QUEER COMRADES

Gay Identity and *Tongzhi* Activism in Postsocialist China

HONGWEI BAO

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Contents

Figures

Acknowledgements

This book is based on my Ph.D. thesis, submitted to the University of Sydney in 2011. It has taken many years to take shape and many people have offered me generous help and have contributed to the project in its various stages. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of them, knowing that an exhaustive list is impossible and a brief mention of their names is insufficient.

My heartfelt thanks go to my two Ph.D. supervisors, Professor Catherine Driscoll and Professor Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang, for their academic generosity and consistent support that has extended beyond my Ph.D. candidature. I thank the thesis examiners, Professor Fran Martin, Professor Meaghan Morris and Professor Lisa Rofel for their generous comments and suggestions for the thesis. I am also grateful to Professor Howard Chiang and Professor Fran Martin for their insightful comments and suggestions for the book manuscript. I may not be able to address all their suggestions and critiques because of time constraints and gaps in my knowledge, but writing the Ph.D. thesis and subsequently preparing the book manuscript has been the single most rewarding learning experience I have ever had.

I would like to thank Dr Cecilia Milwertz and Gerald Jackson from NIAS Press for their patient and nurturing support for the book project. David Stuligross' meticulous copy-editing, Anthony Horton's excellent indexing and proof-reading as well as Adam Øster Posselt's administrative support have also been instrumental in shaping this book as it is. Over the years while the book has come to fruition, I have benefitted enormously from numerous conferences, research workshops and short research stays hosted by the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, the University of Copenhagen.

I also wish to thank the Queer China Working Group, a diverse group of international scholars working on queer China issues, for their kind collegial support and constructive dialogues. Particular thanks go

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Figure 1: Poster for the Beijing Love Queer Cinema Week, 2015 (photo from Creative Commons)

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Notes on Translation and Transliteration

All of the translations from Chinese to English in this book are mine unless otherwise stated.

I use the *hanyu pinyin* system of transliteration for Chinese words, names and phrases, except in cases where a different conventional or preferred spelling or pronunciation exists. The ordering of Chinese names usually follows their conventional forms: that is, family names first, followed by given names.

Figure 2: *New Beijing, New Marriage* (dir. Fan Popo and David Cheng, 2009) film still (photo courtesy of Fan Popo)

Figure 3: *Queer Comrades* webcast studio shot (photo courtesy of Wei Jiangang)

Figure 4: China AIDS Walk on the Great Wall, organized by the Beijing Gender Health Education Institute, Beijing, 2016 (photo courtesy of Wei Jiangang)

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Introduction

Queer Comrades

> To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognise it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling class. In every era, the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it.
>
> Walter Benjamin 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'

In April 2009, Tongzhi yi fanren (literally 'comrades as ordinary folk'), an independent lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community webcast based in Beijing, changed its English name from *Queer As Folk Beijing* to *Queer Comrades*.[1] The programme has enjoyed great popularity in young and urban queer communities in China with its wide-ranging topics on queer issues and its light-hearted narrative style. 'We aim to present a positive image of queer people living in contemporary China, with healthy and diverse lifestyles', explained Xiaogang, the programme director I met during my fieldwork in Beijing. Although the webcast retained its Chinese name, the new English name certainly sounded more creative and interesting. Indeed, if the old *Queer As Folk Beijing*, with its explicit reference to the popular British and American

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1. Founded in 2007 by a group of gay men living in Beijing, Tongzhi yi fanren is an independent queer webcast that aims to document queer culture and to raise public awareness of queer issues. The programme primarily targets an urban and young queer audience. It is made in both Chinese and English to maximize its reach. Website: http://www.queercomrades.org/home (accessed 1 September 2017).

queer TV dramas, suggests close associations with transnational queer culture and an endeavour to situate queerness in the ordinary and every-day, the new name *Queer Comrades* is at once an acknowledgement of the programme's close link to transnational queer culture and a conscious departure from it.[2] The term 'comrade' conjures up not only a sense of alterity in global capitalism but also a feeling of déjà vu with reference to China's recent historical past of socialism. Juxtaposing 'comrade' with 'queer' strikes up a sense of discord: can comrades be queer, and can queers be comrades?

Queer Comrades is more than a community webcast that makes video programmes to represent queer lives for the communities.[3] Working un-der the umbrella of Beijing Gender Health Education Institute (BGHEI), a Beijing-based queer NGO (non-governmental organization), and in collaboration with other queer NGOs, *Queer Comrades* also organizes political, social and cultural events such as the Queer University, China AIDS Walk, China Rainbow Award, Beijing Queer Film Festival and China Queer Film Festival Tour (which I discuss in Chapters 4 and 5).[4] At Queer University filmmaking workshops, community members work together with experienced queer filmmakers and make their own films before they share their films with others online and offline to encourage more do-it-yourself (DIY) community filmmaking. At the annual China Rainbow Award, awards are given to queer-friendly media organizations and individuals to encourage positive representation of queer issues. The type of media and cultural activism in which *Queer Comrades* engages becomes a viable and culturally-sensitive form of queer political activ-ism in China, where queer parade marches have been deemed politically

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2.   The title of the programme, Tongzhi yi fanren, is a literal translation of the UK and North American TV series, *Queer as Folk*, that inspired it. Most gay people in urban China are familiar with the English-language series as a result of the wide circulation of the programme through online streaming and through China's bootleg DVD market.

3.   For a more detailed discussion of the Queer Comrades webcast, see Deklerck 2014; Deklerck & Wei 2015.

4.   The relationship between Queer Comrades and the BGHEI is complicated. Officially, the Queer Comrades project is administered by the BGHEI. However, as the two share the same office space and largely the same staff, especially since Wei Jiangang became the BGHEI director in 2008, many activities are usually shared by and attributed to both.

sensitive; where claims to sexual rights can often lead to police detention; where representation of sexual minorities is banned in mainstream media; and where media censors exercise power over filmmaking and film distribution. Like many other queer media platforms and NGOs, *Queer Comrades* used to keep its distance from politics by branding its activities as purely cultural or entertaining. After experiencing the forced closure of the Fourth International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) Asian Regional Conference in Surabaya, Indonesia, in March 2010, *Queer Comrades* shifted its focus away from lifestyle and toward rights-related issues (Tan 2016: 46).

The story of *Queer Comrades* brings together several interrelated issues central to this book: community media, queer activism and an increasingly politicized queer identity, represented by the term *tongzhi* used in the Chinese name of the webcast. Literally 'comrade', *tongzhi* is one of the most popular terms to refer to sexual minorities in China today. Despite the numerous other terms that circulate in China, including *tongxinglian* (homosexual) and *ku'er* (queer), *tongzhi* is the most widely accepted term for self-identification by queer people in early 21st century China. The dynamics and politics of these terms will be discussed in detail in this book, especially in Chapters 2 and 3.

Tongzhi is not only a linguistic term; it is a newly emerged sexual identity that underpins much of the past thirty years of queer subject formation and activism in the People's Republic of China and beyond, and it is often imagined as a politicized sexual subjectivity.[5] Perhaps one of the most remarkable things about queer life in China is the emergence of *tongzhi* identity and activism, an increasingly politicized mode of queer subjectivity and politics. In an era when 'depoliticisation of politics' (H. Wang 2009) becomes the norm under neoliberal capitalism in China and globally, the politicization of sexual identity has significant implications and holds out positive promises for a radical and progressive Left politics.

This book suggests that among other things, an important lesson we can learn from *tongzhi* identity and activism in China is the recognition of socialist aspiration and longing in constructing queer identity and activism, together with the political potentials that this brings about. Indeed,

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5.   I use the term subjectivity to refer to a type of selfhood that is historically and socially specific. It denotes a non-essentialist understanding of the self.

in a global neoliberal era that witnesses the erosion of political identities in the face of individualism and consumerist drives, it is more important than ever that China's socialist legacy is recognized, together with socialist experiences of anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist struggles, as well as aspirations and longings for a more egalitarian and just society. I argue that by drawing strategically on identity formation and experiences of grassroots mobilization from China's socialist past, in conjunction with aspirations and longings for a more egalitarian society, queer people in China today have begun to construct a radical response to the actions of a repressive state and the neoliberal capitalist vision it now promotes. This book thus goes beyond the study of sexual minorities in China and becomes a critical enquiry of radical politics and social movements in a transnational context. *Tongzhi*, as an identity category and as a form of activism, offers valuable insights into how social movements and radical politics can develop today in a globally neoliberal era.

This is a book about *tongzhi*, or 'queer comrades' in its creative English translation to capture its semantic pun (*tongzhi* as both 'comrade' and 'queer') and subversive potential. The two meanings of *tongzhi* constitute the central theme of this book. Using a Derridian deconstructive approach, I problematize the privileging of one meaning ('queer') over the other ('comrade') in the popular use of *tongzhi* in China's queer communities today. I attribute this to contemporary China's postsocialist condition, which is characterized by the continuing existence and gradual erasure of China's socialist past and the state's active incorporation of neoliberal capitalism. If China's postsocialism is characterized by the synchronic non-contemporaneity of different modes of economic, political and ideological legitimacy, the term 'queer comrades' can be seen as an articulation of forms of subjectivities, power, governmentality and social imaginaries produced in this shift. 'Queer comrades' is embedded in the context of post-Cold War neoliberal capitalism. This concept disrupts transnational neoliberal capitalism by conjuring up the socialist past and opening up alternative social imaginaries.

In this book, I propose to consider 'queer comrades' as an analytical framework through which to examine subject, power, governmentality, social movements and everyday life in China. Such an expansive approach suggests that subjects in China today are not only constructed by multiple discourses but also live in shifting temporalities, all of which

are critical for both socialism and neoliberal capitalism. While other researchers have correctly identified the role of neoliberal capitalism in constructing desiring subjects in contemporary China, they have often neglected or undermined the impact of China's socialist past on subject formation in China today. By studying gay identity and queer activism in contemporary China, I aim to illustrate how the socialist 'comrade' has become a foundation of, and a catalyst for, the postsocialist queer subject. The discussion of 'queer comrades' will therefore offer a more complex and nuanced understanding of identity, power and politics in contemporary China. It will also open up possibilities for alternative forms of subjectivity and politics that are not constrained by the nation-state and neoliberal capitalism.

This book brings together critical analysis of queer cultural texts, including queer films and published personal diaries written by gay 'patients' as they undertook conversion therapy. It also harnesses insights gained from two years of ethnographic research of queer public culture, from 2007 to 2009, during which I explored and documented events including, among others, the Beijing Queer Film Festival, Shanghai Pride, China Queer Film Festival Tour Guangzhou Screenings, an unarmed clash between cruising gay men and the police in Guangzhou's People's Park, and online discussions of Chinese queer politics in the activist community. Drawing on queer theory, feminism, Marxism, postcolonial and critical race studies, this interdisciplinary project contributes to a nuanced understanding of gay identity and queer politics in China today; it also highlights the role of socialist legacies and imperatives in articulating political subjectivity and a radical and progressive Left politics under transnational capitalism and neoliberalism. This book contributes to a number of academic fields, including China studies, media and cultural studies, film studies, gender studies, sociology, anthropology and political theory.

In this introductory chapter, I first define and delimit the project by introducing the theoretical approach and the research methodology. I then situate this book in the context of a neoliberal queer China and engage with scholarly debates of queer theory and Chinese queer studies, thus identifying research gaps and specifying ways this book can make a contribution to the field of Chinese queer studies. I end the Introduction by outlining the structure of the book, delineating the

arguments of each chapter, and anticipating the scholarly contributions I intend to make.

The Making of a Radical Political Subject

This book is about a particular type of queer subject and politics which I call, with some caveats, *tongzhi* identity and activism. Instead of asking what they are, I am more interested in the conditions of their emergence and the forms of their expressions in specific historical moments, and I ask what a radical and progressive Left queer politics can be.[6] This book thus departs from an ontology of identity and politics and embraces a performative mode of queer becoming. Let me define this project by clarifying some possible misunderstandings and laying out some important theoretical concepts and concerns that are central to the development of my argument:

1. This book is not an attempt to map all and every type of gay identity and queer activism existing in the PRC today. Given the geographical vastness of China and all the regional and local differences, together with the complexity of the queer lives in real life, such an ambitious undertaking would be both impossible and self-defeating. I illustrate this point in Chapter 2, where I give readers a sense of the complexity of queer subjects in urban China with an ethnographic study of Shanghai's queer spaces. In Chapter 3, I offer an account of how the *tongzhi* label begins to assume a hegemonic position within the contemporary Chinese queer culture.[7]

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6. 'Radical', as in 'radical democracy' or 'radical politics', suggests a commitment to the expansion of liberty and equality into the ever wider areas of the 'social' so as to give political voice to the ordinary people (Laclau & Mouffe 2001). The term 'radical' is not necessarily associated with a radical and progressive Left or an egalitarian and fair social order in real life, but in this book, I designate and articulate it as such.

7. The concept of hegemony is a central element of a discursive understanding of politics. In their preface, Laclau & Mouffe (2001: x) describe hegemony as 'the central category of political analysis'. As a Gramscian (1992) term, hegemony describes how consent is secured for a particular social order and at a particular historical juncture. For Laclau, hegemony is understood in terms of the signifying 'operation' and affective investment where a particular identity assumes a 'totality or universality' (Laclau 2005: 70–1). Neoliberalism, for instance, is a type of hegemonic articulation worldwide at the moment, but the articulation is always challenged and contested by counter-hegemonic struggles.

2.   Although I use the term *tongzhi* throughout the book, I do not consider it a concrete identity, or a set of personality traits which reside within some people, or a list of characteristics against which activists can 'tick boxes'.[8] This project is more prescriptive than descriptive. It aims to identify critical moments of identification and articulation in order to underscore the historical and discursive conditions of its emergence. The term has a 'performative' (Austin 1962) function; that is, by naming certain types of identity and politics as such, it brings that identity and politics into being.

3.   It is best to understand *tongzhi* as a subject position that one can potentially occupy, or one that can be articulated under contingent historical circumstances.[9] *Tongzhi* can also be seen as a mode of 'becoming' (Deleuze & Guattari 1988) rather than a mode of being; it therefore does not have an essence and an ontology. Another way to understand *tongzhi* is to see it as an 'empty signifier' (Laclau 2005), used catachretically, waiting for its temporary articulation; or a discourse that can be articulated, mobilized and radicalized to serve desired purposes.

4.   All this does not erase the materiality of *tongzhi*. There is no doubt that many people in real life use the term for their self-identification and to engage with queer activism. There are countless *tongzhi*-identified books, films, websites, organizations, academic programmes in and out of China. A discourse of *tongzhi* clearly exists, and it has changed many people's lives.[10] To break the linguistic/material dichotomy, I

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8.   I adopt a constructivist approach to identity. In this approach, identity formation is the result of articulatory practices; that is, the contingent and partial fixation of elements that have no necessity identity and relation. That suggests an anti-essentialist understanding of identity; it also recognizes the necessity and possibilities of articulating, de-articulating and re-articulating identities for political purposes.

9.   Laclau and Mouffe call articulation 'any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice' (2001: 105). Articulation is what makes identity and politics possible in the social contingency.

10.   Laclau and Mouffe describe discourse as 'the structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice' (2001: 105). Discourse should not be seen simply as a synonym for language; in fact, Laclau and Mouffe reject the ontological distinction between linguistic and material practices. Discourse is the always partially fixed regularities structuring the links between linguistic and extra-linguistic prac-

take the greatest interest in the moments of identification or articulation; I seek to understand when, and why, people 'choose' the term to name themselves and their politics. It is also important to note that to 'choose' is a problematic word, as it suggests a type of individualism and voluntarism; i.e., people can and do consciously 'choose'. In many situations, people are probably simply 'interpellated' (Althusser 1971) into a subject position. The whole book thus can be seen as an engagement with the canonical 'structure versus agency' debate (Barker 2005: 448).

5. Tongzhi does not preclude other ways of articulation, nor does it render other articulations less possible and effective. Scholars in Chinese queer studies have identified diverse ways of articulating the queer subject, be they transnational, national, local, regional, urban, liberal, neoliberal etc., each with their own theoretical underpinnings and political priorities. In this book, I articulate Chinese queer culture with a *tongzhi* identity, with China's socialist tradition, and with a radical and progressive Left politics. This is based on my politics, priority, understanding and personal experience, which are by no means neutral and objective. I acknowledge that Chinese queer culture does not have to be articulated in this way, a regressive, conservative, liberal, or neoliberal queer politics would be equally possible. But I feel that a radical Left queer politics is the best way I can articulate at the moment, under the current historical conditions of state violence and neoliberal hegemony. The historical condition may, of course, be subject to change, and so might my politics. However, it is the openness and contingency of the social, and the incompleteness of social identities, that give me hope: neoliberalism seems to be a hegemonic mode of political and social articulation at the moment, but such an articulation does not entail historical inevitability. Such historical conditions are open to change, and they *must* change. Tracing the conditions of alternative discourses, subjectivity and politics is my way to effect change as a queer scholar.

It should be clear by now that this book draws on, and engages with, multiple theoretical strands such as Marxism, queer theory, feminism,

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tices (Laclau & Mouffe 1990: 100). Laclau and Mouffe's conception of 'discourse' derives from Foucault, who defines discourse as 'a group of statements which provides a language to talk about … a particular topic at a particular historical moment' (1972: 86). Discourse constructs the topic; it also defines and produces the object of knowledge.

poststructuralism, postcolonialism and critical race studies. But perhaps more obviously, it is inspired by poststructuralism and its articulation with Marxism, often referred to as post-Marxism and frequently associated with the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001[1985]).[11] Deeply committed to socialist ideals of egalitarianism, social justice and democracy, but meanwhile unconvinced by the economic determinism and class-centrism manifested in classical centrism, Laclau and Mouffe propose a new way of thinking about the social and the political that draws on poststructuralist theorists such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan. They bring Marxism into the analysis of new social movements, such as women's movements and gay and lesbian movements, that are not necessarily based on specific social classes. They seek to understand the historical circumstances under which and the means through which political identities can be brought into being. Like Laclau and Mouffe, I hope to 'identify the discursive conditions for the emergence of a collective action, directed towards struggling against inequalities and challenging relations of subordination' (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 153).

A Genealogical Approach and a Queer Methodology

In this book, I document some important historical events in postsocialist China's queer public culture. But these events are necessarily a partial reconstruction of history, marked by my own eclipses, omissions and biases. It is more appropriate to regard my account of queer history in China as a 'genealogy', a Foucauldian (1991b) notion developed from the Nietzschean concept of 'critical history'. For Foucault, genealogy identifies the complexities of historical processes, which cannot be reduced to a singular and coherent narrative. It points to the 'discontinuous, illegitimate knowledges' that counter the 'centralizing powers' operating to stabilize contemporary society (1980: 83–4). In my account of queer history in postsocialist China, my selection of materials, events and cases disrupts the dominant narrative of how China's entry into the transnational capitalist world brings freedom to individuals, and how 'global queer' politics have liberated gay individuals and groups in China. In addition to pointing

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11. I acknowledge my intellectual debt to the Essex School of Discourse Analysis, set up by Laclau. For more information about the Essex School and their efforts to bring together discourse theory and media studies, see Dahlberg & Phelan 2011.

out the complicity between the Chinese state and transnational capitalism in China, I also highlight the ways in which gay people in China resist and subvert both state and neoliberal discourses.

Modern historians of China Studies often declare 1978 as a watershed year. In her magisterial interrogation of gay and lesbian subculture in urban China, Loretta Ho (2010) argues that 'modern' Chinese gay identity, which marked a radical break from the homoeroticism in China's historical past, emerged in tandem with China's 'opening up' (*kaifang*) to the West in 1978. Historians of same-sex intimacies in China have examined homoeroticism in the premodern era (Hinsch 1990; Ng 1989; Sommer 2000; Stevenson & Wu 2012; Wu 2004; Wu and Stevenson 2010; Xiaomingxiong (Samshasha) 1984; Van Gulik 2003; Vitiello 2011; Vlopp 2001; Z. Zhang 2001) and the Republican era (Chiang 2010; Dikötter 1995b; Guo 2016; Kang 2009a; Sang 2003). Sociologists and anthropologists have conducted productive fieldwork researching same-sex identities in contemporary China (Chou 2000; Engebretsen 2008, 2014; 2015; Engebretsen & Schroeder, 2015; Fu, 2015; Ho, 2010; Kam, 2013; Kong, 2010; Y. Li 1998; Rofel, 2007; Schroeder, 2012; Tong et al. 2008; Wei 2007, 2015; Yau 2010; Zheng 2015). Representations of homoeroticism in Chinese film, fiction and popular cultural texts have also been discussed by literary and film studies scholars in considerable detail (Bao 2015, 2016, 2017; Berry 1994; Chao 2010a, 2010b; Leung 2008; Lim 2006; Martin 2003, 2010b; Robinson 2015a; Sang 2003). There has also been an increasing number of studies addressing the medical and legal issues of homosexuality in contemporary China (Gao 2006; X. Guo 2007; Jones 1999; D. Liu & Lu 2005; B. Zhang 1994; Zhou 2009).

