is more inclusive of various settings	53	16.67%	39.26%
Not exactly, I follow a specific CP as a result of my preference for a particular English-language cultural product	47	14.78%	34.81%
Not exclusively, I activate in both fandoms as long as the personal setting or worldview setting fits my preference	46	14.47%	34.07%
Yes, fans within the retirement fandom are mature and sensible, and my fan activity is not restricted	43	13.52%	31.85%
Yes, the personal setting and worldviews in the fan creations of English-language cultural products are more imaginative than the common depictions in Chinese fandom	41	12.89%	30.37%
Yes, fans of English-language cultural products are more educated, and there are fewer younger fans in this fandom	31	9.75%	22.96%
Yes, the genre of English-language cultural products fits my imagination and affection for Euro-American culture	30	9.43%	22.22%
Yes, fans of English-language cultural products can distinguish between role-based CP and real-person CP	22	6.92%	16.30%
No, I only occasionally follow CP within English-language cultural products for language learning or social needs	5	1.57%	3.70%
Total	318	100%	235.56%

Goodness of fit:  $\chi^2=50.887$   $p=0.000$

The cultural phenomenon of CP fans interpreting Harry Potter and Fantastic Beasts as CP-ised small narratives demonstrates a typical imaginative act in intercultural communication. Intercultural

communication is the contact between individuals who have various cultural views and symbol systems, according to Mayer et al. (2021), then intercultural coupling is the localised understanding of the original text by Chinese fans who play on their intercultural imagination of English culture. This imagination is not essentially a reflection of the nature of the culture being imagined, but of the imaginer's own experience and cultural background, the process of interpretation is therefore inseparable from the interpreter's own social and cultural context.

A further result is that there is a certain degree of 'decoding plurality' of characters and texts within different cultures. Schmid and Klimmt (2011) take *Harry Potter* as an example claim that readers' internal representations of Harry Potter's traits, or how they describe Harry Potter as a person, may vary depending on their cultural background. And this decoding difference for Chinese CP fandom manifests itself in the form of dismantling the characters in *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* into various personal settings and then assembling CPs according to their own cultural frames of reference. This way of CP-ised interpretation may appear to be a cultural misinterpretation to those outside the CP fandom, and indeed, given that an individual's cultural frame of reference is the standard by which other cultures are compared and evaluated, it may lead to a tendency to unconscious misinterpretation in the assumptions made about other cultures (Schein, 2020; Klopff & Park, 1982; Masliyah, 1999). In fact, however, what can be observed in CP-ised interpretations of intercultural texts by CP fans is a 'deliberate' rather than an 'unconscious' misinterpretation, i.e., they intentionally interpret the meanings and characters of *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* as personal settings according to '2.5-dimensional settings database' to satisfy their preferences, and this deliberate intercultural misinterpretation contributes to the production of new cultural forms.

However, it must be pointed out that the CP-ised imagery of Chinese CP fans in dealing with intercultural texts does not always have a positive impact on cultural exchanges. Some CP fans of English-language cultural products draw a clear line between themselves and CP fans of Chinese cultural products, and they hold a certain degree of 'contempt' for CP fans of local Chinese culture, the former always revel in the sense of superiority that comes from being an audience with 'higher tastes', and with their self-perceived superiority they defy or dissolve the significance of the existence of fans who prefer local CP culture. According to Gray (2021), aversion can be a manifestation of identity and show the superiority of fans based on their identity; as a result, this rejectionist attitude of some CP fans of English-language cultural products towards 'object cultures'

that are different from their own is related to some degree of elitism, and is a kind of misinterpretation of film and television art from other cultural backgrounds based on the absolute criterion presented by their customised aesthetics, thus, this kind of condescending accusation of other cultures and fan groups deepens to a certain extent the cultural differences within the same nation.

Vice versa, fans within the local Chinese cultural scene also have numerous negative perceptions of CP fans of English-language cultural products, according to a chi-square goodness-of-fit test of *Question 25 — Have you ever been criticized while showing a high level of commitment to CP of English-language cultural products* (see Table 11), CP fans of English-language cultural products are considered as ‘fans who pretend to be niche and noble and despise local CPs’ (N = 3, 24.44%) by fans of indigenous cultural products.

**Table 11 Criticisms Received when Being a CP fan of English-language Cultural Products**

Categories	Response		Popularity rate (n=135)
	n	Response rate	
Never been criticized	56	26.92%	41.48%
Fans who have no respect for the originals and coupling to satisfy their personal preferences	36	17.31%	26.67%
Fans who pretend to be niche and noble and despise local CPs	33	15.87%	24.44%
Fans who are not concerned with the interests of the country or even unpatriotic	30	14.42%	22.22%
Love-struck fans who are ignorant and egoless	20	9.62%	14.81%
Fans without a bottom line and moral integrity	20	9.62%	14.81%
Quirky, withdrawn, socially inept fans	13	6.25%	9.63%
Total	208	100%	154.07%

Goodness of fit:  $X^2=40.702$   $p=0.000$

Mutual disdain and misunderstanding among CP fandom are inevitable results following the segmentation of CP fans, and as Ashton & Gowland-Pryde (2019) point out, arts segmentation provides the possibility of understanding the identity of a changing audience, but exclusion as an

integral and unavoidable result of audience segmentation. Therefore, no matter whether the CP-ised interpretation of English-language cultural products is as a positive attempt at intercultural imagination or a relatively negative cultural misinterpretation, it is a pervasive cognitive phenomenon in human intercultural communication, which has limitations that are difficult to circumvent, but more importantly, CP-ised intercultural imagination reflects the positive efforts to approach and reproduce a heterogeneous culture consucted by this group of Chinese youth, and it reflects the imaginers' conception of the ideal cultural characteristics.

## **2. Identity construction of CP fans of English-language cultural products**

### **2.1 Self-superiority of CP fans of English-language cultural products**

According to preference for different CP fandoms (see Table 9), some participants made judgements about the CP fandom of English-language cultural products and the CP fandom of indigenous cultural products around 'fandom characteristics', and they thought they preferred the CP fandom of English-language cultural products because 'it is more inclusive of various settings' (N = 53, 39.26%); or, because this fandom performs like 'a retirement fandom' where the members are 'mature and sensible', and their fan activities would 'not be restricted' (N = 43, 31.85%); or because 'the personal settings and worldview settings in the fan creations of English-language cultural products are more imaginative than the common depictions found in Chinese fandom' (N = 41, 30.37%); as well, they believe that 'fans of English-language cultural products are more educated, and there are fewer younger fans in this fandom' (N = 31, 22.96%). These several judgement criteria of fans' decisions on which CP fandom to join suggest that CP fans of English-language cultural products generally have a differentiated (relative to CP fans of Chinese-language culture) perception of their own fan tastes and collective identity.

In addition, in terms of the overall temperament and cultural style of CP fandom, there are also differences between the CP fandom of English-language cultural products and the CP fandom of Chinese local culture. Based on the results of the frequency analysis about *Question 28— What is distinctly different between the CP of English-language cultural products and the CP of Chinese cultural product?* there is the greatest consensus among CP fans of English-language cultural products (see Table 12) on 'English-language cultural products have more diverse and sexual tension in their CPs' personal settings, while Chinese cultural products have more introverted emotional expressions in their CPs' (N = 31, 51.15%), with regards to the diversity of personal

setting, participant No. 17 thinks that “the Chinese CP fanfic is too rigid, and that the current mainstream CP fanfic accommodates too many popular prohibitions, whereas the English language cultural productions have a less restrictive CP fanfiction”. Besides, they suggest that ‘the various types of fans of English-language cultural products coexist in harmony, while CP fans of Chinese cultural products are younger, less qualified and more prone to conflict’ (N = 16, 92.37%), as well as ‘CP fandom of English-language cultural products have less restrictive, while CP fandom of Chinese cultural products have complicated rules’ (N = 12, 80.15%).

**Table 12 Differences between CP fandom of English-language cultural products and CP fandom of Chinese cultural products**

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No significant difference	19	14.50%	14.50%
CP in English-language cultural products revolve around characters and are less utilitarian, while CP in China’s local culture has obvious traces of artificiality used for profit	17	12.98%	27.48%
CP in English-language cultural products have more diverse and sexual tension, while CP in Chinese cultural products have more introverted emotional expressions	31	23.66%	51.15%
There are more evenly matched CPs within English-language cultural products, while Chinese cultural products have a distinct division between powerful top / weak bottom	10	7.63%	58.78%
Actors playing CPs within English-language cultural products had no significant rejection of the real-person CPs	10	7.63%	66.41%
The popularity of male/female CP and male/male CP for English-language cultural products is close to each other, but male/male is most CP in Chinese cultural products	1	0.76%	67.18%
The personal settings of CPs within English-language cultural products are more masculine	5	3.82%	70.99%



**Table 12 Differences between CP fandom of English-language cultural products and CP fandom of Chinese cultural products**

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
CP fandom of English-language cultural products have less restrictive, while CP fandom of Chinese cultural products have complicated rules	12	9.16%	80.15%
The various types of fans of English-language cultural products coexist in harmony, while CP fans of Chinese cultural products are younger, less qualified, and more prone to conflict	16	12.21%	92.37%
Clear distinction between character-derivative CPs and real-person CPs for English-language cultural products	10	7.63%	100.00%
Total	131	100.0%	

Collectively, CP fans of English-language cultural products have a strong sense of their own identity and therefore do not want to be confused with local Chinese CP fans. They prefer to present themselves as guides and progressors of fan culture, and they see their CP-ised intercultural imaginings of English-language cultural products as promoting a niche and high-quality culture. As well, they believe that they have a more open and tolerant attitude towards the regulations of the CP fandom and the various settings of fan creation than local Chinese CP fans, and they believe that the CP fandom of English-language cultural products has a harmonious and mature atmosphere to get along with each other.

John Fiske pointed out early in 1989 that fandom is characterized by two main activities: ‘discrimination’ and ‘productivity’. These textual discriminations are often homologous of social discrimination, choosing texts is choosing social allegiances, the links between social allegiance and cultural taste are active and explicit in fandom, and the discrimination involved follows criteria of social relevance rather than of aesthetic quality (Fiske, 2010, p. 147). Brower (2002) also states ‘aesthetic quality’ is the central to the interests of the social organization, members usually combine social significance with aesthetics, thus, for CP fans of English-language cultural products, they acquire, refine and consolidate their superior fan identities and social images by engaging in CP

activities within the cultural circles formed by specific cross-cultural texts. Therefore, they are committed to portraying themselves as mature, rational, well-educated CP fans who are detached from low-grade aesthetic interests, to differentiate themselves from the native CP fans who are stereotypical conservative, fanatical, uneducated.

## 2.2 The Neutral Pessimist

During the implementation of aca-fan in the first phase of the present research, a hypothesis was made about CP fans' attitudes towards mainstream culture, i.e., they should adopt a more hostile attitude towards mainstream culture compared to local Chinese CP fans. However, the actual data collected in the second phrase of mixed methods approach did not match this hypothesis, according to a chi-square goodness-of-fit test of *Question 26— Would you like your CP to be recognised by the official or mainstream culture*, there are four different attitudes towards the mainstream (see Table 13).

**Table 13 Attitudes of CP fans of English-language cultural products towards the mainstream**

Categories	Response		Popularity rate (n=135)
	n	Response rate	
Neutral, I want CP culture to be better understood and accepted, but I do not want it to suffer from cultural castration	83	51.55%	61.48%
No, it is unnecessary to keep up with the mainstream culture and should be free to the maximum extent	39	24.22%	28.89%
I do not care about the relationship with mainstream culture, I just want you to admit that my CP is real	27	16.77%	20.00%
Yes, the proximity to mainstream culture provides more exposure for CP culture, encourages fan creativity, and improves the image of CP fans	12	7.45%	8.89%
Total	161	100%	119.26%

Goodness of fit:  $\chi^2=69.634$   $p=0.000$

The first category is unwilling to engage with the dominant culture, 'No, it is unnecessary to keep up with the mainstream culture and should be free to the maximum extent' (N = 39, 28.89%). For

this category of fans, they are perhaps the group that best highlights the pioneering nature of CP fans of English-language cultural products, considering their rejection of all possible cultural emasculation in favour of maintaining the absolute independence of CP culture. Although CP culture's resistance from the moment of its birth in a centralised cultural ecosystem such as China's is devoid of any practical significance, and it is more like a self-protest and revelry of the subculture's fanbase.

The second type of position is a willingness to align with mainstream culture, 'Yes, the proximity to mainstream culture provides more exposure for CP culture, encourages fan creativity, and improves the image of CP fans' (N = 12, 8.89%). This category of fans has a more positive attitude towards official cultural censorship, believing that the gesture of goodwill and cooperation with mainstream culture will help to improve the cultural status of the CP fandom, but this means that the rebellious and resistant attributes of CP culture as a subculture must be sacrificed.

In addition to the above two standpoints, the third position adopted by CP fans of English-language cultural products reveals an attitude of 'indifference' to official and mainstream culture, 'I do not care about the relationship with mainstream culture, I just want you to admit that my CP is real' (N = 27, 20.00%). For example, participant No. 124 expressed that "I do not care about the relationship with the mainstream culture, coupling is supposed to be about pleasing ourselves and satisfying the spiritual world". From this completely isolated position from the mainstream, they could be considered idealists who do not care about, or even abhor, the association of CP with mainstream and secular developments. Participant No.135 bluntly stated "*It's none of my fucking business!*" which seemingly vulgar and outrageous, is indeed indicative of the intense aversion towards mainstream culture that this category of fans holds, but this apparent indifference and vehement dislike of mainstream culture also indicates that they are the pessimists in terms of the CP culture in China.

Surprisingly, however, fans in the last category were the most numerous, i.e., 'Neutral, I want CP culture to be better understood and accepted, but I do not want it to suffer from cultural castration' (N = 83, 61.48%). For fans who maintain a neutral stance on mainstream culture, as what Stanfill (2013) suggests, "fandom is a self-identified community united in and by its rejection of the mainstream". An answer given by participant No. 99 "Govern by doing nothing that goes against nature", is thought-provoking from Chinese philosophical perspective, she believes that the

relationship between CP subculture and mainstream culture is not modified by any individual's willingness because things have their own inevitable and regular development.

Synthesising the four attitudes, it can be found that CP fans of English-language cultural products have a pessimistic and neutral attitude towards mainstream culture, neither close nor distant, in fact, the development of fan culture in China to the present day, the posture is neither advanced nor rebellious, but only as a mirror of the mainstream culture. Participant No. 110 was a CP fan of *Star Trek* at the beginning of slash's rise in China, she believes that "in those days CP fans were pioneers, but now, apart from the content replicating a terrible reality, the form of existence seems to have been co-opted by consumer culture." Indeed, it is hard to deny that Chinese CP culture is gradually losing its pioneering and rebellious subcultural nature, and that the power mechanisms of mainstream CP culture (e.g., the division of top/bottom) as well as the operational mechanisms of Chinese pop culture (e.g., data labour) are also present in the CP fandom of English-language cultural products. As a result, CP fans of English-language cultural products choose to draw a line under the relationship with mainstream Chinese culture, they take a neutral position and to keep a 'respectful distance' with the dominant culture because they are dissatisfied and pessimistic about the current state of cultural development in China as a whole.

### **3. The rules of CP fandom of English-language cultural products**

In the CP culture of English-language cultural products, in addition to the specificity of the identity construction of fans, the rules of fandom are also strikingly unique, which is in fact the fundamental reason that determines CP fans' preference for domestic/international CP fandoms. Among them, especially the fans' attitudes towards real-life CPs are the most representative and complex, as this difference directly leads to whether the dominant cultural approach of CP fans is emotional labour or digital labour.

#### **3.1 Different attitudes in relation to real-person CP fans**

One of the most important criticisms of the subculture is that it often leads to an oversimplified description of a phenomenon that is practically complex by bringing together completely disparate elements (Baldwin & McCracken, 2014, p.325). Therefore, to make a convincing analysis of why Chinese fans favour CPs of English-language cultural products, it is important to note the existence of segmented fandom groups in the CP fandom circle, especially real-person CP fans. Some fans prefer to join in the CP fandom of English-language cultural products for the reason that 'fans of

English-language cultural products can distinguish between role-based CP and real-person CP' (N = 22, 16.30%, see Table 9). Thus, fans' attitudes towards real-person CPs are a key feature that distinguishes CP fans of English-language cultural products from local Chinese CP fans.

Although the coupling of two celebrities (especially the male actors) into an intimate relationship has become an important type of celebrity consumption in contemporary Chinese popular culture (Lin, 2021), and recent research has also found that fans use CP to cover heterosexual and/or homosexual pairings of characters and celebrities (Zhou, 2017), this is still a relatively new research topic, and the terminology throughout the academic field is inconsistent, for example some scholars have directly adopted 'RPS (real-person-slash)' to describe similar pairing practices by Chinese fans (e.g. Tian, 2015; Zhang, 2021). In particular, it is important to note that although RPS in the English-speaking world also refers to fan behaviours featuring male-female romantic and/or erotic relationships between two real people, such as celebrities, actors, and athletes (Thomas, 2014), most fans are well aware that celebrities are real and fictional at the same time, and thus RPS fans are rational, and their RPS creations simply utilise characters created by celebrities (Busse, p. 209; Thomas, 2014). However, Chinese real-person CP fans enjoy both fictional creations and real-world celebrity discussions (Guo, 2022), i.e., their real-person CP fan identity exists simultaneously intertwined with a fondness for both character-derivative CP and real-life CP, and thus Chinese RPS fans have been viewed as pathologically obsessive-compulsive (Gray et al. 2017) with a high degree of emotional and affective engagement with real-life CP.

Examining this difference in the context of '2.5-dimensional setting database', what local Chinese CP fans are addicted to is the 'pseudo-real' personal setting of the celebrities themselves under the packaging of their agencies, which is merged with the personal setting of the character played by the actor. However, for fans who have been assembled on the basis of CPs from English-language cultural products, there is a degree of sober differentiation between the personas of the actors themselves and the personas of the CPs. This is a very important distinction between the two CP fandoms, and it directly leads to which fandom that CP fans prefer to join.

Zhang Ming's research (2021) on real-person CP points out that there is an ambivalent approach to RPS fans in China. On the one side, fans are self-consciously aware of the boundary between reality and their imaginary fantasies in the digital era through employing hashtags and disclaimers that highlight the fictional nature of RPS and practicing the most authoritative fandom rules, "keep the

fantasy within a circle, do not disturb the real idol”; on the other side, they are keen to find ‘proof’ of the intimacy between the two actors as a real CP in their social media posts, interviews and shows, and to repost it on public social media. This paradoxical practice of real-life CP fans is, according to Piper (2015, p. 3.3), “the process of presenting a part of a celebrity’s known public existence alongside fantasies about the celebrity’s private self.”

This ambiguous identity exposes real-person CP fans to even stronger accusations that their actions have led to the over-objectification of real people (McGee 2005). In other words, linking these two categories into a whole allows real-person CPs to be perceived as a doppelganger of the character-derivative CP they play and, in turn, the real doppelganger’s real-life social behaviours and social relationships give the character-derivative CP subtextual content that goes beyond the original text, in a way that makes real-person CPs morally ambiguous (Adeoluwa & Stroud, 2018; Riley 2018), and also makes their passions pathological.

In the case of Fred Weasley/George Weasley, which is controversial in *Harry Potter*’s CP fandom, some fans at CP Super Topic have made products to sell using photos of the real-life actors, which has been strongly criticised by other CP fans, they believe that taking photos of real people to make profitable peripherals is a completely legally-unaware act. Also, given that the two characters in the CP are brothers in both the 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional worlds, those fans who love the real-life CP have also made it unacceptable to some other CP fans, who believe that forbidden homoerotic relationships between brothers in life is immoral, conversely, it is acceptable if such a relationship occurs in a fictional CP.



(Figure 8 Card packs for sale based on photographs of James Phelps and Oliver Phelps who played the Weasley Twins)

This is why CP fans of English-language cultural products are so resistant to being labelled as real-life CP fans who have been considered as pathological, hypochondriac. Since what appear to be real people' in the narratives of real CP fans are in fact fictionalised but aspirational characters of celebrities invented by the culture industry (Galbraith & Karlin, 2012), they are therefore considered not to be fans who deal with real people (Fathallah, 2018), but fans who deal only with the public performances of deliberately engineered real-life CPs. It is clear that real-life CP fans, like a class of pathological hypochondriacs, cannot coexist with CP fans of English-language cultural products who identify with their own image.

In addition to this, existing research has overfocused on the case of fans of real-person CPs composed of male actors, such as Qiuyan Guo (2022) who mistakenly identified RPS as a genre that combines real person fiction which is imaginatively narrating real-world people (Thomas, 2014) and slash which is homosexually shipping of two male characters (Jenkins, 1992). Out of scholars' focus on queer study, real-person CPs are considered to be people who develop homosexual fantasies about two male celebrities, while real-person CPs which also occurs in heterosexual CP fandom has been ignored.

In fact, the heterosexual CP presented by Tom Felton x Emma Watson is incredibly popular, with fresh posts still being generated on Baidu's Tom x Emma posting board, with 2,866 CP fans and 13,437 discussion posts, where fans carefully sort out the relationships between the two, translating posts made by fans in English-speaking countries to analyse their relationship and reprinting various updates from the actor in real time. Meanwhile, it is clearly stated in the rules that this 'CP Super Topic' is for the real-person CP and not for Draco x Hermione, which is a character-derivative CP, a fan here questioned why the CP fans of Tom x Emma were not CP fans of the Draco x Hermione, which led to a fierce discussion and an eventual ban by the bar admins.

Therefore, CP fans of English-language cultural products tend to have high self-requirement on the guiding ideology of drawing a clear line between character-derivative CP and real-life CP, and they try their best to avoid being regarded as pathological fantasists who are incapable of distinguishing between reality and fantasy, just like many CP fans of local cultural products.

### **3.2 Affective labour versus Digital labour**

The ability and willingness to differentiate between real-person CPs and character-derivative CPs determines the predominant style of the CP fandom because the real people who play CPs, i.e.,

actors, are essentially equivalent to data traffic stars in the Chinese pop culture context, and this directly determines whether CP fans would engage in digital labour or not. Data traffic stars refers to those who usually are good-looking and possess a huge fan base (Chen, 2022) yet are perceived to lack strong professional capacity. When the high-speed wave of China's data economy spills over into fan culture and forms real-person CPs made up of data traffic stars, the emotional consumption displayed by the CP fandom is not only self-conscious and frenzied, but also collective, virtualised, and data driven.

In Chinese fan culture, through the process of producing, exchanging, and rewarding the idol as a product, idol fans and idols even create a 'parakin relationship' (Liebers & Schramm, 2019) and cultivate the idol together as family members (Yan & Yang, 2021). For fans, there is a sense of responsibility, "we are the only ones for our brother/sister", fans refer to male celebrities as 'brothers' and female celebrities as 'sisters', which visually shows that the emotional bond between fans and actors has reached the level of families. As if they are the only supporters and protectors of the actor playing the CP, and everyone else holds malicious intent towards their beloved CP, and their CP could immediately become a target of bullying and an object of everyone's scorn once fans stop working on the data performance. Therefore, under the influence of the parakin relationship of fans-idols, data fans have become an inseparable (Zhang & Negus, 2020) and even the most crucial part of the entire Chinese fandom. In essence, labour fans' devotion to their idols is non-material and emotional and stems from their shared interest in and love for their idols (Wang & Luo, 2023; Jenkins, 2012; Lazzarato, 1996), but the object of love, or rather, support, invested by CP fans of China's indigenous cultural productions is the idol who is actually the data traffic stars, and the source of fans' fulfilment is the favourable position they gain by dealing with various data sets and tasks to create data vanity for these data traffic stars who played the CP on the unreal internet. Thus, the devotion of the labour fan transcends the immaterial and emotional basis and becomes a contribution of data that can be converted into internet traffic and money.

