

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

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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,<sup>1</sup> Jane Austen’s works are also generating enthusiastic fans on the Chinese cyberspace. Chinese fans may not possess the same background knowledge demonstrated by those who call themselves “Janeites,” who show “self-consciously idolatrous enthusiasm for ‘Jane’ and every detail relative to her” in the histories of English and American literature,<sup>2</sup> or by users at the Republic of Pemberley, a renowned English-language website featuring lore, fan fiction (fanfic), and discussion related to all things Austen. They may also lack resources to partake in the wide variety of Austen-themed conferences, balls, and tourism enjoyed by their Western counterparts.<sup>3</sup> But 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.

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 world-wide Chinese speaking audiences. By examining specific themes, literary devices, and discussions, I show that the production and consumption of these

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah Yaffe, *Among the Janeites: A Journey Through the World of Jane Austen Fandom* (Boston and New York: Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), xvii.

<sup>2</sup> Claudia L. Johnson, “Austen Cults and Cultures”, in Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 211-226. Also see Deirdre Lynch, ed., *Janeites: Austen's Disciples and Devotees* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> E.g., see Juliette Well, *Everybody's Jane: Austen in the Popular Imagination* (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011).

works achieve multiple goals. They do not just allow fans to appropriate from existing cultural products while benefitting from the original's cultural cachet. But also, these works 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. 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.

### **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 investment 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.<sup>4</sup> Judging by their self-identifications, users of the fiction forum are mostly women whose ages range from mid-teens to forties and who live all over the world.

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<sup>4</sup> One Web administrator constructed a map to summarize demographic information on Yaya users as of May 2011, accessed March 26, 2012, <http://www.chineseindc.com/forum/viewthread.php?tid=122764>.

Yaya consists of three major parts: the forum, blog space, and computer games. Yaya's blog space resembles those of popular social media 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. The forum at Yaya 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, and both creative works authored by Yaya users and "transferred" (*zhuanzai* 转载) 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 the sites where they were originally published, though 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 have all been 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 proper authorization before copying fiction works, while others buy VIP novels (available to those who pay cash to read) published at Jinjiang and then reproduce them at Yaya, but make sure to lag behind a few chapters, either using 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 will be 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 access works published elsewhere at no cost.<sup>5</sup>

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. But 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 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 to the site works published elsewhere with little fear of penalty, since at Yaya fiction is ostensibly the shared hobby of a limited number of registered members rather than a piece of goods for sale, and in any case Yaya’s server is located outside China. Additionally, the tripartite structure of Yaya also benefits discussions at the fiction forum. For 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 and picture, or as fellow posters at some other forum at Yaya. Their previous interactions (or simultaneous engagements) elsewhere cultivate a sense of familiarity, foster mutual trust, and create an intimacy conducive to open and substantive discussions of romances.

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<sup>5</sup> Accessed March 23, 2012, <http://www.chineseindc.com/forum/viewthread.php?tid=15593>.

However, in contrast to Jinjiang, at Yaya's fiction forum the authors of romance novels 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.<sup>6</sup> 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 all-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 more lively and reader-centered atmosphere that is 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* 歪楼) discussion to the usual fare of "flattery or smear" at Jinjiang.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> Pirated authors' tolerance of Yaya echoes the sentiments of the famous dissident Web author Murong Xuecun 慕容雪村, who insists that copyright abuse is the least of his concerns, for "a relaxed and free environment is

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<sup>6</sup> For example, at Jinjiang, authors constantly participate in discussions of their works and try to persuade readers to see things their way. See Jin Feng, *Romancing the Internet: Consuming and Producing Chinese Web Romance* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013) for details.

<sup>7</sup> Accessed February 17, 2012,

<http://www.chineseindc.com/forum/viewthread.php?tid=169883&extra=&page=60>, #898.

<sup>8</sup> Accessed October 2, 2011,

<http://www.chineseindc.com/forum/viewthread.php?tid=150770&rpId=4090988&ordertype=0&page=90#pid4090988>, #1338.

more important than royalties.”<sup>9</sup> The genial, reader-centered participatory culture at Yaya indeed ensures the free flow of comments and exchanges surrounding any novel, not to mention fanfic works, which foster even more tight-knit fan communities than other types of Web fiction.