Throughout the proliferation of discourses on Chinese same-sex eroticism in both Chinese and Western academia, there has been an embarrassing silence about sex, sexuality and intimacy during the Maoist era, and the impact of the socialist forms of identity and intimacy on contemporary Chinese queer identities. The reason for this silence seems apparent: there is scant historical material available regarding sex and sexuality during the Maoist era. In an era where everyday life was politicized, the mere mention of sex and sexuality would have spelled disaster for individuals. For this reason, the socialist era is thus either conceived as a sexless era or as an era of severe sexual repression. However, what many would read as 'sexual repression' in the socialist era requires rethinking

the historical construction of sexuality, identity and intimacy. If we cease to think about sexuality as a coherent and transhistorical category, we may look at the socialist era differently: the socialist 'comrade' subjectivity, with its radical departure from traditional forms of family, kinship, intimacy and gender norms, together with its remapping of the social relations and everyday lives, intrinsically relates to queer meanings. This suggests an answer to the question I raised at the beginning of this introduction: comrades can certainly be queer. And, as I will demonstrate throughout this book, queers can also be comrades.

This book will argue that in contemporary China, the socialist 'comrade' and the postsocialist 'queer' are *mutually constitutive*. Gay identity and queer politics in China can be best understood through a discourse of the 'queer comrade'. That is to say, the socialist past laid the foundation and provided the inspiration for contemporary Chinese gay identity and queer politics, which are both produced by and pose resistance to the Chinese state, as well as to transnational capitalism.

It is not my intention to delve into a study of socialist sexuality. Rather, I am more interested in how the socialist past finds itself in the postsocialist present and disturbs the neoliberal dream that the Chinese state and transnational capitalism are contriving to produce. In other words, this book will show how the socialist 'comrade' concept is embedded in the contemporary conception of 'queer' and how the socialist forms of cultural work and grassroots mobilization may have empowered queer activism.

Although I use such commonly recognized historical categories as the socialist/Maoist era and the postsocialist/post-Mao/Reform era, I use them with a critical awareness that boundaries between them do not necessarily suggest radical historical ruptures. In fact, I am more interested in their continuities than their ruptures. After all, it is the *discourses* regarding their 'ruptures' that should draw our attention. It is, therefore, more appropriate to understand my use of 'gay identity' or *tongzhi* as *discourses* of 'gay identity' or *tongzhi*. Foucault defines discourse as 'a group of statements which provides a language to talk about … a particular topic at a particular historical moment' (1972: 86). Discourse constructs the topic; it also defines and produces the object of knowledge. Seen through a Foucauldian lens, gay identity in China is thus a construction that involves multiple discourses including

the state, the market, the intellectual and the media. There is no single, hegemonic discourse surrounding queer identities in China. In fact, there are multiple and sometimes contesting and contradictory ways of talking about queer people in China, and not all of them are internally coherent. The complexity of queer identities and identifications is an issue that I will elaborate on at considerable length.

This book endeavours to bring together cultural studies and modern Chinese history. Refuting the notion that cultural studies can generate meaningful insights regarding contemporary and popular phenomena without interrogating their historical roots, Meaghan Morris (1998) stresses the importance of employing historical perspectives when conducting contemporary cultural analyses. For Morris, history can be used in multiple ways: as discourses about the past, contexts for theoretical provocation, methods for critical inquiry, and sites of representation and contestation in contemporary public culture. History facilitates a critical understanding of a society's multiple and complex power arrangements, 'the present context of their co-existence, as well as the specificity of each', and the creation of 'future contexts in which the terms of their coexistence might be different' (1998: 28). This study of gay identity and politics in contemporary China is precisely such a project: it is both attentive to the power geometry in which gay identity has been historically constituted and is open to future possibilities in which power might be configured in different ways.

This book draws on and speaks to multiple disciplines and fields, including cultural studies, media studies, gender studies, China/Asia studies, sociology, anthropology and political theory. The methodologies employed are similarly eclectic, including aspects of historical analysis, textual analysis, discourse analysis, interviews and ethnography, each with its specific purposes and strengths. Previous research into queer culture in China has mostly been single-discipline-based; they include historical research (Chiang 2010; Hinsch 1990; Kang 2009), analysis of literary and film texts (Berry 1998, 2000, 2001; Chao 2010a, 2010b; Chiang & Wong 2016, 2017; Lim 2006; Liu 2015; Martin 2010; Robinson 2015; Sang 2013), and sociology and anthropology of queer lives (Chou 2000; Engebretsen 2014; Fu 2012; Ho 2010; Kam 2013; Kong 2011; Y. Li 1998; Rofel 2007; Wei 2007; Yau 2010; Zheng 2015). While this scholarship sheds important light on aspects of queer culture

in China, the single disciplinary and methodological focus often cannot offer a broader picture of Chinese queer culture in its integrated historical, textual and lived forms. An interdisciplinary approach thus helps us to overcome the rigid text/society binary that results from deeply rooted humanities/social sciences disciplinary boundaries; it also helps us to focus on the dynamic interactions between texts and society by directing the scholar's critical attention toward the social construction of texts and discursive formation of society.

My research method is best described as what Jack Halberstam (1998) calls a 'queer methodology', 'a scavenger methodology' that 'uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behaviour', that 'attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other' and that 'refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence' (1998: 13). A queer methodology refuses to conform to disciplinary norms and it queers academic knowledge production. This book thus brings together archival materials including medical records, published diaries, queer films, interviews, ethnography, online discussions and personal anecdotes, through which I hope to shed light on the 'structures of feeling' (Williams 1961) that pervade queer culture in China today.

An Engaged Ethnography

The fieldwork of this book was primarily conducted between 2007 and 2009, as part of my Ph.D. research. This time frame happened to be during a period of fast development for queer identities and communities in urban China, when there was a great deal of energy and optimism in the community to push for social change. Writing about *lala*s (lesbians) in urban China, Elisabeth Engebretsen describes roughly the same period as 'a particular period of relative political permissiveness and relaxed official censorship and control in Beijing, a focal point for new *lala* and gay communities and discourses in the country' (2014: 5). The 'relative political permissiveness and relaxed official censorship and control' during this period is not without reason: it is the result of both historical contingency and reasons underpinned by political economy. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Chinese government eventually recognized the importance of HIV/AIDS prevention and intervention; MSM (men

who have sex with men) were identified as a key target group for HIV/AIDS intervention. This produced a stigmatized and pathologized gay identity, but it also raised the visibility of gay identity in China's public discourse. Many queer NGOs were set up with the help of international HIV/AIDS funds and often with the support of the Chinese government (Hildebrandt 2013). The HIV/AIDS epidemic, ironically, promoted a particular type of queer identity and activism in China; its impact on gay identity and queer activism will be discussed in Chapter 2 and 3.

From April 2007 to August 2009, I made three research trips back to China to conduct my fieldwork on queer culture, where I conducted semi-structured interviews and participant observation in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. In each city, I interviewed about ten self-identified gays and lesbians. My major questions concerned their experiences and lives as queer people, their participation in queer community events, their knowledge about transnational queer public culture, their engagement with media with queer content, and their use of queer spaces in the cities they live in. I identified potential interviewees through previous networks of connections and through snowballing techniques. I also attended queer public cultural events including queer film festivals, queer theatre performances, queer art exhibitions, HIV/AIDS prevention conferences, and queer NGO community outreach activities. I talked to people I met on these occasions and conducted individual interviews with some of them afterwards.

Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou were each chosen for specific reasons. Beijing was chosen because it is known as the political and cultural centre of China. The queer communities in Beijing are famous for their advocacy of activism and its vibrant community culture. In fact, the cultural meaning of the queer public events, including queer film festivals and public 'gay weddings', was first defined in Beijing and then spread over to other cities in China. In many ways, Beijing is the 'political centre' of China's queer movement and is known for its politicized local queer community culture. My familiarity with the city also made it my first choice. I lived in Beijing from 2000 to 2006 and had engaged actively with the city's queer communities before I started this research project. I met my interviewees in Beijing mainly through attending queer public events such as the Beijing Queer Film Festival, the Gender/Difference Queer Art Exhibition, the Queer Comrades public screenings, an HIV/

AIDS Prevention Conference, and several community activities organized by the Beijing LGBT Centre. Founded in 2008 as a queer NGO, the Beijing LGBT Centre soon became a central hub for local, regional and national queer communities and activism.

Shanghai's very urban and cosmopolitan gay scene offers another perspective on queer identity and politics in contemporary China. I met my interviewees through three queer organizations: the Chi-Heng Foundation Shanghai Office, Leyi Working Group and Nü'ai Lesbian Group. Chi-Heng Foundation is primarily interested in HIV/AIDS prevention in the queer communities; Leyi is an NGO dedicated to helping local sex workers, and especially transgender sex workers; Nü'ai offers a hotline and information service to the local lesbian communities. I will discuss the widely observed differences between the local queer communities in Beijing and Shanghai in Chapter 2.

As one of the first cities to open up to the West in the Reform era and with its geographical vicinity to Hong Kong, Guangzhou is known as one of the most queer-friendly cities in China. The city's trans-Asian commercial queer culture via its Hong Kong connections offers a different picture of queer identity and politics in contemporary China. My field trip to Guangzhou had not been in my fieldwork plan until I met two of the organizers of the travelling queer film festival and followed them to Guangzhou for the festival. Through the queer film festival group, I was introduced to gays and lesbians working in the Chi-Heng Foundation Guangzhou Office and the Same-City *Tongzhi* Community (*Tongcheng shequ*), as well as two local celebrities: Ah Qiang, a community media watchdog who made his name by running his blog 'The Life of Two Husbands' (*Fufu shenghuo*); and Wu Yuanjian, organizer of the Parents and Friends of Lesbian and Gay (PFLAG) China.

It is also worth mentioning that my account of gay identity and queer politics in contemporary China is necessarily a *representation* of my fieldwork experience. I am aware that my ethnographic account is only one of the possible representations of my fieldwork, and further that no such experience can be reduced to a singular and coherent narrative. Moreover, my representation of queer identity and politics in contemporary China is both based on and restricted by this particular experience. The experience is certainly fraught with tensions, ambivalences, complex negotiations of power, as well as shifting moments of

joys and pains. This experience is self-transforming for both myself and my interlocutors. The experience has produced my ethnographic account of China's queer culture as it is presented here.

Notably, my research data have their bias: most of my interlocutors are queer NGO organizers and volunteers, queer filmmakers and artists, queer studies researchers, government office workers, company employees and university students. Most of them are aged between 20 and 40. Although they come from different parts of China, they either work or study in big cities, are university educated and have relatively well-paid jobs. 'Gay' or 'lesbian' is a component of most of their identities. Despite this bias, I feel that my research data are justified in a book that focuses primarily on urban queer identities and politics and the impact of globalization and neoliberalism on sexual subjectivities.

The data bias has also pointed to possible directions for future research. My research has focused on big cities. Admittedly, same-sex attracted people who live in small cities, towns and villages and who come from different religious and ethnic backgrounds in China are well worth researching. Also, most of my interlocutors are gay men. The lives of lesbians, transgender people and other gender and sexual minorities are underrepresented in this book, apart from a short section in Chapter 6 that documents events surrounding lesbian film director Shitou's film screenings. I acknowledge these shortcomings and urge future researchers to pay attention to the aforementioned gaps and weaknesses as they continue to push the boundaries of Chinese queer studies.

The 'Double Consciousness' of a Researcher

I acknowledged myself as both an 'outsider' and an 'insider' of China's queer communities while conducting this research: I was an outsider because I travelled from Australia and Europe as a researcher to conduct fieldwork on queer identities and communities in China, and most of my theoretical perspectives and tools are considered 'Western'. Meanwhile, I was also an insider because I considered myself part of the Chinese queer communities, and many of my interviewees clearly regarded me as part of the communities, too. Born and having grown up in China, I am fluent in mandarin Chinese and know the protocols in Chinese society well. Having lived in Beijing for six years as a self-identified gay man, I was familiar with the queer communities in Beijing and had the necessary

'local knowledge' when I started my research. It did not take me long to familiarize myself with the queer communities in other Chinese cities when I went to Shanghai and Guangzhou to conduct my fieldwork.

During my fieldwork, I participated in community events. For example, I helped to organize queer film festivals in Beijing and distributed safety packs and community newsletters in gay bars and saunas in Shanghai. The often emphasized need for 'distance' and 'objectivity' regarding one's research subjects seemed suspicious in this context. Can a researcher like myself produce a convincing ethnographical account of queer culture in contemporary China?

In traditional anthropology, the dominant paradigm presents an ethnographer, mostly White, urban, middle-class and of course male, who goes to remote non-Western countries to observe the 'primitive' lives of the locals, to engage in participant observation in order to record the 'local culture' objectively. Anthropologists' historical complicity with Western colonialism and Western imperialism has been criticized by many (Gough 1968). Clifford Geertz's (1973) oft-cited ethnographical account on the Balinese cockfight evidences a critical reflection on the ethnographer's subject position in relation to their research subjects. In a review article on the anthropological study of queer sexualities, Tom Boellstorff (2007) notes the change in anthropological research into non-Western sexualities: While traditional anthropology frames its subject of study as the Other and often places it into a 'static past time', anthropologists in the past decade

> had little patience for nostalgic approaches that dismiss lesbian women and gay men outside the West as contaminated by the foreign, to seek instead ritualised forms of transgender or homosexual practices that supposedly reveal regimes of idyllic pre-colonial tolerance. This newer research takes non-Western gay and lesbian subjectivities as legitimate forms of selfhood and addresses the role of mass media, consumerism, ethnicity, religion, class, and a range of modern factors … . (Boellstorff 2007: 22)

In the article, Boellstorff not only points to the shifting research focus in sexuality studies (from the 'primitive' way of life to 'modern' life and selfhood); he also notes the change of subject positions on the part of the ethnographer. One of the most striking changes in sexuality studies in the last few decades has been that research into gays and lesbians which

used to be carried out by straight people, usually 'experts' in medical and social sciences, has now been taken up by people from inside the sexual minority groups. The myth of 'objectivity' and 'truth' has subsequently been challenged. The knowledge produced by straight people is not necessarily more 'objective' than the knowledge produced by queer people themselves; and vice versa. In this sense, a queer-identified scholar's findings regarding queer culture in China are as legitimate, and as problematic, as those of a straight-identified researcher.

As a gay male Chinese researcher who is relatively familiar with the local queer culture, I did not have difficulty in finding my interviewees; nor did I experience any trouble in gaining people's trust. I got to know most of my interlocutors from queer NGO leaders, or from well-known public personas in China's queer communities. *Guanxi*, or personal connections, plays an important role in finding my potential interviewees.[12] Some of my interlocutors took me to queer venues or public cultural events; some helped me locate contacts and make liaisons; some generously accommodated me in their homes during my travels. In return, I also showed my thanks to them in different ways, from inviting them to dinner to buying them coffee, from helping queer filmmakers translate their film subtitles into English to offering to write articles for community magazines and websites. I believe, and I certainly hope, that the analiyisis made of their narratives, as presented in the volume you are now reading, is the form of thanks they most appreciate. I was also keenly aware of the power relation between my interlocutors and me. I hope that I have not abused their trust and my ethnographic account has done justice to their lives.[13] I am aware of the possible problems with representing the fieldwork experience, and the transformation of the self during the interviewing process. I am not an 'outsider' and do not wish to assume an 'objective' position. An engaged ethnography involving the self, as well as the transformation of the self, comprises the epistemological foundation of this work.

In conducting my fieldwork, I was also inspired by Probyn's (1993;

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12. For a detailed account and an in-depth analysis of the art of social relationship, or *guanxi*, in China, see Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang 1994.

13. I use real names for some well-known queer community leaders and celebrities. In the case of ordinary gay Chinese, I use pseudonyms in order to protect their anonymity.

2000) auto-ethnographic approach to including the ethnographer's feelings and experiences in ethnography so that 'the researcher herself is always positioned as a body: she must be attuned to her own capacities for affecting and being affected' (Probyn 2004: 236). An engaged ethnography, therefore, has to take into account the researcher's feelings and experiences, as well as the dynamic interactions between bodies, emotions and spaces.

Following Probyn, I try to describe my experiences, emotions and affects in interacting with other people and critically examine how these interactions impacted on me and on others. This should collapse the boundaries between the self and the other, between the ethnographer and the subject, and between looking-at-ness and looked-at-ness. As I walked into my interviewees' lives and changed their lives, they also changed mine. My task as an ethnographer, therefore, is not to assume that I can record 'objective facts'. Rather, it is to reconstruct my experiences and my interactions with other people, delineating how people relate to each other, interact with each other, and impact on each other. I aim to produce an ethnographic account of intersubjectivity, relationality, connectivity and, indeed, of bodies, experiences and emotions in a contingent and dynamic world.

Queer China and Neoliberalism

Does queer theory need China? Petrus Liu (2010) asks. Why should queer China concern us? This question inevitably raises the critical question of who is speaking and who are assumed to be 'concerned', as well as the power relations embedded in the act of representation. Writing in English for an international readership from the perspective of a 'native informant'-identified researcher located in a Western higher education institution, I devote the whole book to addressing the issue. To start with, let me use an example from Western media to illustrate why a TV documentary about sex and sexuality in contemporary China may be of interest.

A CBC documentary titled *China's Sexual Revolution* (CBC 2007) starts with the following blurb:

> The world's biggest country is going through the world's biggest revolution. From the Internet to corner sex shops, China is changing. Courtship,

romance, fashion … but lost in the midst, millions of single men can't find a date, much less of a mate. Turbulent times in China. The Cultural Revolution is over; the sexual revolution has begun.

The documentary compares what is happening in today's China to the sex rebellion in the West in the 1960s, a 'time lag' common to many dominant narratives of globalization and modernity. It juxtaposes images and interviews about China's sexual repression during the Mao era with the sexual liberation in the post-Mao era. The documentary celebrates the end of a 'repressive era' and the advent of a new era in which sexuality is liberated and people can freely express their gender, sexuality and desire. Disturbingly, it attributes sexual freedom to China's departure from socialism and entry into capitalism, suggesting not only a temporal link and but also a causal relationship between the two. The tone of the documentary is celebratory and even prophetic, resembling the optimism articulated by Francis Fukuyama's (1992) 'end of history' thesis that, with the demise of communism, capitalism is the best system that is found on earth and it has the potential to liberate all human beings. In what Jacques Derrida (1994) calls a 'neo-evangelistic' tone, Fukuyama celebrates the collapse of communism and the triumph of liberal democracy:

> the good news has come … From Latin America to Eastern Europe, from the Soviet Union to the Middle East and Asia, strong governments have been failing over the last two decades. And while they have not given way in all cases to stable liberal democracies, liberal democracy remains the only coherent political aspiration that spans different regions and cultures around the globe. In addition, liberal principles in economics – the 'free market' – have spread, and have succeeded in producing unprecedented levels of material prosperity, both in industrially developed countries and in countries that had been, at the close of World War II, part of the impoverished Third World. A liberal revolution in economic thinking has sometimes preceded, sometimes followed, the move toward political freedom around the globe.

Fukuyama links the 'end of history' to the triumph of the 'free market', and specifically to 'a liberal revolution in economic thinking'. The free-market principle that characterizes the economic, social and political spheres is also known as neoliberalism, a project that started in the Global North from the 1970s and spread worldwide. Neoliberalism is usually understood as a set of political economic theories and practices

'that proposes that human beings can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong property rights, free markets, and free trade' (Harvey 2005: 2). The neoliberal idea dominates economic, social and cultural production in a society and in people's everyday life. The liberalist-neoliberalist argument about China's opening-up to capitalism liberating repressed gays and lesbians sounds politically naïve and even dangerous.

