

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Fandom is a community of fans that engage in fan activities and communicate through forum discussions, creative works, gatherings, convention and on/offline written communication ('Fandom', n.d.). Started to be used by science fiction fans, the term now relates with various fandom types, such as anime fandom, band fandom, media fandom and real-person fiction (RPF) fandom ('Fandom', n.d.). On the era of printing machine, fandom practices revolve around fanzine (fan magazine) and conventions (Gooch, 2008). The growth of social media and internet technology allows fans to grow their community on several platforms such as LiveJournal, Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr (Bury, 2016). Fans created their own culture inside their fandom. They have their own language or "fanspeak" (words only fans would understand) or their own literature and art as "fanfiction", "fanart" and "filk songs" (Gooch, 2008). Fandom grows as a recognized cultural group that produced their own language, literature and arts based on their preferred contents (Gooch, 2008). Henry Jenkins (1992) stated that fans "rework and rewrite" over the primary contents, as they are trying to dismiss unsatisfying aspects and to develop their insufficiently explored interest (Gooch, 2008).

Shipping defined as an activity of supporting two or more characters to become involved in a romantic relationship (Owens, 2018). A psychologist and

self-proclaimed fangirl, Lynn Zubernis, stated shipping activity as a self-narrative therapy and identity exploration, because fans (tend to) ship characters that depicts their own romantic, sexual and emotional fantasies (Owen, 2018). Shipping also turned into a device to broaden the definition of love, sex and romantic representation (Owens, 2018). The word shipping came around from “relationshipers”, a term to define X-files fans who wished Mulder and Scully to be together, thus created another term, “ship” for the pairing being rooted for and “shipper” for the fans rooting the pairing (Klink, 2016). Another term in shipping world after ship is the “slash”. Slash means “pairing characters together in a same-sex relationship” (Owens, 2018), while the word “slash” itself came from the slash (/) between name of the pairing (Klink, 2016). The first slash couple was found in 1974 with Kirk/Spock from Star Trek, long before the term “shipping” appeared around 1996 (Klink, 2016). Before the era of internet, fanzine (or fan magazine) was the only way to distribute fan fiction, without any classification of categories and age ratings (Klink, 2016). Later, fanzines in 1970s started to put age classification and around 1990s people began to make classification in fanfiction: “slash”, “het” (story about heterosexual relationship) and “gen” (story without any relationship). The classifications became broader as fandom practice continues. According to Aja Romano (2016) in his article, *Canon, fanon, shipping and more: a glossary of the tricky terminology that makes up fan culture* on Vox.com, shipping has several sub-classifications, such as ‘canon’ (ships based on the ‘canon’ or source material), ‘het’ (ships based on heterosexual pairing), ‘slash’ (ships involving male/male pairing), ‘femslash’ (female version of male slash) and ‘real-

person fiction’ (stories and/or ships about real people, with ‘real-person slash’ as their slash shipping version).

*Hallyu*, often translated as “Korean Wave”, defines to the phenomenon of people become fascinated with Korean popular culture such as music, dramas, fashion, food and beauty (Bok-rae, 2015). Korean drama (K-drama) marked the beginning of Hallyu in the late of 1990s, following with the emergence of Korean idol groups introducing K-pop in mid-2000s (Bok-rae, 2015). With the supports of Korean national branding, media liberalization and globalization, and global fan-driven participatory cultures, (Choi & Maliangkay, 2015; Huang 2011; I. Oh & Lee, 2013; Shim 2006; Laurie, 2016), the growth of K-Pop has reached countries beyond East Asia (Bok-rae, 2015), as in Middle East, Europe, South America and United States (Song and Velding, 2020). This worldwide expansion of K-pop, as highlighted by K-pop researchers, is a modern transnational phenomenon that change the direction of globalization influences from a cultural periphery to a new cultural centre (Lyan & Levkowitz, 2015; Song and Velding, 2020). Male K-Pop idols promotes various form of masculinity, includes *kkot mi nam* (translated as “flower men”) and *jim seung dol* (translated as “powerful beast”), in order to appeal female fans across countries and to satisfy the fans’ desire for ideal men who might not be represented in their own countries (Oh, 2015; Song & Velding, 2020). The *kkot mi nam* image attributed to the male idols creates a “vibrant aesthetic imaginary” through their fashions, friendships and intimacies, which fans elaborate through same-sex shipping and slash fanfiction (Laurie, 2016).