### **P & P Fanfic**

The works that attract 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*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Twilight*, and the Sherlock Holmes and Harry Potter series. The rewritings of *Pride and Prejudice* fit the definition of fanfic in that they deliberately borrow from an original work, they are written without the initial creator’s expressed permission, and they are usually not published professionally for profit. Perhaps most crucial, each work of fanfic presumes an audience that possesses previous knowledge of the source text and an interest in the canon universe created by the original work.

The P & P fanfic works circulated at Yaya had all been originally published at Jinjiang.<sup>10</sup> The authors of these works are in most cases not involved in readers’ discussions, with the exception of Canghai Muye 沧海暮夜 (Vast Sea at Night), who apparently knew about and tacitly accepted the pirating of her work at Yaya, and even

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<sup>9</sup> C. S.-M. [author’s initials], “Chinese online literature: Voices in the wilderness,” *Prospero* (blog), *The Economist*, March 24, 2013, accessed March 27, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2013/03/chinese-online-literature>.

<sup>10</sup> Jinjiang has by now opened a sub-site entitled “Yansheng xiaoshuo zhan,” [Extention fiction site], accessed September 27, 2016, <http://www.jjwxc.net/fenzhan/ys/>, featuring fan fiction only. As of September 27, 2016, it has published more than 300 fanfic works and related commentaries on P & P. It is also worth noting that in contrast to the female-dominant Jinjiang, Qidian, or Starting Point, the first pay-per-view Web literature site in China, did not host the genre of fanfic at all until it opened a “women’s channel.” That was perhaps due to copyrights concerns, but it also reflected its male-oriented nature. After all, fanfic is mostly written by women and for women.

occasionally came by to chat with her readers.<sup>11</sup> These Chinese works share a unique characteristic compared to English-language P & P fanfic. They unanimously 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 mind, to their skills in reciting premodern Chinese poetry, sewing, and cooking. Additionally, these Chinese-flavored “secret weapons,” whether concrete or amorphous, 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. 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 Bennett household, including Elizabeth, Jane, Mary, Kitty, Lydia, and Mr. and Mrs. Bennett, or that of Charlotte or Maria Lucas, Carolyn Bingley, Georgiana Darcy, and John 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 arrange different marriage partners for original characters, at times even turning the fanfic into a homoerotic romance. Additionally, the authors feel free to lift and combine elements from a variety of works in addition to P & P, such as *Twilight*, the

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<sup>11</sup> She appears surprised to see that a lot discussion has already appeared at Yaya, though she received no comments on the new chapter at Jinjing yet. Canhai Muye, *Aoman yu pianjian zhi Jian Bannaite xiaojie de jiong rensheng* [Pride and prejudice: the embarrassing life of Miss Jane Benette], accessed October 3, 2016, <http://www.chineseonboard.com/forum/viewthread.php?tid=152112&extra=&page=182, #2725, #2727>.

Shylock Holmes series, or the Harry Potter series, as well as from Austen's other novels such as *Sense and Sensibility*. Interestingly, many of them also admit to having only watched filmic or TV adaptations rather than read P & P in Chinese translation, let alone in its original English. But most of them have the 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, 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 Bennett, the original heroine, but also, and more and more often, as a formerly minor and even villainous character in the original, such as Charlotte Lucas, Lydia Bennett, and John Wickham. If the latter proves to be the case, the time-traveler immediately set out to subvert the lot assigned him or her by Austen. For instance, Chinese fanfic works may feature a Mary Bennett romantically pursued by several aristocratic men rather than remaining the unpopular “ugly duckling” of all the Bennett sisters, a war-hero Wickham who eventually gets Darcy as his spouse, and a Lydia Bennett who dumps Wickham and marries someone far more eligible and in the process making a fortune through her own wit and hard work. Even where the fanfic authors design for their protagonists less grand career or marriage accomplishments than those mentioned above, we can still find a Charlotte Lucas indulging in long internal monologues to contemplate the meaning of her existence and devise plans for a brighter future, while being cheered on by enthusiastic readers who not only echo her musings but also initiate related discussions.