Neoliberalism is a revitalized form of capitalism. Advocates argue that state socialism is necessarily inefficient and that society has a greater possibility for flourishing if its government engages in 'deregulation, privatisation, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision' (p. 3). Neoliberalism's global penetration also witnessed the collapse of communism and socialism worldwide. China's economic reform, started in 1979, with inward-looking state socialism increasingly being replaced by privatization and entry into the global marketplace, is part of the global neoliberalizing process. Yet, this is a neoliberalism 'with Chinese characteristics' (Harvey 2005: 20), most notably in the form of the significant role retained by the Party-State as the neoliberal reform agenda is pushed forward:

> The party has also acceded to the massive proletarianisation of China's workforce, the breaking of the 'iron rice bowl', the evisceration of China's social protections, the imposition of user fees, the creation of a flexible labour market regime, and the privatisation of assets formerly held in common. It has created a social system where capitalist enterprise can both form and function properly. (p. 250)

Paradoxically, this process is led by a communist party, with its alleged commitment to egalitarianism and with its official version of socialism and Marxism. The 'Chinese model' (Dirlik 2012) that the Chinese government advocates effectively justifies an authoritarian state in its active endorsement of global capitalism. Neoliberalism has mutated into new forms to prolong its life. We are witnessing the rise of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' (Bruff 2014), 'neoliberalism as exception' (Ong 2006), and even 'neoliberalism as a mobile technology' (Ong 2007), both in China and transnationally.

In the context of international proclamations concerning the failure of communism, there arises an uncritical subscription to neoliberalism,

together with a violent rejection of anything described as socialist or Marxist. How to deal with the legacy of socialism and Marxism became a question that people on the political left had to face. Since its emergence in post-Mao China, gay identity has had an ambivalent relationship with neoliberalism and residual socialism. On the one hand, it can be seen as a subject brought into being by neoliberal capitalism; on the other, it still bears socialist 'traces' from China's recent past. The ideological struggles inherent within the 'queer comrade' identity is the focus of my book.

Popular interest in sex, sexuality, and China in the West thus has historical roots and ideological imperatives. It is premised on what Michel Foucault (1990) calls the 'repressive hypothesis', which describes a popular belief that sex and sexuality, suppressed by a repressive regime, can be set free when the regime is gone. In the post-Cold War era, China's socialist past is often imagined to be a repressive era in which 'natural' human natures and desires are hidden or twisted. By the logic of this narrative, sexuality and, by extension, humanity itself, can be liberated only via removal of the communist regime. Lisa Rofel (1999; 2007) uses the term 'postsocialist allegory of modernity' to describe a popular myth that communism in practice necessarily involves repression of human natures and desires and, for this reason, communism necessarily fails. 'Because such repression, like all repressions, produces the very obsessions, perversions, and fetishisms it hopes to forestall, communism failed.' (Rofel 1999: 218) Besides a story that accounts for the failure of communism and socialism, the allegory also holds out the promise that 'people can unshackle their innate human selves by emancipating themselves from the socialist state' and the prophecy that 'to the extent the state recedes, people will be free to "have" their human natures.' (Ibid.). Gender, sex and sexuality lie at the heart of what people believe to be human natures. The popular obsession about lesbians and gays in China is in fact an expression of the 'postsocialist allegory of modernity', symptomatic of the ideological contestations between communism and capitalism in the post-Cold War era.

Queer Marxism

Since its birth, queer theory has sat somewhat uncomfortably with Marxism. This probably results from classical Marxists' obsession with

'economic determinism' in which sex and sexuality do not play a sig-
nificant role. Despite the efforts of numerous 'post-Marxists' to free the
cultural sphere from the economic base, sex and sexuality are still con-
sidered marginal in Marxism. Despite taking sex and sexuality seriously,
queer theory has been heavily influenced by Michel Foucault's *History
of Sexuality* Volume I, in which Foucault launched a severe critique of
Louis Althusser's structural Marxist approach and Herbert Marcuse's
(1966) revolutionary and utopian *Eros and Civilisation*. Queer theory
has since participated in 'a general theoretical regression away from
concrete socioeconomic analysis, and towards a politically retrograde
concern for the vagaries of language, discourse or signification' (Penny
2014: 72). Although the 'concrete socioeconomic analysis' and 'con-
cern for the vagaries of language, discourse or signification' are in fact
a false dichotomy, and whether the so-called 'linguistic turn' signifies
'retrograde' is debatable, the schism between Marxism and queer theory
continues to represent a challenge for scholars in both fields. Queer
theorists recognizes that

> queer theory has failed to entertain the possibility that its appearance at
> the present historical moment is a symptom of capitalist social relations
> in their most recent, supermobile and globalised phase. This phase is
> characterised by the shift of material production from the historical
> locations of industrial production in Europe, North America and Japan,
> to the Global South. Concurrently, the forms of labour in the Global
> North have become increasingly virtual-immaterial, 'cognitive', tran-
> sient and precarious (Penny 2014: 73).

This important insight accounts for the historical conditions of queer
theory as a body of knowledge and the theory's relationship with global
capitalism and the international division of cultural labour necessitated
by such a system. For a long time, critical theory (such as queer theory)
and area studies (such as China studies) have been characterized by
the universal/particular dichotomy: critical theories produced in the
West and the Global North offer a 'universal' knowledge of abstraction,
whereas area studies provide 'unprocessed raw materials' that await
'universal' explanations and solutions. Discussing the place of queer
theory in Taiwan and China, Petrus Liu (2010: 297) demonstrates
that 'China' and 'queer theory' do not have to be placed on mutually
exclusionary terms; rather, they can be mutually constitutive and trans-

formative: 'critical attention to local knowledges and concerns does not immediately constitute a categorical rejection of the "queer"; rather, it shows that what is "queer" is constantly expanded, supplemented, and revised by what is "Chineseness"'. Similarly, Howard Chiang (2014b) uses 'queer Sinophone' as an analytical category to conduct a historical critique and to deconstruct the universalism/particularism dichotomy. All these efforts mark an increasing critical awareness of the political economy of knowledge production and ways to challenge the status quo. More work needs to be done to take Chinese queer studies out of the area studies ghetto and bring it into dialogue with critical theories. This book marks one such effort.

Perhaps queer theory and Marxism do not have to stand at odds with each other. John D'Emilio (1993) gives a historical materialistic account of the conditions of the emergence of gay identity under capitalism in the US context. Rosemary Hennessy (2000) offers a critical insight into how late capitalism, labour and commodification produce and transform sexual identities. Jose Esteban Munoz (2009) highlights the role of utopia in inspiring queer art production and an emancipatory queer politics. Kevin Floyd's work *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism* (2009) brilliantly brings together Marxism and queer theory by focusing on two categories that the two theories have in common, totality and reification, and by paying acute attention to the historical conditions of the emergence of sexualities and sexual knowledges under capitalism. Lisa Duggan (2003) describes 'homonormativity', understood as the prevalence of bourgeois, liberal and consumerist norms of family, marriage and a happy life for lesbians and gays in the US under neoliberalism. Jasbir Puar (2007) examines how liberal politics in the US incorporates certain queer subjects into the nation-state's governance and produces classed, patrotic and racialized queer subjects. Peter Drucker (2014) shows how the successive 'same-sex formations' of the past century and a half, each of which manifested during a different phase of capitalist development, have led to today's 'homonormativity', homonationalism, and queer resistance.

The scholarship in each of these studies is impressive. However, they all invariably focus on the US and European context and fail even to consider whether or not sexual identities are produced differently in the

global south, or whether power relationships between the Global North and the Global South affects the production of sexual identities in either place. The 'globalization of sexuality' theory tries to address the issue and is perhaps best represented by Dennis Altman (2001), who argues for a spread of sexual identity and politics from the West to non-Western countries as a result of capitalist expansion. This approach is not without controversy; Altman's 'global queering' (1996) or 'global gay' (1997) thesis has been criticized by queer researchers for its assumed Eurocentrism and its imperialist rhetoric, as well as its failure to account for the wide range of local queer traditions in many parts of the world that pre-date the globalization phenomena highlighted by Altman (see, e.g. Berry et al. 2003; Martin 2003; Martin et al. 2008; Rofel 1999; 2007; Sullivan and Jackson 2001). The field of Asian queer studies has grown rapidly, and many scholars have critically engaged with Altman's 'global gay' identity and produced fine scholarship based on a more nuanced understandings of the process of globalization and its interaction with and influence on local, national, regional, and hybrid forms of sexual identities (e.g. Benedicto 2014; Berry et al. 2003; Besnier & Alexeyeff 2014; Blackwood 2011; Boellstorff 2005; Chiang & Wong 2016, 2017; Chiang & Heinrich 2014; Erni 2005; Garcia 2009; Gopinath 2005; Huang 2011; Jackson 2001, 2016; Lavin et al. 2017; Leung 2008; Lim 2014; Liu & Rofel 2010; Martin 2003; Martin et al. 2008; McLelland 2005; Manalansan 2003; Sinnott 2010; Suganuma 2012; Sullivan & Jackson 2001; Tang 2011; Yau 2010; Yue & Zubillaga-Pow 2010; Wilson 2006; Wong 2017).

Queer Marxism in China

While a lot of research has been done on queer history and culture in China, and sociologists and anthropologists have revealed a lot about contemporary queer lives, and some scholars have asked questions about the significance of the queer culture to academic fields such as queer studies, China studies and Asian studies, few researchers have asked about the *political* implications of *tongzhi* identity and activism for contemporary social movements and radical politics. The assumption might be a homonationalistic one, i.e., that the gay rights and activism in China are not as 'developed' as in many other countries, especially America and countries in Europe. Besides, in China, both 'social movements' and 'radical politics' are seen as politically sensitive terms and

few people, including participants, would readily acknowledge their links with them. What can the world learn about social movements and radical politics by looking at China's queer identity and activism? Can queer subject formation and activism be enabled if we mobilize *tongzhi* as a critical concept? This book tries to shed light on these questions.

If 'queer' signifies a critique of historical, social, and cultural norms, it can become 'such a discursive site whose uses are not fully contained in advance … for the purpose of continuing to democratise queer politics' (Butler 1993: 230). Scholars in Chinese queer studies have used the term to engage with a number of different normative categories, including family, kinship and cultural traditions (Engebretsen 2014; Kam 2013; Yau 2010), the communist Party State (Ho 2010; Hildebrandt 2013; Zheng 2015), capitalism and neoliberalism (Eng 2010; Kong 2011; Liu 2015; Rofel 1999b; Rofel 2007; Wong 2017), and global geopolitics (Chiang & Wong 2017, 2016; Chiang & Heinrich 2014; Chou 2000; Kong 2011; Liu & Rofel 2010; Liu 2015). In the following literature survey, I review a particular strand of literature in queer Chinese studies that is informed by a Marxist anti-capitalist critique. Such a review is bound to be selective and incomplete, but I hope that it sheds light on some important theoretical issues central to the argument of this book.[14]

In the context of China, the Marxist approach to queer studies seems to have a clear anchoring point: an urban, middle-class, cosmopolitan gay identity in relation to its abject other, including the poor, promiscuous, money-seeking male prostitute, known as 'money boys'. Lisa Rofel (1999) identifies 'cultural citizenship' as the key to understanding the emergence of a respectable middle-class gay identity in a 'desiring China' (Rofel 2007); she further attributes the gay communities' stig-

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14. In this literature review, I have prioritized book-length and English-language publications in the field of Chinese queer studies. I restrict my literature review to the contemporary PRC context. I acknowledge the influence of queer Sinophone and queer Asian scholarship on me and this book. They include Berry et al. 2003; Chiang 2011, 2014b, 2016; Chiang & Wong 2017; Chiang & Wong 2016; Chiang & Heinrich 2014; Erni 2005; Liu & Rofel 2010; Martin et al 2008; Sinnott 2010; Sullivan & Jackson 2001; Welker 2014; Wilson 2006, Wong 2017, and the 'Queer Asia' series published by the Hong Kong University Press. I am also indebted to queer historical scholarship, for example, Chou 2000; Chiang 2015b; Guo 2016; Hinsch 1990; Sommer 2000; Kang 2009; Ng 1989; Sang 2003; Stevenson & Wu 2012; Wu & Stevenson 2010; Wu 2004; Van Gulik 2003; Vitiello 2011.

matization of 'money boys' in Beijing to neoliberalism's differentiating effects in defining legitimate and illegitimate desires (Rofel 2010). Travis Kong's (2010, 2011a, 2011b) studies of transnational Chinese sexualities across three different geographical locations and the exclusion of 'money boys' from Mainland China's urban queer imagination shed light on the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in the different formations of sexual citizenship. Alvin Wong's (2017) critical reading of cultural texts from postsocialist China, postcolonial Hong Kong and post-Martial Law Taiwan reveal the 'perverse use value', embodied by the 'money boys' in Cui Zi'en's 2003 film *Money Boy Diaries*, in imagining alternative and anti-capitalist modes of queer subjectivity in transnational China. The dichotomy in Chinese queer theorization between the 'popular urban gay' and the 'money boy', as important as it is, needs to be broken down in order to account for a diverse range of queer subjects, each distinguished from others by different modes of intersection of class, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, urban-rural divide, profession, as well as transnational, national, regional, local cultural differences that capitalism engenders and reinforces.

Petrus Liu and Lisa Rofel (2010) see queer cultural politics in the PRC and Taiwan as a symptom of Cold War and post-Cold War global geopolitics dominated by Pax Americana. Liu (2010; 2015) even suggests that queer theory needs China to understand its complicity with liberalism and that there exists a queer Marxist thinking, or 'Chinese theory of the geopolitical meditations of queer lives' (2015: 7), since the 1990s, practised by scholars, queer activists, artists and filmmakers from Taiwan and the PRC. According to Liu, such a theory 'does not begin with the concept of social identity; instead, it emphasizes the impersonal, structural, and systemic working of power' (Ibid.). It offers 'a non-liberal alternative to the Euro-American model of queer emancipation grounded in liberal values of privacy, tolerance, individual rights, and diversity' (Ibid.).

Liu's theorizations of 'Chinese queer Marxism' mark one of the most ambitious and impressive efforts to bring together Marxism and queer theory in the form of a post-colonial, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist critique. However, in setting up a dichotomy between China and the West, Liu also risks creating an imaginary of a transnational China that is isolated from the global circulation of queer knowledge and practices,

thus reinforcing a 'China exceptionalism' popular in the traditional area studies paradigm. Would the queer Marxist scholarship produced in the West that I outlined briefly above constitute a 'Western queer Marxism', and how are they different from a 'Chinese queer Marxism', and to what extent are they the result of global geopolitical effects? In what sense is a 'Chinese queer Marxism' also symptomatic of what Howard Chiang calls a 'cultural particularism' that results from 'self- or re-Orientalisation' (2014: 32)? Also, it is important to note that most of the examples Liu cites come from Taiwan, with only scant analysis of the situations in mainland China. Considering the popular suspicion of 'official Marxism' in mainland China's queer communities, whether such a 'queer Marxism' exists in the PRC context and what impact it may have is open to question. Furthermore, Liu's text-focused study does not attend to ordinary people's lived experiences. More historically grounded and context-specific research is needed to determine whether, and to what extent, a queer Marxism exists in the PRC context.

This book marks an effort to bring queer theory and Marxism into dialogue with each other in the context of the People's Republic of China. It does not attempt to propose another universalizing theory such as 'queer Marxism'; nor is it obsessed with the ontology of queer Marxism. Through a critical reading of queer cultural texts, in tandem with an ethnography of queer public culture, this book hopes to locate some radical queer Marxist moments in the articulation of gay identity and queer politics; in doing so, this book brings a queer Marxist critique of neoliberalism and the state violence into existence.

The 'Language Game' of Chinese Queer Studies

For a reader who is not familiar with the Chinese context, or who does not read mandarin Chinese, the numerous indigenous terms in their *pinyin* romanization, including *tongzhi*, *tongxinglian* and *ku'er* might cause some difficulty. The politics of naming same-sex subjects in the Chinese context can also be confusing even to many Asian Studies specialists. Although I will explain the differences of these terms, together with their distinct histories in modern China, in detail in Chapters 2 and 3, it is useful to skim through some of the terms here to make it easier later.

Tongzhi is not the only way to name same-sex subjects in China. In fact, it is difficult to pin down a specific term for same-sex intimacy in

China. This is because different terms are used to translate queer in Chinese, and these terms often converge and conflate in contemporary social spaces. They are produced by different discourses and reflect particular power configurations. It is also important to remember that the various words used to refer to queer people are not simply different linguistic terms; they also denote diverse sexual subjectivities. In fact, there are many different types of same-sex subjects, including *tongxinglian, tongzhi,* 'gay' and *ku'er,* in China, as in other parts of the world. We need to be aware of the diversity of sexual subjectivities when we talk about such issues as 'gay people in China' or a 'Chinese gay identity'. These identities, each with its own specific histories and contexts, intersect at various times. What terms are used where, when, and in which contexts is a matter of politics.

Despite China's 3,000-year history of homoeroticism (Hinsch 1990), the concept of gay identity is relatively new to China, and it is linked to what is variously called the postsocialist era, post-Mao era, or Reform era of the 1980s and 90s, when sociologists and medical researchers 'rediscovered' homosexuality as a perversion or a disease. Earlier, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the English term 'homosexuality' was translated into Chinese as *tongxinglian,* or *tongxing'ai,* literally 'same-sex love'.[15] It was not, then, generally considered inherent and innate (Sang 2003). In the postsocialist era, when talking about sex was no longer a taboo, the term *tongxinglian* was 'rediscovered' and 'reused'; it became a stigmatized identity closely associated with both medical and legal discourses. Many cruising gay men were arrested by the police on the charge of 'hooliganism' (*liumangzui*) and were similarly referred to as *liumang* (hooligans). In the late 1990s, under the increasing influence of transnational queer culture, more terms entered the Chinese language to refer to same-sex subjects, and these terms include *tongzhi* and *ku'er* (queer). I have discussed the 'queering' of the term *tongzhi* in the last section, and I will now focus on the term *ku'er.*

Ku'er, a transliteration of the English term 'queer', was first used by queer scholars and activists in Taiwan and Hong Kong in the 1990s and was later introduced to mainland China by scholars and activists. Chinese sociologist Li Yinhe (2003) used the term *ku'er* in one of

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15. In China, people who identify themselves as homosexuals often call themselves *tongxinglian* (same-sex lovers) or *tongxinglian zhe* (people who do same-sex love).

China's first books on queer theory, *Ku'er lilun* (Queer theory). Ever since then, the term began to gain increasing popularity among academics, gay and lesbian filmmakers, artists, writers and activists in mainland China. Beijing Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, for instance, changed its name from *Tongxinglian Dianyingjie* (homosexual film festival) to *Ku'er Yingzhan* (queer film exhibition) in 2005. The change in language reflects the change in politics on the part of the event organizer: whether they subscribe to gay identity politics or whether they celebrate queer politics; and whether they aim to put on an elitist film festival that compares and contrasts films with a single criterion, or whether people should recognize the incommensurability of different films and treat these differences with respect (Cui 2010).

From its scholarly origin, *ku'er* was adopted by a group of Chinese filmmakers and artists, who call their works 'queer films' (*ku'er dianying*) or 'queer art' (*ku'er yishu*). Most *ku'er* films, works of art and academic writings seem abstruse, if not depressing, for community consumption because of their theoretical density and aesthetic avant-gardism. And as Song Sufeng (2009: 198) notes, as opposed to the histories and memories of being stigmatized and repressed embedded in the English term 'queer', the Chinese term *ku'er* takes on meanings of freedom, fashion and carnival. Despite the increasing popularity of the term queer in sexuality studies and social activism, most gays and lesbians in China prefer calling themselves *tongxinglian*, *tongzhi*, or 'gay'. For many people who are not 'in-the-know', *ku'er* may simply conjure up an image of 'a cool child', as the Chinese characters literally mean, or a certain type of orange drink branded *ku'er*.

This interplay between imported and indigenous terms does not exhaust the significance of naming non-heterosexuality in China. In fact, there are also different indigenous and local terms to refer to queer people in various parts of China, including *gei-lou* (in Cantonese), *piaopiao* (Sichuan province), *bingzi* (Wuhan) *boli* (Nanjing, Taiwan), *ban* (Lanzhou), and *huo* (Urumqi). Wei Wei's (2007) study of *piaopiao* subjectivity in Chengdu demonstrates interesting interactions between indigenous sexual subjectivities and global/national sexual discourses. As Peter Jackson (2001) points out, many so-called 'pre-gay' subjects in Asia are actually 'post-queer' because these subjects are presented as both ambiguous and contingent.