Same-sex shipping practice appeared in K-pop fandom as the result of idols' prohibition to date, 'skinship' between members of the group and self-shipping performance done by the idols for the purpose of "fan service" (Beyond Hallyu, 2013). The kind of "fan service" mentioned before is what Hagen (2015) called as "stage gay", when the (same-sex) performers hugged, kissed and flirted each other on the stage. Idols performed fan service simply for the reason of fulfilling "what the fans want", since pop stars are made to sell fans' desire and idols are just medium of which desire could be performed (Beyond Hallyu, 2013). Shipping idols is the way fans connect with the given media as it also helps queer fans to find space and representation in the community (Beyond Hallyu, 2013). On the other hand, Korean heteronormative society circulates the assumption of "idols are straight until proven otherwise" within the fans, thus make the fans think homosexuality is only a sexual preference which can be tried freely, or they accept homosexuality in fanfiction but hate it in reality (Lee, 2007; Laurie, 2016). In K-pop industry, there are several ships that have massive fans, to the point that their agency agreed to make "official" contents of them. Super Junior's Donghae and Eunhyuk debuted as a sub-unit named Super Junior D&E in 2011 with a title track "땡다 오빠 (Oppa, Oppa)", considering the fans usually pair them up as the main dancers of Super Junior and their close friendship (Fanniberger, 2019). BTS' J-Hope and Suga formed a vocal duo named SOPE-ME in 2016 and hold their own live stream called "Hwagae Market" ('Sope', n.d.). The fans love their interaction since both of them have a strong relationship since their pre-debut era and how they are completing each other personalities ('Sope', n.d.).

Since this study explored the practice of male slash shipping in K-pop boy group fandom, therefore BTS was chosen. BTS is a 7-member boy group debuted in 2013 from Big Hit Entertainment, consisted of RM, Suga, J-Hope, Jin, Jimin, V and Jungkook. As one of some Korean leading boy groups, such as EXO and Big Bang, BTS recently gained massive publicity both in Korean and English media (Song & Song and Velding, 2020). In 2017, BTS won fan-voted Billboard Music Awards' Top Social Artist Awards, beating comparatively big fandom of Justin Bieber and Selena Gomez (Lipshutz, 2017). Shortly afterwards, BTS was selected as one of the 25 most influential people on the Internet in 2017 by TIME magazine (TIME, 2017). Additionally, according to an on-going online voting created by KingChoice (2020), two BTS pairs made it to the top 10 of The Most Favorite KPOP Ship Couples 2020. The first pair, BTS' V and Jungkook (shorten as Tae/Kook) gained 1 million upvotes in the #1, while BTS' Jimin and Jungkook (shorten as Ji/Kook) gained more than 420.000 upvotes ('The Most Favorite KPOP Ship Couples 2020', 2020).

This study explores how BTS members are presented in slash shipping fanart. Fanart is fan-created artwork made from 'redrawing' the original story or media (Arunrangsiwed, 2017). Similar to fanfiction, fanart allows the artist to construct their fantasy of their favourites in a visual reality (Jóhannsdóttir, 2017). It gives the artist a space to express their thought about the characters imitating or having some desirable features (Manifold, 2009). Jessica Seymour (2018) on her work *Homage, Collaboration or Intervention: How framing fanart affects its interpretation* stated that the intention on making fanart could be classified into



three types, Homage (artwork as a tribute to the original text), Collaboration (artwork with some additional details) and Intervention (artwork with different perspective to the original story). According to that classification, slash shipping fanart is part of intervention artwork since the original media did not ended like that. Slash shipping fanart are created because, as AfterEllen (2009) said, the fan artists could see “something between the lines” among the characters then put some effort to make it come true by creating the art. As the focus of this study is BTS, therefore the discussion will be more specified into Real-Person Slash (RPS), where the characters depicted on the work are generated from “official” and “personal” material (Busse 2006). The “official” material was described by Richard Dyer (1987) as “star image”, such as performances, interviews and gossip (taken from Piper, 2015), while the “personal” described was by Fathallah (2018) as information taken from backstage life on (e.g. personal Instagram and Twitter).

Several previous related studies have been conducted by other researchers, under the issue of fan art, slash shipping, and idol fandom. The first one is *Idol Worshipping for Vain Glory, Illusory Romance or Intellectual Learning: A Study in Nanjing and Hong Kong* by Chau-kiu Cheung and Xiaodong Yue in 2000. This study examined three aspects that affected by the activities of idol worshipping: vain glory, illusory romance or intellectual learning. The idol’s joyous performances and smiling faces on stage have created an ideal image for young people that satisfy their fantasy of a romantic partner. Illusory romance is related to young people’s emotional needs to develop intimacy with physically attractive, charming and romantic idols. Both genders could be influential for young people

equally, as same-sex idols are ideal for their identification and opposite-sex idols are the targets for remote intimacy. However, the study did not explain more about what kind of idols that being studied, whether they are Chinese local idols or they also include overseas idol such as Japanese and Korean idols. This study merely focused on the perspective of Nanjing and Hongkong students about three activities of idol worshipping as mentioned before.

