

Time-Travel to P&P: Web-based Chinese Fanfic of Jane Austen

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Abstract: The fan fiction (fanfic) works of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (P & P) on the Chinese web unanimously deploy time-travel to insert Chinese men or women into the canon universe. The protagonists can take up any original roles, or they become newly created characters. They can maintain the original romantic pairing, choose different partners, or even enter into homoerotic relationships. Yet they all accomplish great feats not only in romantic relationships, but also in establishing careers and accumulating fortunes.

Fanfic allows fans to appropriate existing cultural products to hone creative skills and to benefit from the original’s cultural cachet. Chinese P & P fanfic also serves specific personal and political ends. Some rewrite the fate of the “wronged woman,” whose victimization in the canon universe has roused indignation and generated a tale of redemption. Others use fanfic to recast ideal masculinity and femininity. Finally, reworking this Western classic helps them re-imagine Sino-British relation and position themselves in today’s complex world.

Discussing, reinterpreting, and refashioning the source text alongside like-minded insiders produce explanation and validation of Chinese women’s lives. Ultimately, these works provide examples of the “open canon” that fanfic can create, while querying the dynamics between cultural globalization and localization.

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Occupying a secure place in both “the solemn pantheon of classic English literature and the exuberantly commercial realm of pop culture” in the West (Yaffe xvii), Jane Austen’s works have also generated enthusiastic followers in Chinese cyberspace. Chinese fans do not

possess the same background knowledge demonstrated by those Western fans known as “Janeites,” who show “self-consciously idolatrous enthusiasm for ‘Jane’ and every detail relative to her” in the histories of English and American literature (Johnson 211). They are also inclined to play fast and loose with Austen’s original works, in sharp contrast to the users at the Republic of Pemberley, a renowned English-language website featuring lore, fan fiction (fanfic), and discussion related to all things Austen, who insist on historical accuracy and faithfulness to the “spirit of Jane” (Johnson 211). Additionally, Chinese fans lack resources to partake in the wide variety of Austen-themed conferences, balls, and tourism enjoyed by their Western counterparts, as delineated in a study of the Austen fandom in the West by Deborah Yaffe. However, they more than make up for the ostensibly limited scope and depth of their engagements through creative and passionate rewritings, reinterpretations, and debates of the original on the Chinese web.

Indeed, these Chinese fans manifest few qualms about challenging a classic of English literature, given that they operate in less restrictive online platforms than the Republic of Pemberley, which boasts rigorous “internal systems of governance and control” (Mirmohamadi 61). They also show less awareness of and reverence to “a wider, pre-existing hierarchy of knowledge that is visible almost everywhere in Janeite culture” than their Western counterparts (Mirmohamadi 61). The Chinese fanfic works and comments demonstrate a similar “virtual evanescence,” an “outward momentum” that has proliferated in Austen-inspired texts in the West (Malcolm 6). They likewise appropriate from a wide variety of sources across multiple media platforms in the “convergence culture” of the Internet (Mirmohamadi 36). However, in addressing unique concerns relevant to their lives, Chinese fans often break away from Western conventions by producing new definitions and interpretations of what constitutes romantic love.

In this article, I examine a group of Chinese-language, web-based fanfic works of Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (P&P) published at Yaya Bay, a U.S.-based discussion forum catering to worldwide Chinese-speaking audiences. By examining specific themes, literary devices, and discussions, I show that the production and consumption of these works achieve multiple goals. They do not just allow fans to appropriate existing cultural products while benefiting from the original’s cultural cachet. These works also serve specific personal and political ends for the women who write and read them: to vent anger at the marginalization of women, to recast ideal masculinity and femininity, and to reimagine their Chinese identity.

In what follows, I first introduce the unique structure of Yaya to provide some context for my analysis. I then look at the common themes, devices, and interests shared by those participating in the creation and discussion of the fanfic works. I end this study with some reflections on how the exchanges made possible by these Chinese fanfic works shed light on the power dynamics of today’s globalized international romance market. I show that for these Chinese women, the desire to create something relevant to their lives by “poaching” from the source text (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*) far outweighs any consideration for staying true to the original. Their liberal reworking of Austen’s original piece may horrify a bona fide Janeite, but their attempts at appropriation show that cultural globalization can advance along creative, diverse, and surprisingly localized routes.