The cultural translation of terms such as 'homosexual', 'gay' and 'queer' into the Chinese context helps us reconceptualize sexuality, identity and politics. Homi Bhabha states vis-à-vis the process of cultural translation that he is more interested in the 'foreign' elements than in the 'original', as cultural translation 'desacralises the transparent assumptions of cultural supremacy, and in that very act, demands a contextual specificity, a historical differentiation within minority positions' (1994: 327). Gayatri Spivak (1993) also suggests that cultural translation can be used as a 'decolonizing' strategy. Indeed, the 'cultural translation' of queer subjectivities, queer theories and queer politics neither renders the 'original text' of queer subjectivities more authentic nor the 'copy' less effective. Rather, shifts in meaning that more than metaphorically get 'lost in translation' help to disrupt the 'aura' of the 'original' and break the monopoly of the 'authentic', together with the hierarchy that accompanies them. The 'cultural translation' of 'queer' calls for alternative ways of conceptualizing queer subjectivities and queer politics that are non-Eurocentric, non-linear and less hierarchical.

Howard Chiang (2014a) observes the 'obsession' with indigenous terms, *tongzhi* included, to refer to same-sex subjects in the study of Chinese histories and cultures. He points out that the continued emphasis on the importance of language in the study of queer Chinese histories and cultures may highlight 'a discrete set of historical and sometimes transcultural explanations for difference', but, in refusing the name 'queer', they also risk missing the opportunity to bring queer histories and cultures from different parts of the world into dialogues for a 'more global synthesis' (2014: 354–5). Like Chiang, I refuse to orientalize and compartmentalize Chinese queer studies, but I also appreciate the careful historicization and contextualization of queer subjectivities and cultures by many Chinese queer studies scholars, which serves as a necessary caution against some universalizing claims and tendencies in queer studies in general. This book is the result of my efforts to reconcile universalism with particularism, and queer studies with area studies.

Elisabeth Engebretsen and William Schroeder (2015) observe that 'in everyday uses, *tongzhi* and *ku'er* are not always separate in meaning and are sometimes used interchangeably'; they come up with the term 'queer/*tongzhi*' to highlight the 'symbiotic relationship between languages, identifications and positionalities, politics, locations and theo-

ries' (2015: 8). Indeed, rather than creating a China/West dichotomy in the use of language to refer to same-sex subjectivities, and trying to pin down the multiple, fluid, contradictory and contingent meanings, it is more productive to ask, to appropriate a line from communication studies, which term is used in which context for which purpose and with what effect, and what insights we can gain and lose by choosing to use one term instead of the other. In this book, I use all the terms, including queer, *tongzhi*, LGBT, gay, and *tongxinglian*, I highlight the contextual specificity of these terms and the politics of language and identity. The contingent meanings of each term will become clear in my discussion.

Structure of the Book

This book examines how a particular type of queer identity and politics, represented by the word *tongzhi*, has emerged in contemporary China, and how it can be used to articulate a radical and progressive Left queer politics. In this book, I weave together textual analysis, ethnographic accounts and theoretical discussions. In doing so, I create a narrative or genealogy of *tongzhi*. I delineate the different types of gay identities and queer activisms in contemporary China, including how they came into being, how they are practised and understood in China at the moment, and how they can reinvigorate a radical queer politics. This is by no means a linear and progressive narrative and there is no inevitability or teleology. It is best to see the book as a journey into queer China with the author as a tour guide. As with all tours, the narrative of this one is shaped by the guide's own priorities, perspective, enthusiasm, frustration, bias, omission, interpretation, idiosyncrasy, and above all, politics. And, just as in all guided tours, one need not agree with everything that the guide says, and some will most likely discover things more interesting along the way and decide to follow their own path. But a guide is there to help get all things started.

Our journey will start from Shanghai, arguably China's 'gay capital' and the 'queerest' city in China (Chapter 2). We will follow the footsteps of the annual Shanghai Pride into different queer spaces in the city: from glamorous gay bars to community centres created by local queer NGOs; from an old-fashioned dance hall to open-air cruising grounds. We will meet and talk with queer people who use these spaces, and see how they

think of themselves and of Shanghai as a queer city. In this process, we will discover that they identify themselves as fitting, less or more comfortably, into one or several categories: 'gay', *tongxinglian* and *tongzhi*, with good reasons. We ask why this is the case and what this tells us about China's social change and its impact on the queer population. We also ask what *tongzhi* means and why it should interest us.

In Chapter 3, we trace the genealogy of the term *tongzhi* and ask how a term originally denoting socialist political subjectivity takes on a queer connotation, and what is so interesting and radical about this. I suggest that terms such as *tongzhi* are not simply linguistic categories, they also denote different types of subjectivity created by different power relations and governmentalities, or the rationality and techniques used to govern people in a society. We locate the changing subjectivity of *tongzhi* (from comrade to queer) in the shifting governmentalities from China's socialism to postsocialism. The complexity of postsocialist governmentality, together with the lingering presence of the socialist governmentality, makes the postsocialist *tongzhi* a subjectivity fraught with tensions and loaded with potential.

Chapter 4 offers a concrete example of how power relations and governmentalities effect a change in human subjectivity by looking at how some gay men changed their subjectivity from gay to straight after going for gay conversion therapy. Controversial I know, but it is my argument that medical interventions did not play a substantial role in this change of personal understanding; social and cultural factors such as political antagonism, community belonging, affect, and desire to become a politicized citizen play a more important role in the transformation of the self. While the process of transformation rejects liberal individualism, and embraces a Marxist theory of political subjectivity, it also reminds us of how human subjectivity can be transformed under certain power relations and governmentalities, and the role of socialist subjectivity in the postsocialist subject formation.

Chapter 5 turns to the life and works of Cui Zi'en, China's leading queer filmmaker and activist. His community documentary *Queer China, 'Comrade' China* (Zhi tongzhi) marks his effort to politicize and radicalize the *tongzhi* subjectivity. Many people have noticed the change of style between his earlier fiction films and his later documentaries. I suggest a continuity in his films: a commitment to Marxist theory and

practice. His works reject a bourgeois liberalist subjectivity and political vision; he uses film to imagine a world of proletarians who fearlessly challenge gender, sexual, social and political norms. While his works are extremely queer and uncompromisingly Marxist, his later activist documentaries are distinguishable from his early fiction films depicting utopian socialism by their commitment to political activism through the strategic use of digital video films. This is what he calls 'digital video activism'. With his queer films, filmmaking practices and active participation in queer activism, Cui shows not only the importance of Marxism and a socialist vision in invigorating a radical queer politics in today's China, but also how digital media can be used to articulate a queer politics effectively in the contemporary Chinese context.

Chapter 6 continues the discussion of 'digital video activism' by looking at what happens outside Beijing and Shanghai. We follow the steps of three queer filmmakers, Fan Popo, Shitou and Mingming, to Guangzhou for two community screening events. We look at how these film screening events help build queer identities and communities; we examine how *ku'er* (queer) is interpreted by young filmmakers to articulate their radical politics and to connect to ordinary queer people. We also look at how socialist discourses of cultural work and what I call the 'mass line' may continue to inspire queer activism today.

Our discussion so far has focused on a more intellectual type of queer activism led by queer filmmakers through the use of digital films, and how they mobilize the concepts of *tongzhi* and *ku'er* to articulate their queer politics. This does not mean that a radical queer activism has no relevance to the lives of ordinary *tongxinglian* or *tongzhi*-identified people. In Chapter 7, we look at an unarmed clash between the police and a group of cruising gay men over the use of public space and who has the right to citizenship in Guangzhou. We also examine how ordinary queer people and *tongzhi* activists mobilized themselves, offline and online, to imagine a radical queer politics at a critical historical juncture. Queer people's offline and online discussions concern issues such as sexual rights and citizenship of queer people, as well as what a culturally sensitive queer politics might look like in China. This case study shows the agency of ordinary people in mobilizing themselves and claiming citizenship rights, and the important role of the Internet and social media in shaping citizen politics in contemporary China; it also

sheds light on the impact of the socialist experience and legacy on mass political mobilization, and the potential for a radical queer politics in postsocialist China, with all its unpredictability, contingency, potentials and promises.

In Chapter 8, the conclusion, I revisit the key arguments made in this book. I also reflect on some critical issues central to my argument and highlight some theoretical implications of the study to multiple academic disciplines and fields, such as the value of engaging with history in cultural studies, practising a non-media-centric media studies, and using queer Asia as a method and critique. I highlight the necessity of injecting a radical, democratic political vision into academic knowledge production and embrace a performative mode of research and writing.

Figure 5: Shanghai Pride 2009 (photo by Kris Krüg, Creative Commons)

Figure 6: Lailai Dance Hall, Shanghai, 2016 (photo courtesy of Travis Kong)

2.

Imagined Cosmopolitanism

QUEER SPACES IN SHANGHAI

> Shanghai appears to be run by youth, staffed by youth, and patronized by youth. The population now exceeds 20 million … Nearly every gay you meet in China says they want to live here. The nightlife is constantly reinventing itself, but many venues have found consistent patronage from young, professional locals and expats. Shanghai has come to rival Hong Kong as the gay centre of China as the winds of freedom continue to blow.
>
> 'Shanghai: General Information', www.utopia-Asia.com

> In the not terribly distant future, we'll be talking about the Shanghai club scene the way we discuss Sydney, London, San Francisco, or any other major international destination. It's a matter of when, not if.
>
> Andrew Collins 'Gay Bars in Shanghai'

Shanghai has recently become known as the 'gay capital' of China. *The Independent* lists Shanghai as one of the world's five most improved cities for gay tolerance (2008).[1] Utopia-Asia.com, a queer web portal in Asia, claims that every gay man in China wants to live in Shanghai. Fudan University in Shanghai is the first university in mainland China to offer

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1. The fieldwork of this chapter was conducted from 2008 to 2009. Since then, many things have changed including the closure of Eddy's in 2016. The Lailai Dance Hall still exists but its entry fee has been raised. Shanghai Pride Week continues as an annual event and is getting bigger each year, but many of my observations in this chapter, including its depoliticization, commercialization, expatriate-centrism and insufficient engagement with the local queer community, are still valid. For a more up-to-date account of the queer venues in Shanghai and Shanghai Pride Week, see Qing 2017 and the event website http://www.shpride.com/?lang=en (accessed 1 September 2017).

courses on queer studies (Gao 2006).[2] *China Daily* celebrated Shanghai as 'one of the most open and progressive Chinese cities' following the success of the 2009 LGBT Pride Week ('Pride of tolerance' 2009). This celebration also strengthened this image of Shanghai as a queer metropolis. In a week-long period from 7–14 June 2009, Shanghai celebrated what its organizers called 'China's first LGBT festival', with parties, performances, film screenings, art exhibitions, panel discussions, BBQs and 'gay weddings'.[3] More than one thousand beautifully-dressed gays and lesbians, both locals and foreign expatriates, together with tourists, packed the festival venues on Pride Day. The event attracted wide media coverage, including by the BBC, *New York Times*, *Newsweek* and *China Daily*. Although government intervention forced the organizers to cancel a few events, including one film screening, one theatre performance and one social mixer, the Pride Week was still a great success. Despite the cautiousness of Chinese-language newspapers in reporting the event, *China Daily*, China's national English newspaper, commented that:

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2. Two queer related courses were offered by Fudan University in Shanghai: 'Homosexual Health Social Science' (Tongxinglian jiankang shehui kexue), coordinated by Professor Gao Yanning from the School of Health Sciences since 2003, and 'Gay Studies' (*tongxinglian yanjiu*), coordinated by Associate Professor Sun Zhongxin from the Department of Sociology since 2005. The two courses had been discontinued at the time of writing.

3. In China, gay weddings have not been recognized by law, although there have been repeated appeals to the state legislative body to legalize same-sex marriage rights. One of the most outspoken advocates of same-sex marriage in China is Professor Li Yinhe, China's leading sexologist from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Since 2003, Li has appealed to the National People's Congress and National People's Political Consultative Conference to recognize same-sex marriage rights. Her appeals have generated heated debate in Chinese media (T. Li 2010).

    Although the event organizers claim that this is China's first-ever queer festival, others claim that this is only a strategy for publicity. Since the 1990s, queer activists in Beijing and other parts of China have held different events and campaigns which might be called 'queer festivals'. One interviewee who works for a queer NGO based in Shanghai said that the event organizers, mostly foreign expatriates in Shanghai, know how to do PR (public relations) better than their Chinese counterparts. The disagreements and clashes between local Chinese queer NGOs and foreign queer NGOs based in Shanghai are worth our attention, as they remind us of the heterogeneity of queer communities and identities. For a critical analysis of Shanghai LGBT Pride, see Engebretsen 2015.

> Shanghai Pride 2009 should be a source of great encouragement to
> the tens of millions of 'comrades', as homosexual men and women are
> called in the Chinese mainland. Meanwhile, the festival, though bereft
> of the massive street parade that is a feature of gay and lesbian festivals
> elsewhere, is also sending a strong signal to the 1.3 billion Chinese
> about greater acceptance and tolerance. ('Pride of tolerance' 2009)

Shanghai certainly embodies the pride and confidence of a China
bidding farewell to its socialist past and embracing global capitalism.
Gay identity becomes the best metonymy for such a '*new* new China'
(Kang 2011). Through looking at queer cultures in Shanghai, we can
potentially get a glimpse of where queer culture is heading as China
speeds up the process of economic and ideological neoliberalization.

This chapter offers an account of queer spaces in Shanghai. In doing
so, I wish to reveal the complexity of the queer subject formation and,
in doing so, unravel the various political economic and cultural forces
that shape the queer subject formation in contemporary China. I use
this chapter as an introduction to a more optimistic version of queer
China and its promises for a queer future. I also reflect on the role of
neoliberal capitalism and the Chinese state in the construction of urban
gay identities.

This chapter is based on fieldwork conducted in 2008 and 2009.
Although Shanghai's queer scene has expanded since then, many obser-
vations about queer Shanghai made a decade ago are still valid today,
and the gaps between different types of queer spaces have since widened
rather than disappeared. In Shanghai, I sought to map the types of 'queer
spaces' that are available for sexual minorities and delineate how they are
related to particular types of queer identity. Drawing on Henri Lefèbvre
(1991) and Michel Foucault (1986), I also wished to delineate the
complex relations between identity construction and spatial formation
evident in the queer spaces of Shanghai. The results of that effort are
reported here, where I will also discuss how queer culture in Shanghai is
configured within debates of cosmopolitanism and urban politics.

Cosmopolitanism and Queer Spaces

The two epigraphs to this chapter demonstrate the central role that sexu-
ality plays in constructing an 'imagination' of cosmopolitanism, both for
Shanghai and for China, both by foreign visitors and by the Chinese who

live in the city. Cosmopolitanism has been a contested concept in academic discussions in recent years (Appiah 2006; Beck 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2007; Binnie 2006; Brennan 1997; S. Donald, Kofman, & Kevin 2009; Harvey 2009; Morgan & Banham 2007; Robbins & Cheah 1998; Rofel 2007b; Schein 1999a; M. M.-h. Yang 1997). It is understood both as a philosophy of world citizenship which transcends state boundaries and a term for people's skills and attitudes towards diversity and difference (Binnie & Skeggs 2006: 13). In this chapter, I deploy the concept of 'imagined cosmopolitanism' developed by anthropologist Louisa Schein (1999a), who in turn draws on Benedict Anderson (1983) to highlight the ways in which cosmopolitanism works as a social imaginary shared by people who may never have met each other but who embrace a common sense of both belonging and aspiration. That this sense of commonality is imagined does not necessarily render the feeling of being cosmopolitan less real. Imagination has performative dimensions and often translates into social realities through people's lived experiences.

Schein observes that people in postsocialist China produce individualities (which they often believe should break away from socialist collectivism) in innovative ways including by participating in practices of consumption. Such participation is not, however, equally available to every member of the society in the same way. Schein stresses that it is important to 'put some inequalities back into the picture':

> Assuming a state of generalised yearning, then, does not presume that all who crave goods are equally driven to produce distinct selves through acquisition. Just as the structures of feeling around transnational commodity desire differ in each historical moment, so too is the political-economic context for those desires highly divergent. (1999a: 369)

Certainly, people from different social backgrounds may imagine cosmopolitanism in divergent ways. Cosmopolitanism as a social utopia coincides with growing social inequalities in a society, especially in urban spaces.

If access to diversity is at the core of the cosmopolitan imagination, free expression of gender and sexuality is certainly part of this project of imagining cosmopolitanism. In their study of the production and consumption of cosmopolitan space in Manchester's Gay Village, Jon Binnie and Beverley Skeggs (2006) call for a reconsideration of social inequality within cosmopolitanism and highlight the intersection of

sex and class. Like Manchester, queer cosmopolitanism in Shanghai is fraught with hopes and despairs, tensions and precariousness, with its evident racial and class politics as well as its reference to an urban/rural divide. As Bruce Robbins (1998) cautions, cosmopolitanism should not be considered as a utopian world of universal love and mutual understanding, as it points instead to a domain of contested politics. And, as Rofel (2007), Schein (1999) and Yang (1997) point out, the imagination of cosmopolitanism in China remains closely tied up to both global capitalism and transnational neoliberalism. The ability to negotiate cosmopolitanism is classed, raced, gendered, and sexed. And these disparities are manifest in different queer spaces in Shanghai.

I would like to juxtapose three types of queer spaces from Shanghai in relation to three types of same-sex oriented subjects. In so doing, I create 'dialectical images' (Benjamin 1999) representing Shanghai's cosmopolitanism and delineating how gays and lesbians in Shanghai imagine cosmopolitanism in different ways through various ways of using and appropriating urban spaces. Dialectics, according to Henri Lefèbvre (1976), does not simply refer to historicity and historical time, it also recognizes the importance of space, what 'takes place' there and what a space is used for, hence revealing the contradictions of space. In a similar vein, Walter Benjamin (1999) uses the technique of dialectical images to describe the city formed through metropolitan industrialization and high capitalism. Dianne Chisholm, who writes on queer spaces in English literary representation, stresses the spatial dimension of dialectical imaging, which aims to 'represent the space of the city and the space of city history in montage' (2005: 10–11). She also refers this to Benjamin's philosophy of history. Benjamin (1999) speaks against the notion of a linear, progressive history and views history as the space of an era that clashes with the other eras. By 'collecting and recollecting sites and citations not yet incorporated into official history or lost in the fragmentation of perception that characterizes urban experience', it is possible to reveal 'contradictions that capitalism's panoramas of expanse and narratives of progress obscure' (Chisholm 2005: 11).

Sex and the City: Queering Shanghai's Cityscape

Shanghai has been imagined as a gendered and sexualized city in popular cultural representations. Shanghai's twentieth-century modernity

is often discussed as embodied in women and prostitutes (Hershatter 1997; Lee 1999; Y. Wang 2007b). The city was simultaneously called the 'Paris of the Orient' and 'whore of the Orient' in the colonial era (Yatsko 2003). The experiences and passions of foreign expatriates, tourists, compradors, literati, women, and prostitutes made the city extremely cosmopolitan in the 1920s and 30s (Lee 1999). After 1949, the communist state transformed it into an industrial city and a revolutionary city. Prostitutes and homosexuals, which used to be a hallmark of the city's cosmopolitanism, were ordered to transform themselves into socialist subjects at the beginning of the Maoist era. But China's reform and opening-up at the end of the twentieth century revived the city's sexual landscape in the public space. A booming sex industry and a vibrant youth culture have appeared in the city. Shanghai seems to be 'opening-up' under post-Mao China's 'reform and open-up' policy (Farrer 2002). It stands at the forefront of imagining a cosmopolitan and, as Rofel (2007) puts it, a 'desiring China'.

Gay spaces in Shanghai have undergone significant changes in the past three decades. According to Lee San, a local gay man whom I interviewed and who lived through several decades of changes in Shanghai's queer scene, Shanghai's queer public space started in the 1970s and 80s with 'beats', or cruising places such as parks, river banks and public toilets.[4] One of the earliest meeting places for queer people, according to him, was the small garden on Hankou Road. Together with its adjacent areas, including the Bund and the banks of the Suzhou River, this part of town was called 'the Golden Triangle' (*jin sanjiao*) by local queer people. In a popular online queer story titled *Once Upon a Time in Shanghai* (*Shanghai wangshi*), Zhang Haoyin (2003) recalls:

> The Bund is a strange place. She [the Bund] is always changing. In the 1980s, there was the 'lovers' wall' (*qinglü qiang*). [The place was so busy that] sometimes people had to pay in order to get a place there. There were also jobless young people who used to hang out there. Later, together with the newsstand at Fuzhou Road, the Bund formed a 'homosexual triangle' (*tongxinglian zhijiao*). You could often see single handsome young men standing there and looking around, or several young people flirting and laughing with each other. They seemed to have inexhaustible energy.

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4.   For discussions of the transformation of urban spaces in relation to sexual minorities in other Chinese cities, see Wei 2007 and Fu 2015.