Once CP fans fall into the trap of the "data worship", the secondary creation of CP fans is no longer the core force that unites the fandom, but the 'traffic-monetisation' is, then CP culture has already gone against to its original intention of serving the fans. The logic of 'traffic-monetisation' for real-



person CPs revolves around the ‘Weibo CP Ranking<sup>22</sup>’ that acts as an influence index, which is not only to give CP fans a sense of pride and achievement, but the real purpose is to help real-person CPs to achieve appreciation of their commercial influence. That is, the higher the ranking of a real-life CP in the list, the more media exposure and traffic they get, and the greater chance they have of being noticed by market-oriented companies, and hence obtaining more advertising endorsements or commercial sponsorships. These business strategies take into account a range of data activities, such as posting rate, re-posting frequency, and interaction rate. Fans then improve the online data performance of the real-life CPs they support through ‘digital labour’, such as posting consistently and reposting or tagging other posts under relevant hashtags.

Thus, the affective economy in CP fan culture has broken through Henry Jenkins’ definition that “fans build fan communities and strengthen their identities by consuming, sharing, and creating fan artefacts (Jenkins, 2008; Turk, 2014)”. Instead, fans’ loyalty to CPs is no longer the ultimate goal of fan labour, but rather the achievement of a kind of data observability with the help of fan labour. This considerable data is the virtual currency used to exchange the development resources in the internet entertainment industry for, and is also the visible measure of the commercial value of CPs (especially real-person CPs).

In contrast, the CP fandom of English-language cultural products has a clearer boundary between live-action and character-derivative CPs, so they do not engage in digital labour to promote live-action CPs; instead, their main form of labour is ‘affective labour’. CP fans of English-language cultural products do not enthusiastically engage in endless ‘comment control (控评)’, ‘boost popularity (打投)’, ‘copywriting (文案)’, and ‘strike back anti-fans (反黑)’. Thus, for CP fans of English-language cultural products, they are living a ‘retirement life’, the term they themselves often use to refer to their freewheeling status in relation to other CP fans.

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<sup>22</sup> Chart beating for Weibo CP ranking requires time and money, so to be efficient and competitive, a CP fan club usually sets up a clear division of labour to collaborate with the help and guidance of an entertainment company (Duffett, 2013), these data fans understand how to employ individual and collective strategies to influence statistical, metrics, and semantic data collected on Weibo (Negus, 2019).



(Figure 9 CP Super Topic of Draco/Harry)

As the reasons for the rise of CP culture introduced in Chapter Two, Weibo as a mediating force has tailored a range of functions to enhance CP fans' reliance on the media platform, enabling them to participate in digital labour, either actively or passively, in particular Weibo's introduction of the 'CP Ranking' which uses algorithms to visualise the commercial data of real-life CPs. However, CP fans of English-language cultural products use Weibo in a different way, as they engage in online CP activities within the Weibo CP Super Topic in a casual, relaxed, and pleasurable manner since they consciously stayed away from the data task. In the case of the Draco/Harry, the contents in this CP's Super Topic on Weibo are, from left to right, posts, essential posts, related videos, fan paintings, fan works, promotion, and fan product trading, CP fans are basically exchanging Photoshop techniques and experience in editing videos, discussing fan works, and trading fan products within Super Topic. Therefore, the CP fandom of English-language cultural products maintain more of the original style of fan culture, it is a fan sphere that is dominated by the affective labour instead of the digital labour performed by the fans.

Specifically, regarding the 'affective labour' performed by CP fans of English-language cultural products, unlike the traditional control of affective labour which is mainly based on the employment relationship between capital and labour, their 'affective labour' is mainly based on fan activities such as knowledge sharing and emotional exchanges, then, to gain a sense of ease, friendliness and satisfaction, even a sense of connection and belonging. Take the CP Super Topic of Draco x Hermione as an example, all fans who join the Super Topic on Weibo need to first read the rules

first: fans are prohibited from abusing other CPs in the Super Topic of Draco x Hermione, including making inappropriate comments of a provocative nature in the Super Topic of other CPs; Prohibited from attacking and denigrating ‘Tai Tai (太太, fan creators)’ and fellow fans in the Super Topic. Anyone who violates the above rules would be blocked by the admins from accessing the Super Topic and posting information here. The reason for the various rules to maintain a harmonious atmosphere in the fandom is to create positive guidance for fans from the origin, thus, to avoid them from getting involved in any fan disputes, or even having to use data labour strategically to defend their CPs in the same way as CP fans of local cultural products.

To be more specific, these two types of CP culture are shaped differently, and even in opposite order. For those CP fandom of Chinese cultural productions, they are the ones that have the identified CP before the final presentation of the work, especially the interactions between the two actors during the filming process released by the production company through ‘marketing ID (营销号)’ and professional fans, premeditated and planned to motivate the interest of CP fans, then, after the work is officially broadcast in, fan discussion and fan creation, the media’s promotion, and the production’s deliberate guidance, the three conspire to inflate the public’s attention to the CP to an extremely high level (paying for the Trending Topic on Weibo is a typical modus operandi), thus creating a CP fandom that remains steadily advancing over a period of time. However, for CP fans of English-language cultural products, the order is reversed: first, good quality works are translated by online fan-subtitles groups, and only then can fans extract their favourite CPs for further fan-creation based on their personal aesthetics, and then, most importantly, it is the free and unpaid circulation of fan creations that glues together the scattered fans to form a long-term stable fandom over time.



(Figure 10 Cotton Doll of Draco/Harry)

Therefore, for CP fans of English-language cultural products, the core of the fandom is the fan writers, video producers, fan artists, whereas, for the local CP fan communities in China, it is the ‘professional fans’ and ‘fan site administrator’ who are the central figures in the fandom, and their output has absolutely nothing to do with fan creation and is designed to attract fan consumption. Take ‘cotton dolls’ of Draco/Harry as an example, the seller (often affectionately referred to by fans as Mummy of cotton doll) released the ‘group-buying announcement’ in CP Super Topic of Draco/Harry, and then the fans put forward their opinions on the design of the cotton dolls, until a graphic design is formed that everyone agrees with, and then ‘Mummy of cotton doll’ take a crowdfunding, full-payment pre-sale approach to determine the number of pre-ordered fans, and then provide the drawings to the doll factories. Therefore, their production of cotton dolls is not profit-oriented only, but a way for fans to entertain themselves, which differs from the way ‘professional fans’ in CP fandom of China’s homegrown CP are monetised, i.e., who obtain celebrities’ itineraries through grey channels and take creepshot then sell them to their fans for a profit. In contrast, the purchase of CP’s cotton dolls is driven by affectional attachment (Zhang, 2023), especially for fans who seek to establish a parakin relationship with the CP.

In short, CP fans of English-language cultural products are fans dedicated to intellectual secondary-creations based on ‘affective labour’, while fans of local Chinese CP are ‘data labourers’ and data fanatics, and the former retain their aesthetic and creative subjectivity, rather than being media users suppressed by the calculating law of data.

#### **4. A guideline to classify the two parties in a CP as top/bottom**

In addition to the differences in the identity construction of CP fans and the different rules of operation of CP fandom, there is a difference in the implementation of a law of ‘top/bottom’ between CP fans of English-language cultural products and CP fans of native Chinese culture, which is also the third important feature that distinguishes these two fandoms. This delineation is in part defined by the aesthetics and conventions of the Japanese BL, in which one partner must be the ‘seme (dominator)’, the other, the ‘uke (subordinator)’, and the assignment of the roles is usually fixed and nonreversible (Camper, 2006; Yang & Xu, 2017).

Thereby a set of patterned criteria for distinguishing top and bottom in CP by external characteristics was developed, the top is often depicted as restrained, physically powerful, and protective, with a stronger chin, shorter hair, smaller eyes, and a more stereotypically masculine (Suzuki, 1999); on

the contrary, bottom usually has softer, androgynous, feminine features, has larger eyes and a smaller stature, and is usually physically weaker than the top (Madill et al., 2018; Jones, 2005).

Currently, most of the research on top/bottom focuses on the intercultural BL (Nagaike, 2003; Pagliassotti, 2010), and these studies set the direction for the study of the top/bottom, that is, exploring gender, power, intimacy as expressed in this role dichotomy. However, the top/bottom of Chinese CP cannot be equated with ‘seme/uke’, much less be regarded as ‘musculine partner/female partner’ or ‘butch/femme’. And even Chinese CP fans in the same cultural context may have different ways of dividing the top/bottom, as well as holding different attitudes towards this division, when they are faced with CPs of English-language cultural products and CPs of Chinese-language cultural products.

#### **4.1 Implementation of the top/bottom rule by CP fans in English-language cultures**

Influenced by Japanese BL culture, CP fans of local Chinese cultural products also have strict requirements for the top/bottom. In contrast to Western slash fiction which is marked by versatility (Wang, 2021), the patented and irreversible dichotomy between the top and the bottom is often displayed in local male/male CP fiction (Yang & Xu, 2017), as well as the ‘reverse CP’ is mostly unacceptable for some Chinese CP fans (Chang & Tian, 2021). Once the top/bottom of the CP in a CP fan work is in the opposite order to the generally recognised order, then it is known as reversed top/bottom, the fan writers have to explicitly mark the ‘reversed CP’ warning hashtag to inform the readers, because for many fans the CP cannot be reversed even if it is split up. To sum, as discussed by No. 100 participant, “the mainland Chinese fandom place a high value on the “top/bottom temperament”. Thus, in the long run, many Chinese CP fans have mistakenly believed that the order of the slash symbol ‘/’ in Western slash also represents the order of top/bottom, for example, if a CP is written as Draco/Harry, means Draco Malfoy is the top and Harry Potter is the bottom, conversely, if a CP is written as Harry/Draco, means Harry Potter is the top and Draco Malfoy is the bottom.

However, as opposed to Japanese BL fans, there is no strict distinction of seme/uke in Western slash fiction, this difference is related to the variation in fans’ perceptions of gender temperament and homosexuality in different cultural contexts, as well as the promotion of different images of masculinity. Fan works are moulded through social norms and therefore usually reflect the gender configurations and identities that fans encounter in their daily lives, hence BL fans project their

fantasies of ideal male homosexual romances onto illusory 'uke' and 'seme' without the need to match the realities of a homosexual relationship, which in a way reflects a certain degree of misogyny and misogynistic complexes in Japan society (Graffeo, 2014; Nozawa, 2023), which is also the case for China (Zhao & Madill, 2018). Since they lack, or are not interested in, or even disgusted by, real-life male homosexuality, they do not understand genuine homosexuality, and instead bring seme/uke into the heterosexual paradigm. In contrast, slash fans' view of homosexuality is much closer to reality because the popularisation of knowledge about homosexuality in Western society started earlier, and in real sexual intercourse top/bottom only represents a difference in the position or physical power of the two partners, so they do not consider top/bottom to be completely equivalent to the division of psychological power as dominant/submissive.

Moreover, Western society has looser stereotypes of gender temperament than Japanese society, so slash fans can often swap top/bottom roles between characters. Frazer Lamb and Diana L. Veith (1986) approach slash as a 'play with androgyny' by female, which Jenkins (1992, p. 198) explains by saying that "both characters mix and match traditionally masculine and feminine traits, and that slash is a struggle for intimacy between the sexes". In short, in the slash fiction of English-language cultural products (e.g., *Star Trek*, *Sherlock*, *Harry Potter*), both characters can be equally powerful and dominant or equally vulnerable and submissive, with none of these qualities permanently associated with their sexual orientation or gender (Lindström, 2017).

The second reason for the absence of the stereotypical division of characters into seme/uke in Western slash is the different appreciation of masculinity in the West and Asia. Sun Jung (2010) points to the prevalence of pan-East Asian 'soft masculinity' of male celebrities in Japanese and East Asian popular culture (p.35), with the 'variability or fluidity of soft masculinity' at the heart of its regional (and, increasingly, global) impact (Chin, 2013). This finding fits with the enthusiasm of BL fans and some Chinese CP fans of the local cultural products for portraying bottom (or uke) characters as 'soft males' who are thin, feminine, non-aggressive, and, to be precise, more closely aligned with stereotypical femininity. On the other hand, gay men are more likely to conform to the 'masculine' portrayals of their 'visual selves' on the screen, regardless of the actor's (or his role's) sexual role as 'top' or 'bottom' (Rothmann, 2013), and therefore fans does not overly promote bottom characters with effeminate masculinity.

However, the absence of seme/uke terminology in slash fanfiction does not mean that there is no division of gendered power between the two characters in a ship. Slash as an alternative means of allowing a female fan to assign her desired emotions and behaviours to the males in the relationship seems to make equal love relationships potentially possible, however Hansen (2010) argues that a large portion of slash fanfiction is dark because these stories are based on unequal real-life male/female relationships, and in fact depict a model of male authority, so that there are clearly dominant/submissive characters in sadomasochistic and violent erotic storylines. But, comparatively speaking, slash fans are much more resistant to this divisive model than BL fans. Lönnroth (2017) discovered that some fans disliked the practice of feminised uke in slash fanfiction, i.e., a very masculine seme, and a uke who is turned into a ‘typical female’ who is submissive, naive, and passive, regardless of gender, and the only difference is that bottom has a penis instead of a vagina.

In sum, the explicitly dominant masculine seme/submissive feminine uke is a feature of BL, whereas, slash fanfiction breaks down stereotypes about masculinity and femininity and reconstructs them in challenging ways (Hayes & Ball, 2009). Thus, for CP fans of English-language cultural products who have been subjected to two cultures and have more experience with slash reading, what they mean by Gong (攻) / Shou (受) is not simply equivalent to seme/uke, but should be referred to by top/bottom. As in *Question 24 — For your CP, have you read or watched the original English version or translated works created by English-speaking fans, and do you think there is any difference between these works and those created by Chinese fans*, some CP fans of *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* spliced their reading experience of fan texts in both languages to point out that (see Table 14), ‘English fanfiction has no compulsory division of top/bottom’ (N = 9, 69.57%).

**Table 14 Similarities and differences between English Fanfiction and Chinese Fanfiction**

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Different ranking of popular CPs	3	2.61%	2.61%
More open depictions of sexuality	7	6.09%	8.70%
No significant difference	6	5.22%	13.91%
Gradual homogenisation	9	7.83%	21.74%

**Table 14 Similarities and differences between English Fanfiction and Chinese Fanfiction**

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No significant difference, love is universal discourse	3	2.61%	24.35%
Different understanding of personal settings and how CPs get along due to different cultural backgrounds	12	10.43%	34.78%
English fan fiction has bolder and richer personal setting, which is more innovative than Chinese fan fiction	22	19.13%	53.91%
There are more evenly matched CPs in English CP fan fiction	5	4.35%	58.26%
English fan fiction contains more reflections on social issues	2	1.74%	60.00%
English fan fiction with a strong narrative, Chinese fan fiction with a strong emotion	2	1.74%	61.74%
English fan fiction has no compulsory division of top/bottom, reversible CP are accepted	9	7.83%	69.57%
English fan fiction is more direct and passionate, while Chinese fan fiction is more introspective and subtle in its emotional expression	9	7.83%	77.39%
English fan fiction is concerned with sexual consent, while Chinese fan fiction likes to glorify forced sex	4	3.48%	80.87%
English fan fiction is closer to the original and more thoughtful because there are no cultural differences to interfere with it, while Chinese fan fiction is infantilized and romanticized	15	13.04%	93.91%
The logic and style of writing is different, and translationese of Chinese fan fiction is obvious	7	6.09%	100.00%
Total	115	100.0%	

There are two main reasons for this more optimistic result, the first being fans' intercultural reading experience and the second being the rise in female consciousness. According to *Question 28* (see Table 12), CP fans of *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* pointed out that 'there are more evenly matched CPs within English-language cultural products, while Chinese cultural products have a distinct division between 'powerful top / weak bottom' (N = 10, 58.78%). A particularly important



point here is that CP fans' quest for evenly matched CPs has occurred as the subject of CP shifts to English-language cultural products. As participant No. 32 answered, before participating in the CP fandom of English-language cultural products, she was more inclined to 'powerful top/weak bottom' with a kernel similar to most heterosexual relationship, and after indulging in CP of English-language cultural products, she was more interested in 'powerful top/powerful bottom' because both of them have independent personality and personal charisma; Participant 89 pointed out that "local Chinese CPs are very fond of portraying 'bottom' role as an 'innocent baby', but Western slash fandom does not appreciate this image".

This means that they have not found out about top/bottom when they read English fanfiction, then even if they return to the Chinese online environment, the subconscious idea of having to divide CP into top/bottom would not be ingrained in their minds too much. Thus, fans are aware of the different division of top/bottom based on the different reading experiences they get from the two fan worlds, which in turn they consider as a key feature to distinguish the two CP fandom.

Secondly, apart from the influence from Western fandom conventions, it has more to do with the feminist social climate that continues to develop in China. According to some scholars such as Wang Aiqing (2021), a large number of narratives in Chinese male-male romance novels involve the feminisation of bottom characters, motivated by the popularity of 'soft masculinity', and similarly, Zhang Chunyu (2016) notes that bottom characters often resemble many physical and emotional stereotypes of femininity. However, as Chinese women become more clearly aware of the misogyny that is widespread in society, CP fans of English-language cultural products are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the over-feminisation of the bottom and are demanding that more equal traits be given to both the top and the bottom.

With the development of social and economic development and the popularity of feminist ideology, one-child women are more independent materially and spiritually, so women appreciate the inevitable result of the role of women who are independent and active in their careers. When women realise the fact that the traditional female role of wife and mother in patriarchal society exists as a subordinate existence to male rights and interests, then female CP fans in the age of the one-child woman will no longer be "determined through their relationship with men" as described in De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1953), but will make more use of their own voice and ability to modify

prejudices and shape their own subject positions, so CP fans of English-language cultural products possess a stronger sense of pursuing equal gender relations.

For this, comparing the number of negative responses to ‘reverse top/bottom’ (N = 37) and ‘bi-directional top/bottom’ (N = 24) with the number of negative responses to ‘feminine / weakly bottom’ (N = 87) in *Question 20* (see Table 9) reveals that CP fans of *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* are more averse to the existence of ‘feminized bottom’ than to the swapping of the top/bottom positions. As well as, according to *Question 27* (see Table 4), the fans think that ‘both sides (top and bottom) must be strong, with no obvious difference in appearance’ (N = 12, 68.75%), which is the best indication that fans of English-language cultural products have discarded the stereotypical top/bottom dichotomy when using it from the aspect of appearance description.

So while it is still possible to identify CP fans of English-language cultural products who would classify the top and bottom according to their appearance, for instance (see Table 4), ‘blonde sophisticated top/lovely petite bottom’ (N = 1, 96.25%) or ‘elegant top / energetic bottom’ (N = 1, 41.25%) for male/male CP; and for male/female CP which represented by ‘noble and sophisticated male protagonist x cute and petite female protagonist’ (N = 2, 95.00%). But in general a significant number of them can get rid of the mindset of dividing the top/bottom based on stereotypes of gender temperament and physical characteristics, and they believe that both characters in CP should present robust and powerful images, rather than the presence of some CPs in the local Chinese culture, which, by forcibly portraying the bottom as a ‘pan -East Asian soft masculinity<sup>23</sup>’, to set off the strength of top, thus turning top/bottom into a replica of the unbalanced heteronormative dichotomy that exists in reality.

As a result, the fans’ interpretation of top/bottom has become politicised, which not only “deconstructs the notion that sexual attraction must be based on an essentialist notion of sexual difference” (Kee, 2010, p. 133), but also implies that Chinese women launching a counterattack against the yoke of gender stereotypes and the oppression of women by patriarchy. In particular, CP

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<sup>23</sup> In Japanese and Korean popular culture, there is an appreciation for less masculine images of men (Holliday & Elfving-Hwang, 2012), with boys who are “beautiful in appearance, with smooth skin, silky hair, and feminine mannerisms” (Jung, 2011, p. 58-59). Influenced by this, some Chinese CP fans also favour ‘male bottoms’ with ‘pan-East Asian soft masculinity’.

fans of *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* have been making efforts to revise the deliberate conferral of femininity on the bottom through their usage of top/bottom, replacing it with a more pronounced appeal to the equal intimacy between top and bottom.

#### 4.2 Implications of ‘evenly matched’ CPs

When surveying the CP fans of *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* on their views of top/bottom, they put great emphasis on the ‘equalization’ between the two parties of the CP, and the fans demanded that top and bottom should be ‘neck and neck’ and ‘stand shoulder to shoulder’ in their imaginary intimate interactions, they called it ‘evenly matched (勢均力敌)’ CPs which refers to the power and force of the top and the bottom match each other equally, thus achieving a counterbalance state of mutual restraint. This equalization mentioned by ‘evenly matched’ CPs refers to the ‘powerful top/powerful bottom’ in terms of the division of top/bottom, and the key point is the definition of ‘powerful’.

Data collected from *Question 21— What factors do you use to determine the top/bottom division of a CP?* shows (see Table 15), more than half (50.39%) of the participants in the sample judged the top/bottom in a CP on the basis of ‘personal setting (the dominant is top; the passive is bottom)’. In addition to this, physical appearance (20.47%), fans’ preference for the character (0.79% or 2.36%), physical position in sexuality (8.66%), and ‘competence and intelligence’ (1.57%) are all factors that influence their judgement of top/bottom, but not the largest percentage of the way it is judged.

**Table 15 Criteria for Distinguishing between Top and Bottom**

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Name of CP (the first name is top)	1	0.79%	0.79%
No division is made	19	14.96%	15.75%
Competence and intelligence	2	1.57%	17.32%
Personal setting (the dominant is top; the passive is bottom)	64	50.39%	67.72%
Physical position in sexuality	11	8.66%	76.38%
Preferred character is bottom	3	2.36%	78.74%
Preferred character is top	1	0.79%	79.53%
Physical appearance (height, stamina, body type, hair colour)	26	20.47%	100.00%

**Table 15 Criteria for Distinguishing between Top and Bottom**

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Total	127	100.0%	

Thus, fans' criteria for defining 'powerful top/powerful bottom' are more diverse and can include both being clearly masculine in appearance, having a comparable social status, being physically and intellectually equal, and both are mentally powerful. But none of these external 'personal settings' are crucial traits that can genuinely determine whether or not a CP's 'personal setting' belongs to a 'powerful top/powerful bottom'.

According to the *Question 22 — Is the top/bottom division of the CP related to the 'strength and weakness' of the two characters in terms of physical strength and power* (see Table 16), 40.34% of the fans think that 'the strength level of CP's physical strength and power does not affect the division of top/bottom' (N = 48, 40.34%), on the contrary, 34.45% of the fans believed that 'the powerful role is top, the weaker role is bottom' (N = 41, 34.45%). Combining these two views, social status and physical strength are not directly proportional to the top/bottom roles of the CPs, which means that it is not physical strength and power that defines the connotation of 'power', in fact, it is the 'mental strength' that determines whether two parties in a CP are 'powerful top' and 'powerful bottom' or not.

**Table 16 Relationship between the Physical/Power strength Level of CP and the Division of Top/Bottom**

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
The strength level and power of CP does not affect the division of top/bottom	48	40.34%	40.34%
A relationship exists, but it is not necessarily proportional	30	25.21%	65.55%
The powerful role is top, the weaker role is bottom	41	34.45%	100.00%
Total	119	100.0%	

The 'powerful top/powerful bottom' takes the equality of spiritual power as the principle for constructing CP relationship, which can be seen through the narrative conventions of CP fanfiction.

Generally speaking, ‘powerful/powerful bottom’ CP fanfiction has a relatively stable plot pattern, which can be broadly divided into two categories: ‘confrontational’ and ‘supportive’ relationships. In the ‘confrontational stories’, top and bottom are evenly opposed in all aspects of their abilities, and they see each other as mortal enemies in every way, and the two protagonists are usually at the top of the two opposing forces and collide in love amidst constant confrontation, best represented by GGAD both of whom possess strong beliefs and spiritual power. In a ‘supportive fanfic’, top or bottom may be dominant at the beginning of the story, but as the plot develops, one party suffers setbacks and the other party gives them help and spiritual support; or one partner of the CP may be vulnerable at the very beginning, and then the other side helps them to grow in the plot, so that the mentally weaker party grows into someone who can fight alongside the other side.