Furthermore, the Chinese fans, whether authors or readers, often, though perhaps inadvertently, invoke Chinese ethnical 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* 平等) partners, emphasizing not only the couple's compatibility in interests and values, but also their matching family backgrounds. Many are the cases where a time-traveler 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 entirely 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, and between Darcy and Elizabeth, criticizing the former as the union of two weak souls and the latter that of two headstrong people bent on full collision. They also cite the unseemly behaviors of the Bennett relatives, such as those of Lydia and Wickham, as potential spoilers of these ostensibly happy unions, and make dark forecasts for divorces and tragedies. They 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 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 Bennetts as a perfect example of "marry in haste, repent

at leisure,” they also characterize Mr. Bennett as an irresponsible parent who does not provide for his family adequately while praising Mrs. Bennett’s unconditional love for her children, and rationalizing her limits such as ignorance and flightiness by attributing them to her upbringing before marriage.<sup>12</sup>

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. But they also feel depressed by how it demeans women and limits or deprives female agency. In the same vein, the ways authors reform the characters and behaviors of former “rascals” such as Lydia and Wickham, and turn them into successful business people or good marriage prospects, represent attempts at recasting ideal femininity and masculinity to search for a way out of the quandary facing contemporary Chinese women, and envision a brighter future for themselves, if only in words.

Through writing, reading, and discussing P & P fanfic works, Chinese fans wrestle with questions such as: how important are a woman’s looks in romance and marriage?<sup>13</sup> How reliable is love at first sight? Do women have to sacrifice independence

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<sup>12</sup> Fengliu Shudai, *Pinqiong gui gongzhu* [Princess in poverty], accessed October 4, 2016, <http://www.chineseonboard.com/forum/viewthread.php?tid=244634&extra=&page=1>, #3.

<sup>13</sup> E.g., An Xiu, *Aoma yu pianjian zhi chengwei Xialuote* [Pride and prejudice: becoming Charlotte], accessed October 3, 2016, <http://www.chineseonboard.com/forum/viewthread.php?tid=170285&page=1&authorid=164874>, #1, the

of mind and career in order to find a good husband? Is romantic love indispensable to a woman's self-realization? They value independence, rationality, 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 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, 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. Similarly, 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, bemoan the omnipresent home-wrecking *xiaosan* 小三, or, the other woman, even to the point of blaming widespread marital infidelity in China on generational gaps and moral decline in contemporary society.<sup>14</sup> 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."<sup>15</sup> Similarly, these

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author comments in her introduction: "Charlotte's only problem was her looks. Her tragedy was caused by God, by the era she lived in." Also in #3, the time-traveling heroine states: "I sympathize with Charlotte, and also respect her wisdom. However, hers is not the kind of life I wanted: living with a boring man I do not love until death."

<sup>14</sup> Tao A Li, *Erci hunyin* (Second marriage), accessed September 29, 2016, <http://www.chineseonboard.com/forum/viewthread.php?tid=257849&rpid=7685172&ordertype=0&page=4> reader comment, #60; accessed October 3, 2016, <http://www.chineseonboard.com/forum/viewthread.php?tid=257849&extra=&page=5>, reader comment, #73.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 18.

Chinese fans believe that fiction and real life exist side by side, and insist that fiction reflect and inform life.

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 Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and, more importantly, to help better position themselves in today's complex world of international politics. A relatively unskilled author employs traditional Chinese discourses on filial piety, respect for authority, upholding the hierarchy between ruler and subject, and master and servant, and depict 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.<sup>16</sup> Yet simplistic comparisons of Chinese and Western culture also buttress 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.<sup>17</sup> The ways fans' rewrite the "destinies" of certain original characters as mentioned above, moreover, reveal cultural stereotypes, biases against individualistic romantic love, and preconceived ideas of what constitutes a happy marriage, all shaped by their upbringings and life experiences in China.