Yaya Bay

Yaya Bay was founded in August 2008 by a group of young Chinese men working and living in the Washington, DC area in the United States. They established this online discussion forum initially as a venue for exchanging tips about investing in the stock market. As more people joined, they found that women, including their own wives and friends, liked to read web-based literature. The web administrators then added more topics to the discussion forum, especially “Fiction Appreciation,” and saw membership grow exponentially. They now have over 223,000 registered members around the world (Yaya Bay). Judging by their self-identifications, users of the fiction forum are mostly women whose ages range from the mid-teens to forties and who live all over the world.

Yaya consists of three major parts: the forum, blog space, and computer games (now defunct). Yaya’s blog space resembles popular social media sites such as Facebook. Here, users can play games, write blogs, upload photos and other images, share music and video clips, exchange text messages, and comment on one another’s blog entries and pictures. They can also participate in the discussion forum, which is currently divided into twenty-seven sub-forums, such as “Stocks and Finances,” “Immigration,” “Love and Marriage,” and “Delicious Foods of the World,” as well as the sub-forum of “Fiction Appreciation,” the focus of this study. The fiction sub-forum is further split into ten units. In one unit, users can discuss fiction in general, ask questions about forum rules, and conduct surveys. Six of the units feature serialized web fiction, including both heterosexual and homoerotic tales, creative works authored by Yaya users, and “transferred” (*zhuanzai*) works.

In order to protect itself from lawsuits and also to encourage participation and interaction among users, Yaya has established a system of hierarchical access. Only those who have accumulated a certain number of points—by posting repeatedly, visiting the site over an extended period, or referring other users to the site—can access certain fictional works. Yaya has further borrowed from the system of civil service examinations in premodern China, assigning each level of participation a rank, starting from pupil (*tongsheng*), progressing through successful candidate at the county level (*xiucaī*), successful candidate at the provincial level (*juren*), and successful candidate at the national level (*jinshi*), up to *Hanlin wensheng*, “Literati Sage of the Imperial Hanlin Academy.” Members are motivated to post more frequently by the promise of a higher and more glamorous rank. But more importantly, this system has practical implications: only those of a certain rank can access certain works.

Yaya has no claim to ownership of most of the works available through the site. They have mostly been transferred to the site by users from sites where they were originally published, although a link to the original publication site is provided in the very first posting of each work, together with its title and a plot summary. The fanfic works discussed in this article were all first published at Jinjiang Literature City, the largest Chinese-language creative literature website for women, and then transferred to Yaya. Some of the transferrers request and receive authorization from the author before copying fictional works, while others buy VIP novels (available to those who pay cash to read) published at Jinjiang and then reproduce them at Yaya, making sure to lag behind a few chapters, either based on their own judgment or by agreement with the original authors. Yaya defends itself against the charge of piracy by claiming that the site simply facilitates the discussion of literature among

a network of users. But if the original author objects, access to the work is restricted to a limited group of users who have a long history of participation at the site and are presumably not simply using the site as a channel to freely access works available for a cost elsewhere. Thus, it seems that VIP status means different things at Jinjiang and Yaya; while users pay cash to read VIP works at Jinjiang, members contribute labor to earn access at Yaya instead.