In recent years, shopping centres, restaurants, cafes and bars have been popular meeting places for relatively well-off young queer people in Shanghai. The density of people in these public spaces makes it relatively safe for queer people to meet. Thieves, robbers and 'money boys' (male prostitutes) who frequent more isolated parks and 'beats' seldom patronize these commercial places. These are often sites where fashion, lifestyle and class distinction are publicly represented and thus often symbolized. Many queer intervewees identified Starbucks cafes as popular meeting places, in part because, as one explained, cafes and bars have a 'petit bourgeois ambience' (*xiaozi qingdiao*). The common phrases 'petit bourgeois ambience' and 'middle-class lifestyle' bespeak young people's understanding of cosmopolitanism as deeply intertwined with class, and their desire to belong to certain social classes.

According to Lee San, 'pink' gay bars and clubs began to appear in Shanghai in the early 1990s, with Eddy's and Erdingmu being among the first of them.[5] They shifted their locations many times and were closed several times for various reasons.[6] More bars mushroomed in the late 1990s, together with numerous clubs (*huisuo*), saunas, hair salons and massage parlours. Many of these commercial venues are located west of the Huangpu River and inside the main city centre or districts such as Jing'an, Luwan, Huangpu and Xuhui. Their geographical locations have become a dominant factor in attracting different groups of clientele. Generally speaking, commercial venues in the inner city areas more often attract international and middle-class customers, whereas commercial venues in some less favourably-located districts, such as Yangpu and Hongkou, cater mostly to working-class and migrant customers.

Although such an introduction to Shanghai's local queer history may help people who are not familiar with the topic to grasp a broad picture

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5. 'Pink' is a term with queer associations, such as 'pink bar' and 'pink economy'.

6. Apart from reasons such as termination of land leases and demolition of old neighbourhoods, Lee San explained that one reason many gay bars in Shanghai stay closed for long periods of time is the bar owners' pragmatism. 'They do not have a sense of serving the community,' he said, 'that is why as soon as the bars do not make profits, they shut them down.' Yutian, another interviewee from Shanghai, also points out the rapid changes in Shanghai's gay scene: 'New bars open and close every year. A once-most-popular bar loses its popularity in just a few months. People crowd to other bars and forget the old ones, which close very quickly.'

of its background, the shortcomings of any such description are also obvious and they will be demonstrated in the next few sections.

The gay bars and clubs in Shanghai should be understood both as contemporary transnational queer spaces and as social spaces that have evolved from and retain links to China's homoerotic past. Before 1949, urban queer spaces existed mainly in the environment of classical Chinese opera theatre (Sang 2003; Jing 2009; Liang 2010). The theatrical space was where desire and money were exchanged, often between rich patrons and opera singers. Homoeroticism, considered an 'obsession', was widely practised in that setting (Kang 2009; Wu 2004). The reform of opera theatres in 1949 completely changed the function and status of the theatre. The theatre becomes a formal location with little personal desires and intimacies exchanged between the performers and their patrons. Instead, this social space is transferred to pubs and clubs, where the exchange of money and desire usually takes place between performers and clients. Gay bars and clubs are not simply commercial and recreational spaces influenced by transnational practices; they are also new social spaces developed in connection with China's historical social spaces.[7]

This expansion of queer social spaces happened just as the use of the Internet and social media became more and more popular in the queer communities. The Internet and social media have been the preferred way for dating for many gays and lesbians because of their anonymity and the ease of locating people through queer websites and dating apps, compared to the difficulty and the risk involved in offline dating. China's queer community 'pink paper' reports that there were more than 160 queer websites in China in July 2000, a number that increased to 340 in June 2004. In 2006, there were more than 3,000 queer websites in the form of personal web pages or blogs. Boysky (*yangguang didai*), a queer

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7. Although this book primarily deals with gay identities in contemporary China, we should not assume that China's historical legacies are irrelevant. Indeed, today's queer sexuality is still subject to the influence of the past, and traditional concepts of gender, sexuality and identity still leave traces on contemporary queer subject formation, although the rupture between the 'premodern' and 'modern' episteme of sexuality is also evident. Due to the limit of space, this chapter has not delved into the discussion of the traditional concepts of homoeroticism. For a detailed description of homoeroticism in premodern China, see Hinsch 1990; Wu 2004; and Zhang 2001.

community web portal, has a click rate of 70,000 times a day. (Tong 2008: 177–8).

The increasing popularity of queer websites and dating apps in China contributes to new forms of sociality and community. Many people meet online first, followed by an offline meeting. They not only meet online through queer websites and QQ instant-message groups, but meet off-sline to have parties, play sports and engage in other pastimes.[8] Online and offline spaces are increasingly intertwined. Many queer people attend community events using their online names and avatars. Relatively few people who participate in these community events ask, or care about, what another person's 'real name' is. Names are not considered to be a matter of 'authenticity' or 'sincerity', nor are they components of some sort of 'essentialized self'. Online communication brings new and transformative conceptions of the self, identity, human relations and sociality. Homosexuality, as Foucault suggests, denotes a way of life:

> Another thing to distrust is the tendency to relate the question of homosexuality to the problem of 'who am I?' and 'what is the secret of my desire?' It would be better to ask oneself 'what relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied and modulated?' The problem is not to discover the truth of sex but rather to use homosexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships. And no doubt that's the real reason why homosexuality is not a form of desire but something desirable. Therefore we have to work at becoming homosexuals and not be obstinate in recognising who we are. (1996: 204)

Alongside this change, new forms of queer community organization appeared. The discovery of HIV/AIDS in China since 1985 made queer issues visible to the public in a new way. The Chinese government began to acknowledge the existence of queer groups and the importance of HIV/AIDS prevention in the late 1990s. Queer NGOs have grown in major Chinese cities, funded by international foundations and the Chinese government.[9] Although the link between queer identities and

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8. For a more detailed account of a historical review of the queer spaces in Shanghai, see the Shanghai LGBT Pride week panel discussion: http://www.iboysky.com/inews/guonei/200906/26219.shtml. Accessed 11 July 2009.

9. Most of the HIV/AIDS campaigns involve mobilization of the grassroots queer community, which entails the funding of NGOs in different parts of China. As

public health discourse may contribute to the further stigmatization of queer identities, the significant role that queer NGOs play in identity construction and community formation is undisputable (X. He 2006; Jones 2007; D. Li 2004).

China's queer NGOs started from community hotlines and newsletters in the late 1990s. The earliest queer NGOS include: the Beijing *Tongzhi* Hotline started in 1997 and the *Friend Exchange* (*pengyou tongxin*) community newsletter in 1998. After 2000, with the Chinese government's recognition of the HIV/AIDS issue in China, more and more NGOs were founded. There were more than 120 queer NGOs in China in 2007 (Tong et al. 2008: 248). Most NGOs were funded by such international foundations as the Ford Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Chi-Heng Foundation. Some were established by the National Centre for Disease Control (CDC) affiliated to China's Ministry of Public Health, and they were often referred to as Government-Organized NGOs, or GONGOs. NGOs and GONGOs often compete against each other for limited funding and resources. At the National Conference on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Treatment among Men Who Have Sex with Men that I attended in November 2008, the clash of interests among different NGOs became the spotlight of the conference.[10] Such a phenomenon has often been described as *neihong* (internal struggle) or *butuanjie* (not being united) (Ho 2005).

There is no shortage of such queer NGOs in Shanghai. A gay man who works for one such organization told me that queer NGOs in Shanghai are less antagonistic to each other than those in other cities. Shanghai's prominent position in transnational capitalism has contributed to its

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most of these NGOs are funded for 'projects' (*xiangmu*), a great many disappear when the projects are over. Some interviewees have remarked that these NGOs are short-lived and their work lacks sustainablility. Also, the clashes of interest between different NGOs and foundations have caused concern. At a queer NGO conference on HIV/AIDS held in Beijing in December 2008, Zhang Beichuan specifically addressed the problems of 'lack of sustainability' (*quefa chixuxing*) and 'internal struggle' (*neihong*) in queer grassroots organizations.

10. The full name of the conference is Working Conference on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Treatment among MSM Groups, the Ten-Year Anniversary Celebration of the *Friends Exchange* Project, and Berry & Martin Prize Awarding Ceremony. The conference was organized jointly by the China Preventive Medicine Association and the *Friends Exchange* Project led by Zhang Beichuan from the Medical School of Qingdao University. I thank Professor Zhang for his kind invitation.

increasing significance in global biopolitics. Almost no philanthropic foundation will miss Shanghai in their implementation of humanitarian programmes in China. NGOs in Shanghai return the generosity of these international foundations with 'accurate' figures and statistics about Chinese society. Moreover, each organization in Shanghai has its clear range of responsibility and target groups, and their interests do not clash so directly. My informant attributes this to the less political, less aggressive and more pragmatic personality of the Shanghainese, which I will address later in this chapter when I compare perceived differences between local queer cultures in Shanghai and Beijing. It is important to note that the financial support from international foundations marks the cannibalization of the China's civil society by transnational capitalism, which competes intensely against the Chinese government's reassertion of its power over the queer communities in China. The establishment of, and competition among, NGOs and GONGOs would not have been possible without the cooperation and competition between transnational capitalism and the Chinese state.

In this process, a new social identity, 'Men Who Have Sex With Men' (*nannan xing xingwei renqun*), or MSM, has emerged in the public health discourse. The English abbreviation of the term, MSM, has been widely used by the Chinese government and queer NGOs in connection with HIV/AIDS prevention efforts. Interestingly, not everyone in China speaks English and can pronounce the term clearly, considering the awkward combination of the three English letters. The term is often pronounced as MSN (an instant messenger), or SM (sadomasochism), or even MSG. These slippages in mimicry manifest the complex process of cultural translation and demonstrate the ambivalent agency of the non-Western cultures in globalization (Bhabha 1994).

Transnational and Commercial Queer Spaces

Successful as the Shanghai LGBT Pride Week in 2009 was, careful observers are quick to point out that its organizers and participants are predominantly Western, white and middle class. The working language of the festival was a mixture of English and Chinese. The logos, banners, advertisements, and even the website of Pride Week were exclusively in English. The event organizer offered explanations for this, including that use of the English language reduced the likelihood that the Chinese

government would intervene. Drawing on the lessons of failed LGBT cultural festivals and queer film festivals held in Beijing in the previous few years, the organizers decided to limit publicity to an English-speaking audience.[11] Despite this, they were still warned by the police to limit the crowds, keep the noise down and cancel some events.[12]

Negotiating with the Chinese state was not the only reason for organizers to use English for event publicity. The organizer, Shanghai LGBT Group, was established by foreign expatriates. It regularly publishes bilingual event information on their website and on social media. These events include pub quizzes, scavenger hunts, bowling, dinners, wine tasting and pub nights. Most of these events are not cheap for a local consumer. The high entrance fee for the festival also excluded many people: the inaugural dinner cost 150 *yuan* and the wine tasting party another 150 *yuan* in 2009. 'We welcome local participants,' an organizer told me, 'but we also want to make sure that participants are within a manageable number and that they feel comfortable with each other'. 'Feeling comfortable' is not only about the number of participants; it is also about class preferences and taste communities. The issue of class becomes pertinent here. For some foreign expatriates, working in a big metropolis like Shanghai, witnessing the rapid changes of the city, experiencing the excitement that the vibrant city life offers and having a few local Chinese friends all comprise their cosmopolitan disposition. For their Chinese counterparts, being able to participate in the 'global gay' scene with their international friends is equally symbolic of their own cosmopolitan outlook. In both cases, cosmopolitanism is a '*habitus*', a

11. The earliest LGBT cultural festival I have been able to locate in China was scheduled to be held in the 798 art district in northeast Beijing in December 2005. It was called to a halt by police (Cristini 2006; Macartney 2005).

12. 'We should not let anything happen that might embarrass the government,' Hannah Miller, organizer of the Shanghai LGBT Pride, said to a *New York Times* correspondent after returning from the impromptu sidewalk meeting. She described the impromptu meeting with the Chinese police as 'a close call'. (Jacobs 2009) It was apparent that the event organizer negotiated with the Chinese police and both parties compromised. The result of the negotiation was that the Pride Week could continue, but some events that might involve too many people had to be cancelled and the publicity of events had to be limited to the English-language media.

certain disposition intrinsically related to which social classes people imagine themselves to be members of (Bourdieu 1984).

To be gay is a kind of 'sexual capital' that places one in certain social strata and with particular class privileges. For example, many queer people in Shanghai feel that they are better positioned in Chinese society because they have more direct access to the international expatriate community in the city. One does not necessarily have to work in a foreign enterprise in order to be with people from other countries and cultures. The feeling of sharing the same sexual identity provides a sufficient reason for a local gay man to sit together and start a conversation with a Caucasian who comes from another part of the world. This makes some queer people in Shanghai feel that they are more urban and cosmopolitan than queer people in other Chinese cities who may have less knowledge about the West.

Apart from an imagined queer cosmopolitanism, being queer also establishes a set of hierarchies experienced as internal to queer culture. For Chinese gay men in Shanghai, the ability to communicate in English, having a group of international friends, reading local English newspapers such as *That's Shanghai* or *City Weekends*, going to the regular 'meet and greet' night on the last Thursday of each month at Frangipani, and enjoying a cocktail are the types of activities that locate one within the Shanghai-based version of a 'global gay' scene. They also comprise less harrowing versions of the 'technologies of the self', discussed by Foucault (1988b) and in Chapter 4 of this book. Needless to say, being this type of queer person does not come cheap, and not everyone can afford to be gay in this way. Some local Shanghai gay men I interviewed remarked that they did not know about the LGBT Pride Week until it was over. Others expressed a lack of interest, saying that it was foreigners' business and not designed for the Chinese. The type of 'global gay' identity represented by the glamorous Shanghai LGBT Pride is thus very exclusive.

On 12 December 2008, I attended a queer theatre première also organized by the Shanghai LGBT Group. Australian producer and director Michael Darragh put on the British queer play *Beautiful Thing* together with a group of foreign expatriates based in Shanghai. The play was performed in English, with a predominantly Caucasian cast and audience. To 'localize' the play, the director chose Derek Kwan, an Asian

American who worked in Shanghai, to perform one of the roles. A small number of the audience members were either fluent English speakers or came along with their Caucasian friends. Many of these worked in foreign enterprises or joint ventures, and many had studied or worked abroad. My conversations with them demonstrated that most of them were confident about the future of Shanghai. They cherished the work opportunities available in Shanghai and which, according to them, may not be available to those living in other cities. They seem to have what Aihwa Ong refers to as 'flexible citizenship', grounded in

> the cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions. In their quest to accumulate capital and social prestige in the global arena, subjects emphasize, and are regulated by, practices favouring flexibility, mobility, and repositioning in relation to markets, governments and cultural regimes. (1999: 6)

Ong insightfully points out that the mechanism on which such 'flexible citizenship' relies is the transnational flow of capital which has made the transnational flow of population possible. In an article about media and cosmopolitanism in Shanghai, Mayfair Yang also discusses the 'deterritorializing' effect of transnational capitalism on the Chinese state (1997: 297–8), arguing that the stability and rigidity of state logic is challenged and undermined by the restless and fluid nature of capitalism. Quoting Deleuze and Guattari (1983), Yang highlights the flows of desire that capitalism unleashes. Both Yang and Rofel use the term 'desire' to refer to a broad range of 'dreams, longings and aspirations that the Chinese citizen embodied' (2007b: 25). Here I would like to put 'desire' back into an Oedipal place that Deleuze and Guattari would reject, at least sufficiently to discuss sex and sexualities.

John D'Emilio (1997) has demonstrated that gay identity is a product of capitalism. Dennis Altman (2001), in his controversial book *Global Sex*, also observes the dissemination of globalised form of gay identity from the Euro-American West to other parts of the world. Although scholars tend to accuse Altman of being Eurocentric (or, rather, American-centric) (Martin 2003, 2008; Martin, Berry, & Yue 2003; Rofel 2007; Sullivan & Jackson 2001), they often downplay the eroding forces of global capitalism and the new sexual subjectivities emerging in and beyond the nation-state as a result of the global expansion of the

capital. Altman cautions against seeing these new sexual subjectivities as replicas of Western gay identity:

> Homosexuality becomes a particularly obvious measure of globalisation … Yet we must beware of reading too much into these scripts. What is happening in Bangkok, Rio and Nairobi is the creation of new forms of understanding and regulating the sexual self, but it is unlikely that they will merely repeat those forms which were developed in the Atlantic world. (2001: 100)

If we only focus on the glamour of queer scenes in bars and clubs, we may well get the impression that the gay scene in Shanghai testifies to Altman's (1996) notion of 'global queering'. At ten o'clock on a Saturday night, I find myself at Eddy's, one of the longest running gay bars in Shanghai. The bar has a modern design, with red lighting, Chinese antiques, and modern art. The red lighting at the bar is designed to create an effect of ambiguity, connoting both sexual innuendo and political subversion. Most eye-catching are the paintings on the wall portraying the Maoist 'comrade', serving as both a pun and a parody of communist ideology. The crowd is a mixture of foreign expatriates and local Chinese. English seems to be the working language. The bartender is busy but friendly. One glass of beer, Budweiser or Corona, costs 30 to 40 *yuan* (3–4 British pounds). The DJ is playing trendy music mixed with a global flavour, but not loud enough to disturb conversations. Men in tight T-shirts and jeans show off their well-toned bodies. The Chinese gay men here are mostly in their 20s or 30s and they are young, relatively well-off and very confident. They proudly command both economic and cultural capital and are active participants in the transnational queer scene. This might be anywhere in the world: London, Paris, New York, Berlin, or San Francisco. It seems in this place that Shanghai has become a very transnational and cosmopolitan city for gays and lesbians. The Chinese gay men at Eddy's also seem to have Ong's (1999) 'flexible citizenship'. Some work in international companies and travel to different parts of the world. They appear to negotiate their sexual identity and cultural identity with ease: their being queer is not apparently in contradiction with their being Chinese. It is a 'double consciousness' (Gilroy 1993) of being both Chinese and transnational that gives the queer scene in Shanghai a sense of exoticness to both Chinese and foreign residents and visitors.

Most of the people I met in events organized by Shanghai LGBT groups and at these commercial gay bars identified themselves as 'gay', as in the frequently-used phrase *wo shi gay* (I am gay). The English word is not often translated into Chinese even in a conversation in Chinese. It does not need to be. It both embraces a transnational and cosmopolitan identity and manifests a classical Chinese aesthetics of *hanxu* (implicitness or reticence), that is, one does not need to articulate it clearly, at least not in Chinese.[13] Code switching, in this context, is an indirect gesture of 'coming out': at least, it suggests a move toward 'moving out', but the 'coming out' is apparently limited to people who understand English, or people who have similar class positions or education backgrounds. The English term 'gay' in this context can be considered both an 'out' strategy and a closet. Fran Martin discusses the dual, and ambivalent, meanings of 'coming out' politics in Taiwanese society in her book *Situating Sexualities*:

> I want to suggest that the pervasive practice of a particular way of representing homosexuality in contemporary Taiwan is one that inscribes '*tongxinglian*' as animated by an incessant movement between the poles of the hidden and the shown. Specifically, the discourse I am referring to tends to appeal to a dynamic alteration between the state of *yin* (concealment) and *xian* (disclosure), for example in such phrases as *yin er wei xian* (concealed and undisclosed) or *ruo yin ruo xian* (now-concealed, now disclosed) which cluster particularly thickly around figurations of homosexuality. (2003: 189)

Martin is talking about queer politics in Taiwanese society, but her insight certainly holds true in mainland China as well. I understand her discussion of the *yin/xian* dynamics as a critical dialogue with Eve Sedgwick (1990) and with Western gay identity politics in general. As Sedgwick argues in *Epistemology of the Closet*, homosexuality is closely related to several binary oppositions in the Western popular culture, including secrecy and disclosure, as well as the public and the private. One has to be either 'closeted' or 'out'. 'Coming out' is encouraged in the gay identity politics of the West, as it is directly related to the notions of 'truth' and 'authenticity', two privileged terms in the modern episteme. The importance of seeing and visibility is also raised. Martin's account

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13. For a discussion of the politics of reticence in Chinese queer communities, see Liu & Ding 2005.

points to the complexities and nuances of the 'closet' and 'coming out' politics in the Chinese context, in which dichotomies such as out/in, visibility/ invisibility, and authenticity/inauthenticity become blurred and contested. In the phrase *ruo yin ruo xian* (now concealed, now disclosed) and, I shall add, *shi yin shi xian* (at times concealed, at times disclosed), concealment and disclosure do not point to the authenticity of one's identity. Rather, they are historically and socially contingent. Indeed, for many gays and lesbians in China, one does not need to be completely 'in' or 'out'. Being 'in' and 'out' depends on the particular social setting and on the person that they are with. When to conceal and when to disclose one's identity, together with to whom, becomes a matter of politics.