But some fanfic works have also generated much self-reflection and soul searching for both authors and readers as Chinese nationals. For example, when Canghai

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<sup>16</sup> E.g., Fengliu Shudai, *Pinqiong gui gongzhu*, accessed October 4, 2016, <http://www.chineseonboard.com/forum/viewthread.php?tid=244634&extra=&page=6>, reader comment, #77.

<sup>17</sup> E.g., Ibid., reader comments, #82, #85, and #87.

Muye briefly depicts Lin Zexu 林则徐, a high Qing official who banned the opium trade initiated by the British to offset their trade deficit, which led 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, 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."<sup>18</sup> But most fans do not show the same nonchalance or callousness toward China's colonization by foreign powers. Instead, they call out 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."<sup>19</sup> As they see it, China's defeats in colonial wars can be attributed to multiple factors, such as its self-isolation and stagnant economic development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>20</sup> While apparently invoking the social Darwinist theory of survival of the fittest, these readers also tacitly challenge the official-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,"<sup>21</sup> they show international awareness, global perspective, and tolerance for different opinions, in radical contrast to

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<sup>18</sup> Tong Guining, *Laogong zai ai wo yici* [Hubby, love me one more time], accessed September 28, 2016, <http://www.chineseonboard.com/forum/viewthread.php?tid=287860>, #108.

<sup>19</sup> Canghai Muye, *Jian Bannaite xiaoji*, accessed October 3, 2016, <http://www.chineseonboard.com/forum/viewthread.php?tid=235956&extra=&page=9>, reader comment, #129.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

the nationalist fervor demonstrated by some Jinjiang users nicknamed the “Little Pink” (*xiao fenhong* 小粉红) group.<sup>22</sup>

Yaya fans’ higher degree of tolerance may have something to do with diligent policing by moderators at the fiction forum or the general congenial culture of Yaya. But it is likely also related to the particular temperament of authors and readers of this type of fanfic works. After all, these self-selected Chinese fans have all had exposure to Western cultural products inspired by P & P, and share an interest in its canon universe. Some of them have studied and worked, or are studying and working abroad, and have thus developed a cosmopolitan outlook even while feeling more keenly the need to reflect on and reshape their Chinese identity.

These fans also demonstrate sophisticated skills in literary creation and analysis as well as an open mind. For instance, one author 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 conquer Mr. Darcy” typical of many fanfic works.<sup>23</sup> That is to say, this kind of device facilitates a metanarrative that pokes fun at 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.”<sup>24</sup> Likewise, readers can

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<sup>22</sup> Lotus Ruan, “The New Face of Chinese Nationalism,” Tea Leaf Nation, *Foreign Policy*, August 25, 2016, accessed September 28, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/08/25/the-new-face-of-chinese-nationalism/>.

<sup>23</sup> E.g., Tong Guining, *Laogong zai ai wo yici*, accessed September 28, 2016, <http://www.chineseonboard.com/forum/viewthread.php?tid=287860>.

<sup>24</sup> Sheenagh Pugh, *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context* (Seren, Poetry Wales Press, 2005), 85.

immediately detect, and often criticize, the tendency to “go Mary Sue” in any 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 an author makes the original Mary and a Chinese time-traveler named Sue share the same body when the former is ten and the latter in her twenties.<sup>25</sup> They praise the author for juxtaposing two different worlds views, personalities, and thought processes without passing judgment on one or the other. The readers also approve that 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 and 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.<sup>26</sup>

As we can see from the above discussion, Chinese-language P & P fanfic works hold a variety of attraction for Chinese women. As a loose form of adaptation, fanfic always provides the combined pleasure of repetition and difference, the comfort of ritual and the piquancy of change at the same time. Moreover, it also 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

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<sup>25</sup> Zhen zao jian hupo zhu, *Malisu de gongfan* (An accomplice of Mary Sue), accessed September 28, 2016, <http://www.chineseonboard.com/forum/viewthread.php?tid=222227>.

<sup>26</sup> E.g., see Tao a li, *Erci hunyin*, accessed October 4, 2016, <http://www.chineseonboard.com/forum/viewthread.php?tid=257849>, reader comment, #60.