Like Jinjiang, Yaya fosters a participatory culture that feeds on itself through a variety of interactive features. For instance, readers can send “flowers” (two web coins for one flower) to those whose postings (whether updated fiction or comments) they like. In turn, the more flowers a certain work receives, the more followers it will attract. The operation of Yaya also differs from that of Jinjiang. Since the server is based in the United States, web administrators at Yaya have more leeway to post works and comments and do not have to follow rules of censorship to which the China-based Jinjiang is subject, such as the prohibition of sexually explicit content and politically sensitive topics and phrases. Moreover, Yaya users find it easy to transfer works published elsewhere to the site with little fear of penalty, since fiction on Yaya is ostensibly the shared hobby of a limited number of registered members rather than goods for sale, and in any case Yaya’s server is located outside China. Additionally, the tripartite structure of Yaya also benefits discussions in the fiction forum. Those reading and commenting on fiction may have made one another’s acquaintance earlier on, whether as “friends” playing the same computer game, as commentators on the same blog entry or picture, or as fellow posters at some other forum on Yaya. Their previous interactions (or simultaneous engagements) elsewhere cultivate a sense of familiarity and intimacy and foster mutual trust, even though their relationships are established and enacted in a virtual space where users do not necessarily reveal their true identity or other personal information. For instance, a reader of a novel that I was also following sent me a private message through Yaya’s blog space to vent frustration about setbacks in her business; she did not expect a response but was writing just so she “could be listened to” (personal communication). In another case, an enthusiastic reader and commentator of fiction wrote me to talk about her family problems, including the suicide of her sister-in-law (personal communication). Yaya’s unique structure thus promotes a sense of community among users of the fiction forum, which in turn creates a friendly atmosphere conducive to open and substantive discussions of romances.

However, in contrast to what happens at Jinjiang, the authors of romance novels on Yaya’s fiction forum are usually not involved in the posting and commentary process, since their works have often been “transferred” to the site without their knowledge or authorization; the authorial monitoring and manipulation of reader response common at Jinjiang is absent here (Feng 59-67). As a result, when voices critical of a work become dominant and strident, the author is not present to explain his or her intentions and motives and thereby temper reader dissatisfaction. Sometimes authors are put on trial *in absentia*, a practice that is perhaps unfair to the author but nevertheless further showcases the overwhelming importance of user participation and the egalitarian structure of the fiction forum.

Many web readers admit that they prefer to read and discuss works at Yaya rather than at Jinjiang, because Yaya offers a livelier and more reader-centered atmosphere conducive to airing their opinions and emotions. They even appreciate postings that provide historical and cultural knowledge and insights but are unrelated to the work at hand, preferring a “skewed” (*wailou*) discussion to the usual fare of “flattery or smear” at Jinjiang.

Authors whose works have been pirated from their original publication sites sometimes also drop by Yaya, attracted by the constant flow of substantive and lively commentaries. Lan Yunshu, the author of *Datang mingyue* (Moon of the Tang dynasty), enjoyed far more attention at Yaya than at the original site of publication. While not openly endorsing the piracy of her work, she nevertheless read the commentaries for her work frequently and chose to turn a blind eye to Yaya readers' copyright violations (Lan #1338). Pirated authors' tolerance of Yaya may echo the sentiments of the famous dissident web author Murong Xuecun, who insists that copyright abuse is the least of his concerns, as "a relaxed and free environment is more important than royalties" (C. S.-M.). Further, posting and discussion of their works at Yaya could generate attention and a following at Yaya or elsewhere on the Chinese web, a prospect especially attractive to authors who specialize in genres with limited fan bases, such as male-male homoerotic tales or fanfic, or who have just started out and are far from certain to secure the bestselling status that Murong Xuecun enjoys. In any case, the genial, reader-centered, participatory culture at Yaya ensures the free flow of comments and exchanges surrounding any novel, not to mention fanfic works, which fosters even more tight-knit fan communities than other types of web fiction.

P&P Fanfic

The works that attract the most attempts at fanfic writing on the Chinese web include not only Chinese and other Eastern Asian novels, TV operas, and films, but also Western fictional and media works such as *Pride and Prejudice* (P&P), *The Lord of the Rings*, *Twilight*, and the Sherlock Holmes and Harry Potter series. Rewritings of P&P deliberately borrow not just from Austen's various works, but also from other Chinese and Western cultural artifacts and even computer games. They also overlap with other sub-genres of Chinese web romance, such as male-male homoerotic tales. Perhaps most crucially, each work presumes an audience that possesses some previous knowledge of P&P and an interest in the canon universe created by the original work.