Regardless of the narrative convention, the kernel of ‘powerful top/powerful bottom’ is the pursuit of an equal relationship, i.e., an emphasis on the equality of personal values and emotional relationships between top and bottom. Therefore, different from the ‘seme/uke’ which is a gender symbolic system in Japanese BL that seems to distinguish the penetrating party as the top and the penetrated party as the bottom, but implies the differences in social status, physical strength, and mental ability between the two people, top/bottom is no longer used as a gender dichotomy system or a hierarchical power symbol system representing the two parties in Chinese CP culture. Instead, top/bottom has become a complex symbol and representation system after continuous transformation and localization, it is not a replica of realistic gender relations, and it is even less equivalent to dominator/subordinator. Especially based on the emphasis on ‘powerful/powerful bottom’ by CP fans of English-language cultural products, which is evident that the fans use top/bottom as a personal setting to achieve the way to achieve their goal of realising and acting out an equal intimate relationship.

In addition to the ‘powerful top/ powerful bottom’, CP fans of English-language cultural products have a more tolerant attitude towards ‘reversible top/bottom’ (mean = 2.607, see Table 8). Reversible setting is used to describe couples where the top (uke) and bottom (seme) are not strictly defined (Asna, 2021; Wood, 2006), both parties in the CP can be penetrating or receptive in sexual activities (Zhao & Madill, 2018). In male homoerotic narratives, authors occasionally forego the stylisations of the top and bottom to portray both lovers as “equally attractive handsome men” or subvert expectations of dominance by depicting the active pursuer in the relationship as taking the

passive role during sex (Kamm, 2013). In fact, reversible CP can be seen as a similar concept to the ‘powerful top/ powerful bottom’, except that it focuses more on describing the top and the bottom as being on equal footing in the sexual act, and in terms of sexuality in the powerful top/powerful bottom, it is not uncommon for top to be penetrated due to the dominant mental power of bottom, but versatility is uncommon and unacceptable in Chinese CP fanfiction.

Besides, this heterotopia of a ‘powerful top/powerful bottom’ CP does not only include male homoerotic CP, but female homoerotic CP as well, such as Pansy/Hermione. In fanfiction *Pansy’s Omniscient Girl* (San Qian Yu Jun, 三千羽君, Jinjiang Literature City, 2021), a noble lady from Slytherin who is ambitious and arrogant, and a commoner girl from Gryffindor who is witty and brave, this a classic CP configuration. The author sets up Pansy in the same way as Malfoy, the male heir in the male/male CP Draco/Malfoy, who has to bear the responsibility of the family, and Hermione, who is gentle but determined like Harry, not passively avoiding but actively guiding her lover out of the confines of the family, thus, with regard to this CP, the personal settings of both female top and female bottom are ‘spiritually strong’. It can be seen that whether it is female/female CP or male/male CP, CP fans of English-language cultural products are committed to constructing a ‘powerful top/powerful bottom’ relationship, and growing together and supporting each other are the themes of CP’s intimacy.

In a nutshell, in the view of CP fans of English-language cultural products, the core issue of intimacy is called ‘relational reciprocity’ rather than ‘security that comes with a male partner’ or ‘delivery of trust to a male partner’. Therefore, they adopt a series of personal settings, including sexual power, appearance, occupation, etc., to make the top and bottom achieve an equal match, and the key to constructing this kind of equal relationship is the setting of mental power. The reason why CP fans of English-language cultural products put extra emphasis on the setting of ‘powerful top/powerful bottom’ is, to a certain extent, influenced by the reading experience of Western slash, but at the root of the matter, the reason why CP fans of English-language cultural products are able to use top/bottom to portray an equal relationship is the result of the improved level of women’s education under the implementation of the One-Child Policy.

As a result, the existence of top/bottom only serves as a framework for fans to experiment with how various ‘personal settings’ from the ‘2.5-dimensional settings database’ would flow, and it signals that both parties in a CP can achieve a near-perfect equality. In other words, the two love interests

enter into a happier and stronger relationship while their equality and autonomy are preserved, which is exactly what ‘powerful top/powerful bottom’ ultimately seeks to achieve and express.

### **5. Questionable validity of top/bottom**

‘Powerful top/powerful bottom’ is favoured by CP fans of English-language cultural products precisely because it allows women to have a fair emotional experience outside the confines of the traditional male-female relationship, and they build a heterotopia independent of the existing system (Zheng, 2016) where fans who are ‘only daughter’ to perform as only powerholder. But the practical validity of replacing the male/female dichotomy with top/bottom is questionable.

For a long time, there are two main voices while discussing the top/bottom relationship. On the one hand, some optimistic scholars acknowledge the relative equality of the relationship between top and bottom based on the fluidity of gender traits and the multiplicity of combinations of CP (Chao, 2015); on the other hand, some critical scholars analyse the unequal relationship between the top and bottom, as well as the absence of the female role in the novel, pointing out the insurmountable contradiction between such depictions and the readers’ desire for equality. Indeed, a number of scholars like Bauwens-Sugimoto (2011), Kee (2010), Pagliassotti (2010) and Sihombing (2011) have questioned the division of sex roles in BL by arguing that it still draws heavily on conventional heterosexual relations.

Gladys Pak Lei Chong (2013) makes it clear that different sets of gender ideals have been constructed to respond to China’s century-long pursuit of modernity and its zeal to catch up and be acknowledged as the West’s equivalent Other, however, most of the criteria for modern women still reflected the feminine ideals emphasized by the Confucius tradition represents by ‘the four virtues’ which includes moral behavior, proper speech, good manners and diligence. Thus, the progressiveness of top/bottom is objectively influenced by the stereotypes of gender temperament and gender responsibility that CP fans have long learnt by ear in society and culture, and as Wang Aiqing (2021) argues, homoerotic CP novels are not an innovation of the digital age because the top/bottom dichotomy is similar to the classic Chinese anecdotes of ‘caizi-jiaren (scholar-beauty)’ which have been around since the 17th century, i.e., the personal settings of a CP is often made up of ‘wen (cultural achievement)’, which represents femininity, and ‘wu (martial courage)’, which represents masculinity.

But now, some CP fans of English-language cultural products are committed to breaking down the stereotypes of such a gendered temperament through establishing ‘powerful top/powerful bottom’. The character who is aggressive and initiates the pursuit of the object of his or her desire is likely to be the bottom, meanwhile, the bottom may be more capable, more powerful and more intelligent than the top, conversely, the top may be gentle and vulnerable, or naive and innocent and beautiful. The diversity in appearance and temperament and behaviour of the top/bottom leads to a variety of styles of combining the CP. It can be said that the strategy of CP culture to dismantle the hierarchical order of gender is not to abolish gender, but to make it infinite, so that gender temperament can be diversified in a flat dimension, instead of a hierarchical structure that binds different gender temperaments with different shares of power as in traditional societies.

Although top/bottom transcends the limitations of the male/female gender dichotomy, it is debatable whether or not it can help CP fans construct an equal and intimate relationship. There are two common criticisms of the strict top/bottom symbol system in the Chinese CP fandom. The first comment is that, since many women believe that the meaning of male/male CP is that both partners in a relationship are no longer shackled by heterosexual social conventions and cultural prejudices, and that they can be relatively equal, then forcing a distinction between the two distinct identities as the top/ bottom, in effect, replacing some of the stereotypes of heterosexuality into this hypothetical homosexual relationship. For example, Madill et al (2018) point out that “there is a clear contra between the top and bottom roles in Chinese *Harry Potter* fanfictions which can correspond to the traditional husband and wife respectively, additionally, each top and bottom in diverse CPs are given distinct tasks.” Indeed, the present research also found that in some of Draco/Harry’s CP fanfiction, Harry is always given the task of procreation, while Draco is responsible for working to support the family, which seems to make the top and bottom take on the stereotypical division of labour between husband and wife.

So, top/bottom as an approach to establish intimacy equality still has major drawbacks, and even a ‘powerful top/powerful bottom’ setting is not perfect. A portion of the ‘powerful top/powerful bottom’ settings in which the top who is the initiator of intimacy is also the one with the higher social status makes the equal power of CP a pseudo-concept. At such moments, the active role of the top roles in the sexual relationship metaphorically signifies their dominance in the sexual relationship, as the sexual roles defines social gender roles, and the act of sexual intercourse is seen



as a gendered expression of dominance, especially when the active partner’s social status is much higher than the passive partner’s, which means that the top roles’ dominance in the erotic relationship and their social superiority would form a isomorphic relationship that serves to strengthen the order of power. While powerful mental strength is key to defining the ‘powerful top/powerful bottom’ model, this emphasis on mental strength is still not enough to dissipate the negative effects of unequal social status on the ‘powerful top/powerful bottom’ model.

As well as the results of *Question 19 — Which perspective do you take when reading CP fanfiction* (see Table 17), some CP fans read CP novels with the perspective of the ‘bottom/female protagonist’ (N = 29, 21.48%) indicative of the fact that they more or less see the bottom as a female role in a heterosexual fan narrative. This construction of the top/bottom relationship according to the male-female model perpetuates the power structure of traditional heterosexual norms and contradicts the equal relationship implied in the original and secondary works.

**Table 17 Reading Perspective**

Categories	Response		Popularity rate (n=135)
	n	Response rate	
Narrator	58	23.77%	42.96%
Top/Male Protagonist	17	6.97%	12.59%
Bottom/Female Protagonist	29	11.89%	21.48%
Villain	4	1.64%	2.96%
Supporting Character/Bystander	42	17.21%	31.11%
Mother Fans	10	4.10%	7.41%
Critic	9	3.69%	6.67%
Random	70	28.69%	51.85%
Other	5	2.05%	3.70%
Total	244	100%	180.74%

Goodness of fit:  $\chi^2=175.754$   $p=0.000$

Therefore, objectively speaking, the top/bottom dichotomy plays a limited role in the subversion of real-world gender rights and the construction of gender equality. One of the most intuitive facts is that if Chinese CP fans of English-language cultural products could really reject the influence of

real-world social culture and the logic of power and reach the pure heights of gender equality, then there would be no top/bottom dichotomy, even if it is a ‘powerful top/powerful bottom’. However, CP fans of English-language cultural products have made more efforts than some CP fans of local Chinese culture in eliminating the copying of real unequal gender rights, as they avoid the stigmatisation of femininity by deliberately feminising the bottom, and use the ‘equality of spiritual power’ to portray a ‘powerful top/powerful bottom’, thus emphasising the need for equality and respect in intimate relationships.

## **Chapter Six. Cross-cultural, Cross-textual, and Cross-dimensional La Lang CP**

Based on the content of the previous five chapters, we know that the essence of CP is a fan-initiated configurational experiment based on a ‘2.5-dimensional settings database’, in which they dissolve grand narratives, extract characters from the original work, deconstruct them into diverse personal settings, and then collage them with other personal settings to assemble a fluid CP. However, to outsiders of CP fans, this ability seems to be an indication of the lack of cultural innovation among contemporary young people, and some CP works are regarded as assembly-line collage of romantic sequences or replicas of traditional romance stories, and CP literature is thus regarded as ‘head-swapping literature’, i.e., just replacing the names of the characters without any original or special content. But in fact, CP fans have the ability to create CPs even in the face of nothingness without any symbolic meaning, and this assertion should not be used to accuse CP fans of producing some kind of standardised CPs in an assembly line like female workers in a factory, but on the contrary, it should be an affirmation of their ground-breaking creative ability.

The most important part of the coupling process is ‘in-brain replenishment’, which refers to the ability to unleash the imagination to create a past, present, and future for two unrelated objects, and when the distance between the two objects is maximised, it represents the birth of a kind of CP that is beloved by CP fans in China, but seen by outsiders as a ‘deviant’ CP, Lalang CP. Taking ‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’ which is the most famous pair of La Lang CP in China as an example, the creative approach of La Lang CP fans subverted the classic literature *Dream of the Red Chamber*, which is not to be desecrated in traditional Chinese culture, and thus La Lang CP is regarded as a kind of spoofing culture, but in terms of La Lang CPs’ modus operandi, it is an intracerebral

experiment on intimacy unfolded by fans based on the ‘2.5-dimensional setting database’, and thus the present research argues that it is necessary to make a judgment on La Lang CPs’ complex attributes to make a judgement. Secondly, La Lang CP is controversial even within the fandom, as it has been accused of being purely database-based writing, i.e., it does not require a narrative or any rules, so the present research argues that a clarification of these misconceptions is needed, thereby allowing the value of La Lang CP and the contribution that La Lang CP fans have made to intercultural fan culture to be recognised.

### **1. The concept of ‘La Lang(拉郎)’**

Marriage in traditional Chinese beliefs is first and foremost an agreement between families (Long, 2015), and filial piety demands that children, even as grown-ups, are subservient to their parents (Zhao & Madill, 2018; Gu, 2015). This filial obedience includes marrying the ‘right’ person as both families become deeply involved in the couple’s lives, with some parents even making decisions about their children’s spouses (Wu, 2015), this is the context of the era in which the original meaning of ‘La Lang (拉郎)’ was born. Therefore, the term ‘La Lang(拉郎)’ in the context of colloquial Chinese culture, originally meant to force two young people to enter into a marriage relationship without any emotional foundation; it could be equivalent to a kind of arranged marriage under a feudal autocracy. The focus is therefore on the compulsion of intimacy between the characters, but CP fans have created some dramatic conflict over the act of forcing this relationship to be contracted. According to the frequency analysis based on a categorical summary of the open-ended answers to the *Question 32 — Do you accept the La Lang CP regarding Harry Potter and Dream of the Red Chamber* (see Table 18), in terms of the distribution of specific perceptions of La Lang CP, a relatively high proportion of the sample (20.00%) chose ‘against, as the CP lacks both a story basis and an emotional relationship’. Participant No. 97 responded, “No, it’s the 21st century...say no to arranged marriages”, which means she equated La Lang with the arranged and forced marriage. For these groups of participants, La Lang CP is seen as two characters without emotional basis or any factual intersection that has been forcibly placed together by fans, the fans here, perhaps, acted as the parents of feudal society who ignored the wishes of their children and only arranged marriage according to their own profits and preferences, thus, contributes to the La Lang CP becoming a suspended CP that exists apart from the story.

**Table 18 Attitudes towards La Lang CP**

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Against, as it does not conform to the original personal/worldview settings	11	10.00%	10.00%
Against, as the personal settings have no sense of CP	15	13.64%	23.64%
Against, as it is a mere spoof	13	11.82%	35.45%
Against, as the CP lacks both a story basis and an emotional relationship	22	20.00%	55.45%
Support, for the two-way redemption setting creates a sense of CP	14	12.73%	68.18%
Support, for the story of the fan fiction makes logical sense	2	1.82%	70.00%
Support, for seeking the sense of spoofing	7	6.36%	76.36%
Support, to compensate for the regret of the original	4	3.64%	80.00%
Support, for fan-made videos with engaging storylines	12	10.91%	90.91%
Support, for the contrasts when cross-cultural settings are integrated	4	3.64%	94.55%
Support, for attractive appearance of this CP	6	5.45%	100.00%
Total	110	100.0%	

But this perception is the exact opposite for La Lang enthusiasts, according to the *Question 31—What attracted you to become a La Lang CP fan of ‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’* (see Table 19), ‘the sense of CP is so convincing that it is irrelevant whether it is La Lang or not’ (N = 21, 15.56%), which suggest that fans of the La Lang CP do not regard the act of La Lang as compulsory or immoral, and far from the feudal system of marriage, but rather as a show of free will. In response, participant No. 135 even asked rhetorically, “is there anything that cannot be La Lang-ed?”, this is the attitude of the La Lang CP fans, as long as the CP can give fans emotional resonance, then it makes sense for La Lang to exist. In other words, in the eyes of the fans of La Lang CP, the original author was the creator of the feudal relationship, and Cannon CP became a couple that was passively created based on the author’s will, and their fans were then viewed as supporters of ‘arranged

marriages’, whereas only La Lang CP was a product of the free love that resulted from the elimination of the official stance.

**Table 19 The attraction of La Lang CP**

Categories	Response		Popularity rate (n=135)
	<i>n</i>	Response rate	
E’gao or Spoofing	14	16.09%	10.37%
Sense of the Unknown	23	26.44%	17.04%
Sense of Immersion	14	16.09%	10.37%
The CP aligns with the orientation towards personal setting	12	13.79%	8.89%
The sense of CP is so convincing that it is irrelevant whether it is La Lang or not	21	24.14%	15.56%
Other reasons	3	3.45%	2.22%
Total	87	100%	64.44%

Goodness of fit:  $\chi^2=17.483$   $p=0.000$

According to these two completely opposite views, the evaluation of the La Lang CP is not whether the CP itself deviates from the original, but whether the action of fans ‘pulling’ unrelated characters out of the original is well-intentioned liberalism or malicious feudalism.

In fact, similar traces of La Lang CP can be found in fandom outside of China, there is a kind of ‘crack ship’ or ‘crossover ship’, referring to a paring between characters from various media contents who have never been in the original work and who have never been in the original film. characters from various media contents who have never or hardly interacted (Jeewa, 2014; Scettrini, 2016). Early on Jenkins (1992, p. 37) found that fans do not confine their interests to a single television series, but rather constantly nestle their favourites in larger intertextual networks, read intertextually as well as textually and their pleasure comes through the particular juxtaposition that they create between specific program content and other cultural materials. Therefore, what fans experience in La Lang CP is the thrill of travelling freely between cultures, between texts, and between subgenres, taking the characters out of the constraints of the original worldview setting and

imagining the intimacy that they might exist in a whole new context is the purpose of La Lang CP fans.

## 2. The complex nature of La Lang CP

### 2.1 Voldemort x Lin Daiyu

In ‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’, ‘Voldemort’ refers the villain in *Harry Potter*, and ‘Lin Daiyu’ is heroine of Cao Xueqin’s masterpiece *Dream of the Red Chamber*<sup>24</sup>, in the original story respectively, Voldemort is the shadowy, cruel and evil Dark Lord, and Lin Daiyu is a sentimental, naturally withdrawn, antifeudal and talented orphan girl, whereas in the CP fan’s world, this CP always appear in the personal setting of ‘a dark and affectionate wizard’ x ‘an intelligent and innocent human maiden’. NetEase News (2019) has processed data from videos with the keyword ‘La Lang’ uploaded by fans on Bilibili.com and announced the 30 most popular CPs in La Lang videos, ‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’ surprisingly topped the list (NetEase, 2019), and the most-watched video of this CP, ‘*Di San Nian De Jian Yi Si Qian 第三年的见异思迁*’ (Gong Li, 2017), has received 6.468 million views as of August 2023. Many clueless Chinese netizens and fans of both works were immediately shocked and intrigued by this cross-cultural, cross-textual and cross-dimensional CP.

At first glance, there is no connection between the two characters from two completely unrelated texts and world settings, the reason why they were forced to make a CP is back to a gambling party between a fan writer ‘Feng Wu Qing Ying(风舞轻影)’ with her friends in 2011. The bet stipulates that the loser must randomly select two well-known characters from various classics and popular texts to form a couple and write novels for them, ‘Feng Wu Qing Ying’ admit defeat for bet, but accidentally, she picked Voldemort and Lin Daiyu separately. Thus, the pioneering work of

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<sup>24</sup> *Dream of the Red Chamber* is an 18th-century (the feudal period of Chinese society in the Qing Dynasty) novel written by Cao Xueqin that is generally considered to be one of the four greatest classical novels of Chinese literature. In this masterpiece to the Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu love and marriage tragedy as the center, write the rise and fall of the four major families. It reveals the end of the dark hierarchy of feudal rule, men and women, parents and children, and many other conflicts. It profoundly reflects the characteristics of the prosperity and decline of the feudal society (Yang, 2023).

‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’, *From afar, bury flowers for you* (Jinjiang, 2011) was born, in this story, Voldemort travel through space-time to the ‘Grand View Garden’ in the Qing Dynasty and become an elf who lives in a flower, he is carefully cared for by Lin Daiyu, however, Voldemort dies for saving Lin Daiyu’s father, and Lin Daiyu, who is disheartened, accepts a husband arranged by her father, but accidentally discover that the man is her own flower elf, and so the two live happily ever after.

At first, this piece of bantering work was only circulated on the Internet in a small scale, since the author received so many attacks after she published it, she angrily published 50 stand-alone printed copies, which is now a collector’s item in the CP fandom of ‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’. Until 2015-2016, a group of video editors found it by accident and were inspired deeply after reading the novel, then, they edit and uploaded videos for ‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’. Subsequently, the enthusiasm of fans was out of control, a number of high quality ‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’ videos have been edited successively by uploaders on Bilibili.com represented by ‘Xuan Yuan (轩辕)’, with emotional music and romantic lines and even logical plots, the influence and popularity of this CP began to rise rapidly, since then, the fandom of this La Lang CP ushered in the first wave of video creation with a golden five-part series. At present, ‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’ has already formed a stable fandom with fan works in various forms, on March 7, 2017, the CP Super Topic of ‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’ on Weibo was officially launched, which attracted 24,000 fans to participate in the discussion and 140 million views.



(Five famous fan videos from the CP fandom of Voldemort x Lin Daiyu)

The love affair of Voldemort and Lin Daiyu breaks down the barriers between Western pop culture and traditional Chinese culture, straddles the temporal and spatial boundaries of medieval England and Qing-dynasty China, and pushes the boundaries between 2-dimensional historical figures and 3-dimensional fantasy characters, making the manipulators behind it - La Lang CP fans -the purpose of which seems both straightforward and complex. Therefore, the nature of La Lang CP is more

complex than that of same-text CP and crossover ship, in that La Lang CP has the attributes of both spoof culture and intimacy experimentation.

## 2.2 Youth cultural movements for spoofing

‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’ was born as a result of an absurd bet, making this La Lang CP inherently carry the gene for spoof culture, and one of the key reasons that has made La Lang CP to become a striking secondary cultural product is precisely the nature of ‘e’gao (恶搞, spoofing)’. According to the *Question 31* (see Table 19), some fans believe that La Lang CP is appealing precisely because ‘E’gao or spoofing’ ( $n = 14, 10.37\%$ ).

Further, extracted the keywords with the word ‘e’gao (spoofing)’ based on the data collected from *Question 32* (see Table 18), two contrasting views were obtained. On the one hand, for those fans with positive attitudes towards La Lang, ‘for seeking the sense of spoofing’ ( $N = 7, 76.36\%$ ) was the third most positive reason for support out of a total of seven. For example, No. 122 claims that “I like Lalang CPs for the reason that they are so weird”. That is to say that the weirdness of the spoof is the key nature that makes the unique style of La Lang CP to be formed, and for a part of the fans, the sense of spoof is the key factor that attracts them to join in the La Lang CP.

For participants with a negative attitude towards La Lang CP, however, the sense of spoofing became a reason for opposing it, with ‘against, as it is a mere spoof’ ( $N = 13, 35.45\%$ ) being the third of the four reasons for opposing La Lang. With a particularly thought-provoking response from participant No.35, who argued “If it is a La Lang like Voldemort x Lin Daiyu, I do not think it is a CP in the traditional sense; what readers get from this CP is not the interaction of the characters, but a sense of satisfaction in seeking for novelty that breaks with tradition.”

Combining the arguments for and against, it could be argued that the ‘abrupt weirdness’ of ‘La Lang CP’ is a thrill for some enthusiasts, but at the same time for those who resent it, it is a parodic culture that should be despised, but what is certain is that La Lang is a subcultural product with a spoof nature. In Chinese, parody is called ‘e’gao (恶搞, spoofing)’ with the first character meaning evil and wicked, and the second meaning to make fun of someone/something. According to Christopher Rea (2013), ‘e’gao (spoofing)’ as a main buzzword associated with online Chinese parody, literally means ‘evil doings’ or ‘malicious manipulation’, and online spoofing (e’gao) carries a sense of playfulness, tricks, mischief, deviance, unsettling, messing up and maliciousness (Yu & Jian, 2016). In its wide range of usage, it can be applied to any cultural expression from parody to mockery, so



in a more restricted sense, ‘spoofing (e’gao)’ refers the practice of digitally manipulating mass culture products to comic effect and circulating them via the internet.