The second study is *Aktivitas Fandom dalam Mengaktualisasi Fenomena Slash Pairing pada Akun Media Sosial Instagram* by Elysa Yuni Rahmawati in 2018. This study aimed to examine fan's activities on slash pairing phenomenon posted on Instagram. The author examined six EXO fan accounts that supported and produced slash pairing contents and also comments below the posts. The results are the fandom support their idol to become 'gay', based on the content (the memes, fanarts and interaction videos on stage). The goal of the fandom is to create imagination that the couple from the group were getting married with its own member. However, this study did not examine the motivation behind the fan account to post slash pairing contents.

The third study is *Loving the love of boys: Motives for consuming yaoi media* by ZsilaA,Â, Pagliassotti D, UrbaÂn R, Orosz G, KiraÂly O, Demetrovics Z. in 2018. A qualitative research using Yaoi Consumption Motive Questionnaire (YCMQ) have been done to 724 Hungarian volunteers to identify the range of motivational factors prompting Yaoi media consumption. This survey is using the 10 motives from an earlier survey made by Pagliassoti. The result turned out that the most attractive features of Yaoi media are their sexual content and aesthetic

portrayal of characters and sexuality, one out of ten motives. This finding is related to the previous study that the motive for consuming *Yaoi* is because of their aesthetic aspect of the story. However, this study did not mention what fandom they focused on.

Jeffery P. Dennis (2010) in his work, *Drawing Desire: Male Youth and Homoerotic Fan Art*, studied about the impact of 872 fanarts depicting male homoerotic pairings to 442 young artists. The fanarts selected came from animated television programs (e.g. Danny Phantom and Fairly Oddparents) where the characters mostly involved in secrets relationships or identities. The study analysed the physical transformation, relationship and activities of the characters involved, resulting in several differences came from heterosexual female artists, heterosexual male artists and gay male artists. Heterosexual female artists tend to involve the characters in minor intimacies (i.e. hug and kiss) with younger age and less physical details, sometimes transforming one into a girl, as they use homoerotic fanarts another way to explore their heterosexual desire. In line with female artists, heterosexual male artists, who prefer to enhanced the physical details (such as muscles) and put a realistic yet humorous situations, created homoerotic images as a participation in the fan community to queering the original text. On the other hand, gay male artist used homoerotic fanart as an exploration of their own same-sex desires and portrayal of same-sex relationship in real life.

Kumiko Saito (2011) in *Desire in Subtext: Gender, Fandom, and Women's Male-Male Homoerotic Parodies in Contemporary Japan* found similarities between English slash and Japanese BL parody contents. The male-male



relationship constructs an ideal love for women: an equal relationship for both partners, a clean and honest mutual caring rather than typical relationship that started from romantic or erotic motivations. BL parodies appeared to express women's frustration of the paradox between patriarchy and equality and to challenge women's position in conservative gender roles. However, the readers acknowledge that the characters are not actually gay men, as they are only a channel for women to find ideal romance in imaginary spaces. Therefore, the aspect of homophobia and misogyny still appear in the narrative, so that the characters need to overcome the taboo to 'prove' their love.

Chunyu Zhang (2016) in *Loving Boys Twice as Much: Chinese Women's Paradoxical Fandom of "Boys' Love" Fiction* interviewed 15 heterosexual female readers of BL fiction to examine their fandom practices and experiences. The study resulted in four main themes. First, BL allows the readers to access male partnership as a different sexual orientation, to fulfill female curiosity about sexual desire without any anxieties and shame, and to enjoy a 'female gaze' towards the male protagonist. Second, BL helps them to understand the thought of gay people, to appreciate their gay friends in real life, and to voice their desire for relationship with equality, independence, mutual understanding and support. Third, BL fandom suggest youth resistances against parents' authority (i.e. the requirement to study for academic achievements) and commodification to oppose the traditional heteronormativity. Fourth, BL provides a "spice of life" entertainment in the middle of their normal live as students or career women, an alternative aesthetics and

storytelling for a pleasurable female fantasy, and enjoyable beauty of the pretty boys as the characters.