Just like fans at Wattpad, a literature website launched from Canada in 2006, Yaya fans display a "fannish desire for endless narrative [and] the active reader's aspiration to intervene in the story-making process and influence story outcomes" (Mirmohamadi 79). However, the authors of the P&P fanfic works are, in most cases, not involved in readers' discussions at Yaya, with the exception of Canghai Muye (Vast Sea at Night), who apparently knew about and tacitly accepted the pirating of her work at Yaya, and even occasionally came by to chat with her readers. These Chinese works share a unique characteristic in contrast to English-language P&P fanfic: they all deploy time-travel as a literary device to insert Chinese men or women into the canon universe. Moreover, while most authors are not meticulous about researching period details or attaining historical accuracy, they are eager to introduce Chinese elements into their works. These range from objects that the protagonists have brought from contemporary China, such as books and cosmetics, a Chinese computer game somehow planted in their brains, to their skills in reciting premodern Chinese poetry, sewing, and cooking. These Chinese-flavored "secret weapons," whether concrete or more abstract, prove highly effective for launching successful careers and catching the ideal spouse.

The fanfic works also share similar thematic concerns and follow the same arc of plot development among themselves. Yet the authors show remarkable flexibility in some aspects of the plot. For instance, the time-traveling protagonists can become newly created classmates, friends, and siblings of the original characters, though they can also take up the role of existing characters, such as any member of the Bennet household, including Elizabeth, Jane, Mary, Kitty, Lydia, and Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, or that of Charlotte or Maria Lucas, Miss Bingley, Georgiana Darcy, and George Wickham. The fanfic authors may choose to maintain the original romantic pairing (or “CP” in their lingo, short for “coupling”) in P&P, or they might arrange different marriage partners for the original characters, at times even turning the fanfic into a homoerotic romance. Additionally, the authors feel free to lift and to combine elements from a variety of works in addition to P&P, such as *Twilight*, the Sherlock Holmes series, or the Harry Potter series, as well as from Austen’s other novels, such as *Sense and Sensibility*. Interestingly, many authors also admit to having only watched filmic or TV adaptations, such as the 1995 BBC TV series, rather than reading P&P in Chinese translation, let alone in its original English. However, most of them have their time-traveling protagonists accomplish amazing feats. These Chinese men and women not only find a highly eligible marriage partner, they also make great achievements in business, the military, medicine, or politics, even ascending to the crown as the Queen of Britain in one work.

In other words, both authors and readers of these fanfic works are invested in bettering the lives of the time-traveling protagonists, including but not limited to their marriages. A Chinese man or woman can be “reborn” into the body of not only Elizabeth Bennet, the original heroine, but also, and increasingly often, as a formerly minor and even villainous character in the original, such as Charlotte Lucas, Lydia Bennet, and George Wickham. If the latter proves to be the case, the time-traveler immediately sets out to subvert the lot assigned him or her by Austen. For instance, Chinese fanfic works may feature a Mary Bennet romantically pursued by several aristocratic men rather than remaining the unpopular “ugly duckling” of all the Bennet sisters, as is the case in *Miss Mary* (Aoman yu pianjian zhi Mali xiaojie) by Mengli Wutong. They may describe a war-hero Wickham who eventually gets Darcy as his spouse, as in *I Am Wickham* (Aoman yu pianjian zhi wo shi Weikehanmu) by Fengyu Xiaolou. They may also present a Lydia Bennet who dumps Wickham and marries someone far more eligible, and in the process makes a fortune through her own wit and hard work, as in *My Dear Lydia* ([Aoman yu pianjian] Qin’ai de Lidiya) by Xi Pin. Even when the fanfic authors design for their protagonists a career or marriage less grand than those mentioned above, we can still find a Charlotte Lucas indulging in long internal monologues about the meaning of her existence and devising plans for a brighter future, while being cheered on by enthusiastic readers who not only echo her sentiments but also initiate related discussions, as has happened around *Becoming Charlotte* (Aoman yu pianjian zhi chengwei Xialuote) by An Xiu.