The fan activity of ‘e’gao (spoofing)’ is also common in Western popular culture, with a similar term being ‘parody’, referring to parodies that implicitly criticise the object of their ridicule through satire (Booth, 2014). *A Very Potter Musical* is one of the most famous parody videos of Harry Potter on YouTube, it is a parody musical with music and lyrics by Team StarKid, in June 2009, the group put the entire musical up on YouTube and it became a viral video, obtaining millions of views. As a spoof of transmedia storytelling, *A Very Potter Musical* not only not only retells the story and thus fills in the gaps in the narrative, but also adds content to it, including reinterpretations of the story, particularly through the use of parody and humour to amplify certain features and events (Boyce, 2019). And in the opinion of Henry Jenkins (2007), successful transmedia storytelling requires filling in narrative gaps and focusing on specific characters and plot lines (Atarama-Rojas, 2019), for which both Western parody video and La Lang CP have successfully done.

Participants in parody video gain empathy by quoting and appropriating other media texts to create new content (Highfield, 2016), same to it, the La Lang video is an unauthorised extension of these media franchises. La Lang reflects the desire of this portion of CP fans to fill in the gaps they find in original texts across cultures. The word ‘parody’, however, is a formal term and can be considered a form of artistic device, unlike the ‘e’gao (spoofing)’, which is an informal language developed by folklore, it is a completely grassroots culture.

Furthermore, the same sense of absurdity in parody videos is also present in La Lang CP videos, except that the former is meant to be humorous and the latter is meant to evoke emotional resonance in the viewer. Some scholars point to ‘e’gao (spoofing)’ as a networked practice of online political satire (Yang & Jiang, 2015); an alternative means of social engagement with, political critique of and cultural intervention in mainstream culture (Voci, 2010; Meng, 2011); and a digital reproduction of a rich repertoire of satire, humour and parody in oral and written forms in Chinese popular culture, and a product of Chinese post-socialist techno-political condition (Yu & Jian, 2016). Thus, from the attribute of ‘e’gao (spoofing)’, La Lang CP fans do serve to highlight a kind of fan identity as rebels.

Young female fans have subverted *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the most classic of traditional Chinese culture, which is regarded as the spiritual guideline of Confucianism, and deconstructed

Lin Daiyu, the transcendent woman who is regarded as the ideal personality by countless Chinese literati, from the grand meaning of the heavy Chinese history, and made her a character composed of a series of personal settings, together with Voldemort, the villain from the Western pop culture classic *Harry Potter*, who also consists of a series of personal settings, to become a La Lang CP, thus highlighting the ‘anti-discipline’ of young female fans against the mainstream and elite culture, which is why the La Lang CPs are also known as the cult CPs. Therefore, the Chinese La Lang CP carries the provocation to the mainstream culture, compared with the Western crossover shippers, La Lang CP fans prefer to deliberately select the works which are sealed as the classics of the national heritage as the material of La Lang CP. In other words, maybe the choice of *Dream of the Red Chamber* is a beautiful accident at the beginning, but the subsequent pushing of Voldemort and Lin Daiyu to the throne of the king of La Lang CP is a premeditated and deliberate provocation to the rigid mainstream culture and elite culture, which puts a veneer of a youth cultural and political movement beyond fan entertainment on La Lang CP.

The La Lang CP represented by ‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’ is the result of the combination of parody and CP fan culture, but in terms of the style of La Lang CP videos, there is a distinction between its rebelliousness and the rebellious focus of pornographic parody which is a well-known parody in slash fandom. Harris (2000) suggests that whilst parody is an independent genre, it can also be part of other genres, notably the product of a combination of erotic parody (Shelton, 2002, p. 125) and slash fan writing (Booth, 2014). Booth (2014) argues that both pornographic parody and slash fan fiction exhibit the characteristics of Bakhtin (1984)’s description of carnival, pornographic parody critiques mainstream cultural products through a combination of sarcasm and sexuality (Shelton, 2002, 125), in the same way, slash fanfiction utilises characters from existing media texts to produce original writing outside of mainstream media. Accordingly, Martin (2006, p. 199) notes that “pornographic parody can erode patriarchal power”.

However, the subversive nature that La Lang CP’s spoof videos demonstrate is not through the combination of pornography and slash, but rather as an integration of historical classic literature and CP fan culture. Pornographic parody can function as critical parody because it usually contains “some suggestion of subversive intent, thus suggesting a critique of the original’s repressive and erotic possibilities (Hunter, 2006, p. 325).” In contrast, La Lang CP’s spoof video serves as a critique because it systematically reappropriates parts of mainstream media culture that symbolise traditional

Chinese culture and social history, and uses CP-ised intercultural parody to re-express and overthrow stereotypical cultural imagery and monolithic interpretations. In short, whereas pornographic parody undermines patriarchal power by focusing on ‘sex’ (Booth, 2014), in the case of the Chinese La Lang CP parody, the focus is on class-based cultural patriarchy.

### **2.3 Configuration experiments with personal settings**

La Lang CP’s appeal to fans goes beyond parodies in the nature of spoof, although Aiqing Wang (2021) points out that spoof creations that rewrite characters from canonical works as homosexuals are prevalent in Chinese online pop culture with the intention of undermining the icons of mainstream culture. According to the *Question 31*(see Table 19), ‘e’gao or spoofing’ (N = 14, 10.37%) did not rank first in terms of response rate and popularity rate, and was significantly lower than ‘the sense of CP is so convincing that it is irrelevant whether it is La Lang or not’ (N = 21, 15.56%), and was closer to another reason related to the way the text was read, ‘the CP aligns with the orientation towards the personal setting’ (N = 12, 8.89%). So overall, the fan creations of ‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’ not only refer to spoofs of the classics, but rather a return to the form of CP culture, the essence of which is the experimentation with 2.5-dimensional settings, and exploring and demonstrating the possibility of CP’s intimacy is the core cohesion of the formation for the La Lang CP fandom.

Especially for La Lang CP fans, ‘the intimacy setting of two-way redemption creates a sense of CP’ (N = 14, 68.18%) is the strongest of the seven reasons why La Lang CP attracts fans. The intimacy setting of ‘two-way redemption’ means that both people in a CP are pillars for each other, succeeding or healing their wounds with each other’s help and companionship, it emphasises mutual and unreserved support between two characters for the same common goal. ‘Two-way redemption’ and ‘love-hate’ are both ‘evenly matched’ intimate relationship settings consisting of two sets of personal settings, which is in the same vein as the pursuit that CP fans of English-language cultural products display in regular CP creation (CP activities within the same text), i.e., the pursuit of an equal relationship between the two parties of the CP. In other words, as with the core concept of ‘powerful top/powerful bottom’, the essence of ‘two-way redemption’ intimacy setting is to allow for the two sets of ‘personal settings’ that can constitute an equal intimate relationship to be configured.

See specifically what some ‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’ CP fans described in the questionnaire. For instance, participant No. 14 replied that “Voldemort and Lin Daiyu have complementary personal settings and can redeem each other”; similarly, participant No. 15 thought that “Voldemort x Lin Daiyu was a good match and could redeem each other, especially Daiyu could redeem Tom”; participant No. 76 also pointed out that “Voldemort and Lin Daiyu had a sense of two-way redeeming and thus created a sense of CP”. That is to say, the audience does develop an emotional identification that has sustainability with the love story of this CP, as Stringer (2002, p. 1) points out regarding Japanese pornographic parody: “it is by no means merely critical or destructive ..... but also expresses a certain affection for the object its ridicules’. In particular, the fans have accurately identified the intimate setting of ‘two-way redemption’ as the signature of ‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’.

Moreover, take the plot of *Ruo Shui San Qian* as an example, there are two central points in the setting of this story, one is the ‘two-way redemption’ between Voldemort and Lin Daiyu, the second is that this romance eventually comes to a ‘happy ending’. Behind these two points lies the reason why this La Lang CP has become popular on Bilibili.com and in the Chinese fandom of English-language cultural products.

First of all, in the ‘two-way redemption’ setting, Lin Daiyu is different from the passive heroine waiting to be rescued by the male protagonist in outdated romance novels, but rather rescues Voldemort by continuously improving her own strength, whilst Voldemort is also distinguished from the male protagonist in heteronormative narratives, who ‘gives alms with pity’ to the female protagonist with a distinctly patriarchal temperament, thus, La Lang CP fans are deliberately circumventing the logical trap of ‘male strength and female weakness’ in heteronormative narratives. Their emphasis on the intimacy setting of ‘two-way redemption’ proves that CP fans pay extra attention to the personal growth and self-awareness awakening of female characters in the construction of CP’s intimacy, i.e., embedding the myth of the independent female individual in the intimacy of the equal heterosexual CP.

Secondly, the happy ending of this CP also means that fans’ intended grievances about the fates of these two characters are filled in La Lang videos, which confirms that ‘support, to compensate for the regret of the original characters’ (N = 4, 80.00%) is another important reason why fans support LaLang. In the original plot of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the ending of Lin Daiyu is regrettable,

and fans believe that Daiyu, such a victim of feudal society, also needs a person to protect her, so the approach of La Lang CP gives fans a kind of opportunity to watch Voldemort strip Daiyu from the established tragedy; on the other hand, in the opinion of the fans, Voldemort, as a victim of the family's evils, also likewise needs a person to save him from darkness and loneliness, so Daiyu saves Voldemort from his unfortunate fate, thus giving him another kind of romance and warmth that distinguishes him from the original. Therefore, the significance of the emergence of La Lang CP is that the fans have provided a framework for their own conception of an equal and successful intimate relationship.

Although the 'happy ending' that CP fans expect in 'Voldemort x Lin Daiyu' after their 'two-way redemption' points not to freedom, but to the bondage of a relationship concluded under the dictates of the patriarchal system, this does not mean that Lalang CP has returned to the aesthetics and ideology of non-modernity (or feudalism) before the Renaissance. CP fans of 'Voldemort x Lin Daiyu' have an extreme imagination of equal intimacy, and they deny the incompleteness and inequality of real relationships, so they try to imagine and create a kind of non-traditional freedom that is both complete and free from social and historical textual constraints.

In conclusion, the nature of La Lang CP is complex, it is both a spoof and provocation of traditional culture by young women, symbolising the cultural campaigns initiated by Generation Z and Generation Y in China, meanwhile, La Lang CP is a kind of equal and complete intimacy constructed by female fans for healing their own emotional wounds, signified by the two-way redemption of CP. But in general, from the point of view of the way La Lang CP is assembled, its essence is still the same as CP culture, which is an experiment in configuring various '2.5-dimensional settings'.

### **3. Fan-made videos of La Lang CP**

The well-produced La Lang CP video with engaging storylines contributed a lot to the establishment of the Voldemort x Lin Daiyu's prominence among a host of Lalang CPs. According to the data collected from *Question 32* about the acceptance towards the La Lang CP (see Table 18), fans' specific attitudes towards La Lang CP from *Harry Potter* and *Dream of the Red Chamber* can be divided into positive support (seven reasons in total) and negative opposition (four reasons in total), to be specific, "support, for fan-made videos with engaging storylines" is the second most frequent (N = 12, 90.91%) option among seven reasons for positive support. The fan-made videos of La Lang



emotionally-charged viewers posted ‘bullet-screen comments’ blaming Potter in such large numbers at the same juncture that a crescendo of interlocking words was presented on the screen.

Once the characters are incorporated into the plot setting, the final step in La Lang CP’s video is the use of superb editing techniques. If the protagonists have never been in the same scene together, various talented video-makers can edit the two unrelated people into the same picture. As long as the picture is presented, and then adjust the texture of the video through colour grading, and even a professional voiceover can pull up the quality of the La Lang CP video, at this point, a soundtrack that is just right to set the mood is important. Fans adding or reordering voice-overs, sound effects and music in re-edited trailers inspires the potential for fans to re-imagine the source text (Deaville, 2016).

At this point, a complete set of La Lang CP video process is completed, and a CP with the potential to attract fans is established. At the same time, reviewing the most important part of the whole process, i.e., the plot description, it can be found that La Lang CP’s video has a different production method from that of fan-made MTV. Jenkins (1992, P. 233-234) describes fan-made MTV as a memory palace, where “images are anchored to their canonical provenance or quoted from the fandom’s understanding of the TV show’s characters and the meta-textual worldview.” A fan may not recognise all of the specific images, nor have the time to recognise the connections between all of them, but the experience of watching this video still draws the fan back to the original show and invites them to reconsider the narrative development of the original show. As such, the fan-made MTV act as a kind of memory palace, encapsulating a complex narrative within a smaller number of highly iconographic shots.

However, it is not the responsibility of the La Lang CP video to become a memory ATM machine; according to *Question 31* (see Table 19), it can be seen that one of the reasons why fans like La Lang CP is “sense of the unknown (N = 23, 17.04%), which means that La Lang CP creates imaginative space for the fans; it wants to erase the viewers’ memories of the original show first, and then to make them accept the brand-new episodes and put new memories into the subsequent repeated viewings to put new memories, thus it is a double information processing process.

the first thing their brain would do is to locate the point where the plot of the original occurred, i.e., Lin Daiyu is sick because of Jia Baoyu, but immediately they would have to go along with the plot of the video placing this scene shift under the plot that she is doing this because Tom has left. In

this way, the La Lang CP video allows the reader to see these images as part of a new narrative and to simultaneously recall their significance in the context of a completely different world structure, so that the La Lang CP video established a type of constructed reality in which the creator poaches from multiple media cosmologies to construct an original narrative and re-establish a context for the poached images.

Briefly, the foundation for La Lang videos is zero, and it is not based on an established and well-formed audience or fandom, even if it is deliberately overturning this frozen state of imagination and composition. Moreover, La Lang does not actually require audiences to be extremely familiar with the worldview and plot of the original work, for example, ‘two-way redemption’ as a representative intimate relationship setting for ‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’ does not take as a necessary prerequisite a fan’s knowledge of the original work. What is more important in La Lang CP videos is whether the viewer is able to keenly capture those personal settings that the characters possess in La Lang CP videos, and whether they can match them with other settings in the extensive 2.5-dimensional settings database for initiating mental experiments oriented towards the construction of equal intimacy.

So far, CP fans of ‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’ have even evolved the video from a mere editing and splicing of clips based on *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Harry Potter* to a miniature video of the episode played by real people. In January 2022, blogger ‘isBlur’ uploaded a homemade video [*Voldemort x Lin Daiyu*] *She is my past, present and future* on Bilibili.com. The creator of the video, who also plays the role of Lin Daiyu, ‘isBlur’ and her boyfriend, filmed the storyline and adaptation of Voldemort’s famous fanfiction *The Flower Affair* in France while dressing in traditional Chinese costumes and Hogwarts wizarding robes, and then made it with some clips from *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (Part 2)* to become the latest acclaimed fan creation in fandom of this CP. This video has now received 458,000 views, with a cumulative total of 713 bullet comments and 1041 comments.



### 【伏地魔x林黛玉】她是我的过去，现在和未来

45.8万 713 2022-01-13 00:26:59 未经作者授权，禁止转载



isBlur 发消息  
Luna和Yann的日常 / 穿搭 / 旅行 - “爱生活基...  
充电 + 关注 17.2万

弹幕列表 :

时间	弹幕内容	发送时间
01:01	黛玉送了老伏相思子，老伏自己...	01-13 10:53
00:43	伏地魔好像	01-13 10:54
00:36	时代的眼泪算是	01-13 11:06
01:03	来自远方为你葬花!	01-13 11:37
01:29	神秘的东方力量 (doge)	01-13 11:41
00:08	啊啊啊啊啊啊啊啊	01-13 11:51
00:04	卧蚕! 凭本事!!!	01-13 11:52
00:17	我有一瓶香水叫浮黛	01-13 12:00
00:23	666666	01-13 12:16
02:05	好浪漫!	01-13 12:21
00:57	我的妈脑洞这么大	01-13 12:23
02:05	我看了我磕了 我大受震撼 绝美..	01-13 12:39
00:01	????	01-13 12:51
00:04	离谱	01-13 12:59

1人正在看, 已装填 710 条弹幕 发个友善的弹幕见证当下 弹幕礼仪 > 发送 查看历史弹幕

(Figure 12 Video of Voldemort and Lin Daiyu played by fans)

### 3.2 Intimacy experiments in La Lang CP

intimacy has always occupied a central place in the creation of fan fiction (Hellekson & Busse, 2006; Leavenworth, 2015), and it is no different for fans of La Lang CP. Once an ‘alternative universe’ based on the common will of the fans (Kirby, 2022) is established, the characters are no longer attached to the original text, but become a collection of personal settings that assist La Lang CP fans in their experimental fantasies of intimacy.

This experiment can be divided into two steps: the first step is make a CP, which is to repeatedly try and estimate whether two or more characters are suitable for coupling; the second step occurred after some participants found their ideal couple, then, they will postpone step one and go on to explain and analyze the rationality, artistry and various details that can be interpreted as evidence of intimacy, and carry out literary creation and interaction within fan community based on the construction of this CP. When step two is suspended or terminated for some reasons, the experimental progress will return to step one and start a new circulation.

This procedure is necessarily preparatory work for La Lang as a kind of ideological experiment. After all, only a ‘collection of personal settings’ that are collaged together from a ‘2.5-dimensional setting database’ that is independent of all works can qualify to be freely selected and paired up as an experimental subject without being restricted by the original work and its environment. In addition to this, personal settings are often regarded not only as ‘experimental data’ to be used to ‘calibrate’ the experimental subjects, but even as the experimental subjects themselves. Based on

numerous complicated but limited elements of the ‘dynamic 2.5-dimensional settings database’, fans naturally refine a formula for a CP that fits their personal orientation.

Take the abstract of fan fiction *Voldemort x Lin Daiyu: life and death knot* (Jin Jiang literature, 一个小 K, 2017) as an example:

“At the beginning of his entrance to the magic school, young Riddell was involved in an unpredictable conspiracy, he plans and prepares cautiously, but the exotic soul summoned by him unexpectedly made him confused. He is indifferent, introverted, and unscrupulous; Lin, on the other hand, is pure, kind and unsophisticated. They compassionate, dependent and warm to each other.” In this description, an obvious formula for the construction of intimacy can be found. That is, character A (Riddle) × character B (Lin Daiyu), where the symbol ‘X’ like ‘/’, indicates the existence of intimacy between the two characters before and after; while ‘character A (Riddle)’ and ‘character B (Lin Daiyu)’ as experimental objects are limited by two sets of ‘personal settings’, i.e., set one (indifferent + introverted + unscrupulous) X set two (pure + kind + unsophisticated).

These collages of ‘personal settings’ form the basis for the second step of the fans’ experiment in intimacy during the process of La Lang CP, and the above formula is the core algorithm to explore the intimate relationship. Thus, what the fans of La Lang CP and do is to repeatedly check how well a collage of personal settings fits with another (or several) collage(s) of personal settings. In this process, the storage function of the ‘dynamic 2.5-dimensional setting database’ in CP culture greatly improves the operability and repeatability of the experiment.

#### **4. Clarification of misconceptions about La Lang CP**

Based on the frequency analysis conducted for the *Question 30* — How high is your degree of acceptance to the cross-cultural and cross-textual La Lang CP (see Table 20) firstly, the largest number of the sample is ‘neutral and respectful’ (N = 65, 66.67%); and secondly, there are significantly more fans who express a clear support for La Lang who ‘perfectly acceptable’ (N = 23, 100%) than those who express a strong resentment for it ‘completely unacceptable, even disgusting’ (N = 5, 3.97%); thirdly, with regard to fans who expressed a more moderate attitude towards La Lang, comparing who are ‘relatively unacceptable’ (N = 14, 15.08%) and ‘relatively acceptable’ (N = 19, 81.75%). Overall, although the difference between the two sets of figures is not significant, the majority of fans who can be relatively positive about La Lang are still in the majority, and they respect the existence of La Lang CP.

**Table 20 Acceptance level for La Lang CP**

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Completely unacceptable, even disgusting	5	3.97%	3.97%
Relatively unacceptable	14	11.11%	15.08%
Neutral and respectful	65	51.59%	66.67%
Relatively acceptable	19	15.08%	81.75%
Perfectly acceptable	23	18.25%	100.00%
Total	126	100.0%	

While at the same time, there are not a few fans who have a more negative attitude towards the La Lang CP. In fact, both the spoofing attributes of La Lang CP's subversion of traditional Chinese culture, and La Lang's practice of having characters completely removed from the original, have caused La Lang CP fans under more pressure compared to fans who show a high level of commitment to CP assembled from characters in the same text, thus, they have long been subjected to criticisms from two main sources. The first is the accusation that La Lang CP is a completely database-type creation, and thus has no concrete meaning; the second is the accusation that La Lang CP is unbound and thus it is a completely OOC (out of character) creation; in fact, both accusations are misconceptions caused by a lack of understanding of La Lang CP's logic.

#### **4.1 The narrative impulse of La Lang CP fan**

The emergence of 'Voldemort x Lin Daiyu' as a prominent representative of the La Lang CP heralds a new direction in fan culture creation, whereby, any two randomly designated characters can form a CP as long as there is a large enough database available to the fan, and the fan-creator is competent enough to identify, extract, and combine various personal settings as a CP, and thus, the La Lang CP is perceived to be symbolic and insubstantial in having a symbol made up of two names. The act of La Lang CP is then a form of 'data appropriation' and 'cultural appropriation' defined by Coleman (2019), and La Lang CPs are therefore suspended CPs without storytelling. Especially for opponents of La Lang CPs, the lack of storytelling basis and emotional relationship between CPs is its most blameworthy characteristic, as shown in *Question 32* (see Table 18) where among the participants who have a negative view of La Lang CPs, they think that 'against, as the La Lang CP lacks both a story basis and an emotional relationship' (N = 22, 55.45%) is relatively high with a

proportion of 20.00%. In their opinion, La Lang just takes the stories, worlds and/or characters in existing media texts as a starting point on which to create their own stories (Stock et al., 2017) and form their own favourite CPs, and consequently, La Lang CPs are regarded as CPs created out of thin air without the support of story bases and emotional relationships.

This argument may not be flawed if examined simply from the perspective of regarding the usage of the symbolic '2.5-dimensional setting database', but the problem arises in that it ignores the emotional investment that fan authors have invested in La Lang CP, and their strong desire to construct new stories. Therefore, even though La Lang CP itself dismantles the grand narrative of the original, it does not mean that they do not need a story; quite the contrary, in addition to the story that needs to be created and recreated in the process of creating a La Lang CP, the fans are not passively waiting for the CP to create or display certain behaviours with strong romantic connotations, but rather create a scenario that carries the CP's expressions of emotion and intimate interactions, and this is the most creative and hardest labour input of La Lang CP fans.

Therefore, the fact is that fans have a higher demand for the narrative of La Lang CP, even higher than what fans of the official CP want from the story. For participants who had a positive view of La Lang in *Question 32* (see Table 18), 'support, for fan-made videos with engaging storylines' (N = 12, 90.91%) and 'support, for the story of the fan fiction makes logical sense' (N = 2, 70.00%) collectively illustrate the importance of narrative in secondary creation for La Lang CP fans. Participant No.95 commented on this point by saying that "it doesn't matter who is being shipped as a La Lang CP, it's the editorial plausibility and the content of the story that matters"; No.135 also highlighted the importance of 'story' to the plausibility of the La Lang, "I'm fine with most La Lang CPs as long as the story is logical and well written."

Theoretically, La Lang can be a random and illogical combination of various personal settings, but the reality is often that La Lang CPs do not come out of nowhere without any reason. Fans still apply the formula of personal settings in the first stage of La Lang, looking for points of correlation between the characters, to test again and again whether or not the result of the different configurations of personal settings is plausible, as well as whether or not it meets the fans' idea of an equal intimacy, and then, in the second stage, to manifest a stronger narrative drive to make the empty (without backstory) CP takes root in the reader's consciousness. Therefore, La Lang has such a duality, its characters are certainly divorced from the original story, but this does not mean that

La Lang necessarily abandons the need to tell the story; on the contrary, precisely because of this narrative deficiency, La Lang's fan writers seem to be more eager to virtualize and construct a new story than the average fan author.