China and globally despite apparent copyright infringements.<sup>27</sup> For an English classic like P & P, first published in 1813, the issue of copyrights 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 polish up creative skills while being aided by instant feedback from the readers.

More importantly, the production and consumption of P& P fanfic serves various personal and political ends, allowing the 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 Bennett, whose pedantry earns her mockery; Charlotte Lucas, a plain spinster with no dowry to speak of; or Mrs. Bennett, who is neglected by a condescending husband and ridiculed by everyone including her daughters. Fans create tales of redemption to address perceived injustice in these cases. Others use fanfic to reshape unsatisfactory original characters, and thereby 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**

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<sup>27</sup> Lena Henningsen, *Copyright Matters: Imitation, Creativity and Authenticity in Contemporary Chinese Literature* (Belgium and Austria: BW. Berlinger, Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2010), 162.

What can we learn from these Chinese women's production and reception of P & P fanfic at Yaya? First of all, 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 rather than sequels to the original, and in showcasing their own creative skills and visions of life rather than adhering to "the spirit of Jane," in contrast to fanfic works published at the Republic of Pemberley.<sup>28</sup> They thus feel free to mix and match, and weave in and out of the Shylock Holmes, *Twilight*, or Harry Potter series as well as cultural products inspired by Austen's other works.

In these women's liberal and audacious attempts at rewriting, marriage remains the central plot, though it is also often turned into a vehicle to explore real-life issues important to contemporary Chinese women, such as marriage fidelity and women's independence. Further, they 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 earn her friendship and admiration all over. Her faithfulness to traditional Chinese morality wins her respect. Her training in classical Chinese art in a previous life paves her way to financial success in the 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.

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<sup>28</sup> For example, see Veerle Van Steenhuyse, "Jane Austen fan fiction and the situated fantext," *English Text Construction* 4.2 (2011): 1-21.

Thus, it can be seen that these Chinese fans do not all 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 CP, 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.<sup>29</sup> But most of them are far less puritanical. Some criticize those authors who denigrate the original characters or dismantle the original CPs 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, not at all concerned with 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 film adaptation without knowing much else about the author, her work, 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, though 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 the fanfic authors, let alone the long-gone Austen herself.

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<sup>29</sup> babycarrot, "Yijia zhiyan—luan tan wo kanguo de naxie Aoman yu pianjian tongren xiaoshuo" [Personal opinions: casual comments on P & P fanfic works I have read before], accessed October 3, 2016, <http://www.chineseonboard.com/forum/viewthread.php?tid=150446>.

Therefore, these fanfic works also provide a perfect example of the “open archive” that fanfic can create, not because the canon is still being added to by the original author, but because they call out for creative consumptions by both fanfic authors and readers. Jenkins points out that the “negative capability” of the source text, such as gaps, silences, and potentials in the original, often invites fans to use their imagination to rewrite.<sup>30</sup> Austen’s P & P summons Chinese fans’ participation also because its perceived inadequacies “make the text open and provocative rather than completed and satisfying.”<sup>31</sup> These Chinese women devote their energy to expanding or “rectifying” the canon universe while being motivated by 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 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.

Ultimately, the “open canon” that these fanfic works have created also illustrates the complex dynamics between cultural globalization and localization. For these Chinese women, “poaching” from the source text to create something relevant to their lives far outweighs the importance of staying true to the original. Their liberal reworkings of P & P may horrify a bona fide Janeite, but their attempts at appropriation show that cultural globalization can advance on creative, diverse, and surprisingly localized routes. Rather

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<sup>30</sup> Henry Jenkins, “How Fan Fiction Can Teach Us a New Way to Read Moby-Dick (Part One),” at “Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins,” February 21, 2009, accessed October 3, 2016, [http://henryjenkins.org/2008/08/how\\_fan\\_fiction\\_can\\_teach\\_us\\_a.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2008/08/how_fan_fiction_can_teach_us_a.html).

<sup>31</sup> John Fiske, “The Cultural Economy of Fandom,” in Lisa Lewis, ed., *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 47.

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' daring projects to create new meanings and significances through recycling and mixing different elements from different sources.