Further, the Chinese fans, whether authors or readers, often, though perhaps inadvertently, invoke the traditional Confucian ethical code to support their reinterpretations and rewritings of original characters and plot, motivated by intimate and deeply felt personal concerns. The Chinese time-traveler in these fanfic works often voices the opinion that an ideal marriage is a union of two equal (*pingdeng*) partners, emphasizing not only the couple’s compatibility in interests and values, but also their matching family backgrounds. Many are the cases in which a time-traveling Jane, Mary, or Elizabeth turns down Mr. Darcy’s marriage proposal on the grounds of rational thinking and filial piety. The

time-traveling heroine questions the lifespan of Darcy's romantic impulse, predicting that when passion cools down, their marriage will only end in tragedy, given that she cannot and will not be severed from her family while he holds such a low opinion of her relatives.

Similarly, readers find fault with Austen's depiction of happy marriages between Bingley and Jane, as well as between Darcy and Elizabeth, criticizing the former as the union of two weak souls and the latter as that of two headstrong people bent on full collision. They also cite the unseemly behaviors of the Bennet relatives, such as those of Lydia and Wickham, as potential spoilers of these ostensibly happy unions, and make dark forecasts for divorces and tragedies. Readers thus challenge the prevailing Western idea of romantic love as an irrational, individualistic, and all-consuming affair that may overcome common sense, break traditional barriers, and sustain the lovers' struggle, such as that of Elizabeth and Darcy, against their families' and society's wishes and expectations. These Chinese fans' seemingly conservative streak shows up in their analyses of familial relations as well as romance. For example, while regarding the Bennets as a perfect example of "marry in haste, repent at leisure," they also characterize Mr. Bennet as an irresponsible parent who does not provide for his family adequately, while praising Mrs. Bennet's unconditional love for her children and rationalizing her limits, such as ignorance and flightiness, by attributing them to her upbringing before marriage.

As can be seen, both fanfic authors and readers devote much energy and passion to discussing the institution of marriage, while critiquing and challenging Austen's original work. Readers reveal deep concerns with real-life issues such as a marriage partner's fidelity, women's independence, and interfamilial relationships dictated by Chinese cultural and ethical norms, even while ostensibly only reinterpreting existing characters in P&P. They agree that marriage as a way to financial security and companionship is a necessary evil in the original setting. However, they also feel depressed by how it demeans women and limits or deprives female agency. Likewise, fanfic authors "reform" the characters and behaviors of former "rascals," such as Lydia and Wickham, to turn them into successful businesspeople or good marriage prospects. Their attempts at recasting ideal femininity and masculinity reveal a similar search for a way out of the quandary facing contemporary Chinese women, as is manifested by readers' discussions.

Henry Jenkins describes how fans of popular American soap operas "seemingly blur the boundaries between fact and fiction, speaking of characters as if they had an existence apart from their textual manifestations, entering into the realm of the fiction as if it were a tangible place they can inhabit and explore" (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 18). Similarly, Chinese fans believe that fiction and real life exist side by side, and they insist that fiction reflect and inform life. Through writing, reading, and discussing P&P fanfic works, they wrestle with questions such as: How important are a woman's looks in romance and marriage? How reliable is love at first sight? Must women sacrifice independence of mind and career in order to find a good husband? Is romantic love indispensable to a woman's self-realization? Readers value independence, rationality, and powers of action as positive personality traits in both men and women. However, comments by both authors and readers also illuminate intense uncertainty, anxiety, and insecurity about their own relationships and roles in heterosexual relationships and marriages, even as they unwittingly fall back on traditional ethical values to buttress their confidence. For example, in a postscript to one of the chapters in *The Awkward Life of Miss Jane Bennet*, the author Canghai Muye confesses that the time-traveler Jane in her work reflects her own personality. She even tells her

readers how she has rejected a suitor, a purported “playboy,” because she lacks confidence in that relationship (Canghai #68). Moreover, readers of *Second Marriage*, a fanfic work that describes the divorce of Elizabeth from Darcy and Darcy’s second marriage to the time-traveling heroine, object to the young author’s “glorification” of a home-wrecking *xiaosan*, or, the other woman. They bemoan the pervasive and pernicious influence of marital infidelity in contemporary China, even to the point of blaming the web writers’ disregard of the traditional ethical code, as shown in this fanfic work, for the perceived moral decline in general (Tao #60, #73).