Furthermore, the creators of La Lang CP have deliberately chosen the personal settings in the database, partly for narrative convenience, but also for the purpose of constructing an equal intimate relationship between two parties of a CP, especially for Voldemort x Lin Daiyu, which is a La Lang CP marked by the setting of 'two-way redemption'. In the fan fiction *Voldemort x Lin Daiyu: life and death knot*, due to a fortuitous magical manipulation gone wrong, Lin Daiyu's soul is summoned into the hands of a teenage Voldemort, Tom Riddle, as a result, Daiyu sees a wider world beyond the feudal mansion, and Riddle sheds his initial cold cruelty to try to understand how to cherish and love a woman. For fans, what they are doing is expressing in a serious and earnest way their understanding and desire for the attributes that the ideal intimate relationships should have, i.e., equality and mutual support.

In sum, La Lang CP fans have had the narrative logic of the original work completely dismantled when some CP fans are still obsessed with confirming their legitimacy from the original, such as the GGAD fans who have been tirelessly shining a light on the status of the canon CP which is certified by J.K. Rowling's seal of approval. And when the characters are taken out of the story, "it semi-automatically liberates all individual stories from the imaginations of other stories" (Azuma, 2009), and with it comes an even stronger narrative impulse, since fans know that only a more neatly crafted and well-developed storyline is fundamental to supporting the legitimacy of La Lang CP. So even though the success of La Lang CP emphasises the role of the '2.5-dimensional setting database', the stories have not disappeared, but rather proliferated by fan authors of La Lang CP, as Chin & Morimoto (2013) found in GGAD's slash fandom, for some fans looking for subtext within the canon and using their imagination to do so is exactly what they enjoy, at which point a statement from the original author is instead not expected. In short, La Lang CP is not a game of momentary revelry, nor is it a vapid collage of data with no storytelling, but rather serious and earnest storytelling.

#### **4.2 The basic consensus within La Lang CP fandom**

Disrespect for the original text is therefore the most common accusation found against La Lang CP in this study. A fourth important factor that provoked significant conflict between La Lang fans and

its detractors was the loyalty towards the original. According to the data collected from *Question 32* about the acceptance towards the La Lang CP (see Table 18), ‘against, as it does not conform to the original persona and worldview’ (N = 11, 10.00%) was one of the reasons why participants had an opposing attitude towards La Lang. Some representative statements are as follows, participant No. 84’s attitude was “I respect it, but it is not very respectful of traditional Chinese literature.”; participant No. 16 responded that “there is a cognitive conflict between La Lang CP and the Canon CP”; participant No. 34 did not like La Lang for similar reasons, “if the original CP were placed in another worldview then the CP would not be the same as the original.”

The accusation that La Lang is illegitimate as a CP independent of the official text implies that the official text remains orthodox and canonical. In the early stages of fan creation, the official still held authority, and La Lang fanfiction was still cautiously underground in its shadow, waiting to be recruited by the official. However, at a time when Voldemort x Lin Daiyu became a fan consensus and form a stable fandom, fans had no qualms about accusations outside the fandom.

This is not to say, however, that La Lang CP is completely exempt from any rules, the operation of La Lang cannot exist in isolation from the soil on which they rely for survival: a group of Chinese fans who are mainly women, they joint together and keen on discussing related topics. Usually, in a particular fan community, the personal setting of the CP and the details of the intimate relationship are a collection of public knowledge and basic consensus formed through long-term negotiation, accumulation, and abandonment by integrating the collective wisdom of the community members. In the case of ‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’ might more accurately be understood as the CP of ‘Tom Riddle x Lin Daiyu’, because ‘attractive appearance’ (N = 6, 100.00%) is a significant reason for fans to form CP. So, Tom Riddle and Lin have aesthetical looks, is the consensus within the fandom for this CP, which is an invisible rule that cannot be broken. For example, once any story line in a fanfiction suggests that Lin is an average looking girl, fan writers shall be overwhelmed by the outrage of fans and accused of being ‘out of character’.



(Figure 13 and 14 CP fan comic by Duo Qing De Lao Ban, Voldemort is created in the image of Tom Riddle)

A principal of ‘OOC (Out of Character)’, it refers to the behavior of a character who does not conform to the setting of original work in the process of fan creation, normally, fans can easily tell that OOC with respect to their canon counterparts is happening (Polanki, 2016). In fact, OOC has the same meaning in the fandom of La Lang CP, except that the criteria for defining OOC is no longer the description of the original, but the fandom consensus, which means that the authority to define OOC has been handed over from the official to the fans. Thus, in order to cater to the mainstream aesthetics of the members in the fandom of ‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’, the ghastly face of Voldemort, which was explicitly written in the original novel, was heartily discarded over time, and Tom Riddle, who was gloomy and handsome in appearance, gradually became the ‘fanon’ by the consensus of the fan community. This process of shifting fan consensus from ‘canon’ to ‘fanon’ is illustrated by Thomas (2011) as the process by which, over time, certain plot or character become established in the fandom, even if they never appear in the source text or deviate from it altogether. In this sense, it is unfair to accuse the La Lang CP of being disloyal to the original; after all, no piece of fan works can be ontologically faithful to the original.

## 5. La Lang CP fans

To sum up, La Lang CP, which takes cross-cultural, cross-textual, and cross-dimensional character to assemble a CP as its antecedent action, is essentially an ‘in-brain experimental field of equal intimacy’ initiated by female fans based on the ‘2.5-dimensional settings database’, where fans follow the basic consensus within the community according to specific personal setting formulas. Although the present research argues that from the perspective of an intimacy experiment based on

personal setting configurations, the characters in La Lang CP are symbolic, this does not mean that La Lang CP is merely a form of data appropriation and that CP fans are not going from being textual poachers to becoming setting poachers, because the attributes of La Lang CP are complex.

Firstly, La Lang CP fans are more revolutionary, as contemporary young women, they bravely launch a new cultural movement against the elite culture, and they deviate from the classical literature to create spoofs and CPs, which not only provokes the authority of defining the classics, but also gives new vitality to the solidified civilisation. Secondly, La Lang CP fans are also the most diligent type of fans, who are confronted with a huge amount of material, but the basis of creation is practically blank, thus they have to work twice as hard to first detach fans from the memory of the original, and then construct a plot with logic for the new CP, so as to make the La Lang CP present the attractiveness and reasonableness that a successful pair of CPs should have. Finally, La Lang CP has made the greatest contribution to global fan culture, they have not only broken through the limitations of the text, but also built an alternative bridge of communication between the two civilisations, thus proposing a new way of solving the problem of promoting intercultural communication.

Thus, La Lang CP is the freedom of the fans, their labour and emotion in constructing an equal intimacy, and their contribution to creating a new cultural paradigm should not be maligned and misinterpreted; rather, La Lang CP is a glimpse into the pioneering nature of the CP fandom of English-language cultural products.

## **Chapter Seven. Stopping Support for CP of English-language Cultural Products**

Whether in the intra-textual CP of *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts*, or the inter-textual CP of *Harry Potter* and *Dream of the Red Chamber*, as well as, no matter how the gender of the CP is composed and how the top/bottom configuration is delineated, the CP fans of the English cultural productions have demonstrated a great capacity for cultural creativity and a progressive line of thought, they have developed a new content of the international fan culture, and they have provided a new model for how intercultural communication can be adapted to the current cultural habits of young people.



However, the present research found that compared to fans of CPs from Chinese local cultures, the CP fan identities of English-language cultural products sometimes subjected them to more criticism, and this criticism came from the conflict between their national identities as Chinese and their fan identities of English-language cultural products, which sometimes led to the discontinuation of the fans' emotional investment and fan labour in a heterogeneous cultural CPs. Thus, intercultural CP fans have to compromise between their national identity and fan identity in order to achieve a balance, which also leads to the emergence of fan nationalism in the CP fandom of English-language cultural products.

Jonathan Dean (2017) argues, a more thorough reflection on fans may provide a valuable addition to understanding contemporary modes of young people's political participation in highly mediated environments. Meanwhile, fan identity may be a powerful facilitator in pairing non-civic ethical frameworks (i.e., values derived from participation in pop culture fan activities) with civic ethical models (Hammonds, 2020). Despite the political potential of fans being recognised, most of the current research on Chinese fan culture focuses on how Chinese fans reinforce Chinese nationalism in the world, whereas it remains relatively under-researched on how they use nationalist discourses in their daily fan practices on social media.

Therefore, the present research takes the split between CP fans of the old and new versions of GGAD as an example, originally incorporating fan-democracy as an important factor influencing the continuation of coupling activities among CP fans of English-language cultural products. While the CP fandom of English-language cultural products strongly emphasises its liberal-democratic apolitical ethos of keeping respectful distance from mainstream culture, and they appear to be practising an irrational affective activity in a private sphere outside of politics, as McRobbie and Garber (2006) argue about subcultural fans, they form a 'defensive retreat' to avoid being restricted and judged by those who identify with the dominant culture. In practice, however, CP fans of English-language cultural products as an interest-orientated group of young people with a full range of codes of action and spiritual essentials, not only do they have a willingness to engage in politics, but they also demonstrate their ability to link their national identity with their fan identity. Further, the present research is original in suggesting that there are differences in the attitudes and implementation of nationalism between CP fans of English-language cultural products and CP fans of Chinese-local cultural products, and that such differences are manifested in two main forms:

firstly, CP fans of English-language cultural products tend to adopt softer means of struggle, and secondly, they are able to negotiate their identities more than rationally with regard to fanhood and national identity.

### 1. Cessation of cross-cultural CP fan activities

Based on the *Question 25 — Have you ever been criticized while showing a high level of commitment to CP of English-language cultural products* (see Table 11), although many participants said that they have never been misunderstood or attacked by others (N = 56, 41.48%), CP fans of English-language cultural products do receive a certain degree of criticism and attack. One category of these accusations was made from the commonalities of CP fans, for example, ‘love-struck fans who are ignorant and egoless’ (N = 20, 14.81%), ‘fans without a bottom line and moral integrity’ (N = 20, 14.81%), and ‘a homebody who is eccentric, withdrawn, and socially inept’ (N = 13, 9.63%). As well as criticisms that have been made from the styles of CP fans of English-language cultural products, including ‘people who have no respect for the originals and coupling to satisfy their personal preferences’ (N = 36, 26.67%), and ‘fans of English-language cultural products who pretend to be niche and noble and despise local CPs’ (N = 33, 24.44%). Both types of accusations are centred on the ‘fan attributes’ of CP fans of English-language cultural products as opposed to local Chinese CP fans; in short, the scope of criticism is still limited to the level of divergence between the mainstream culture and the subculture.

But for CP fans of English-language cultural products, they bear the additional accusation of ‘people who are not concerned with the interests of the country or even unpatriotic’ (N = 30, 22.22%). This is the most serious and more dangerous accusation that CP fans of English-language cultural products are subjected to, as their fan behaviour seems to cause harm to national sentiments and national politics. In China’s fan culture ecology, the defence of nationalism has always been the bottom line for fans, so the most famous ‘cancel incident<sup>25</sup>’ in the CP fandom of *Fantastic Beasts* is precisely because it involves the forbidden zone of nationalism.

In 2020, actor Johnny Depp, who played Gellert Grindelwald in *Fantastic Beasts*, stopped playing the role due to being embroiled in a divorce case and accusations of domestic violence, and the role

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<sup>25</sup> Cancel (sb) means to disagree with what they do or say, stopping supporting or promoting someone, esp. a celebrity.

of Grindelwald was taken over by Mads Mikkelsen in *Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore* as Depp's replacement. The incident caused a great deal of controversy on international social media, with a high level of interaction between various identities and interest groups and a renewed debate around topics related to domestic violence, the #MeToo movement, and women's rights. Social media in China is no exception, with news related to the progress of the case hitting the Weibo trending list several times, albeit, in the forum of entertainment news. Which means that even though there have been some discussions of gender politics around the incident on Chinese media platforms, as well as, Johnny Depp fans concerned about the impact of the incident on his career, and fans of *Fantastic Beasts* concerned about whether or not the release of *Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore* will be impacted, the majority of Chinese netizens are actually discussing the incident as nothing more than a foreign celebrity's scandal.

It was only when CP fans of GGAD in China entered the fray that a political element was added to the discussion. This was not, however, the politics of gender identity in the Western social arena, but rather the politics of cultural nationalism. In August 2022, as Johnny Depp's defamation case against Emeber Shields developed further, a screenshot of Johnny Depp's text messages with rock star Marilyn Manson, which contained racial slurs against Asians as well as inappropriate comments related to the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea, was exposed (Daily Mail, UK). After the incident erupted on Chinese social media Weibo, a topic called '# Depp rh' (德普辱华, rh is the pinyin acronym for 'insulting China'<sup>26</sup>), and since these two words are banned on Weibo, fans use rh instead) hit Weibo's trending topic, with a large number of fans claiming that they had no choice but to terminate their fan's status, and some fans said in GGAD's Super Topic, "I hope I won't have to see his image used in GGAD's fan art again."

As a result, the Chinese GGAD CP fandom created a split based on conflicting national identity and fan identity, with some fans choosing to support the new version of GGAD consisting of Max McCall and Jude Law, and some not accepting the new version of GGAD. For fans who support the new version of the CP, they feel that they cannot support an actor who is politically incorrect to play

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<sup>26</sup> Insulting China involves attacking or insulting China's sovereignty, Chinese people and Chinese culture. The specific criteria for 'insulting China' vary from person to person in practice, and the bottom line varies greatly from fan to fan.

their favourite CP, which is a tarnish, as participant No. 111 stated, “I don’t want the political incorrectness of my CP to be a problem for people who are younger and cognitively incapable of doing so.” But for fans who support the old CP, even though they acknowledge that Max McCall also played Grindelwald well, due to preconceived notions, GGAD is what Depp and Jude Law are in their minds, and, due to the ‘2.5-dimensional setting database’, which makes the old fan’s understanding of GGAD’s personal setting inherently strongly adhesive to the actor’s real personal setting, therefore, changing the role of a new person would be like taking GGAD apart and reassembling it into a new CP. It is clear that the reason for the mass disenchantment of the fans of Depp-version’s GGAD is the untouchable red line in the entire Chinese fan ecosystem — ‘Country first; Idol second’, which is also known as ‘There are no idols in front of the country’.

As the censorship of ‘political correctness’ has solidified into a built-in mechanism, any words or actions of CPs (especially real-life CPs) suspected ‘insulting China’ could lead to habitual vigilance by fans, as GGAD’s CP fans have shown, nationalistic sentiments can easily be fissured into anger and provocation among fans. According to the chi-square goodness-of-fit test performed on the *Question 33 — If one day you are no show a high level of commitment to CPs of English-language cultural products, what may be the reason* (see Table 21), excluding some internal issues such as reduced fan activity in the CP fandom itself, the external pressure from politics and nationalism are the key points that lead to CP fans’ disaffection, including ‘political friction between China and the country to which the original work belongs’ (N = 25, 18.52%); and ‘the actor playing the CP is politically incorrect’ (N = 48, 35.56%).

**Table 21 Reasons for Disengaging from Intercultural CP fan status**

Item	Response		Popularity rate (n=135)
	n	Response rate	
There are too few fan creations	51	19.39%	37.78%
Political friction between China and the country to which the original work belongs	25	9.51%	18.52%
The actor playing the CP is politically incorrect	48	18.25%	35.56%
One partner in the CP is in a relationship or married	15	5.70%	11.11%

**Table 21 Reasons for Disengaging from Intercultural CP fan status**

Item	Response		Popularity rate ( <i>n</i> =135)
	<i>n</i>	Response rate	
My preference for the CP has changed from male/female to male/male	16	6.08%	11.85%
The atmosphere in the fandom is unpleasant	40	15.21%	29.63%
CP is so outrageous that I can no longer be confident	9	3.42%	6.67%
The official CP is too compatible	11	4.18%	8.15%
Real-world pressures (e.g., studies and work)	39	14.83%	28.89%
CP is too imaginary; I want to have real intimacy	9	3.42%	6.67%
Total	263	100%	194.81%

Goodness-of-fit test:  $\chi^2=94.985$   $p=0.000$

This suggests that based on the active censorship mechanism of fans, nationalism is not only a critical factor that acts as an external pressure to make the coupling experience of CP fans of English-language cultural products, but also a key endogenous factor that be actively used by fans to lead to the termination of their intercultural coupling activities. As participant No. 85 stated in question 25, “(she) is very receptive to CP, but she is definitely on the side of the country regarding national issues.” Actually, the fandom consists of many different people, so conflicts are unavoidable (Tushnet, 2014), Chin (2018) argues that the fundamental cause of fan conflicts is discrimination, which enables fans to distinguish themselves from outsiders or other fans. However, the conflict between old CP fans and new CP fans of GGAD suggests that the specific national and cultural context attached an implication of nationalistic struggle to this CP fans’ conflict.

## **2. Online fandom nationalism**

### **2.1 Definition**

Nationalism is a cultural and cognitive ideology associated with a community’s collective identity, cultural cohesion, and social solidarity (e.g., Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 1987; Hardin, 1997). Based on the symbiotic relationship between the nation and the state, nationalism in China is more appropriately understood as state-motivated nationalism, i.e., “a ruler who speaks in the name of the state succeeds in demanding that citizens identify with that state and subordinate other interests to

those of the state” (Tilly, 1994, p. 133; Zhao, 1998, p. 291). With the emergence of Generation Z and Generation Y as Internet natives on the stage of history, Chinese youth have become significantly more aware of nationalism while bringing a fan-cultural quality to online nationalism. The ‘Diba Expedition<sup>27</sup>’ and ‘Little Pinks Incidents<sup>28</sup>’ (Zhuang et al., 2023) unveiled the prelude to the engagement of fans in nationalist disputes in transnational media (Fang & Repnikova, 2018; Liu, 2019), and this dynamic of fandom nationalism spread to various political events after 2016, such as the ‘THAAD dispute’ (Wu et al., 2019).

Since then, online fan nationalism has begun to demonstrate formidable fan power. Fans have applied the tactics and organisational logic they use in fan culture to protect the state as their idol (Fang & Repnikova, 2018; Liu, 2019). In this regard, Huang (2021) and Schneider (2017) explicitly use the term ‘fandom nationalism’ in their study of political engagement with fans in China, and Liu (2019) suggests that this form of fan is a unique combination of nationalism, digital culture and commercial culture. In recent years, a growing number of fans of iconic stars in China have been found to be one of the main forces behind online nationalist activism (Wang & Luo, 2023), they have supported the core national values put forward by the Chinese government in recent years (Fang & Repnikova, 2018; Han, 2015a), and actively act as nationalist fans in response to external political shocks (Wang & Luo, 2023).

It can therefore be argued that a unique feature of Chinese fan activities is the high level of engagement with the dominant culture characterised by nationalism (Wang & Luo, 2023). Especially compared with Western fans, the Chinese fan culture interacts more closely with state power (Jenkins, 2020). Nowadays, nationalism has become an important censorship factor and means of struggle in Chinese CP fan culture, and it is no exception for CP fans of English-language cultural products.

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27 After Taiwan’s 2016 election, members of an online posting site from mainland China called ‘Di Ba’ formed an online expeditionary force that organised attacks on Taiwanese politicians’ Facebook pages with emoticons and emojis.

28 Little Pink is a pronoun for China’s online patriotic youth, which first appeared on the women’s online novel reading website ‘Jinjiang Literature City’ and was initially known as ‘Jinjiang Worrying Country Girls’ because of the site’s pink colour palette and high proportion of female users.

## 2.2 Purpose of fandom nationalism - as a tool for fan conflict

However, defending the dignity of the state-nation is not the only purpose of fandom nationalism; within the nation, ‘patriotism’ is a weapon used by local Chinese CP fans to fight against their competitors. As one of the last Chinese BL-adapted web dramas to air in its entirety, the CP fans of the two characters have caused an uproar of fandom nationalism, with actor Zhang Zhehan<sup>29</sup> being accused of hurting national sentiments for filming cherry blossoms near the Yasukuni Shrine. This photo resulted in him being subjected to mass reporting by only-fans who viewed CP fans as rivals, consequently, this actor being banned from Mainland China in August 2021, more seriously, this incident is believed to have directly led to the banning of BL-adapted web dramas in China.

Fandom nationalism is not only used by fans of local Chinese CPs to initiate fan struggles, but also by fans of transnational CPs in inter-ethnic fan conflicts over ‘insults to China’. Taking fans of the Thailand CP BKPP as an example, on 11 April 2020, Nnevy, girlfriend of Thai actor Bright, who plays a role in this CP, was exposed by fans on social media for her allegedly ‘Taiwan independence’ comments and allegedly ‘insulting China’ behaviour, coupled with Bright’s controversial social media antics that night, completely angered Chinese CP fans, and the incident continued to fester, triggering a heated war of words between Chinese netizens and Thai netizens.

For GGAD’s CP fans, who are fans of English-language cultural products, the purpose of using the ‘insulting China text messages’ is also not solely oriented towards defending national sentiments, but rather as a way of judging whether Johnny Depp -version of GGAD or Max McCall-version of GGAD is more in line with their imaginative conception of this CP. In other words, the essence of this argument goes back to the employment of the ‘2.5-dimensional settings database’, given that CP fans’ understanding of a CP is often determined by a combination of both the character’s virtual 2-dimensional personal setting and the actor’s 3-dimensional personal setting, i.e., separately, the old CP fans of GGAD believe that Depp’s encounters with reality have somehow made him an incarnation of Grindelwald, whereas for the new CP fans of GGAD, they believe that the character and temperament of McCall are the most compatible with Grindelwald. Thus, the core of the debate

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<sup>29</sup> Zhang’s incident initially festered within the CP fandom, as the photo, deemed ‘incriminating’, was recovered by only-fans from a photo album the actor posted on Weibo.

is not so much about the truth of the nationalism incident as it is about which ‘personal setting configuration’ fits their definition of CP.

### **3. Dual identity of CP fans of English-language cultural products**

Liesbet Van Zoonen (2005) drawn parallels between fans and politics by highlighting the structural similarities between fandom and political groups in terms of emotions, values, and practices, Jonathan Dean (2017) further argues that fans have the potential to become a conglomerate of ‘politics’ and ‘fans. Accordingly, CP fans of English-language cultural products are a combination of national identity and fan identity.

#### **3.1 Nationalistic identity**

Communication technologies, as a technological/cultural complex, play an important role in shaping the discourse of nationalism (Anderson, 2006), accordingly, the nationalism that took place in the CP fans’ division in GGAD is a modern media phenomenon, and the nationalism of CP fans who are the aborigines of the Internet is expressed through online social platforms such as Weibo. This development and constant mutation of cybernationalism also nicely refutes the view that the Internet, as a key element of globalisation, is then seen by many scholars as having the potential to weaken and even deconstruct the nation-state, which may render traditional territorial boundaries meaningless (Sassen, 2008) and, thus, rendering the intercultural fans in postmodern societies devoid of nationhood. In fact, the nation remains the undisputed space in which culture, identity and daily life operate, despite the fact that the process of globalisation continues to penetrate deeper and deeper into the economic, cultural and social spheres (Turner, 2016).

And as can be learnt through the clash of fan nationalism between CP fans of old and new GGAD over the Johnny Depp text message incident on social media, for CP fans of English-language cultural products born in the context of globalisation, their national identity is not a vanishing island that is about to be subjugated by the tide of internationalism (Billig, 2017: 308, 319), and they still retain a very strong identification with their nation, and thus their national identity is simply on standby waiting to be awakened at any time. Although intercultural CP fandom complicates the notion of homogenous and stable nationalism, these groups do not challenge the notion that the world is made up of nation-states (Szulc, 2017: 68). In other words, instead of eliminating individual identities based on nation-states, the exponential growth of global communication through the Internet has provoked more nationalist friction through frequent intercultural interactions within the



same space, and has determined that intercultural CP fans in China carry national identities for a long time.

### **3.2 Fan characteristic nationalism**

If traditional nationalism was generally regarded as a male phenomenon, the spontaneous participation in online nationalism by young CP fans, a group of people who usually do not care much about politics but only show a high level of commitment to CP, has given online nationalism a female-led fan character.