It is worth mentioning that such 'global gay' identities are also products of capitalist consumption, which breaks away from old forms of social relations, be they Confucian ties of family and kinship, or socialist collective identities. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1977: 224) might be thought to have put such a challenge succinctly when they discuss the impact of capitalism on the 'old' social order in *The Communist Manifesto*:

> All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.

It seems that this 'global gay' identity is among the new identities that capitalism has brought about. But it would be problematic to attribute it entirely to capitalism in this way. The state also plays an important role in constructing identities and producing these desires, as I shall discuss in the next section in relation to the *tongzhi* identity.

Tongzhi *and the Space of 'Quality'*

At a high school gymnasium, I met Rio, Lee San, and Xiao Feilong. They are all members of a local queer group called Rainbow League (*caihong lianmeng*). Rainbow League hosts many interest groups, including sports, music, dance, reading and foreign languages. The three people I interviewed are all members of the volleyball group. They rent affordable sports venues from high schools and play volleyball every Sunday after-

noon. They know each other quite well, regularly meeting both offline and through the group's webpage and QQ (a Chinese-language instant messenger). People in this group prefer using the term *tongzhi* instead of the English term 'gay' or the often pathologized term *tongxinglian*.

Tony, a volunteer who works for a local queer NGO, told me that he hates the term *tongxinglian* because it is a stigmatized name for queer people. He does not like the English term 'gay', either, because it is foreign. 'Gay' often conjures up the image of promiscuous, sexually aggressive and emotionally unstable Western men. By contrast, *tongzhi* attaches more importance to *qing* (emotional attachment) instead of *xing* (sex). *Tongzhi* are also socially responsible citizens. They work hard, study hard and make significant contributions to society. For Tony, the only difference between *tongzhi* and straight people is their sexual orientation. *Tongzhi* are good citizens and thus should not be discriminated against. Those who volunteer in queer NGOs or participate in such community events as weekend sports are, moreover, good *tongzhi*. He did not mention who is not *tongzhi* or where the borders between *tongzhi* and non-*tongzhi* might lie. But for him, *tongzhi* are different from both Western 'gays' and the Chinese gay men who hang out in Eddy's Bar. This argument has also been proposed by Hong Kong scholar and activist Chou Wah-shan (2000). The rhetoric of *suzhi* (quality) seems to dominate in the construction of *tongzhi* identity: *tongzhi* are characterized by *gao suzhi* (high quality).

Suzhi is a popular rhetorical device in post-Mao China. It effectively distinguishes people by location, class, and education. This is a rhetoric that has been widely and effectively utilized by the Chinese government to legitimize social inequalities and to legitimate its governance. People with high *suzhi* seem to enjoy more rights and privileges than people who have low *suzhi*. This naturalises class and gender differences as well as an urban/rural divide. Furthermore, the state often launches different campaigns to 'improve' people's *suzhi*, to craft legitimate citizens and to facilitate its governance. Andrew Kipnis (2006) even considers *suzhi* as a 'keyword' for understanding governmentality in contemporary China. The state-initiated discourse of *suzhi*, which later gained great popularity in people's everyday lives, serves as an effective means to consolidate and reinforce social hierarchies (S. H. Donald & Zheng 2009a; Ho 2010; Jacka 2009; Kong 2010; Rofel 2007; Sigley 2009; Tomba 2009; Woronov 2009).

Tongzhi, therefore, are sexual subjects who fit into the agenda of the nation-state. On the Rainbow League website, the conduct guidelines for being a good *tongzhi* are clearly spelt out:

> Rainbow League advocates healthy lifestyles. Posting illegal, reactionary, and politically sensitive information is strictly forbidden. Postings that do not comply to the policy will be deleted and their authors' membership rescinded.

But if *tongzhi* are legitimate political subjects who abide by the rules of society and being good citizens for the state, a problem still remains between the Rainbow League's representation of the queer subject. In this way, *tongzhi* citizenship is desexualized in public discourse. If *tongzhi* is indeed characterized by *qing* (deep sentiment) instead of *xing* (sex), as Chou (2000) suggests, then the multiplicities of sexuality have also been reduced to a singularity, in relation to which some forms of sexuality have been marginalized.

Notably, the meaning of the term *tongzhi* is multiple, ambiguous and open to interpretation, as my genealogy of the term in the introduction of this book demonstrates. The 'territorialization' of the term by queer community groups deserves our attention. Here we can see the local queer communities' efforts to define *tongzhi* as a 'proper' form of cultural citizenship. 'Cultural citizenship', according to Rofel, refers to 'a process in which culture becomes a relevant category of affinity' and a trope that conveys 'novel processes of subjectification and new modes of inclusion and exclusion' (2007: 94–5). The queer communities' identification with the *tongzhi* identity is such a process of becoming middle-class and 'Chinese', which simultaneously manifests desires for distinction and normalization. *Tongzhi* is understood as 'Chinese', which marks itself as different from the transnational 'gay'. *Tongzhi* is also understood as a form of middle-class citizenship, which distinguishes people who are identified as *tongzhi* from those who are stigmatized as *tongxinglian*, a subject that I am going to delineate below.

Tongxinglian *and Stigmatized Queer Spaces*

Located within a dilapidated working-class neighbourhood, Lailai Dance Hall is one of the older homoerotic sites in Shanghai. But neither 'gay' nor *tongzhi* are appropriate terms to describe the people who come here. People in this venue are mostly older and more local, and they are

more accustomed to referring to themselves as *tongxinglian* (same-sex love; homosexuals). Lailai Dance Hall, as the name suggests, is a place for ballroom dances. Ballroom dances used to be popular in the 1920s and 30s as a sign of a modern Shanghai. They revived in the 1980s partly in response to the state call for 'reform and open-up'. With the emergence of disco bars that attracted many young people in the 1990s, ballroom dance became a social marker of generation and age and a location for once fashionable youth who had become middle-aged or elderly citizens. Young men who come to Lailai Dance Hall seeking 'sugar daddies' are ironically referred to as the 'archaeological team' (*kaogudui*) in Chinese gay slang. The dance hall opens only three nights a week: from 7 to 9 pm every Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Most middle-aged *tongxinglian* who come here are married men who slip away from their wives and children to meet their fellow *tongxinglian*. The entrance fee is manageable. Snacks and drinks in the dance hall are served at supermarket prices. Evidently, this place caters to people of lower social classes and with limited incomes.

The dance hall is large. People sit in groups, drinking and chatting on the old sofas or plastic chairs lined up against the wall. They eat sunflower seeds quickly while drinking local-brand beer, throwing the nutshells carelessly on the floor. In the centre of the dance hall, many people dance in pairs. Most music is a slow-pace waltz adapted from popular songs from the 1980s and 90s. There is a stage in the front of the dance hall, where performers, including many cross-dressers, are singing and dancing. The whole place has a relaxed atmosphere. At nine o'clock, the music stops and people stand up and leave the dance hall. Within five minutes, the recently packed place is suddenly empty, with only the waiters there doing the clean-up. Everybody seems to know where to go: theXiahaimiao Park.

Xiahaimiao, a small road-side public park, is a five-minute walk from Lailai Dance Hall. Crossing the dirty neighbourhood and passing by some restaurants, hairdressers, massage parlours and sex shops, many of which offer same-sex services, a procession of flamboyantly-dressed men crosses the narrow streets, talking loudly and flirting with each other as they head to their destination. People in the neighbourhood seem used to the spectacle and no one bothers to make a fuss.

The park is dark, with only a couple of roadside lamps and the lights from shop windows on the other side of road. People sit in groups on

the park benches, continuing their conversation and flirtation. Many enjoy examining passers-by, assessing them for their sexual appeal. And some walk up and down, clearly trying to catch others' attention. Some braver individuals walk directly up to strangers and try to start a conservation; a few even begin their greetings by touching others' bodies. Public bodily contact seems quite common here, and accepting other people's touches usually leads to more intimate touches and even sex. A polite refusal, however, is understood and accepted without causing much offence. In the bushes, some people have already found their sex partners and started to enjoy one-night stands ('419' in Chinese gay slang). Despite the flamboyance of some, most people who come here are casually dressed. Some are less neatly dressed, and their accents indicate that they hark from other provinces. Such *waidiren* (people from other places) are usually looked down upon by the local Shanghainese.

One Shanghainese I talked to in the park expressed his contempt for 'these people': 'they are *waidiren*', he said. According to him, some of them are migrant workers from poor areas in China. They have lower *suzhi* than the Shanghainese. 'Only lower-class people come here,' he said, quite oblivious to the irony of the fact that he is there himself, 'most do not have a decent income. Some even come here after nine o'clock to meet the crowd without wanting to pay the five *yuan* entrance fee at the Lailai Dance Hall.' This man also warned me that some of the younger and nicer-looking people are MBs ('money boys', or rent boys). According to him, those MBs are not gay and they engage in homosexual sex only to earn money. 'These people can be dangerous. Some even cheat or blackmail their customers.' He suggested that I should not hang out with *waidiren* and MBs. I was surprised that I was somehow not considered as a *waidiren* by him even though I do not come from Shanghai. While my clothes and my standard Chinese (*putonghua*) pronunciation probably helped, *waidiren* in this context does not necessarily refer to those who are born in other Chinese cities and provinces. It is rather an identity opposed to the seemingly urban and well-educated identity; it is an abject identity cast onto people from the countryside or those who engage in commercial sexual activities.

It is widely believed in Shanghai's queer communities that people who go to Eddy's bar or people who participate in the Rainbow League activities have better *suzhi* than those who go to the Lailai Dance Hall

and the Xiahaimiao Park. Such social discrimination acts like a 'structuring structure' (Bourdieu 1984) and it points to different targets in different contexts. For instance, people who go to both Lailai Dance Hall and Xiahaimiao discriminate against people who only go to Xiahaimiao, simply because the latter have not paid five *yuan* to meet other queer people. At the Xiahaimiao Park, urbanites discriminate against rural people; Shanghainese discriminate against people from other provinces; masculine people discriminate against effeminate people. Everyone seems to establish their identities through repudiation of the other.

The rhetoric of *suzhi* originally came from state policy as a biopolitical strategy to facilitate the administration of populations and to legitimize social inequalities. It has now been accepted and internalized by people who construct their own identities in reference to other identities. Across this social field, the difference between 'gay', *tongzhi* and *tongxinglian* is not simply linguistic, but social and cultural as well. It unveils a multiplicity of differences and social disparities. It also points to the impact of such factors as globalization, nationalism, and commercialisation on people's daily lives and individual experiences.

A Tale of Two Cities

Ulrich Beck (2007) defines cosmopolitanism as the 'erosion of distinct boundaries and the emergence of internal globalization or dissolution of the nation-state in which the "us" and "them" of social identities is constructed less negatively'. His vision seems extremely utopian. Certainly, the power of the nation-state in constructing sex and sexuality has not diminished. Apart from a heightened sense of national identity ('Chineseness'), gays and lesbians in Shanghai also subscribe to a distinct local identity ('Shanghainese-ness'). People I interviewed seem to agree that there is not only a cultural specificity attached to the Chinese *tongzhi* identity, which differs greatly from the Western 'gay', but also a cultural specificity that is attached to Shanghai's locality as well. Queer people from Beijing are often used as a point of reference for comparison and contrast. For instance, Beijing gays and lesbians are perceived by my respondents as very politically conscious and too 'serious'. They always have numerous meetings to attend and a lot of social activism to attend to. That's why some influential queer public events, including the queer film festivals and queer art exhibitions, are

held in Beijing. Gays and lesbians in Shanghai perceive themselves to be more relaxed and pragmatic; they celebrate everydayness and enjoy entertainment. While Beijing's queer NGOs hold numerous meetings and are concerned about such serious topics as 'the future of China's queer movement', their Shanghai counterparts are having dinners, playing tennis, or singing Karaoke. Peter, a local queer NGO leader, told me that his organization had to break away from its headquarters in Beijing, because the Beijing side is very dominant and bureaucratic. 'It's simply not the Shanghai style', he added.

People often attribute two characteristics to queer culture in Shanghai. First, gays and lesbians in Shanghai know how to take care of themselves and how to enjoy life. As Eddy, the boss of Eddy's bar, explained, queer people in Shanghai 'know how to take care of their bodies and the importance of going to sleep early. What Shanghai queers do best is to buy makeup, wear famous-brand clothes, and make themselves more beautiful' (Yatsko 2003: 206). If consumption constructs one aspect of local queer identity, Yatsko continues, rationality is another characteristic frequently contrasted with the 'irrationality' of queer people in other cities:

> In Beijing, they're much more open and passionate about it [queer politics]. They go with the flow and then pay the consequences. Here, in a typical Shanghai style, everyone is always calculating. They're always thinking of the consequences of their actions. If you go to a disco in Dalian [in northeast China's Liaoning province], when the hip music goes on, everyone heads for the dance floor. In Beijing, half the people do and in Shanghai, no one does, then suddenly someone saunters up there.

This 'rationality' is closely tied up with the capitalist logic of production and consumption. The widely acknowledged image of Shanghainese pragmatism and sophistication is consistent with people's recognition of Shanghai as a commercial city and its prominent role in modern Chinese history (Lee 1999; Wasserstrom 2009). As Robin Visser (2010) suggests, China's two major cities, Beijing and Shanghai, are imagined in different ways: 'Beijing as a space for performing identity, and Shanghai as a space to be consumed' (p. 21). One gay Chinese-American who lived in both Shanghai and Beijing explained to me that Shanghainese rationality is more 'modern' than that of unsophisticated folks in other

parts of China. Popular jokes have it that Shanghainese consider people from elsewhere to be 'country bumpkins'. Shanghai's queer identity also bears the imprint of this cultural superiority and imagined cosmopolitanism.

I do not think that the generalizations with which my respondents work are necessarily accurate, but I am interested in why people subscribe to such distinctions. I can sense the impact here of a rising cultural nationalism in modern and contemporary China that has constructed a new version of the China/West binary, along with the ambivalent antagonism embedded in such a dichotomy. It also reflects a strong sense of locality tied to regional differences accentuated by China's central planning system, a legacy which derives from the socialist past. The household registration system (*hukou*), to a great extent, has constructed a heightened sense of locality. *Hukou* gives each person an identity that is related to geographical location. Where one comes from becomes an enduring marker of one's identity.[14] Uneven regional and local development has reinforced this sense of differences in spaces and places.

A Shanghai taxi driver poured out all his grudges against Beijing to me when he heard that I had just come from the nation's capital. According to him, Shanghai sacrificed enormously in the Maoist and early post-Mao era. Otherwise, Shanghai would have been more prosperous by now. The taxi driver's remarks remind me of the importance ethnographers must place on ordinary people's emotions and experiences. His complaints shed an interesting light on why people subscribe to such regional and local differences within queer culture, and what state policies may mean to the ordinary people's lived experiences, feelings and emotions, including in queer culture. Indeed, identities serve not only to provide people with a sense of belonging, but perhaps also as a type of everyday politics that constitutes people's daily experiences. As state policy makes local identities possible, local people can also utilize these identities to resist and to subvert state discourses.

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14. One of the most popular questions that people ask in China when they meet for the first time is, 'where do you come from?' Where one comes from is closely associated with urban/rural divide, class and certain stereotypes about the locality. For discussions about local and translocal cultures in China, see Goodman 1986, 1997; Oakes & Schein 2006.

Classed Cosmopolitanism

I have so far discussed three types of same-sex subjects in Shanghai's queer communities: the transnational and multilingual 'gay', the young and energetic *tongzhi* and the older and often stigmatized *tongxinglian*. These subjectivities are not totally distinct from or exclusive of one another. They converge and overlap in different ways. A person can identify himself as 'gay' or *tongzhi* or *tongxinglian*, depending on where he is and how he understands these terms. It is important to note that identities, and not only for queer people, are always multiple, fluid and contingent. They are never fixed or singular. We should also bear in mind that identities are as socially constructed as they are individually constructed. People do have different understandings of identities and different ways to negotiate with identities.

The three terms, 'gay', *tongzhi* and *tongxinglian*, are nevertheless different social identities at least because they have different histories as identities. 'Gay' is the subject of Shanghai's transnationalism and cosmopolitanism; it celebrates the success of China's reform and opening-up. *Tongzhi* fosters a group of young, well-educated, rights-conscious, socially respectable and consumption-oriented urban youth. And the term *tongxinglian* was invented by medical and public health professionals to define the target population of HIV/AIDS prevention and police intervention. The term also bears witness to situations, understood in Shanghai as more common in the past or in other parts of China, in which queer people have difficulty negotiating their identities with their families, work, and the wider part of society.

These three subjects seem to have their own spaces, located in different parts of Shanghai. 'Gays' find their way to the trendy bars such as Eddy's, Shanghai Studio, D2 Club and Frangipani, mostly located in the former French concessions and other gentrified neighbourhoods (or 'gaybourhoods' in the transnational gay slang). *Tongzhi* seem happy with the more egalitarian and locally/community organized activities such as sports, singing Karaoke, and having dinner together. They appear more interested in 'building a harmoniously gay community' and 'improving the *suzhi* of the gay community', as many *tongzhi* websites claim. Their sense of queer space is based on shared activities and events, and they can appropriate a restaurant or a sports ground as queer space under certain circumstances. And *tongxinglian* find themselves

in the now-unfashionable dance halls, public gardens, public toilets, saunas and bathhouses, hairdressers and massage parlours that offer sex services. In this way, the whole city's sexual landscape is unevenly hierarchical. Same-sex practices, far from being natural or corporeal, are clearly marked by social difference.

Queer space, in Ira Tattleman's words, involves

> the construction of a parallel world, one filled with possibility and pleasure, while functioning simultaneously as an intervention in the world of dominant culture. … Queer space provides an alternative means of worldly inhabitation, makes visible the already in-place hierarchies, and embraces the reciprocity of space and sexual identity. In its place of opportunity, we are free to construct ourselves in flexible, unspecified, and unpredictable ways. (Tattleman 2000: 223–4)

Tattleman seems to be very optimistic about the new possibilities that queer space brings about. I, however, wish to emphasize the point that queer space 'makes visible the already in-place hierarchies'. Like Binnie and Skeggs (2006: 221), I want to point out the issue of class in the production of queer spaces: 'behind and within the articulation and desire for the fluidity of identity associated with the use of the term cosmopolitan, the rigidity of class and lesbian and gay identity are produced'. They further emphasize the issue of class in such articulations: 'class entitlement plays a major role in articulating and enabling who can be included and excluded from this space.' (Ibid.)

In a similar vein, Louisa Schein cautions us against being overly optimistic about and celebratory of cosmopolitanism:

> Imagined Cosmopolitanism, then, is about conceiving a tauntingly chimeric world of spatial, class, gender, and race mobility, where State borders and economic exclusions cease to be intransigent constraints … At the same time, it is fundamentally about the perdurance of immobility. (1999: 223–4)

Returning to the beginning of this chapter, then, when we say that Shanghai is a queer metropolis and that the Shanghainese embrace cosmopolitanism, we may need to ponder what types of 'gay' identity we are talking about, and what is hidden beneath the gleaming dreams of Shanghai's urban cosmopolitanism that seems to bring them together.

This chapter has taken readers to various queer spaces and queer subjectivities in Shanghai. It also sheds light on how queer spaces and

subjectivities have been constructed by transnational capitalism, the Chinese state and local governance. It points to the various ways in which ordinary people negotiate urban space and make sense of their transnational, national, regional and local identities, intersected with different types of sexual subjectivities. In the process, I have demonstrated how neoliberalism shapes desiring subjects in urban China, and how it shapes desires unevenly and hierarchically: as it reinforces existing social hierarchies, it also creates new ones. Queer subject formation is thus both a product and an accelerator of transnational capitalism and global neoliberalism in China.