Although romance, marriage, and women’s experience constitute the main focus of fans’ discussions, reworking P&P, a Western classic, also enables some authors and readers to reimagine the relation between China and Great Britain in the nineteenth century, and, more importantly, to position themselves better in today’s complex world of international politics. Fengliu Shudai, the relatively unskilled author of *Princess in Poverty* (Aoman yu pianjian zhi pinqiong gui gongzhu), employs traditional Chinese discourses on filial piety, respect for authority, upholding the hierarchy between ruler and subject, as well as master and servant, and depicts Chinese art, cuisine, and etiquette to demonstrate the superiority of traditional Chinese culture. Her efforts, however, meet with derision from readers at Yaya, who comment that the author’s glaring mistakes reveal her ignorance of rather than expertise in premodern Chinese culture (Fengliu #77). Yet simplistic comparisons of Chinese and Western culture also boost fans’ cultural pride. For instance, Chinese fans almost unanimously scoff at Britain’s purported “dark national cuisine” while praising Chinese cuisine, regardless of whether they have had any experience living and eating in Britain (Fengliu #82, #85, #87). Moreover, the ways in which fans rewrite the “destinies” of certain original characters, as described above, reveal cultural stereotypes, biases against individualistic romantic love, and preconceived ideas of what constitutes a happy marriage, all shaped by readers’ upbringings and life experiences in China.

Some fanfic works have also generated much self-reflection and soul-searching for both authors and readers as Chinese nationals. For example, when Canghai Muye briefly depicts Lin Zexu, a high Qing official who banned the opium trade initiated by the British to offset their trade deficit, leading to the Opium War and the Qing Navy’s defeat (1840-1842), some readers appreciate her efforts to provide a more complete historical picture rather than repeating the clichéd nationalist discourse of foreign invasion and heroic Chinese resistance. In one fanfic entitled *Hubby, Love Me One More Time* (Laogong, zai ai wo yici) by Tong Guining, a Chinese time-traveler becomes the Queen of Britain and plans to start a war to conquer China in order to achieve her goal of becoming the “wisest Queen in England’s golden age” (Tong #108). But most fans do not show the same degree of nonchalance or callousness toward China’s colonization by foreign powers. Instead, they call for self-reflection and looking ahead: “History is history. It has already happened. We should work hard to change reality rather than dwelling on China’s one hundred years of sufferings” (Canghai #129). As they see it, China’s defeats in colonial wars should be attributed to multiple factors, such as its self-isolation and stagnant economic development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While apparently invoking the social Darwinist theory of survival of the fittest, these readers also tacitly challenge the officially sanctioned historiography in which they have been indoctrinated at Chinese schools. Moreover, they understand that different perspectives lead to different narratives and interpretations of historical events. In stating that “the world is three-dimensional, and people and their

thoughts are diverse” (Canghai #129), they show international awareness, a global perspective, and tolerance for different opinions, in radical contrast to the nationalist fervor demonstrated by some Jinjiang users nicknamed the “Little Pink” (*xiao fenhong*) group (Ruan).

Yaya fans’ high degree of tolerance for dissent and ambiguity may have something to do with the generally congenial culture of Yaya and even its server location outside of China. But it is likely also related to the particular temperament of authors and readers of this type of fanfic work. After all, these self-selected Chinese fans have all had exposure to Western cultural products inspired by P&P, such as the BBC TV series first aired in 1995, which they frequently cite in their comments. They also share a common interest in the canon universe of P&P. Some of them, as Canghai Muye reveals, have studied and worked abroad and thus developed a cosmopolitan outlook, even while feeling more keenly the need to reflect on and to reshape their Chinese identity.