Firstly, unlike previous nationalist events that were stimulated by external factors and triggered a spontaneous response from civil society, fandom nationalism started as an internal fan initiative to a certain extent. Just as the ‘Depp’s text message incident’ has never risen to the level of an international political event, but has been used as a reason for fans to take the initiative to brew a struggle in the fandom, what can be seen in the factionalisation of GGAD CP fans is a kind of proactive guidance by the name of fandom nationalism. That is to say CP fans are not only stimulated by certain major political events, but are habitually physically alert to any derogatory remarks about China and may further trigger a fandom ‘expedition’.

Second, CP fandom has developed a set of mediated means in the struggle for nationalism for defending their rights and the rights of the CPs they support. Some of them have become skilled in actively creating and exploiting nationalist controversies to achieve their own fandom purposes. Fans who actively identify and exploit ‘insulting China texts’ can be seen as ‘fan police’, who see themselves as defenders of nationalism, and therefore take it upon themselves to act as civilian enforcers of censorship (Wang & Ge, 2023). The essence of this practice is the internalisation of the dominant state-sponsored discourse of power as a norm of legitimacy for fan practices, whereby fans who see themselves as defenders of nationalism exploit the power of the state through administrative means such as reporting, censorship of CP’s social media content, and so on, thereby tactically using nationalism as the most effective and lethal weapon in waging CP fans’ conflicts.

Whereas the CP fans who were attacked also have a set of well-developed tactics to ‘strike back anti-fans’, the behavioural logic and organisation of CP fans supporting the old GGAD also has the characteristics of a fanbase. Some fans of Depp have collated his past comments and posted them in the form of a compilation of material on Weibo’s fan page and the GGAD’s Weibo Super Topic, which is used to prove that he has never insulting China, and they have even made a clarification

video to be posted on Bilibili.com. The actions to ‘strike back anti-fans’ can be understood by Judith Butler’s concept of performativity, he proposed that performative acts are shared experiences and collective actions in which identities in historical situations, like scripts, need to be continuously realised and recreated as reality by individual actors (Butler, 2020). Based on this recognition, GGAD’s CP fans realise and emphasise their fan identity through the cyberspace-based manipulation of fan strike back anti-fans actions so that they are not all overshadowed by their ethnic identity.

In this case, some of GGAD’s CP fans’ conflict around ethnicity seem to contradict the symbolism of CP culture as a disintegration of grand meaning, but in fact fans can often use two identities in coupling: when they are in CP, they are fully committed CP fans who work to dismantle the grandiose meaning of the classics, challenge their own dogmatic culture, and transform the heteronormative narratives of patriarchal societies through CP; and when something touches the bottom line of their national identity as Chinese, they can withdraw from their identity as fans and become devoted defenders of national dignity.

#### **4. Fandom nationalism among CP fans of English-language cultural products**

Despite the fact that CP fans generally have mastered the means to engage in online struggles around fandom nationalism, there is a difference between the ways in which CP fans of English-language cultural products engage in nationalism-protection activities and those of CP fans of local Chinese cultural products. This difference manifests itself in two main forms: firstly, is the different mediating means of fandom nationalism adopted by CP fans, secondly is the extent of CP fans’ sense of identity negotiation.

##### **4.1 Different means of struggle and cruelty**

Weibo plays an important role in online nationalist activism as the main site for CP fans to enact the struggle of fandom nationalism (Schneider, 2017). Given China’s basic state policy that ‘the media is the ears, eyes, and mouth of the Party,’ Weibo fully co-operated with the governmental policy by establishing ‘a speech censorship mechanism’ and ‘a reporting mechanism’ that allowed any registered user to report posts, comments, or Weibo users (Wang & Ge, 2023). Fans have wisely discovered that this feature may provide them with the most effective assistance in their fan struggle, and they have developed an effective ‘reporting’ strategy. So, when reporting, fans detailed what

policies they thought a CP had violated and posted them as a template in Weibo's Super Topic, thus guiding more fans to join the 'report'.

Among the various reasons for reporting, 'hurting nationalism' is inevitably the most fatal, once this 'accusation' is substantiated, the celebrity will be 'banned' by the Chinese cultural industry, and immediately, Weibo would coordinate with the practices of 'speech banning' and 'account cancellation', thus substantially leading to the celebrity's 'death' in the Chinese online society. Thus, the fandom nationalism that take place on Weibo carry a stronger overtone of fan struggle, and the use of nationalism by CP fans of local Chinese cultural products to wage a struggle is more explicit and more brutal in its purpose.

Although CP fans of GGAD use the same systematic means of fan struggle as CP fans of local Chinese cultural products, their specific modus operandi and brutality are different, they identified problems with Depp's text messages, they did not use them as a starting point for endless and deliberate discursive censorship. Moreover, for CP fans of English-language cultural products, they are not keen on adopting digital 'counter-defamation' tactics to 'strike back anti-fans' in the long run, nor do they overuse 'comment manipulation', their main way of engaging in fandom nationalism is still to initiate a discussion of the event itself based on the truth, rather than irrational emotional outbursts. Moreover, CP fans do not aim to achieve a certain final goal, such as causing an actor to be banned, as a signal to stop the struggle, but rather to let the incident naturally and gradually die down.

And as far as the overall fandom of *Fantastic Beasts* is concerned, fans are becoming more rational as events unfolded. During the outbreak of the incident, they let their emotional expressions dominate based on their different positions, while in the middle and late stages of the incident, the whole CP fandom seemed to be able to initiate more rational discussions and accommodate different viewpoints, with more fans risking being called 'unpatriotic' and 'politically incorrect' to restore the truth of the incident, thus enabling the two CP fandoms to coexist peacefully. Moreover, CP fans of both the old and the new version of GGAD spontaneously defend this peace on media platforms, for example, by not talking about each other's CPs in their respective Weibo CP's Super Topic, thus eliminating the possibility of bad consequences due to fan struggles.

#### **4.2 Willingness to negotiate between two identities**

Furthermore, for CP fans of English-language cultural products, national and transnational fan identities are not incapable of coexisting; on the contrary, fans can find a self-consistent logic in the identity game, which ultimately leads to the formation of a stable composite identity. Especially for CP fans who support the old GGAD, they are also eager to prove their patriotism before debating for Depp, they claim that “first of all I am a fan of Depp, but I am also Chinese, and I love China”. Meanwhile, for CP fans who support the new version of GGAD, this is also a result of identity negotiation.

Similarly to CP fans’ identity negotiation, Matt Hills identifies the possibility of ‘transcultural homology’ in transnational media, this is a concept based on Paul Willis’s (1978) theory of the ‘symbolic fit between the values and lifestyles of a group’ (Hebdige, 1979, p. 113). Using this idea of ‘symbolic fit’ to analyse the intercultural affinities between self-identified Western otaku and Japanese otaku, Hills (2002, p. 13) argues that homologous structures may interfere with fans of different cultures, thus giving “priority to fan identity over national identity.” According to the concept of ‘transcultural homology’, in CP fan identities of English-language cultural products, fans meet due to their love for English-language cultural products and CP fan culture, and acquire a common subset of fan identities and a relatively independent and closed fan community within the nation. This subjectivity corroborates the possibility raised by Chin & Morimoto (2013) that ‘fan orientations may (sometimes) transcend national, regional, and/or geographical boundaries’.

CP and ethnicity, as the projection and internalisation of the self, can bring satisfaction and security to the fans respectively, and are the transitional objects between the inner reality and the outer reality, so the CP fan identity of English-language cultural products is polysemous and temporary. Therefore, underneath the appearance of disengaging from CP fan identity because of national emotional issues is the multiple contradictions and harmonisation of fan identity and national identity. For old and new CP fans of GGAD, when faced with the issue of fandom nationalism involving foreign CPs, the logic of their behaviour is not a simple division between the so-called rationality and sensibility represented by ‘no idols in front of the motherland’ or ‘brain-damaged fans kneeling down to follow the stars’ respectively, rather, they make continuous negotiation and choices based on different values when two identities are in conflict, and finally find an identity choice that seems to them to be the right one.

In summary, compared to CP fans of Chinese local cultural products, CP fans of English-language cultural products do not fall into the trap of narrow-minded nationalism. On the one hand, this is inseparable from the positive influence of cultural globalisation on them, which has lifted and familiarised them with imported cultural products during their childhood, so that they can access, judge, and interpret information from outside China through the innate cultural capital they possess. However, this positive result has more to do with the shaping of the mindset of CP fans by postmodernist thinking. In Chapter 2, the present research pointed out that the cultural factors of the postmodern society can easily take root among the urban youth, and as postmodern youth, CP fans of English-language cultural products are not keen on engaging in grandiose activities, and they are particularly reluctant to be drawn into politically relevant issues, instead, they tend to engage in various CP activities for self-satisfaction within a peaceful and casual subcultural group that is specific and free of grandiose narratives.

##### **5. Continuity of the grand meaning in CP fandom of English-language cultural products**

Due to the cultural attributes and practices of intercultural CP fandom, they tend to be subject to more pressure of nationalism, both within their own ethnicity and across ethnic boundaries. Therefore, although the CP fandom of English-language cultural products strongly emphasises their liberal and democratic apolitical temperament with the expression of ‘far away from the mainstream culture’, in this case, they still cite the factors that may hurt the national sentiments as the reason for their disassociation from the CP fanhood. Thus, the fact that they consider ‘national sentiments’ when deciding whether or not to continue their transnational coupling also suggests that ‘the generation that is utterly free of grand narratives’ has not actually existed (at least not in China), despite the fact that the ‘collapse of grand narrative’ permeates CP fan creations of English-language cultural products. But the occurrence of fandom nationalism among CP fans of English-language cultural products does not imply new possibilities for the universal reconstruction of grand narratives, or even a return to the ‘Cultural Revolution’ (1966-1976) when nationalism became the only spiritual imperative guiding people’s participation in culture and society. Instead, it implies that young fans are increasingly eager to construct their own systems of grand meanings in transnational cultural positions, and thus to implement their understanding of contemporary nationalism and transnational fandom behaviour.

The dispute between the old and new sets of fans of GGAD began in the fandom, rose to nationalism, and finally returned within the fans. This process, which may seem to run counter to the CP culture's vaunted characteristic of being far from grandiose meanings, but actually, it returns to the realm of the 2.5-dimensional settings database, i.e., the underlying reason that determines the CP fans' choices is still the question of which CPs' personal setting configurations are more in line with their orientations, moreover, CP fans are using nationalism as a tool for fan fighting. This is not to say that they are false patriots, but rather that national identity is only one of the non-exclusive reasons that influence the perpetuation of transnational CP fan identity.

Therefore, CP fans of English-language cultural products are exceptional in that they are neither the so-called 'new left' nor 'liberals' in the cultural sphere (Zheng, 2016). Although their sensitivity to the issue of 'insulting China' is unprecedented, and the nationalist controversy has become the matrix for showing a high level of commitment to CP, but at the same time, in a departure from the earlier pattern of online nationalism events being dominated primarily by real-life political events, CP fandom nationalism to a certain extent began to be brewed on their own initiative within the fandom, and CP fans have mastered a range of mediated means of applying nationalism to their own ends.

## **Chapter Eight. Conclusion**

### **1. Conclusions**

Guided by a mixed method approach consisting of aca-fan, online questionnaire, and textual analysis, the present research addressed five overarching questions to analyse the specificity of CP fan culture occurring in fandom of English-language cultural products in China.

Before responding to the five questions, the present research presents a survey and analysis of the demographic characteristics and fan identities of CP fans of English-language cultural products, as represented by the CP fans of Harry Potter and Fantastic Beasts. The present study finds that this fandom consists mainly of young heterosexual (n=46) women (n=125) born after 1990 and after 2005 (Post-2000s, n=73), who live in urban areas and are well educated (bachelor's degree and undergraduate, n=68) and, crucially, mostly from single-child families (n=74), which directly contributes to the unique intergenerational survival experience of this fandom and gives CP culture

a zeitgeist that is difficult to replicate.

**Question One: What are the reasons for the emergence of CP culture?**

CP culture has proximity to other female-oriented cultures, especially BL culture and slash fan culture, and thus there is an overlap in terms of what causes the culture's popularity. The common factors found in studies by scholars concerned with the popularity of these cultures around the world such as Pagliassotti (2008), Zhang (2016), and Hansen (2010) certainly explain why women read men's homosexual love stories, but do not take into account the uniqueness of CP culture, geographical differences in culture, and generational differences in participants. Therefore, after obtaining the demographic characteristics of CP fans of English-language cultural products, the present research proposes six reasons for the rise of CP culture, incorporating the specific cultural and economic and social environment of China.

First, China's Generation Z and Generation Y are at the intersection of global and local cultures, they accept more diverse values, which makes CP fans of English-language cultural products more susceptible to the decentered ethos of postmodern culture. As a result, the rise of CP culture is a multi-level attack and deconstruction of China's conventional culture and society under the influence of postmodern culture, and the small narratives of CP culture are a dissolution of the grand narratives.

Second, the loneliness faced by postmodern Chinese youth generally has been additionally exacerbated since the epidemic of COVID-19, and young female fans need to find a cultural approach that can help alleviate loneliness while also reconciling the contradiction between the pressures of female existence and the need for perfect intimacy. Against this zeitgeist, the emergence of CP culture provides female fans with an idealised strategy for the economical and convenient virtual exploration of intimacy.

Third, the present research suggests that the rise of CP culture is closely related to the implementation of the One-Child Policy. The One-Child Policy as an 'isolated island' in China's history, has made it difficult for some female CP fans who come from the 'one-child families' to find a reference point for their unique experience in the past and the future. On the one hand, benefiting from the 'One-Child Policy', 'only daughters' enjoy the same spiritual and material support as boys in their families as never before, and they enjoy the right to take the initiative in their lives in a way that women in any era in China have never enjoyed. Thus, fans who are 'only daughters' begin to

question the oppressiveness of love and marriage as pseudo-intimacy for women, and, as a result, examine the deception of patriarchal heteronormative narratives, thus creating narratives such as CP culture that decouple intimacy from procreation-orientated marriages. On the other hand, the gap between homogenised educational competition and patriarchal social reality makes the self-perception of ‘only daughter’ oscillate between the traditional female image and the near-masculine self-image, so they need to create a physiologically and psychologically eclectic image of the CP to put their confusion to rest.

Fourth, the present research found that for Chinese women under moralistic repression reading pornographic depictions of CP is an important reason for their participation in CP culture. However, unlike men’s pornographic activities, CP fans do not read pornography for physical stimulation, but rather for the provocative mental pleasure of subverting the male gaze; at the same time, in terms of the way female CP fans write CP pornography, it is more for the purpose of manipulating the personal settings to act out their imaginations of sexual tensions, i.e., dismantling masculinity and femininity into fragmented elements, observing and attempting to match the ways in which they collide, than for the purpose of reading pornography.

Fifth, CP culture echoes women’s pursuit of aestheticism, which is reflected in CP fans’ strong demand for CP’s facial attractiveness. Fans often make detailed romanticised depictions of CPs in terms of their looks, clothes, and temperament, etc, although the pursuit of appearance by CP fans of English-language cultural products has moved away from the influences of Japanese ACGN culture and South Korean idol culture and has become closer to the Westernised healthy aesthetics, it still shows the tendency of aestheticism that is detached from reality. And taking the factor of facial attractiveness, which is outside the serious order, as a measure of CP’s appeal also reflects the postmodern attributes of CP culture’s database-based creative approach.

Sixth, it is difficult to separate the rise of CP culture since the epidemic from the external push of the communication media. Weibo and Bilibili.com, as the main activity space for CP fans, have discovered the enormous economic value of CP fans, and have therefore proactively contributed to the large-scale popularity of CP culture, so, both of them have tailored a series of functional mechanisms for CP fans to ensure their continuous participation in CP culture. Weibo’s CP Super Topic covers all the necessary aspects of CP fans’ daily online life, from emotional labour such as information exchange to digital labour such as ‘chart beating’, which ultimately makes CP fans rely



on Weibo and continue to participate in CP fan activities on Weibo. As for Bilibili, on the one hand, the bullet-screen comments have fostered a good online participatory cultural atmosphere for CP fandom, coalescing scattered groups of CP fans into a ‘hypothetical community’ with common interests, and increasing the potential for culture to radiate outwards. On the other hand, Bilibili encourages the creation of CP videos through a comprehensive reward mechanism, and has even become the birthplace of La Lang CP, which not only fulfils Bilibili’s obligation as China’s largest community of subculture enthusiasts, but also allows CP fan video producers to take a cut of the revenue. Overall, although the intervention of media platforms has made the rise of CP culture a premeditated economic act, the end result has indeed given CP culture a stronger ability to break through small circles and enter the public communication horizon.

To sum up, the rise of CP culture is the result of a combination of three dimensions: the post-modern socio-cultural background in the macro dimension, the ideological change of ‘only daughter’ in the micro dimension, and the profit-oriented external media communication platform.

#### **Question Two — Why is there a phenomenon of ‘setting supremacy’ in CP fan creation?**

With the influence of CP culture with postmodern attributes gradually expanding, the fan creation method also tends to collapse the grand narrative, thus, ‘setting supremacy’ has become the guideline of CP fan creation method, and CP fans judge the success of a pair of CPs by the ‘compatibility of their personal settings’, rather than by the degree of character restoration and narrative completion of the fan writer, as in the case of traditional fans. In other words, the essence of the phenomenon of ‘setting supremacy’ is the arrangement and combination of different setting fragments in ‘the 2.5-dimensional settings database’. Accordingly, the present research proposes for the first time the concept of a ‘dynamic 2.5-dimensional settings database’, specifically, these settings come from fans’ accumulation over a long period from extensive cultural activities, which contains both 2-dimensional ‘moe elements’ (Auma, 2009) and 3-dimensional personal settings of real people and real mechanisms of social functioning.

Further, the goal of CP fans’ ‘setting supremacy’ is to manipulate two conflicting sets of settings into shaping and experiencing the intimacy of a love-hate setting. Similarly, this setting of intimate relationship where ‘pleasure’ and ‘pain’ coexist is inseparable from the real-life experience of CP fans, i.e., the pleasure of creating and experiencing a perfect intimate relationship in CP fanzines, and the pain of remembering and reconstructing the real-life gender-repression they experience in

patriarchal societies in fanfiction all the time.

In addition to this, the phenomenon of 'setting supremacy' is not only reflected in the fans' construction of CP and CP's intimacy, but also projected on the fans themselves and their relationship construction. Using the aca-fan approach in the online language costume-play game of Harry Potter and Fantastic Beasts, the present research found that CP fans also use the CP's 2-dimensional personal settings in their own 3-dimensional personalities in the text-play game to create '2.5-dimensional personal settings', as well as refer to real-world environments and fictional worldviews in order to construct a gamified worldview setting, and to form a player-player CP relationship in the game. In short, CP fans playing as CPs through online language Cosplay is an implementation of the 'setting supremacy' in another direction; essentially CP fans are still manipulating the '2.5-dimensional setting database' to gain a 'hybrid identity' that is in a state of flux.

In the phenomenon of 'setting supremacy', CP fans also show a clear interest in the construction of worldview settings, which they create as if they were independent of the story, as represented by the ABO, in addition to the emphasis on personal settings. In this case, the purpose of CP fan authors' creation of worldview settings is not to fill in any gaps in the conceptualisation of the original worldview, but to create a new world to provide an operational support system for the CP's relationship. However, the new worldview setting does not only serve the development of CP's intimate relationship, but also carries the fans' reflection and transformation of the real society, especially in the construction of the ABO worldview, CP fans are committed to achieving three purposes: first, balancing the imbalance of the real gender-rights order through the 'struggle for omega's rights'; secondly, to subvert the stereotypical gender temperament and express women's sense of independence through the 'female alpha x male omega'; thirdly, to alleviate Chinese women's sexual anxiety through the physiological characteristics of ABO. In addition to the ABO, 'the male mother' as a typical gender-switching setting is also popular among CP fans of English-language cultural products, fan have used the contrasting setting of the 'male with strong mothering qualities' to re-imagine the lack of fatherly love in reality, and to refute the natural mothering role imposed on women.

Overall, as a form of fan creation that revolves around a 'dynamic 2.5-dimensional settings database', the phenomenon of 'setting supremacy' highlights the ability of fans to extract characters

from the text and make them into personal settings. As well, CP fans' heightened attention to worldview settings reflects their concern for the structure of the world outside of intimate relationships, and highlights their ability to think about and transform the real world, in part due to the indigenisation of postmodernist thinking in fan culture, as well as the educational regime of the 'One-Child Policy'.

While the phenomenon of 'setting supremacy' highlights the innovative capacity of CP culture, it also raises concerns about pseudo-equal intimacy, and about digital intimacy. On the one hand, the purity of equal relationships constructed in worldview settings needs to be questioned, especially for the world of ABOs, where the gender order is difficult to eliminate completely; on the other hand, intimacy constructed by relying on abstract settings cannot really dissolve CP fans' anxiety about real intimacy, but may instead lead them into a deeper sense of emptiness. On top of that, 'the dynamic 2.5-dimensional settings database' makes the creative achievements of CP fans show certain limitations and repetitions.

**Question three — Why are some CP fans attracted to CPs from English-language cultural products instead of CPs from native cultural products?**

Having answered the two questions of the reasons for the rise of CP culture and the connotations of the setting supremacy phenomenon, the concepts and modus operandi of CP fan culture have been clarified. Therefore, the present research next specifies the question further to CP fans of English-language cultural products from the perspective of transcultural fan within the nation, and launches the exploration of the other three questions highlighting the identity of the CP fans of *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts* as heterogeneous cultural enthusiast.

With regard to the causes of the third question, namely, the preference of CP fans of English-language cultural products within the same culture, and their divergence from CP fans of native cultural products, the present research suggests that the answer comes from these two factors: differences in CP fandom in terms of the construction of fan identities; the rules of fandom operation; and the implementation of the 'top/bottom' division.

First, the present research found that CP fans of English-language cultural products distinguish themselves from CP fans of local Chinese cultural products by showing a high level of commitment to CP in *Harry Potter* and *Fantastic Beasts*. Specifically, the self-perception of CP fans of English-language cultural products is that of open, tolerant, mature, pioneering, and keeping a polite distance

from the dominant culture. In short, they perceive themselves as fans with an overall superiority, thus distinguishing them from the local CP fans who are generally perceived as overzealous, conservative, and less educated.

However, the fundamental determinant of CP fans' choice of English-language cultural productions in the fandom lies in the different attitudes towards real- person CP, which fundamentally leads to the different nature of the two CP fandoms. Chinese CP fans tend to obscure the boundaries between character-derivative CP and real-person CP, treating them as one and the same, with the result that this CP fandom is more of a data labourer for the sake of the 'data traffic' of the real person playing the CP on the media platform; on the contrary, CP fans of English-language cultural products benefit from their self-positioning and intercultural reading experience of fan fictions to have a clear perception of real-person CP and character-derivative CP. Therefore, they retain the original purpose of being fans, i.e. fan interaction based on shared interests, and thus, the CP fandom of English-language cultural products is dominated by the fans' affective labour, which for those fans who are not keen on 'producing data' is the essence of what makes the CP of English-language cultural products attractive to them, although they are not completely isolated from digital labour, which will be discussed in the final chapter of this study.

The last operating rule that distinguishes the CP fandom of English-language cultural products from that of Chinese-language cultural products is the attitude towards the 'top/bottom' division of CP. Although CP fans of English-language cultural products show a certain degree of progressiveness, they still have a general sense which is common in Chinese fan culture, namely, dividing the two party in a CP into the dominant 'top' roles and dominated 'bottom' role. But, CP fans of English-language cultural products are flexible in their implementation of this rule, so that the relationship between CPs can be reversed rather than 'irreversible' as stipulated by CP fans of Chinese local culture. Moreover, CP fans of English-language cultural products are extremely averse to the image of the 'feminised bottom' in some Chinese CP novels, they believe that it reflects the essence of misogyny. Instead, they emphasise the creation of a 'powerful top/powerful bottom' CP marked by equal spiritual power, which makes the setting of 'evenly matched' intimacy a prominent feature of CP in English-language cultural products.