Proud Arunrangsiwed has discussed slash fanart on her two works, *Equality, Friendship and Violence in Slash or Yaoi Fan Art* (2015) and *Heroic Role and Attractiveness as the Cause of Creating Slash or Yaoi Fan Art* (2017). The first work aimed to verify the previous belief that Slash or Yaoi fanart were made to satisfy the female fans' need of seeing equal romantic relationship, and to analyse the relationship between equality, friendship and violence portrayed on the fanart. Sixty images of 6 slash pairs selected from Devianart.com containing hero and villain characters, which thirty of the images were Japanese animation and *manga* characters and the other thirty came from western entertainment media, e.g. Transformers, then examined all the image using mean comparison and regression analysis. The belief that female fans prefer slash fanart as they need a portrayal of equal romantic relationship were confirmed as the result of mean comparison on level of equality put hero/hero pairing on the highest level. While pairing with villain-related did not have a high level of equality that much. Because slash is about love and emotion, violence was added to the artwork because men or even female fans needed a greater power than other men. The second work's purpose is to confirm that attractive villains may encourage fans to draw slash fanart with sexual abuse contents on it. The author did the examination using content analysis on forty characters from movie and comics published in Devianart.com. Result showed that both heroes and villains from recent media are more attractive than those in older media, and role of the characters give a bigger influence to create

fanart rather than character's attractiveness. Both on her works focused on fanarts of fictional hero and villain characters from Japan and Western media fandom. The author suggest that the media should make people be the fans of hero rather than villain in order to lessen the fanart containing sexual abuse or the chance of fans imitating the villain's behaviour.

Jessica Seymour (2018) on her work, *Homage, Collaboration or Intervention: How framing fanarts affects its interpretation*, discussed about introducing an interpretive methodology in order to see the author's intention for creating their art, by classifying them into one of these categories: homage, collaboration or intervention. Derived from Walter Werner's (2002) ways of reading images, the author used two out of seven approaches which are instrumental reading (analysing the essential part of an image to find information and manifestation of the text) and indicative reading (concluding implied social condition of the image according to viewer's knowledge and fandom context). The author offered three categories to classify the way fanart interacts with its initial text: homage, collaboration and intervention. Homage artwork reflects the original text, as it is created to be noticed and enjoyed by the fans, with little to no changes about the characters and scenes. Collaboration artwork were made by several artists working together to produce a new piece, and/or giving some additional details without changing the whole canon story. Intervention artwork explores alternative point of view to see the characters and it needs some knowledge about the original text in order to recognise and see 'potential reasons' behind the changes. Some

examples of intervention are slash shipping, genderbending (reversing a character's gender) and racebending (drawing the characters into different race).

The works mentioned above mostly studied about Slash in Western fandom and Boys Love in Japanese fandom. Only one study that is K-Pop focused, but it was specified on memes that EXO fans has posted online. Study about how the fans presented slash shipping pairs on their fanarts, especially in BTS fandom, have not conducted yet. Therefore, this study will explore the way ARMYs, BTS fandom name, presented BTS slash pairing in their fanart. Since fanart has taken many forms of artwork, this study will focus on fanart in the form of comic. Comic is the form of sequential art that combines image and words to builds the story (McCloud, 2006). This will give this study enough data to explore the way BTS members are presented, not only on the visual level, but also in relation to the storylines. This study examined 10 BTS comic posted on Twitter and Instagram. The mentioned platform were chosen because both Twitter and Instagram ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> highest social media that K-Pop fans use (Fandia, 2016) and recommended for promoting art (with several similar advantages such as hashtag to help people discovering the art) ('Which Social Media Channel is Right for Your Art Business?', 2018). The selected fanarts demonstrated BTS members involved in a homonormative-based romance. In order to explain about the activities of slash shipping through the creating fanarts, Martin and White's Appraisal Theory and Kress and Leeuwen's Social Semiotics are needed. A Queer reading in multimodal discourse analysis are adopted to disclose how the fans present BTS members slash ships in their comic fanarts.

## 1.2 Research Question

Based on the background study above, the writer constructs the research question as:

1. How BTS' members slash ships are presented in slash fanart made by ARMY?

## 1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to know how the fans presented BTS members' slash ships in their slash fanarts.

## 1.4 Scope of the Study

This study will be focused on slash shipping which is presented on fanarts in the form of comic. The selected fanarts are involving pairings of BTS members taken from Twitter and Instagram.

## 1.5 Significance of the Study

The study is talking about fanarts which presented slash shipping activities within K-Pop fandom has not yet conducted. Studies under the theme of K-Pop fandom revolves around the growth on international fans and K-Pop idols performances, while studies about fanart and slash shipping merely focused on Japan's comics and Western sci-fi fandom. This study is expected to give a contribution to the Fandom studies especially K-Pop fandom and to give some insights for the K-Pop fans.