These fans demonstrate sophisticated skills in literary creation and analysis as well as an open mind. For instance, Tong Guining deploys a computer game in her fanfic not only to advance the plot, but also as a means to comment on the trite narrative of “time-traveling to date Mr. Darcy” typical of many fanfic works. While the original Elizabeth Bennet remains the heroine of the fanfic, not being replaced by a time-traveler, she has to contend with various contemporary Chinese women who enter the canon universe by participating in a computer game entitled “Conquer Mr. Darcy,” and who are hell-bent to prove themselves by acquiring powerful men as romantic partners, gaining social status, making a fortune, or any combinations of the three. This device facilitates a metanarrative that pokes fun at the standard “Mary Sue”-type of popular romances. According to Sheenagh Pugh, the term “Mary Sue describes a character who is basically an idealized version of the author ... This character will go into the fanfic universe, save its characters, sort out all their problems, probably earn their undying love and often die an heroic death at the end” (85). Likewise, readers can immediately detect and often criticize the tendency to “go Mary Sue” in many P&P fanfic works, even as they go along with the author and enjoy a raucous round of fantasy and wish fulfillment for a while. In another instance, readers appreciate it when the author makes the original Mary and a Chinese time-traveler named Sue share the same body when the former is ten and the latter is in her twenties in *The Accomplice of Mary Sue* (Mali Su de gongfan) (Zhen). They praise the author for juxtaposing two different worldviews, personalities, and thought processes without passing judgment on one or the other. The readers also approve of how the author effectively delineates the loneliness of both characters, one caused by parental neglect and sibling rivalry and the other by involuntary exile into a different time and culture. They like the portrayal of both Mary and Sue as well-rounded characters, as well as the development of a deepening and nuanced friendship between them, in contrast to the common fare of Mary Sue-type self-aggrandizement at the expense of distorting original characters they see in many fanfic works (Tao #60).

As we can see from the above discussion, Chinese-language P&P fanfic attracts Chinese women for a variety of reasons. Fanfic always provides the combined pleasure of repetition and difference, the comfort of the familiar and the piquancy of change at the same time. Moreover, it allows fans to appropriate from existing cultural products to hone their own creative skills while steering clear of the legal constraints that bind print media. Lena Henningsen points out that composing Harry Potter fanfic works functions as “a form of apprenticeship” for young authors in China and globally despite apparent copyright

infringements (162). For an English classic like P&P, first published in 1813, the issue of copyright would never come up, which provides even more leeway than the Harry Potter series. Thus, the authors' attempts at rewriting P&P on the web allow them to test their voices and to polish up creative skills while being aided by instant feedback from their readers.

More importantly, the production and consumption of P&P fanfic serves various personal and political ends, allowing Chinese fans, mostly young women who keenly feel the need for self-expression, to appropriate existing cultural materials to construct personal meanings. Sometimes they rewrite the fate of the "wronged woman" victimized by patriarchal rule to vent their own anger and to explore a viable female identity. For instance, they protest against the marginalization of characters such as Mary Bennet, whose pursuit of knowledge earns her mockery; Charlotte Lucas, a plain spinster with no dowry to speak of; or Mrs. Bennet, who is neglected by a condescending husband and ridiculed by everyone, including her own daughters. Fans create tales of redemption to address perceived injustice in these cases. Others use fanfic to reshape unsatisfactory original characters and thereby to retool ideal masculinity and femininity while attempting to sort out their own issues with romantic love, marriage, and female agency. Finally, reworking this Western classic helps authors and readers to reimagine Sino-Western relations and to promote open-minded and engaged, rather than antagonistic, interactions between nations and cultures globally.

Conclusion

Laurence Raw and Robert Dryden, when analyzing the global appeal of Jane Austen despite her limited mobility in life, point out elements such as depictions of oppression and social class prejudice, and underdog protagonists that evoke powerful identification and resonance in her readers (Raw & Dryden 1-11). Similarly, in Chinese fans' liberal and audacious attempts at rewriting, marriage and romantic love are often turned into vehicles to explore real-life issues important to contemporary Chinese women, such as marriage fidelity and women's independence. Indeed, the Chinese works discussed here represent more the type of "what-if" rather than "what-then" fanfic, since the fans want "more from" rather than "more of" the original work, to use Pugh's classification. That is to say, these Chinese fans are more interested in producing *alternative universes of* rather than *sequels to* the original. In showcasing their own creative skills and visions of life rather than adhering to the spirit of Jane, their works represent a contrast to fanfic works published at the Republic of Pemberley (Van Steenhuyse), and show more similarity with those at Wattpad.