Accordingly, the present research argues that CP fans of English-language cultural products are a pioneering and progressive group of people in China's CP fandom, and that they have surpassed

local Chinese CP fans in this endeavour. The reasons for this more optimistic result are not only related to the fans' cross-cultural reading experience, but also influenced by the explosive development of feminism in China after the implementation of the 'only daughter policy'. However, despite the fact that CP fans of English-language cultural products use top/bottom in a way that departs from male-female dichotomies like seme/uke in Japanese BL and scholar-beauty in Chinese native CP culture, giving it the function of breaking down stereotypical gender temperaments, it is still possible to observe that this division of 'top/bottom' is close to the reality of the social functions of men and women. Even the equalisation of 'powerful top/powerful bottom' which emphasises the spiritual equality of both parties, does not stand up to scrutiny, and thus the practical significance of 'top/bottom' is limited.

**Question four — What is the cross-cultural, cross-textual, and cross-dimensional Lalang CP that appears in the CP fandom of English-language cultural products?**

The fourth question of the present research is directed to the most controversial La Lang CP in the CP fandom of English-language cultural products. Among such CPs composed of cross-cultural, cross-textual, and cross-dimensional characters, the most famous one is the CP 'Voldemort x Lindayu', which is composed of the heroine from the classical literature *Dream of the Red Chamber* by the Chinese novelist Cao Xueqin of the Qing Dynasty and the villain Voldemort in the Western popular text *Harry Potter*. The present research finds that the attributes of La Lang CP are more complex compared to both CP from the same text, and crossover creation, which means that La Lang CP is both partially coterminous with spoof culture, but still fundamentally part of the intimacy experiments unfolded by CP fans' manipulation the 2.5-dimensional database.

First of all, 'Voldemort x Lin Daiyu' was formed as a result of a jokey bet between a group of fanfic writers, as such, La Lang CP culture is partly synonymous with spoof culture. Consequently, the most violent opposition to 'Voldemort x Lin Daiyu' came from their choice of a classic in traditional Chinese literature, *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Because in the minds of many Chinese, this is a masterpiece that combines the essence of Chinese Confucian culture and thought, this approach of assembling Voldemort and Lin Daiyu as CP is tantamount to a direct challenge to the rigid elite culture, which makes the La Lang CP, compared to crossover, have the attributes of a youth cultural and political movement other than fans' entertainment.

Secondly, La Lang CP still belong to the creative paradigm of CP fan culture. Fans first experiment

with the suitability of the two characters through the pairing formula of the personal settings, and then fill the CP with content material to make their intimacy plausible and artistic. When fans do not arrive at the desired result in step two, they repeat step one and start a new round of experimentation, and the material for experimenting with intimacy is precisely various ‘2.5-dimensional personal settings’.

Finally, fans of La Lang CP are one of the most criticised categories of fans, they are accused of being the makers of levitating CPs with no story, and heretics who do not follow any rules. In fact, although La Lang CP can exist apart from the meta-story, it does not mean that they do not need the story, on the contrary, fans have to put more effort to establish the relationship between two irrelevant roles to realise the rationality of the CP. In addition to this, ‘disrespecting the original’ and ‘desecrating the classics’ are other accusations that CP fans ‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’ often suffer. Actually, La Lang CP is not completely uninhibited, and fan creations need to follow strict internal fan rules, for example, any portrayal of the CP’s looks as ordinary or even ugly is against the La Lang CP fans’ consensus.

**Question Five — Why do some CP fans of English-language cultural products choose to terminate their support for a particular CP?**

The final question revolves around the closure of CP culture, the present research creatively suggests that the key point in deciding whether fans’ transnational coupling activity continues or not is whether the CP hurts the national sentiment of the fans. Taking the divergence between the old and new CP fandom of GGAD as a starting point, the present research finds that CP fans of English-language cultural products face additional accusations of being ‘unpatriotic’ compared to native Chinese CP fans. Based on the nationalism inculcated by Chinese education, most of the fans hold the attitude of ‘country first, idol second’, therefore, the defence of nationalism has always been a basic requirement in the Chinese culture industry and fandom ecology. In order to avoid this accusation, GGAD’s CP fans engage in a game of negotiation between national identity and fandom identity, and thus demonstrate the temperament of fandom nationalism.

However, the present research argues that protecting the dignity of the nation is not the only purpose for CP fans to use this form of nationalism, and that in fact, fandom nationalism has been used as a weapon to win in fan struggles. Take the ‘Depp’s suspected insulting China incident’ that led to the controversy between old and new fans of GGAD as an example, unlike the traditional pattern of

‘external stimulus - civil counterattack’ in traditional online nationalism incidents, this incident, to a certain extent, began with the active brewing with the fandom. In addition, CP fans of English-language cultural products, like CP fans of Chinese local culture, have not only mastered the ability to use nationalism to achieve their own goals, but also the ability to use digital labour to defend their CP.

The proximity shown by CP fans of English-language cultural products to CP fans of Chinese-language cultural products in terms of fandom nationalism does not run counter to the postmodern character of CP culture and their labelled fans’ temperament of being respectful of mainstream culture, instead, this just shows that CP fans have two sets of mindsets when coupling, i.e., fully committed CP fans, and defenders of nationalism. Meanwhile, the discourse on fan identity and national identity also refutes the accusation that CP fans of English-language cultural products are ‘romantics who only show a high level of commitment to CP’ and ‘people who are not concerned with national politics or even unpatriotic’. Furthermore, CP fans of English-language cultural products not only explore a kind of self-consistency in the negotiation of identities, but also are more capable of searching for the truth and maintaining rationality in disputes related to nationalism, and thus do not form ‘narrow nationalism’, which once again proves that the CP fans of English-language cultural products are progressive in their thinking.

After completing the exploration of the above five questions, in general, the present research argues that CP fan culture of English-language cultural products is a product of the postmodernist era, fans playfully dismantle the orthodox construction of grand meanings with the ‘dynamic 2.5-dimensional settings database approach’. As well, CP fan culture is one of the most visible cultural consequences of the implementation of China’s ‘One-Child Policy’, that is to say, CP fan culture has emerged as a result of women’s elevated status in economic, cultural, and social spheres, which has empowered them to challenge the patriarchal model of the cultural industry and question heteronormative romantic narratives.

CP culture is essentially an experiment in personal setting based on a flowing database of 2.5-dimensional settings to realise the idea of equal intimacy among female fans, therefore, what is significant in CP culture is not the character being formed into a CP, but the fans who are aware of the possibility of a CP. The evolution of CP fan culture proves to us that young women are capable of transforming rigid cultures and creating innovative ones, and therefore no one has the right to

limit their cultural choices, as well as to degrade their cultural tastes.

Although the present research argues that among the various types of CP fandom, CP fandom of English-language cultural products demonstrates a certain superiority, and that they are more distinctively open and pioneering in their ways of thinking and creating than CP fans of Chinese local culture, the purpose of the present research in making such comparisons is not to devalue the CP fans of Chinese local culture, and thus to elevate CP fandom of English-language cultural products to a position inconsistent with reality. In fact, the feelings and labour invested in CP by local Chinese fans are much heavier and more complex than those of CP fans of free English-language cultural products, moreover, these two fandoms often cross boundaries and converge to show some commonalities. Therefore, this domestic/intercultural division in the present research is intended to illustrate the specificity of CP fans of English-language cultural products and to provide an excavated reflection on the shortcomings of the current CP culture, and in this way, to provide a feasible strategy for the future development of CP culture.

## **2. Contributions**

The problem that CP fans are currently facing is the loss of voice in the world fandom, and even the existing research lacks validity and sufficiency, so a theory that can be applied to CP fan culture in China is urgently needed, as Click and Scott (2018) point out, the lack of effective dialogue about cross-racial and cross-cultural fandom has long been one of the most glaring deficiencies in fan studies (p. 241). By demonstrating the CP fan culture of English-language cultural products for the first time in an international academic arena, the present research not only enriches the diversity of international fanzines, but also, expands the localisation of fan culture theory. Specifically, the present research makes contributions in four areas: theories of intercultural fan studies, postmodernist theories, social impact, and methodology for fan studies.

### **2.1 Expansion of theories in international fan culture**

#### **2.1.1 The academic establishment of CP fan of English-language cultural products**

The most mainstream research on BL and slash around 2000 was mostly dominated by feminist perspectives, (e.g., Radway, 2009; Busse & Lothian, 2009; Salmon, 2005). The most common ideas espoused were three main ones, firstly, BL and slash represent the rise of feminism and that women are no longer passive, secondly, BL and slash provide a gender sanctuary, and third, for women, BL (and some slash) reveals a certain misogynistic quality. And as this cultural influence on women



continues to expand, a growing number of scholars have begun to use the theory of the queer to analyse the destructive power of these homosexual subcultures dominated by female over heteronormative hegemonies (Jenkins, 2014; Turner, 2018). The main thrust of queer theory is to critically question the binaries of male/female and heterosexual/homosexual (Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 2008), therefore addresses how BL fans and slash fans develop queer identities by consuming gay male subjectivities while still being treated as heterosexual women (Lönnroth, 2017; Enriquez & Lippert, 2022).

However, queer theory and feminist interpretations of BL and slash centre on the 'gender space', the spatial constructs of the present research also include database-type CPs and the cultural differences of intercultural fans and local CP fans, thus, the present research constructs a comprehensive theoretical system capable of balancing the complex identities of CP fans of English-language cultural products.

First, the present research introduces the concept of Chinese CP culture for the first time in worldwide academic discussions. CP culture is often misunderstood to have exactly the same theoretical structure as Japanese BL culture and Western slash culture because of the complexity of its origins, especially in the overlap of its focus on female-oriented literature on male/male homosexuality, but the present research clarifies the uniqueness of CP culture in the three aspects of, the diversity of gender configurations of CP, the multiple dimensions of CP, and the radiating range of CP culture, which, thus, makes the CP fan culture to be clarified and develop a theoretical path with Chinese historical and cultural connotations. Moreover, the present research brings cross-cultural, cross-textual, and cross-dimensional La Lang CP fans, and language cosplays conducted by manipulating personal settings to the world academic stage for the first time, thus enriching the genre of global fan culture activities.

Second, the present research uniquely introduces the generational characteristics of CP fans as 'only daughters' as a key factor in the theoretical construction of CP fan culture. The present research found that the majority of CP fans participating in English-language cultural products come from urban one-child families, i.e. they are the beneficiaries of homogenised family resources and school education under the implementation 'One-Child policy', and at the same time, they are also the victims of the fragmentation of their personal values from the traditional values of femininity, which leads to their ability and willingness to modify the patriarchal implications in the mainstream

heteronormative narratives, and to pursue the counter grand narratives instead of the CP-ised small narratives.

Finally, the present research clearly identifies a number of differences between CP fans of English-language cultural products and CP fans of local Chinese cultural products, most notably, CP fans' attitudes towards real-life CPs, attitudes towards the top/bottom division approach, and different uses of fandom nationalism by CP fans. In contrast to the present research, the attention of most scholars of Chinese CP culture has been focussed on CP fans of local Chinese cultural products, e.g., although the English-language academic output by Ng & Li (2020) provides a rich explication of BL fanfiction written by Chinese women, the objects of their study are original Chinese BL novels as well as BL-adapted web dramas produced locally in China, so that they are unable to take into account the substantial differentiation within CP fans due to the diversity of cultural objects.

On the one hand, studies of Chinese fan cultures have noted the grim nature of digital labour, for example of Yin(2020), but the present research not only clarifies that the central cause of this phenomenon is CP fans' attitudes towards the excessive proximity of real-life CPs, but also elucidates that CP fans of English-language cultural products are less likely to get caught up in the pitfalls of the data, whereas previous research has not examined the logic of how the cross-cultural CP fandom operates. On the other hand, the study represented by Wang (2021) is mired in a repetition of seme/uke proposed by Japanese theorists (e.g., Supplementary Literature) in its theoretical articulation of the top/bottom role division between the two parties in CP. However, the present research found that the implementation of top/bottom by CP fans of English-language cultural products differed from the that by CP fans of Japanese uke/seme as well as local Chinese cultural products, thus allowing for the development of new theoretical interpretations of this theory about role delineation, which has been a distinctive hallmark of ACGN and BL cultures in the eyes of Japanese theorists.

Besides, the present study found the fandom nationalism implemented by CP fans of English-language cultural products is characterised by five features: (1) Using social media as a platform for organisational mobilisation and action; (2) The participating subjects are teenage female fandom who usually stay away from politics; (3) CP Fans of English-language cultural products use nationalism primarily as a weapon of fan struggle; (4) CP Fans of English-language cultural products do not become narrow-minded nationalists, when faced with the conflict between fan

identity and national identity, fans are able to initiate identity negotiation and achieve self-consistency in a more moderate way; (5) The way of expression is highly characteristic of fan culture, and they adopt various fandom tactics to defend themselves or attack each other on Weibo.

### **2.1.2 Proposal of a dynamic 2.5-dimensional settings database**

In the second aspect, the present research clarifies that CP fans of English-language cultural products follow the guideline of ‘setting supremacy’ when assembling CPs, and, systematically discusses the specific concept of ‘setting’ and ingeniously proposes a ‘dynamic 2.5-dimensional settings database’ as the core material for CP fans to create and consume. The ‘dynamic 2.5-dimensional settings database’ consists of personal settings and worldview settings that are in between the virtual 2-dimensional and the real 3-dimensional, and is always in a state of flux as new settings are added. Whether or not fans can manipulate the ‘personal settings’ in this database to produce a compatible configuration is the key to determining whether or not the CP has a sense of CP, i.e., ‘bond of karma and emotion’.

The ‘dynamic 2.5-dimensional settings database’ develops a theoretical paradigm that is applicable to the Chinese cultural context, and expands and localises the concept of ‘moe element database’ proposed by Azuma for the study of Japanese otaku. The ‘moe element database’ is proposed based on the 1980s Japanese postmodern society and indeed has generated high academic significance for the study of consumption patterns in Chinese youth subcultures, but the present research argues that in the context of Chinese CP culture, the concept of ‘moe’ has been detached from the ‘fictional somatic sex’ and ‘sexual arousal function’ that exist in the ACGN culture, and has been diluted into a ‘strong fondness’ that exists in the hearts of fans, and therefore the concept of ‘moe element database’ is unable to correspond with the current CP culture in China in both time and space. Instead, the concept of a ‘dynamic 2.5-dimensional settings database’ takes into account the meaning of the settings, and the way fans use the database, and is therefore a theory of cultural production that can be adapted to Chinese CP fans. Therefore, the proposal of ‘dynamic 2.5-dimensional settings database’ is not only a crucial part for CP fan culture, but also an important theoretical accumulation for intercultural fan studies.

### **2.1.3 Expanding the concept of intimacy in female-oriented fan culture**

In addition to this, the present research uniquely clarifies the connotation of intimacy sought by CP fans in China. Most of the studies on female-oriented literature have pointed out that women, by

engaging in and reading these works, such as early romantics, soap operas, and BL culture, slash fan fiction, etc., are trying to gain an experience and imagination of intimacy. CP fan culture, as an archetypal example of this genre, is not exceptional, however, the present research found that what CP fans of English-language cultural products expect to obtain and establish is an intimate relationship marked by a 'love-hate' setting.

The present research points out that the connotation of this dual emotional experience is inseparable from the existential experience of CP fans, they need to enjoy the 'pleasure' of the intimacy in CP's intimacy that refutes the logic of heteronormative patriarchal narratives; and they also need to react to the pain they suffer as 'only daughters' in their daily life through the 'not so desirable' part of CP's intimacy. Based on this connotation of intimacy, the present research further found that CP fans of English-language cultural products would use 'powerful top/powerful bottom' as a framework for the performance of intimacy. The promotion of this kind of CP suggests that they emphasise the importance of equality, respect, and mutual help in intimate relationships more than CP fans of local Chinese culture, and therefore they are adept at applying the top role and bottom role to two sets of 'conflicting settings' in order to observe and collocate a kind of equal (especially equal in terms of spiritual power) intimate relationship.

## **2.2 Theoretical Expansion of Postmodern Manifestations in China**

The imbalance in research direction exists not only in intercultural fan culture research, but also in the theoretical use of postmodernism, where globalised academic sessions have focused more on consumerism or post-socialism in China's postmodernity, as well as, the users of postmodernism have yet to be iterated to the current younger generation (especially female CP fans). However, the present research finds that CP fans of English-language cultural products are themselves a generation that grew up with the postmodern wave into China, and, coupled with the 'setting supremacy' as an agenda for cultural creation that dispels grand narratives, the present research defines CP fan culture as a typical postmodern culture.

The theoretical contribution of the present research to postmodernism does not lie in introducing the history of this Western-originated literary trend in China, or in critically examining the postmodern factors embedded in China's pioneering literature of the 1990s, as scholars such as Chen Xiaoming (1997), Zhang Yiwu & Michael Berry (1997) did, but rather, it is a discussion of how the postmodern cultural trend has played a role in the cultural expression of young Chinese women.

Hence, on the one hand, dismantles the ‘Western-centred’ grand narrative of global postmodernity. On the other hand, the present research provides a Chinese experience of reconstructing the theoretical discourse of global postmodernity by taking the practice of database-based creation by CP fans as an example.

The present research suggests that CP culture, as a kind of small narrative that operates based on ‘setting supremacy’ and is detached from grand narratives, proves that, although the tide of postmodernism has long passed, the postmodern spirit of plurality and the elimination of the centre, and the resistance to the either/or mode of thinking, have already seeped into the cultural consciousness of contemporary youth. In particular, the cross-cultural, cross-textual, and cross-dimensional La Lang CP created by CP fans of English-language cultural products demonstrates their ability to dissolve rigid discourses and promote cultural transformation. Nonetheless, the present research clarifies for the first time that the emphasis on nationalism among CP fans of English-language cultural products through the divergence of the old and new CP fandom of GGAD, thus demonstrating that the post-modernisation characteristics of CP fans of English-language cultural products do not mean that the concept of nationhood has disappeared from their consciousness.

Thus, by examining two seemingly conflicting aspects of CP fans’ online fandom nationalism and CP culture’s idea of expunging-grand meaning, the present research expands the diversity of the exhibition as well as localised adaptations of postmodernity culture in different cultural contexts, while also providing the academic field with a glimpse into how this theory is being used amongst young female fans.

### **2.3 Social impact**

The present research contributes to the elimination of misconceptions about CP fans in mainstream culture, as well as increase society’s attention to the significance of female-oriented literature. CP fans of English-language cultural products have been subjected to several unfounded ‘accusations’, especially ‘nihilists’ and ‘unpatriotic people’ in relation to their status as postmodern niche culture fans, or in response to the fact that their favourite CPs come from exotic cultures.

On the one hand, CP fans have crossed the barrier between male literature and female literature, and started to show active creative enthusiasm for the worldview setting, which is a refutation of the view that ‘showing a high level of commitment to CP is also a kind of lovesick’, and it shows that

young women are actually thinking profoundly about women's situation in the current patriarchal society. On the other hand, those who accuse CP fans of English-language cultural products of being unpatriotic are caught in the measure of a single value system. In fact, the sense of nationalism has always been rooted in the minds of CP fans of English-language cultural products, but CP fans of English-language cultural products could initiate a discursive thinking about these two identities.

Secondly, the fact that what is currently happening in Chinese online culture is the renewed marginalisation and invisibility of the female fandom, so, the systematic articulation of CP culture in the present research helps to arouse Chinese society's attention to its cultural seriousness. Most of the time CP fans appear in social discussions and academic studies as objects of heresy and rebels, or an avatar of a fan economy; at the same time, CP fans themselves may not regard their cultural practices as serious creations, and for reasons of self-preservation they tend not to be particularly active in seeking the approval of the mainstream literary and cultural circles.

In response to the cultural status of CP fans as isolated and entertained as they are, there is a particular need to encourage and emphasise the active self-writing by the 'aca-fan'. Therefore, the present research presents the attributes of serious literary creation carried by CP culture, which is stereotypically perceived not to exist in female-oriented fan literature, adequately through the intergenerational characteristics of CP fans and their emphasis on worldview. In this way, the present research contributes to arousing society's attention to the systematic CP culture, not as an unrealistic and morbid fantasy of girls, but, on the contrary, to make the cultural system aware of the necessity of treating CP as a serious mode of literary creation, and to value the young women's reflections on the real gender-rights system contained therein, their innovations in the solid cultural forms, as well as, confronting the intercultural contributions made by CP fans of English-language cultural products.

#### **2.4 Localised methodological innovation**

The present research used a mixed methods approach consisting of aca-fan, online questionnaire, and textual analysis, which not only provides methodological ideas to avoid the limitations of using a single method in fan studies, but also makes a practical contribution to the use of the mixed methods approach in fan study.

Firstly, the present research combines a qualitative-oriented approach with the necessary quantitative aspects, from the overall design to the operational level. This manner not only allows

for viewing a richer dataset obtained from the combination of aca-fan and questionnaire, but also allows for viewing personalised cases of CP fans through open-ended questions. Subsequently, the present research focuses not only on the CP fans' own thinking tendencies and behavioural patterns, but also on a textual analysis of the phenomenon of 'setting supremacy' that occurs in three types of CP fan-created texts (fanfiction, scripts of language cosplays, and fan-video texts). This mixed methods approach of targeting different approaches for different questions in the overall study helped the present research to explore and answer questions related to CP fans of English-language cultural products in terms of breadth and depth, thus effectively avoiding errors and limitations caused by reliance on one approach.

Secondly, the present research, after adapting the sequential exploratory design for the order of operations within the scheme of mixed methods approach, the three methods are used one after the other, thus providing an operationalisation of the mixed methods approach in cases where there may be an over-reliance on a particular method. In addition, the present research proposes a localised innovation in the use of 'aca-fan', namely the 'moderately lowered stance' based on considerations of the regional nature of Chinese CP culture and the generational characteristics of current CP fans.

### **3. limitations and implications**

#### **3.1 Conflictual CP fandom**

Although the present research analyses the small-scale struggles aroused by the contradiction between 'fan identity' and 'national identity' of CP fans of English-language cultural products, as Chin (2018) points out 'fans' positions are not fixed, but are in a state of constant debate and change', so the flaw of the present research lies in the lack of an in-depth and concrete exploration and analysis of the conflicts between sub-fan groups occurring within the seemingly peaceful CP fandom of English-language cultural products. In particular, because CP is made up of two characters, it is highly susceptible to three-way conflicts between the 'only-fans of the bottom role', the 'only-fans of the top roles', and CP fans, as CP fans desperately demand to maintain a balance of favouritism between the two characters, but in practice not all of them are able to do so, thus creating divisions within CP fans by the differing favouritisms and provoking questioning of their fannish identities and sentiments.

Based on this limitation, subsequent research can pay more attention to how these competing fan communities interact and the development of anti-fan communities. Especially for the 'only-fans of

the bottom role' and the 'only-fans of the top roles', their emotions towards CPs are different, which is a very complicated issue. Thus, the future research can determine whether this affects their willingness to engage in fan fighting by analysing why CP fans have different emotions towards the two parties of the CP.

### **3.2 The diversity of CP**

A second limitation of the present research is the failure to adequately consider the diversity of CPs and CP fans. Actually, CP's affections are sometimes more than just love, and sometimes, for fans, they perceive the relationship between CPs as repeatedly bouncing sideways between friendship, love, intimacy, and soulmates. However, the approach of the present research in defining CP's feelings as intimacy might weaken the complexity of their emotions. Future research could therefore consider analysing CP culture from the perspective of other emotional relationships.

Secondly, although this study breaks away from the narrow definition of CP as male/male homosexual CP, especially extensively examines heterosexual CPs and homosexual CPs when analysing how fans use settings in 'powerful top/powerful bottom' CPs to construct equal gender-power models, as well as the uncommon 'female alpha x male omega' CPs, the aspect of gender in CPs could be analysed in greater depth. Especially in the case of female/female CP, which may have a degree of similarity to male/male CP, but where it differs is currently more ambiguous. Based on this limitation, future research could particularly focus on the female/female CP, as men are naturally excluded from this CP, and therefore this CP may have more potential to develop equal and civilised intimacy compared to the male/male CP and the heterosexual CP, but the accuracy of this speculation needs to be verified by further research.