In the next chapter, I will focus on the *tongzhi* subject, the most popular queer subject in China's queer communities today. By tracing a genealogy of the term, I reveal the politicized history of the term and unravel its radical political potential. The next chapter will also offer a brief overview of the history of queer activism in the postsocialist China. The history is not meant to be complete or authoritative, but I hope that it will shed light on the courage, ingenuity and perseverance of the queer comrades in mobilization.
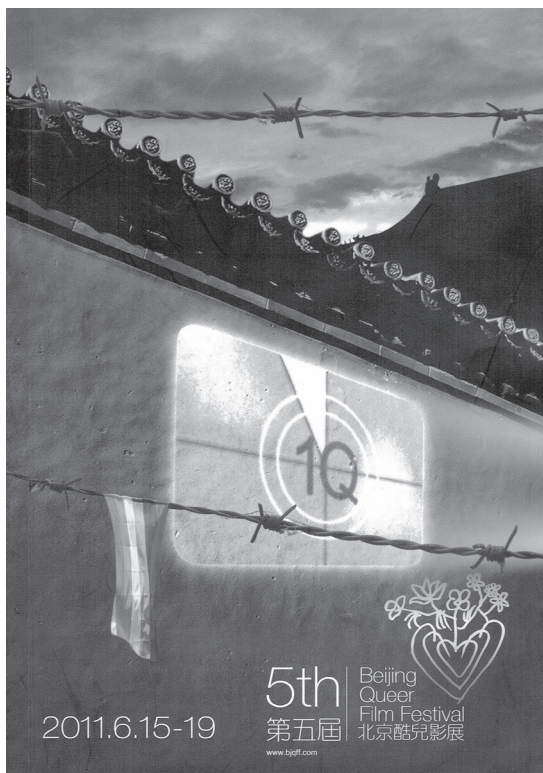
Figure 7: The 5th Beijing Queer Film Festival poster

Figure 8: Members of the Organising Committee of the 6th Beijing Queer Film Festival at the festival closing ceremony, Beijing, 23 June 2013 (photo courtesy of Liu Shi)

3.

From Comrade to Queer

A Genealogy of *Tongzhi*

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionising themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honoured disguise and borrowed language.

Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

In this chapter, I trace a brief genealogy of the term *tongzhi* in modern China. In doing so, I offer an insight into how an ordinary term has been resignified for different purposes in modern Chinese history since the beginning of the twentieth century. I suggest that we see the term *tongzhi* as an 'empty signifier' with no real referent and thus open to resignification. The term was invented to designate a political subjectivity embracing revolutionary and egalitarian ideals in the Republican and socialist eras for anti-feudalist, anti-imperialist, and anti-capitalist struggles. In the postsocialist era, the term was first appropriated by queer activists in Hong Kong and was soon picked up by queer people in the Sinophone sphere to articulate a postcolonial and Sinophone queer politics. In the early 2000s, the term was used in mainland China to refer to a homonormative identity politics influenced by China's neoliberalism. Its popularity and legitimacy, together with its complicity with a neoliberal state, has been challenged by other terms denoting same-sex desires, including *tongxinglian* and *ku'er*. Despite the hegemonic use of the term *tongzhi* in gay identity politics, I argue that yet another resigni-

fication of the term for a radical queer politics is possible, and that queer people in China must not give up the ongoing battle to fight against heteronormative and homonormative hegemonies.

This chapter draws on linguistic studies of the history of the term *tongzhi* (Y. Chen 2012; Liu & Chen 2015; A. Wong 2008a, 2008b) However, it differs from them as I do not consider terms such as *tongzhi*, *tongxinglian* and *ku'er* simply as linguistic phenomena; I see them as different types of subjectivity, constructed within divergent discourses and by various configurations of power. Words, especially words denoting identity categories, are performative; they usually translate into identifications, desires and social practices. It is upon this discursive basis of society that my discussion of *tongzhi* is built.

This chapter also offers a brief history of the queer activism in postsocialist China. I am less interested in writing a comprehensive history than offering a critical view of how different subjectivities, such as *tongxinglian*, *tongzhi* and *ku'er*, emerged under certain historical conditions and how they contested for hegemony in the postsocialist social space. In doing so, I hope to unravel and reinvigorate some of the radical political potential that the term *tongzhi* embodies.

Tongzhi *as an Empty Signifier*

In structural linguistics, a word, or a sign, has two components: the signifier, or the written and/or spoken form of the word, and the signified, the image that comes to the mind (de Saussure 1977). The relationship between a signifier and what is signified is arbitrary; it is fixed only through conventions, ideologies and hegemonic power relations. There is nothing natural or inevitable about a certain signifier being attached to a particular signified object or concept. 'Words are always filled with content and meaning drawn from behaviour and ideology' (Vlosinov 1986: 70). *Tongzhi*, for example, signified a political subjectivity during China's socialist era as a result of the socialist revolution, and it is used to signify a queer subject in today's China under neoliberal capitalism. In this sense, *tongzhi* is a shifting signifier that represents different things under changing historical conditions and discursive regimes. 'The meaning of a word is determined entirely by its context' (p. 32). What we need to ask, therefore, is not which type of signification is correct, or whether there is a misuse of a word, but what kind of social contexts and

power relations make certain significations possible and what are the impacts of such articulations.

The signifier-signified combination is usually used to refer to the 'referent', or the 'actual thing' (de Saussure 1977). When there is no 'actual thing' in the real world to refer to, or when a word does not have a fixed meaning, the signifier is often called a 'floating signifier', or an 'empty signifier' (Laclau 1996). The term 'people' (or *renmin* in Chinese), for example, is a commonly used category in politics. However, no one can pin down who the 'people' exactly are. Politicians often identify their own constituency or target audience as the taken-for-granted 'people'; social activists may, however, point to a different group as 'people'. The 'people' is, as such, an empty signifier, because there is no fixed group of human beings that can naturally and legitimately take up the position of 'people'. An empty signifier usually has to do with the limits of a signifying system; that is, it can only emerge if 'there is a structural impossibility in signification as such, and only if this impossibility can signify itself as an interruption (subversion, distortion, etcetera) of the structure of the sign' (Laclau 1996: 37). In other words, there has to be a need or demand to represent, or to bring out, something yet to exist in order to disrupt the system. And this need or demand constitutes the realm of politics.

Laclau (1996: 42) points out that the presence of empty signifiers is the very condition of hegemony. In the example of 'people', the meaning of the word 'people' depends on who has the power to define it. Those who have access to political power are also in control of producing and defining empty signifiers in order to create a social consensus and consolidate their own dominant position. For Gramsci (1992), hegemony describes how consent is secured for a particular social order and at a particular historical juncture, but only temporarily and thus open to contestation. For Laclau, hegemony is understood in terms of the signifying 'operation' and affective investment where a particular identity assumes a 'totality or universality' (Laclau 2005: 70–1). Neoliberalism, for instance, is a type of hegemonic articulation worldwide at the moment, but the articulation is continuously challenged and contested by counter-hegemonic struggles.

For Laclau, it is hegemonic relationships that produce empty signifiers, and such relationships are only temporary and open to change:

'Any hegemony is always unstable and penetrated by a constitutive ambiguity' (Laclau 1996: 44). It is then the task of subordinate groups who develop a critical vision of the society to challenge the hegemonic relationships, to seize the empty signifiers and change their meanings. The disruption of hegemonic relationships is inherent in the nature of the empty signifiers. Laclau ponders on the relationship between empty signifiers, hegemonic struggles and democratic politics:

> As society changes over time this process of identification [with the empty signifier] will be always precarious and reversible and, as the identification is no longer automatic, different projects or wills will try to hegemonise the empty signifiers of the absent community. The recognition of the constitutive nature of this gap and its political institutionalisation is the starting point of modern democracy. (Laclau 1996: 46)

It is important to note that the democracy that Laclau talks about here is not liberal or deliberative democracy, but a 'radical democracy', that is, a commitment to the expansion of liberty and equality into the ever wider areas of the 'social' so as to give political voice to the ordinary people (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). In my use of the term 'democracy', I draw on Laclau and Mouffe (1985 (2005)), and Wendy Brown (2015) to critique a normative notion of liberal, representational and deliberative democracy and to conceptualize a 'radical' democracy that is more inclusive of and empowering for ordinary people.

Thus far I have offered a brief explanation of 'empty signifiers' and their political potentials. In the following sections, I consider the term *tongzhi* as an empty signifier in order to trace its history of resignification. In doing so, I reveal the hegemonic power relations to signify the word and the counter-hegemonic struggles to resignify the term in different periods of modern Chinese history. It is my hope to unravel the radical political potentials embedded in the term through 'blasting open the continuum of history' (Benjamin 2007: 262).

Tongzhi *as Comrade: Imagine a Political Subjectivity*

Tongzhi as an address term and identity marker is a modern phenomenon. Before the twentieth century, the two terms *tong* (meaning 'same') and *zhi* (meaning 'ideal' or 'aspiration') both existed in classical Chinese; however, they are separate words often used as a collocation.

For example, in *Discourses of the States* (*Guoyu*) dating back to the fourth century BCE, we find the following phrase: *tongxing ze tongde, tongde ze tongxin, tongxin ze tongzhi* ('People with the same last name worship the same totem and have the same nature; hence, they have the same disposition and aspiration.' Cited in Liu & Chen 2015: 74). In *History of the Later Han* (*Hou Hanshu*) dating back to 445 AD, there is the phrase *suoyu jiaoyou, biye tongzhi* ('the reason why I make friends with someone is that we have the same aspiration') (p.74). Although the combination of the two words *tong* and *zhi* is purely random in the aforementioned examples, it is clear that the meaning that the combination generates is 'the people with the same ethics and ideals'. The modern use of the term *tongzhi* as a compound word derives its meanings from this historical use.

The first record to bring the two words together as a compound word is from 1911, when a group of Chinese compatriots launched a political protest movement trying to stop the Qing government from handing over China's railway development projects to Westerners. The group named itself Baolu Tongzhi Hui (Railway Protection Alliance; see Y. Chen 2012: 10). The movement had a nationalist, anti-colonial and anti-imperial character in a country invaded and partially occupied by foreign powers during and after the two 'Opium Wars' (1839–60) and the first Sino-Japanese War (1894–95). At a time of national crisis, the term *tongzhi* was effectively mobilized to refer to people sharing the same political ideals. This was hegemony at work, through which the two separate words *tong* and *zhi* were brought together hegemonically to articulate a shared political agenda for the first time in modern Chinese history. This had profound implications for the subsequent use of the term *tongzhi*. Through creating a *tongzhi* identity, a set of common political ideals became a unifying factor among people who were assumed to be different in a variety of non-political ways.

The large-scale promotion of the term *tongzhi* in modern Chinese language is often attributed to Dr Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), founding father of the Republic of China.[1] He used the term *tongzhi* in several of his open letters such as *Gao haiwai tongzhi shu* (A letter to overseas com-

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1. Song Hwee Lim 2006 proposes that the Chinese translation of comrade as *tongzhi* may have come from Japanese (same Chinese/kanji characters but pronounced *doshi*). Lim also notes that the term has been used in the homosexual argot in

patriots'), *Zhi Nanyang tongzhi shu* (A letter to compatriots in Southeast Asia), both published in 1918, as a political strategy to raise money and garner support from Chinese people overseas for the Republican Revolution. Sun's last words before his death in 1925 marked the most widely known use of the term *tongzhi* to date: *geming shangwei chenggong, tongzhi rengxu nuli* (The revolution has not yet completed; comrades must continue fighting). In this sentence, Sun referred to all who shared the same revolutionary ideals as *tongzhi*. This occurred at a historical juncture when the two formerly antagonistic armed forces and political parties, the Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Communist Party (CCP), joined hands in 1923 in order to form a 'United Front' to fight against warlords during the period from 1926 to 1928, even though each component of the front had its own ambitions and interests. Sun's slogan was a call for all parties to discard their differences in order to fight for a shared political ideal: an independent and united Chinese republic.

Tongzhi was thus officially constructed as a shared identity for people who fought for an anti-feudal, anti-imperial and anti-colonial cause. *Tongzhi* embodied an egalitarian ideal (everyone, regardless of age, class, gender, ethnicity etc., should be treated in the same way and addressed as *tongzhi*) and a cultural identity (insofar as it was premised on an understanding of transnational 'Chineseness'). *Tongzhi* became a political identity that brought people together for a revolutionary cause and the widespread popular use of the term consolidated the Republican revolutionary hegemony. The revolutionary potential and the egalitarian ideal was effectively mobilized through imagining a *tongzhi* identity.

At the same time, another political category was invented: *renmin* (the 'people'). Sun's political philosophy is often expressed as the 'three principles of the people' (*sanmin zhuyi*): *minzu, minquan* and *minsheng* (nationalism, democracy and the livelihood of the people). The 'people' emerged as an imagined identity that referred to the totality of workers, peasants, soldiers and small business owners, all of whom supposedly had been repressed under intertwined regimes such as feudalism, imperialism and capitalism and thus needed the kind of salvation that a vanguard revolutionary party could provide. The 'people' did not comprise a self-evident and pre-existing group of human beings. The

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Japan since at least the end of the Second World War (Lim 2006: 189). The inter-Asian cultural flow of linguistic terms has also been noted by Lydia Liu 1995.

group was brought into existence by the revolution in order to justify the revolutionary cause of the revolution, and as part of the effort to construct hegemonic control over the revolution. The relationship between *tongzhi*, the subjects of political parties, and *renmin*, the subjects of the revolution, was a complex and constantly shifting one, but the two terms were still separable from each other in this era.

As a term for party membership, *tongzhi* was initially used by both the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party. It lost its popularity within the Nationalist Party after the two-party United Front alliance collapsed. *Tongzhi* as an address term among party members was consistently used within the Communist Party during the Communist Revolution (1921–49) and after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The CCP Constitution published in 1921 states: 'those who uphold CCP's Constitution and policies can be regarded as our Party members, and as our comrades (*tongzhi*)' (cited in Y. Chen 2012: 10). In its everyday use, the term went beyond being an address term for CCP members and became a term to address everyone who supported communist revolutionary ideals. The term could be used on its own, or in combination with people's first or family names, such as Xioaping *tongzhi* (Comrade Xiaoping), Wang *tongzhi* (Comrade Wang), or Lei Feng *tongzhi* (Comrade Lei Feng). Even today, most people in China still consider *tongzhi* a positive term of address despite its waning popularity in daily use.

Subsequently, *tongzhi* became an address term for everyone, CCP member or not, under the communist hegemony. The popular use of the term produced a political subject, the subject of the Communist Revolution. Its significance lies in the egalitarian political ideals it embodies and should be understood in the context of the terms it replaces. In polar opposition to terms commonly used in the Republican era such as *xiansheng* (Sir), *daren* (Master), *xiaojie* (Miss) and *taitai* (Madam), which suggest inequality and difference in terms of gender and class, *tongzhi* embraces equality and a shared identity. Everyone, regardless of their family backgrounds and personal experiences, should be treated equally as *tongzhi*, so long as they share the same communist ideals. The reciprocal use of the term between people signified 'solidarity, equality, respect, and intimacy' and established 'an ideology of egalitarianism' (A. Wong 2008b: 278).

In the communist era, *tongzhi* (comrades) assumed the same meaning as *renmin* (the people) and both started to refer to the same group of people. This suggests an expansion of the revolutionary hegemony by seeing everyone, not just CCP members, as political subjects. It also suggests a more antagonistic attitude towards those who did not share the same communist revolutionary ideals: they were no longer part of the 'people', or 'people with differences'; they were now 'enemies'. Lei Feng, a role model during the Maoist era, wrote in his diary: 'Treat comrades like the breeze in Spring; treat work with enthusiasm like hot summer sunshine; treat individualism like the autumn breeze sweeping away withered leaves; and treat the enemy as ruthlessly as the cold Winter' (cited in Jeffreys & Su 2016: 34). The juxtaposition of 'comrades' and 'enemy' in the quote is well worth noting. The consequence of equating 'comrade' with 'people' and against 'enemy' was seen in the antagonisms and violence in various political movements during the Maoist era, including the Cultural Revolution (1966–76).

Controversial as it is, the 'comrade' subjectivity was the first time the term *tongzhi* was mobilized politically for a revolutionary cause and to construct a radical subjectivity. This subjectivity fights against a liberal subjectivity that privileges individualism and self-interest; it upholds principles of egalitarianism and social justice. People today often dismiss the Maoist era as a colourless era in which people were deprived of their 'natural' genders, sexualities and desires, what if we go beyond a liberal notion of individual subjectivity and embrace political subjectivity, revolutionary passion and collective affect? If queer represents a disruption of normative gender, sexuality and social and political norms, the 'comrade' subjectivity is undoubtedly queer.

Queering Tongzhi: *Toward a Postcolonial Queer Politics*

In the post-Mao era, using *tongzhi* as 'comrade' to address one another began to lose popularity. As the country started to embrace capitalism, many people consciously distanced themselves from Maoist discourses. The politicized comrade subjectivity gradually gave way to a desiring subjectivity that embraces differences in gender, sexuality and identity (Rofel 2007). Gay identity emerged in postsocialist China at this historical juncture. With the proliferation of medical, legal and academic discourses surrounding homosexuality, a growing number of people be-

gan to identify themselves as *tongxinglian* (homosexuals), a stigmatized term often associated with criminalization and pathologization. Despite the deletion of 'hooliganism' (*liumangzui*) from China's Criminal Law in 1997 and the removal of homosexuality from the *Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders* (3rd edition) (CCMD-3) in 2001, *tongxinglian* is still the official term in China today to refer to queer people. However, starting in the 1990s, more and more queer people started to use the term *tongzhi* to refer to themselves. Since then, the term *tongzhi* has become one of the most popular terms for queer self-identification in China today.

How the term *tongzhi* was appropriated for queer use makes an interesting story. The 'queering' of the term was often attributed to Maike and Edward Lam (a.k.a. Lin Yihua), two queer activists who were also organizers of the first Hong Kong Gay and Lesbian Film Festival. They decided to use *tongzhi* as the Chinese equivalent of 'gay and lesbian' in the Chinese name for the film festival in 1989 (Chou 1997: 360). The rationale for coming up with a new term for lesbian and gay self-identification was explained as:

> In their opinion, 'gay' and 'lesbian' were Western constructs with their specific histories; they failed to capture the essence of Chinese sexual minorities. *Tongzhi*, however, could create a sense of 'Chineseness' and provide an indigenous identity for Chinese sexual minorities. Both the revolutionists and sexual minorities are marginalised groups living under oppression. They each are united by shared beliefs and striving for a shared cause – for the former, it is the founding of an egalitarian state, and for the latter, it is the promotion of equal rights for sexual minorities. *Tongzhi* called up the image of communist revolutionaries fighting for their ideals, and by exploiting its revolutionist connotations, it called on sexual minorities to respect themselves and to join the common endeavour of fighting for equality in a heterosexist society. (Liu & Chen 2015: 76)

The need to construct an indigenous Chinese queer identity is systematically articulated by Chou Wah-shan, a Hong Kong queer activist and scholar who theorized a type of postcolonial Chinese queer politics in several of his books including *Houzhimin tongzhi* (*Postcolonial Comrade*) (1997). Chou advocates the use of the term *tongzhi* for queer people in Chinese societies; he describes its strength as 'positive cultural

references, gender neutrality, desexualization of the stigma of homosexuality, politics beyond homo-hetero duality, and use as an indigenous cultural identity for integrating the sexual into the social (Chou 2000: 2). In comparison to the stigmatized term *gei-lou* in Cantonese, *tongzhi* indeed seems like a term without derogatory connotations. However, research also shows that the term *tongzhi* is primarily used in the queer activist communities; ordinary queer people in Hong Kong seem reluctant to use the term because of its 'communist connotations' and because of the popular preference of not explicitly naming sexual identities in Chinese societies (Wong 2008b). The political ideals advocated by activists are, therefore, not always shared by ordinary queer people.

Chou's theorization of *tongzhi*, especially his 'coming home' queer politics, has often been criticized for its romanticism, utopianism and cultural essentialism (Martin 2003; Liu & Ding 2005; Kam 2013; D. Wong 2007, 2010). Despite its controversy, Chou's works still remain one of the most ambitious efforts to theorize queer identity and politics in the Chinese context. Its strengths lie in the following three aspects:

1. It is a theory of queer politics rather than gay identity politics. *Tongzhi*, like queer, 'is not defined by the gender of one's erotic object choice but connotes an entire range of alternative sexual practices and sensitivities' (Chou 2000: 3). It includes not only all the sexual minorities but also all the marginalized people in a society to form a coalitional politics. Moreover, '*tongzhi* problematises the idea of identity as fixed, natural, or objective, and destabilises the automatic acceptance of "being gay"' (p. 4).

2. It is a theory that champions a critical and postcolonial stance to a hegemonic Western gay identity and queer politics. The relationship between the sexual and the social has long been a topic of heated debate in queer theory. The 'anti-social' strand of queer theory, represented by the 'no future' thesis (Edelman 2004), has been heavily criticized in the past decade. Beginning in the 1990s, Chou (1997, 2000) consistently addressed the problems of the confrontation type of queer politics. He notes the pitfalls of privileging confrontation in identity politics, which he sees as congruous with a culture that emphasizes individualism. Chou's queer politics is to 'queer', instead of going against the mainstream through subversive strategies: '*tongzhi* subverts the mainstream

culture by queering and destabilising rather than antagonising and essentialising the supposedly straight world' (p. 4).