Furthermore, while feeling free to mix and match, and to weave in and out of the Sherlock Holmes, *Twilight*, or Harry Potter series, as well as cultural products inspired by Austen's other works, the Chinese fans often deploy Chinese elements as a way to assert cultural power through the fanfic works. The heroine's background in traditional Chinese art and culture can change her life for the better. Her skills in Chinese cuisine might earn her friendship and admiration all around. Her faithfulness to traditional Chinese morality can win her respect. Her training in classical Chinese art in a previous life might pave her way to financial success in the work of fanfic. Subtler but perhaps even more fantastical, her Chinese perspective makes her an interesting conversationalist and intriguing marriage prospect to

the hero, for it supposedly adds to her unique and enigmatic charm. In short, they appear as enthusiastic about “cultural empowerment” as about gender empowerment.

It follows that most of the Chinese fans do not share a Janeite’s reverence for the original or zero tolerance for any changes deemed un-Austen. The purists among them confess they cannot stand “distortion” of original characters or destruction of the original romantic coupling, such as babycarrot, who has initiated a thread of discussion on P&P fanfic works at Yaya while introducing the Republic of Pemberley to Chinese readers. But most of them are far less puritanical. Some criticize those authors who denigrate the original characters or dismantle the original romantic pairing for no better reason than to fantasize about their own romantic involvement with Darcy. Yet most enjoy playful and even parodic rewritings of the original, expressing little concern for historical accuracy or anachronistic mistakes. Perhaps not surprisingly, Chinese fans’ demand for fidelity to the original is in direct proportion to their degree of familiarity with the original novel. Some have read P&P in English or in Chinese translation, while others have only watched the 1995 BBC TV series or the 2005 Hollywood adaptation without knowing much else about the author, her works, or the Regency period in British history, when Austen published all her novels. Those more familiar with the original have higher standards for fanfic works, caring more about characterization and historical details, although not necessarily to the same degree as a die-hard Janeite. After all, Yaya fans apparently feel comfortable about and even prefer discussing P&P fanfic works among themselves, without the knowledge and interference of fanfic authors, let alone the long-gone Austen herself.

Chinese fans’ physical, chronological, and cultural distance from the original has perhaps granted them creative license. But more importantly, their fanfic works provide a perfect example of the “open archive” that fanfic can create, not because the canon is still being augmented by the original author, but because it calls out for creative consumption by both fanfic authors and readers. The “negative capability” of the source text, in Jenkins’ terminology, i.e., gaps, silences, and potentials in the original, invites fans to use their imagination in the process of rewriting (Jenkins, “How Fan Fiction Can Teach Us”). Austen’s P&P inspires Chinese fans’ participation because its perceived inadequacies “make the text open and provocative rather than completed and satisfying” (Fiske 47). These Chinese women devote their energy to expanding or “rectifying” the canon universe on the basis of personal concerns and strong feelings. They actively appropriate from both the source and fanfic texts to produce meanings for themselves, to meet their own needs, and, to use fanfic to explain and to validate their own life experiences. As they discuss, interpret, and reimagine the source text with like-minded insiders, their shared knowledge and values make for a far more satisfying experience than reading the text alone.

The “archontic” archive (Derecho 61), or the open canon that these fanfic works have created, illustrates the complex dynamics between cultural globalization and localization as well. Rather than lamenting the offenses they have committed to the original work or denouncing the cultural invasion of Western powers, we may do well to celebrate these fanfic authors’ and readers’ daring projects to make new meanings by recycling and mixing elements from a variety of sources. Kylie Mirmohamadi compares web pages to printed pages of Victorian periodicals that carried serialized texts, for serial text “is encountered amongst a plethora of words and images” on the web just as it was in print (47). Ultimately, the Chinese fans of P&P under discussion have succeeded in producing multiple texts, multiple voices, and a congenial fan culture that not only ignites creativity and generates

mutual affirmation, but also, perhaps even more importantly, localizes and rewrites conventions established and propagated by English-language popular romance works.

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