### **3.3 Methodological limitations**

Mixed methods approach is not a perfect approach. Firstly, mixed-methods research is labour-intensive, it takes a great deal of time and effort to collect, analyse and synthesise both types of data into a single research output (O'Byrne, 2007). Secondly, mixed methods may yield different or contradictory results (Malina et al., 2011), this approach also gave the present research some repetitive and redundant material, and although this enhances the credibility of the conclusions, it also undermines the overall cohesiveness and streamlining.

The second flaw comes from the online questionnaire which has a large proportion of open-ended questions. The present research took a thematic approach to analysing the open-ended questions,



and although the present research tried to be as rigorous as possible, it relies heavily on aca-fan's personal experience, which may have led to compromised reproducibility of results. At the same time, open-ended items take more time and cost more to provide information than multiple-choice questions (Hift, 2014), as it requires not only the willingness of the participant to answer, but also their ability to express the answer freely (Züll, 2016), the efficiency of the present research was substantially compromised as a result.

Based on these two limitations, future research could improve on the present questionnaire, paying particular attention to balancing the weight of open-ended questions with other types of question settings. In addition, more effective digital analytical tools should be used in the mixed methods approach, and hopes can be placed on the advancement of artificial intelligence technology and big data to analyse the complex phenomenon of CP fans logically and mathematically.

## Appendix II: Online Questionnaire

### *A Study on the “Coupling” Phenomenon in the Chinese Fandom of English Cultural Products and the Intercultural Imagination of fan creation*

Dear Participants:

You are invited to take part in a Study on the “Coupling” Phenomenon in the Chinese Fandom of English Cultural Products and intercultural imagination of fan creation. I am interested in understanding your fan activities as a ‘CP fan’ of English Cultural Products, and your acceptance attitudes towards the cross-cultural, cross-textual and cross-dimensional ‘coupling’. This study aims to explore what desire of your intimate relationship that you may project in ‘coupling’, as well as how you adapt the masculinity through your favourite ‘CP’ and ‘setting’ in fan fictions of *Harry Potter*, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. Besides, regarding the cross-cultural, cross-textual non-canon CP created by some Chinese fans, your attitudes and intercultural imaginations will be analyzed. You have been invited to participate in this study because you are the fan of English Cultural Products, *Harry Potter*, *Sherlock*, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, which are the research objects of this study. You are the main consumer as a CP fan, and you might have experience creating fan works, which will provide valuable information and opinions for this study. Understanding your experiences will help us to understand how fans absorb and modify English works as a part of localized fan culture, and how to realize their imagination, passion and self-examination with the brush strokes of coupling. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the research. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don’t understand or want to know more about.

Research Project: A Study on the “Coupling” Phenomenon in the Chinese Fandom of English Cultural Products and Intercultural Imagination of Fan Creation

Researcher: Zhaowei Dang, Postgraduate Researcher at the school of AMA-HUM of the University of East Anglia

Reference number for ethical review: SREC-20-012

All research participants will be anonymised for the purposes of presenting findings of this study, for statistical analysis, data will be in anonymized format so that an individual cannot be identified. It is expected that the questionnaire will take approximately 20-30 minutes. If you choose to answer questions, please answer them carefully and truthfully, which will be related to the conclusion. If you have any further questions or concerns about this survey, please contact this email: [1124538451@qq.com](mailto:1124538451@qq.com). Please read the participant information statement carefully before filling the questionnaire, and if you would like to participate in this study please sign your name at the bottom of participant consent form. Please select “Accept” to begin this survey or select “Decline” to exit. If there are any problems that make you feel uncomfortable, you can quit the online questionnaire.

### 1. PARTICIPANT CONSENT

**I have read the participation information statement of this study carefully, and agree with the information use and protection instructions, and agree to take part in this research study.**

[single choice]\*我已阅读本研究的简介及参与信息说明，并同意相关信息使用与保护说明。

[单选题] \*

Accept | 接受

Decline | 拒绝

**Part one: Personal Information | 个人信息**

**2. Age group | 年龄: [single choice]\***

Post-2005s

Post-2000s

Post-1995s

Post-1990s

Post-1980s

Post-1979s

Other \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Gender | 性别: [single choice]\***

Cis Female | 顺性别女性

Cis Male | 顺性别男性

Transwoman | 跨性别女性

Transman | 跨性别男性

Non-binary gender | 非二元性别者

Other \_\_\_\_\_ | 其它性别

**4. Sexual orientation | 性取向: [single choice]\***

Homosexual | 同性恋

Heterosexual | 异性恋

Bisexual | 双性恋

Pansexual | 泛性恋

Asexual | 无性恋

Queer | 酷儿

Fluid | 流动的, 并非固定不变

Other \_\_\_\_\_ | 其它

Unknown/prefer not to say | 不清楚/不愿意透露

**5. Education Level | 学历 [single choice]\***

High school and the following degree | 高中及高中以下

Bachelor's degree and undergraduate | 大学本科

Master's degree and postgraduate | 研究生

Doctor degree and Ph.D. candidate | 博士研究生

Postdoctoral | 博士以上

Office worker | 上班族

**6. Overseas study background [single choice]\* | 您是否有海外教育背景**

Yes, English-speaking countries, e.g., UK, USA | 是的, 我有在英语国家留学的经历。例如: 英国, 美国

Yes, Non-English-speaking countries, e.g., Japan, Korea | 是的, 我有在非英语国家留学的经历。例如: 韩国, 日本

No, Mainland China | 不, 我没有海外留学经历

**7. Are you from a one-child family [single choice]\* | 您是否来自独生子女家庭?**

Yes, I am an only child | 是的, 我是独生子女

No, I have brother(s) older than me | 不是, 我有哥哥

No, I have sister(s) older than me | 不是, 我有姐姐

- No, I have brother(s) younger than me | 不是, 我有弟弟
- No, I have sister(s) younger than me | 不是, 我有妹妹
- Other | 其它

**Part Two: “Coupling” fan creation | CP 同人创作**

**8. How did you know the existence of CP fan culture? What opportunities do you take to get in touch with them? [Multiple choice]\* | 您是否记得最初是如何知道您磕的 CP 及其同人创作的存在的? [多选题] \***

- Recommended by friends or classmates | 我的朋友、同学安利
- Recommended by other fans | 其它粉丝安利
- Social media recommendation based on big data (e.g., Weibo, WeChat) | 来自一些社交媒体的首页推送 (例如, 微博首页, 微信公众号等)
- Recommended by Uploaders, KOL and fiction recommendation accounts on social media | up主、微博大 V、扫文号的分享和推荐
- I found the category of “Fan works of English-speaking cultural products” on some online Literature websites (e.g., Jinjiang Literature City, Chang Pei) | 我在文学网站阅读时发现了西方同人衍生这一分类 (例如, 晋江文学城, 长佩)
- I found it unintentionally while surfing the Internet or reading magazines and books | 我上网或阅读报刊书籍时无意发现的
- I saw them on the overseas Internet social platform (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, Archive of Our Own) | 我在浏览外网社交软件时看到的 (例如, Twitter, Instagram)
- Other | 其它

**9. Platforms that you read or watch fan works most frequently [Choose at most three] | 您进行同人活动 (阅读, 观看, 创作, 讨论) 的主要平台是?**

- Public social media -Weibo, Lofter, Zhihu | 公共社交媒体——微博、Lofter, 知乎
- Male-demand Literature website – Qidian | 男频小说网站——起点中文网
- Female-demand channel of Literature website-Jinjiang, Changpei, www.xxsy.net | 小说网站女性频道——晋江、长佩、潇湘书院
- Hidden website in fandom-Lovehtbooks, ifuwen | 粉丝圈内部隐蔽网站——海棠、废文网、御宅屋、ifuwen
- ACGN video website | 二次元视频网站——Bilibili
- Online fans discussion group | 网络粉丝讨论组——豆瓣、百度贴吧、QQ
- Cloud storage – Baidu Cloud | 云存储网盘——百度云、微盘、资源包
- Overseas websites—Archive of our own, Twitter | 外网——AO3、Twitter
- Other | 其它

**10. Why are you showing a high level of commitment to CP fan culture? [Multiple choice]\* | 您认为自己沉迷于磕 CP 的主要原因是什么?**

- I like the atmosphere of coupling with other fans | 为了和同担社交
- To satisfy the imagination of an ideal intimate relationship | 满足内心对亲密关系/性关系的想象
- Out of preference for a personal or worldview setting | 我只是单纯喜欢某一类人设
- To make up for regrets or revise dissatisfaction with an original work | 想要帮官方圆梗
- I like CPs consisting of beautiful looking people | 我喜欢拥有美丽外表角色之间动人的爱情故事
- To socialise, because coupling is a common phenomenon | 嗑 CP 已经是一种潮流

- CP is under my control and never disappoint me | 同人的世界由自己掌控，我磕的 CP 不会塌房
- To escape the pressure of reality | 磕 CP 是我逃离现实压力的出口
- To read flesh (pornographic) fan works | 18 禁同人作品太刺激太香了
- To imagine intimate relationships between real people who play the CP | 我看到扮演角色的真人之间有爱的互动，我猜想他们之间存在某种亲密关系
- Other | 其它

**11. Do you have a preference for genre while reading CP fanfictions? [ Multiple choice questions]\* | 您在看同人创作时对文类有偏好吗？ [多选题] \***

- Male/Female CP
- Male/Male CP
- Female/Female CP
- One top/Male character with many bottoms/female characters | ALL 攻/男主
- One Bottom/Female character with many Top/male characters | ALL 受/女主
- Otome (Character x me) | 乙女向（主角 x 我）
- Bisexuality | 双性文
- ABO
- Sex description | 就爱肉香四溢的文
- No flirtation and focus on career | 无 CP（不搞暧昧只搞事业）
- BDSM
- Time travel into the originals | 穿书
- Omnivorous fans | 什么我都嗑，杂食爱好者
- Other|其它

**12. Which expression do you prefer about your fan identity? [Multiple choice]\* | 您对自己的粉丝身份更倾向于哪种表述？**

- Fans who love the setting of world view created by canon | 喜爱原作世界设定的世界观粉
- Fans who focus on fan creation | 专注同人的同人粉
- Fans who love specific roles | 喜爱特定角色的角色粉
- Fans who love certain personal settings | 喜爱某类设定的人设粉
- CP fans | 专磕某对 CP 的 CP 粉
- Fans who love specific plots | 总是被某一类梗戳中的梗粉
- Fans who only focus on BL | 专注腐向的腐女粉
- Both of overall, and be able to realize the change of identity clearly and consciously | 同时，并能清晰自觉的辨认身份的转变

**13. How do you define the sense of CP? [fill in the blank]\*您是如何定义 CP 感的，请用一句话描述： [填空题] \***

**14. Are there any changes for you since becoming a CP fan of English cultural products? [Multiple choice]\* | 您认为嗑欧美 CP 是否对您的现实生活产生了某种影响？**

- More focus on gender political issues in the real world than before | 关注现实社会中的性少数群体及其它性别政治议题
- Disgust some women who are not aware of gender consciousness | 厌恶某些性别意识未觉醒的女性

- I began or even more disgusted with some men whose words and deeds were uncomfortable | 我开始或者更加厌恶某些言行令人不适的男性
- No longer eager to have a real intimate relationship with the members of the opposite sex | 不再渴望和异性发生真实的亲密关系
- I feel more yearning for ideal intimacy | 我对美好的亲密关系感到更加的向往
- I no longer watch or read heterosexual cultural products and fan creations | 我不再观看主角是异性恋的同人创作，文学或影视作品
- There is no impact, the world of fan creation and real life should be completely isolated | 没有任何影响，对我来说同人的世界与现实生活应该完全隔离
- Other | 其他

**15. Is it more positive or negative that coupling activities of English cultural products impact on your mental state and life attitude? [single choice]\* | 总体而言，磕欧美 CP 看同人作品对您的心理状态和生活态度产生的影响是更积极的还是更消极的？ [单选题] \***

- Strongly negative | 非常消极的
- Relatively negative | 比较消极的
- Occasionally negative | 偶尔有些消极的
- Neither negative nor positive | 中立无影响
- Occasionally positive | 偶尔有些积极的
- Relatively positive | 比较积极的
- Strongly positive | 非常积极的

**16. Question 16: What does your ideal intimate relationship look like? Please briefly describe [fill in the blank]\*在现实生活中，您理想的亲密关系（恋爱模式，婚姻关系）是怎样的？请您简述 [填空题] \***

**17. Which is your favourite CP? Can you explain the reason, and how would you define the personal settings of them? [ Fill in the blank]\*在《哈利波特》和《神奇动物在哪里》的魔法宇宙中，您的本命 CP 是哪对？您能否陈述这对 CP 吸引您的原因？以及，您会如何定义这对 CP 的人设或者是性格呢？ [填空题] \***

**18. To what extent do you think the following key elements can determine the quality of a CP fanfiction? [ Matrix scale questions]\*您认为以下关键要素多大程度上可以决定一篇 CP 同人文的质量高低？ [矩阵量表题] \***

Items	1	2	3	4	5
Personal Setting   生动精准的人设	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Worldview Setting   完善的世界设定	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Writing Style   流畅的文笔	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Narrative Logic   合理的叙事逻辑	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adherence to the Original   与原作较高的贴合度	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

19. Which perspective do you take when reading CP fanfiction? [Multiple choice]\* | 在阅读中，您比较喜欢代入哪种视角？

- Narrator | 叙述者
- Top/Male Protagonist | 攻/男主
- Bottom/Female Protagonist | 受/女主
- Villain | 反派
- Supporting Character/Bystander | 配角/旁观者
- “Mama” Fans<sup>30</sup> | 妈粉/爹粉视角
- Random | 随机
- Critic | 批评者
- Other | 其它请补充

20. Please give your "acceptance index" for the following options: [matrix single choice]\* | 请对以下若干选项给出您的“避雷指数”：[矩阵单选题] \*

Item	Strongly disagreeable	Tend to Disagreeable	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agreeable	Strongly agreeable
Split CP 拆 CP	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reversed CP 逆 CP	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Switch Top/Bottom CP 互攻	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gender Switch 性转 CP	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Male Mother 男妈妈	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
NTR (One of the lovers has sexual relations with others) 绿帽文学	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Androgyne 双性	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feminine / Weakly Bottom 女性化受/弱受	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Female Top 女攻	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<sup>30</sup> Mama Fans: It used to refer to fans who were married and had children, but is now more commonly used to describe fans who treat their favorite characters as if they were their own children.

Girl's love 百合	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CP have a sexual relationship with another person 不洁	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Abusive Top/Abused Bottom 渣攻 贱受	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Forced Sexuality 强制爱	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bad ending 结局 BE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Out of Character 角色性格走形	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Alternative universe 平行宇宙	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

21. What factors do you use to determine the top/bottom division of a CP? [Fill in the blank]\* | 通常来说您是根据什么来判断一对 CP 的攻受的? [填空题] \*

22. Question 22. What do you think is the relationship between the strength level of CP's spirituality and power and the division between top/bottom? [ Fill in the blank]\* | 您认为 CP 双方精神或者权力上的“强势与弱势”和性行为中的“插入位和接受位”有怎样的关系? [填空题] \*

23. Do you prefer CP fandom for English-language cultural products to CP fandom for Chinese-language cultural products? | 您是否更倾向于来自英语文化产品的“CP”而不是来自中国文化作品中的?

Yes, the personas and worldviews in the fan creations of English cultural products are more imaginative than the common depictions found in Chinese fandom | 是的, 欧美同人的人设、世界观比中文世界常见的描述更有想象力

Yes, the fandom of English-language cultural products is more inclusive of various settings | 是的, 圈子本身对同人中各种设定的包容度较高

Yes, the genre of English-language cultural products fits my imagination and affection for Euro-American culture | 是的, 综英美题材符合我对欧美文化的想象与喜爱

Yes, fans within the retirement fandom are mature and sensible, and my fan activity is not restricted | 是的, 养老圈粉丝相对成熟而理智, 同人圈活动自由无规则

Yes, fans of English-language cultural products are more educated, and there are fewer younger fans in this fandom | 是的, 圈子本身低龄粉丝较少, 文化素养较高

Yes, fans of English-language cultural products can distinguish between role-based CP and real-people CP | 是的, 可以把剧 CP 和 RPS (真人 CP) 区分开

Not exclusively, I indulge in CPs in both fandoms if the personal setting or world setting fits my preference | 不是, 我都磕, 只要人设或世界设定对我胃口



No, I only occasionally follow CP within English cultural products for language learning or social needs | 出于学习语言的需求

Not exactly, I follow a specific CP because of my preference for a particular English-language cultural product | 不全是, 我只是喜爱某一部欧美影视作品, 因此只关注某一特定同人圈

Other | 其它

**24. For your CP, have you read or watched the original English version or translated works created by English-speaking fans, and do you think there is any difference between these works and those created by Chinese fans? [ Fill in the blank]\*** 对于您磕的 CP, 您是否阅读或观看过由外国粉丝创作的英文原版或是被搬运翻译的同人作品, 您认为这些同人作品和由中国粉丝创作的同人作品是否有什么不同之处? [填空题] \*

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**25. Have you ever been criticized while showing a high level of commitment to CP of English-language cultural products? | 您在磕欧美 CP 的时候是否受到过负面攻击?**

Love-struck fans who are ignorant and egoless | 没有自我只知道嗑 CP 的无知恋爱脑

Fans without a bottom line and moral integrity | 毫无下限没有节操的大尺度爱好者

People who are not concerned with the interests of the country or even unpatriotic | 不关心国家政治甚至不爱国

Fans of English cultural products who pretend to be niche and noble and despise local CPs | 瞧不起内娱 cp 假装小众的高贵欧美圈

A homebody who is eccentric, withdrawn, and socially inept | 古怪孤僻不擅长现实社交活动的阿宅

People who have no respect for the originals and coupling to satisfy their personal preferences | 不尊重原著只凭个人喜好乱拉 cp

Never been criticized by others | 从未受到来自他人的误解和攻击

Other | 其他

**26. Would you like your CP to be recognised by the official or mainstream culture? | 您是否愿意自己的 cp 圈发展壮大, 乃至 cp 文学被官方或主流文化所认可?**

No, it is unnecessary to keep up with the mainstream culture and should be free to the maximum extent | 不愿意, 同人文化不需要向主流文化看齐, cp 文学应最大限度的保持自由

Yes, the proximity to mainstream culture provides more exposure for CP culture, encourages fan creativity, and improves the image of CP fans | 愿意, 提供更多曝光机会, 有助于鼓励粉丝创作积极性, 提高 cp 写手的地位

Neutral, I want CP culture to be better understood and accepted, but I do not want it to suffer from cultural castration | 中立, 希望 cp 文化被更多人理解和接纳, 但害怕受到成为主流所要面对的文化阉割

I do not care about the relationship with mainstream culture, I only care about the CP in which I indulge | 我只需要你承认我嗑的 CP 是真的

Other | 其他

**27. What is the appearance (appearance, body type, dress style) of your favourite CP of English-language cultural product? [ Fill in the blank]\* | 在您的脑海中, 您磕的欧美 CP 双方的外型 (外貌, 体型, 着装风格) 是怎样的? [填空题] \***

28. What is distinctly different between the CP of English cultural products and the CP of Chinese cultural products? [Fill in the blank]\* | 根据您的经验和经历, 您认为欧美 CP 和内娱 CP 有什么明显的不同之处吗? [填空题] \*

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29. In your experience of showing a high level of commitment to CP of English-language cultural products, has your orientation or taboos changed in any way? [Fill in the blank]\* | 在您磕欧美 CP 搞同人的历程中, 您的取向或雷区有没有什么变化? 例如以前看 BG, 但现在看 BL; 或者以前无法接受拆逆, 但现在可以。如果您的取向发生了某种变化, 您认为造成这种变化的原因可能是什么? [填空题] \*

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30. How receptive are you to the cross-cultural and cross-textual ships such as ships from “*Harry Potter x The Dream of the Red Chamber*”? [single choice] | 您对类似“哈红”这样跨文化跨文本的拉郎 CP 的接受程度有多高? (例如: 伏地魔 x 林黛玉 德拉科 x 薛宝钗 斯内普 x 王熙凤 哈利/宝玉 小天狼星 x 晴雯 塞德里克 x 香菱)

- Completely unacceptable, even disgusting | 完全接受不了甚至是厌恶
- Relatively unacceptable | 不太能接受
- No attitude but respects the freedom of Lalang | 无感但尊重
- Relatively acceptable | 比较能接受
- Perfectly acceptable | 非常能接受真的好配
- Other | 其它请您补充 \_\_\_\_\_

31. What attracted you to become a La Lang CP fan of ‘Voldemort x Lin Daiyu’? | 您为什么磕拉郎 CP 呢? [多选题] \*

- E’gao or Spoofing | 猎奇感强烈, 越恶搞越离谱就越带感
- Sense of the Unknown | 平行时空未知感强烈, 更好奇不同宇宙的人物组成的邪门 CP 之间会发生什么
- Sense of Immersion | 代入感更强, 用中国式的思维方式去理解原作中外国人物的行为模式
- The CP aligns with the orientation towards the personal setting | 因为这对 CP 符合我对某种人设或梗的取向
- The sense of CP is so convincing that it is irrelevant whether it is La Lang or not | 同人作品中他们 CP 感太强了, 是不是拉郎真的无所谓
- Other | 其他 \_\_\_\_\_

32. Do you accept the La Lang CP regarding *Harry Potter* and *The Dream of the Red Chamber*? [fill in the blank] | \*您嗑上述哪对拉郎 CP, 能否请您解释这对 CP 戳中您的点是什么? 如果方便请您留下您最喜欢的同人作品 [填空题] \*

If you are not interested in La Lang CP, please explain your reasons in one sentence 如您不磕拉郎 CP, 请用一句话解释您的原因

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33. If one day you are no show a high level of commitment to CPs of English cultural products, what may be the reason? [multiple choices] | 如您有一天爬墙了, 或者不再磕欧美 CP 了, 您认为可能是什么原因造成的? [多选题] \*

- There are too few fan creations | 圈子太冷, 没有太太产粮
- Political friction between China and the country to which the original work belongs | 中国与原作所属国之间的政治摩擦
- The actor playing the CP is politically incorrect | 原作者或主创的政治不正确的负面新闻

- One partner in the CP is in a relationship or married |房子塌了，CP 中一方谈恋爱或结婚了
- My preference for the CP has changed (e.g., from BG to BL) | 我磕 CP 的取向变了（例如现在只磕 BL）
- The atmosphere in the fandom is unpleasant | 一些同担令人厌烦，同人圈乌烟瘴气
- CPs are so outrageous that I can no longer be confident | 脑洞开太大圆不上，说服不了自己
- The official CPs are too compatible | 官配实在太甜，只好打不过就加入
- Real-world pressures (e.g., studies and work) | 现实世界的压力，升学求职等
- CP is too imaginary; I want to have real intimacy | 磕 CP 太虚幻了，我想要拥抱真实的亲密关系
- Other| 如果您的答案未包含在以上选项之内，恳请您在此进行补充

**34. Do you want to communicate with the researcher or want to know the results? | 您是否愿意参与进一步的研究来畅谈您更多的想法，或者您对本研究的结果感兴趣希望被告知？如您愿意，请您留下您的联系方式（邮箱，微信，QQ 等） [填空题]**

- No
- Yes (Your email/WeChat, please) \_\_\_\_\_

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### List of CP Fanfictions

*With Stars in Their Eyes* — by 裊浔, published on AO3

*My faith* — by threezer, published on Lofter

*A beautiful summer night* — by 昏罗帐, published on Lofter

*Voldemort x Lin Daiyu: life and death knot (伏黛之生死结)* — by 一个小 K, published on Jin Jiang literature City

*From Confessions to Love* — by Akita, published on Lofter

### **List of CP Fan videos**

*Ruo Shui San Qian (弱水三千)* — by Xuan Yuan (轩辕)

*The Flower Affair (伏黛•花事)* — by isBlur

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