3.   The theory is attentive to cultural specificities of Chinese societies. By drawing on the long history of homoeroticism in China, Chou notes the traces of a sexist, hierarchical and social relation-oriented sexual subjectivity in contemporary queer culture. Chou also pinpoints the centrality of the discourse of 'home' in Chinese queer narratives. Chou's discussions of cultural specificities are often seen as equivalent to 'cultural essentialism'. However, if we read Chou reparatively (Sedgwick 2003), Chou's discussion can be seen as a useful reminder of the importance of historical and cultural discourses in shaping contemporary identities. By noting the 'coming home' narrative and practices in the queer communities through his interviews and reflecting on its theoretical and practical implications, Chou not only addresses the centrality of family and kinship in Chinese societies, but points to ordinary queer people's agency as well.

Admittedly, Chou's theorization of *tongzhi* is not without problems: his reconstruction of ancient China as 'a world without homo-hetero duality' (pp. 13–42) is problematic and would benefit from more solid and vigorous historical scholarship. His China/West dichotomy risks essentializing cultural differences in a globalizing world where 'hybridity' is the norm. His 'coming home' strategy (pp. 249–82), i.e., actively integrating same-sex relationships into traditional family relationships, can be useful for some people but should not be treated as a universal formula. Chou seems aware of this. At the end of his book, he suggests:

> It is therefore crucial and urgent to pluralise and destabilise *tongzhi* and to explore the signification process through which the category *tongzhi* is constituted, activated, and actualised by each individual *tongzhi* … It is a pressing task to problematise and destabilise any monolithic notion of the *tongzhi* movement, which is actually internally divided by class, gender, ethnicity, culture, language, education, and sexual practices. (p. 206).

As a queer activist and scholar, Chou has not only made careful observations about China's queer communities; he has also theorized about people's experiences and activist strategies. His theory should be seen as not merely descriptive, but performative as well. His *tongzhi* politics should be seen as a serious attempt to politicize *tongzhi* for a

more politically conscious and culturally sensitive politics, and to bring a specific type of queer identity and politics into existence. The longing for diversity, solidarity, autonomy and cultural citizenship embedded in the queer *tongzhi* subject can still be felt in China's queer communities today.

In December 1996, the first *Tongzhi* Conference was held in Hong Kong. About 200 people from different parts of the Chinese-speaking world, including mainland China, attended. There was a heated discussion about the cultural specificity of queer culture in the Chinese-speaking world. The conference concluded in its manifesto that:

> The les-bi-gay movement in many Western societies is largely built upon the notion of individualism, confrontational politics, and the discourse of individual rights. Certain characteristics of confrontational politics, such as 'coming out', mass protests, and parades may not be the best way of achieving *tongzhi* liberation in the family-centred, community-oriented Chinese societies, which stress the importance of social harmony. In formulating the *tongzhi* movement strategy, we should take the specific socio-economic and cultural environment of each society into consideration. ('Chinese *Tongzhi* Conference Manifesto' 1996)

This was the Bandung declaration of Chinese *tongzhi*.[2] It imagines a transnational community of sexual minorities in the Chinese-speaking world; it also articulates a strong postcolonial and decolonial political stance. The cultural specificities it has identified, precarious as they are, will continue to shape Chinese queer identity and culture in the years to come.

Tongxinglian *versus* Tongzhi: *Negotiating Postsocialist Queer Desires*

After the introduction of *tongzhi* to refer to queer people in Hong Kong, the term was soon picked up and subsequently gained great popularity in Taiwan and in countries and regions with large diasporic Chinese populations before it was accepted by queer activists from mainland China in the mid-1990s. With the development of queer activism and

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2. The Bandung Conference was held in Bandung, Indonesia, in April 1955. It was the first large-scale Asian–African conference that brought together newly independent Asian and African countries. The conference, an important step towards the Non-Aligned Movement, proposed to strengthen Asian-African economic and cultural cooperation and to oppose colonialism and neo-colonialism.

the popularization of the Internet, terms such as *tongzhi* quickly spread in all Chinese societies. The queer use of the term *tongzhi* has thus travelled from the 'margins' of the Sinophone sphere to mainland China.

It must be noted that the most popular term to refer to queer people in mainland China in the 1980s and 90s was *tongxinglian* (homosexuals), a term with a pathologized and criminalized history. This was not surprising because most 'experts' who 'spoke' for sexual minorities were heterosexual, including medical doctors Ruan Fangfu, Zhang Beichuan and Lu Longguang, sociologists Li Yinhe and Liu Dalin, and journalist Fang Gang. With their pursuit for 'truth' and their humanistic concerns for the socially marginalized, homosexuality became a metonym for the problems of the Chinese society, and even of a Chinese modernity. Li Yinhe and Wang Xiaobo, in their first sociological research on the 'subculture of homosexuality', attributed the rationales of their study to three principles: (1) a fact-based principle in scientific research; (2) the principle of anti-ideology-centrism; (3) the principle of kindness (Li & Wang 1992: 6). Li and Wang compared the negligence of sexual minorities in China to a serious problem with the 'eyesight' of a society: 'If there is such a serious weakness with the eyesight of our society, who can guarantee that the society hasn't missed anything more important?' (p. 267). Studying sexual minorities, therefore, became a way for Chinese intellectuals to gain 'true' insight into postsocialist Chinese society. The *tongxinglian* subject was brought to public attention through the experts' humanistic and clinical gazes.

At the same time, a group of queer activists based in Beijing tried to create a community and fight for gay rights. Wan Yanhai organized the first open forum for gay men, Men's World, in 1992; this 'cultural salon' lasted six months before it was shut down by the police (Chou 2000: 137). In 1994 and 1995, Susie Jolly and Wu Chunsheng organized lesbian and gay parties in bars and at their Beijing flats. During the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, Wu Chunsheng organized a lesbian dancing party for both Chinese and foreign women, which subsequently led to Wu's short-term detainment (He 2002; Hsiung 2001). At the same, Hong Kong activist Chou Wah-shan also conducted research into mainland China's queer culture (Chou 2000). During the mid-1990s, the queer use of *tongzhi* was introduced to mainland China. It was used primarily

by queer activists to destigmatize homosexuality and as a community argot at a time when not many people were aware of the queer connotation of the term.

Transnational queer activism in the Chinese-speaking world played an important role in developing queer activism in mainland China. Lesbian and gay representatives from mainland China attended the Chinese *Tongzhi* Conferences held in Hong Kong in 1996, 1998 and 1999 and in Taiwan in 2001. In summer 1998, the first National Men and Women *Tongzhi* Conference was held in Beijing and was attended by thirty lesbians and gays from different provinces, together with representatives from the Sinophone sphere. In the autumn of 1998, the first National Women *Tongzhi* Conference was held in Beijing, with twenty participants from different parts of China (He 2001: 44). These national and international conferences have solidified the queer use of the term *tongzhi* and crafted a strong sense of transnational solidarity based on a linguistic and cultural affinity of 'Chineseness'. By the end of the 1990s, a fast developing Internet culture had made the term popular among queer people on the Internet, with popular search terms including *tongzhi* websites, *tongzhi* literature, *tongzhi* films, *tongzhi* bars, *tongzhi* venues and *tongzhi* culture. The 'subculture of homosexuality' (*tongxinglian ya wenhua*) gradually turned into a *tongzhi* 'culture' (*wenhua*).

In December 2000, the Hunan Satellite TV hosted a panel discussion called 'Approaching Homosexuality' (*zoujin tongxinglian*) in its dialogue programme *Youhua haoshuo* (Say it as it is). Three guests were invited: Li Yinhe, a sociologist researching on homosexuality'; Cui Zi'en, a writer and filmmaker; and Shitou, a lesbian artist. It was the first time a gay man and a lesbian 'came out' in China's mainstream media. In the programme, the word '*tongxinglian*' was used by the TV host, studio audience and the expert panel to refer to lesbians and gay men; Shitou, by contrast, identified herself as *tongzhi*. When a member of the audience asked about the term, Cui Zi'en attributed the queer use of the term *tongzhi* to Edward Lam in 1990 and explained the meaning of the term as 'sharing the same aspirations and dispositions' (*zhitong daohe*). Cui emphasized that terms such as *tongzhi* and *tongxinglian* should be used with dignity and pride (Hunan Satellite TV, 2000). The event marked the first time queer activists' consciously 'queered' *tongzhi* for positive self-identification in mainland China's official media.

In 2001, a few heterosexual identified students from Peking University's Film and Television Society, including Zhang Jiangnan and Yang Yang, decided to organize a queer film festival for humanitarian and artistic reasons. They invited Cui Zi'en to identify the films to be presented. Programming was easy, but naming the festival became a problem, as all student-organized activities had to be approved in advance by the university's Youth League – the youth branch of the Communist Party. Knowing that the term *tongxinglian* would not be approved, the students tried their luck and branded the event as 'the first Chinese *Tongzhi* Cultural Festival'. Unaware of the queer use of the term *tongzhi*, the university Youth League approved the event proposal. The event went on for a few days and it attracted enormous media attention. As Chinese and international journalists enthusiastically reported 'China's first gay and lesbian film festival', the university decided to shut down the festival for 'procedural reasons' before its official closing event took place (Cui 2009a).

The deletion of 'hooliganism' (*liumangzui*) from China's criminal Law in 1997 and the removal of homosexuality from the Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders (3rd edition) in 2001 contributed to the development of queer identities and communities in mainland China. While the public continued to call sexual minorities *tongxinglian*, queer people themselves increasingly preferred to identify themselves by using the term *tongzhi*. While this is a clear indication of queer people trying to rewrite the stigmatized history of *tongxinglian*, there is also a deep aspiration to normalize same-sex desires in the aftermath of decriminalization and depathologization, and in the shadow of neoliberalism and HIV/AIDS.

Translating Queer Theory

Queer theory started in American academia in the 1990s. The English word 'queer' was translated into Chinese as *ku'er* or *guaitai* in the 1990s Taiwan (Huang 2011; Lim 2008; Martin 2003). In the 2000s, several mainland Chinese scholars translated scholarship in queer theory from English to Chinese. Literary scholar Wang Fengzhen (2000) translated 'queer theory' as *guaiyi lilun*. Although *guaiyi* is an existing Chinese term and indeed is a translation of queer, Wang's translation did not attract much public attention, largely because it was seen purely as a

'Western literary theory' that did not have much social relevance in China. Drawing on the translation of queer as *ku'er* in Taiwan, Li Yinhe published a translated anthology titled *Ku'er lilun* (Queer theory) in 2002. The translated anthology includes selected articles by Gayle Rubin, Steven Epstein, Steven Seidman and others (Li 2002). This marked the official introduction of the term *queer* to mainland China. For the book, Li adopted the Taiwanese translation of the term queer as *ku'er* (literally 'cool child'), which is devoid of the stigmatized history of the term 'queer' in the Western context and instead takes on a celebratory tone signifying rebellious youth and alternative lifestyles (Lim 2008). The strength of the term *ku'er* is also obvious: unlike *tongxinglian*, *ku'er* does not have a stigmatized history in the Chinese context; the term is little known outside the academic and activist contexts and therefore can be used as an argot within the queer communities. The term sounds trendy and 'cool' and thus appeals to queer people and the general public.

In the preface of the translated anthology, Li (2002) expresses her hope and optimism about queer theory:

> Queer theory is a deeply subversive theory. It will change people's way of thinking dramatically. It makes all the exclusive minority groups appear narrow-minded. It will arm people with the weapons and power to liberate themselves from all conventional ideas. It shed light on the next century.

Whether queer theory can live up to Li's expectations is to be seen. At the time, the public probably trusted Li, a well-respected sociologist who published the first sociological study into homosexuality in the 1990s and an outspoken public intellectual for gay rights in China, more than they could trust, much less understand, an abstruse theory that originated in the Western academia. Thanks to popular trust in Li, queer theory began to take root in China.

In the same period, Li published books on sadomasochism (1998), Foucault (2001) and feminism (2005). These books had a profound impact on how people understand sex and sexuality in China. Sex and sexuality are seen not simply as 'personal matters', but as important issues pertinent to the popular imagination of what postsocialist China is like and where China is heading. Li writes in the conclusion of her book on sexual discourses in the People's Republic of China:

> In the past six decades, we have gone astray and made mistakes, but China's sexual discourses and Chinese people's sexual practices have eventually found their way. Following the right direction, we can expect the gradual formation of a more rational and more civilised sexual order in China. (Li 2014: 337)

Contrary to Li's unreserved endorsement of queer theory, sociologists Pan Suiming and Huang Yingying expressed reservations about the use of queer theory in China:

> An uncritical application of queer theory is to 'normalise' it. This goes against the starting point of queer theory and is therefore a 'sad ending'. In particular, this will suppress Chinese people's choices and explorations of genders and sexualities. If this is the case, a revolution in China can become a hegemony in China. (Pan & Huang 2013: 22)

Despite Pan and Huang's caution, queer theory has been widely accepted in Chinese academia, especially in literature, film studies, sociology and anthropology, as an important approach to the study of gender and sexuality. It was, however, what happened in China in the late 1990s and early 2000s – neoliberalism and HIV/AIDS – that made queer theory relevant to sexual identities and sexual politics.

Tongzhi *and Homonormativity*

Neoliberalism entered mainland China in the 1980s with the demise of China's socialism and Deng's endorsement of economic liberalism. China's official entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001 marked China's full membership in a neoliberal world order. As Rofel (2007) points out, neoliberalism in China is manifested not only economically but also in its active production of desires, and the hierarchical ordering of such desires. Gays and lesbians are seen as the forerunners of a 'desiring China' (Rofel 2007). Rofel's (1999b, 2007, 2010) and Kong's (2010, 2011a, 2011b) studies on the expulsion of the 'money boy' identity, as well as the obsession with the rhetoric of 'quality' (*suzhi*), in contemporary China's queer communities, demonstrate the construction of a homonormative, and even a homonationalist, gay identity in China's urban and middle-class gay communities. Such a gay identity usually labels itself *tongzhi*. Kong sees *tongzhi* as a form of DIY (do-it-yourself) citizenship under China's neoliberal transformation:

> The coming-to-term of a new identity in China has slowly shifted to involve a new understanding of homosexuality, not so much in terms of the medical discourse of perversion (though this is still the dominant model) but in terms of the idea of active self-fashioning. (Kong 2012: 150)

Indeed, neoliberalism shapes *tongzhi* identity in significant ways, including its middle-class disposition and its 'lifestyle politics', devoid of political and radical charges. However, it would take a global epidemic to tie *tongzhi*, previously imagined for a socialist revolutionary politics and then a postcolonial and de-colonial strategy, to gay identity politics. Transnational capital and national government have important roles to play in this process.

Like in many other countries in the world, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections have posed serious threats to the lives and health of many queer people in China. The gay identity, not long after it emerged in China's public discourse in the 1980s and 90s, became a pathologized and stigmatized viral identity because of its close association with HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS infections spread rapidly ever since the identification of China's first AIDS case in Beijing in 1985. HIV/AIDS quickly evolved 'from a disease of "the Other" – foreigners, minorities, and the rural, peripheral, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of people – to an epidemic that threatens the general populace' (Yu 2012: 3). In the public health discourse, queer people soon took up a new identity: Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM) are considered a high-risk group for HIV/AIDS infection. In 2006, the Ministry of Health pledged to send AIDS prevention volunteers to queer groups and it included MSM in the Five-Year Plan. By 2008, the Chinese government had launched the first national programme devoted to the prevention of HIV/AIDS among MSM. (Hildebrandt 2012: 852) The association of HIV with homosexuality has seriously stigmatized queer people, and efforts by HIV/AIDS activists to encourage queer identity and community building and promote queer activism has produced some unintended and problematic consequences.

Despite their ambiguous legal status and the difficulty to get officially registered as legitimate non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in China, NGOs play an important role in queer activism in China, especially in relation to HIV/AIDS (Hildebrandt 2013). China's HIV/AIDS

crisis provides political as well as economic opportunities for many queer NGOs in China. As international HIV/AIDS funding began to enter China in the early 2000s, queer NGOs started to mushroom throughout the country. By 2012 more than 100 queer organizations had been established in various parts of mainland China (Hou 2014). It was estimated in 2014 that there was some semblance of an organized queer group in China's major cities (UNDP and USAID 2014). Because of the specific mechanism through which HIV/AIDS funding was distributed, i.e., international funds have to be channelled through the Chinese government, primarily through the national Centre for Disease Control (CDC), and then trickled down to local governments and NGOs, the HIV/AIDS NGOs in China have become increasingly dependent, financially and politically, on different levels of the government. Over time, arrangements with the Chinese government have shaped various types of NGOs. Some organizations that partner with the state and, under pressure, have shunned gay advocacy, have eventually become 'de-pinked'; others have a partnership relationship that allows for a continued focus on gay advocacy; still others focus on gay advocacy and neither partner with nor challenge the state; but very few organizations engage in forms of gay advocacy that could be interpreted as challenges to the state (Chua & Hildebrandt 2013: 1597–9). Many queer groups advocate a homonormative *tongzhi* politics: *tongzhi* are law-abiding, well-educated and both aspirational and model citizens, in contrast to the stigmatized identities such as *tongxinglian*, MSM and 'money boys'. The *tongzhi* identity also appropriated the state discourse of *suzhi* and people who self-append this label consider themselves to be citizens with good 'quality'. It is in this context that my discussion of the *tongzhi* identity in Shanghai as urban and middle-class in Chapter 2 should be understood.

Tongzhi *versus* Ku'er: *The 'Pretty Fighter' Debate*

The different configurations of power relations that have defined the agenda and scope of queer NGOs have also shaped gay identity and queer politics in China. One of the unexpected consequences was the separation of lesbian groups that did not receive CDC support from gay groups that did (Hou 2014). Although lesbians and gays had collaborated with each other successfully previously, lesbian groups and gay groups

increasingly disagreed with each other over the aims and strategies of the queer movement in the context of the HIV/AIDS crisis. Some gay groups identified HIV/AIDS education and prevention as the primary aim of their activism; in doing so, they tried to monopolize resources given by international foundations and national governments for HIV/AIDS prevention. Lesbian groups were disadvantaged in accessing these resources, and they focused on advocating gay rights and building community cultures instead. The disagreement was intensified when members of some gay goups made patriarchal and misogynous remarks about women, demonstrated dismissive attitudes towards other sexual minorities, and emphasized 'good quality'. The debate about the aims and strategies of the queer movement is nicely put by lesbian-identified activist Xiao Yan:

> When I entered the queer movement, people told me that the strategy of the queer movement is to 'fight AIDS', even though it causes a total silencing of female queer people; then people said that the 'theory of innateness' is an effective strategy, because people more easily accept a situation that seemingly 'cannot be helped'; and then they started moulding a 'positive and open' image of good queer people – to make sure that more people accept a queer community which is equal to the societal elite.
>
> I probably cannot deny that these 'strategies' are 'effective' on certain levels. For example, [they succeed in] elevating the visibility of queer people in society. Yet in the end, who is visible, and who is concealed in an ever deeper place? These strategies are questionable. They make me feel very scared, scared that I might be cast aside by the movement at any time for not conforming to the demands of the strategies. (Xiao Yan 2013)

Xiao Yan's words summarize the deeply entrenched differences within China's queer communities at the time and the marginalized position of lesbian groups within the movement.[3] One of the strategies that lesbian groups devised was to form a coalition with bisexual and transgender people to fight against gay identity politics. They expanded the term *lala* (lesbian) to encompass all LBTI (lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex) people marginalized by the HIV/AIDS emphasis within China's queer movement. In 2007, the first three-day conference on

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3.   For an excellent discussion of Xiao Yan's article, see Deklerck 2017.

Chinese LBT (Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender) activists' leadership development, also known as '*Lala* Camp', took place in Suzhou, with the participation of 1,000 LBT individuals from China and abroad (UNDP and USAID 2014: 50).[4] The Chinese *Lala* Alliance was founded in 2008 to provide support for lesbians and bisexual women. The emergence of a *lala* activism that goes beyond a narrowly-focused lesbian identity politics and that champions an anti-identitarian queer politics was a direct response to a homonormative gay identity politics that falls under the umbrella of *tongzhi*. Confrontations between the two discourses culminated in the 'Pretty Fighter' debate.

In May 2011, Damien Lu (a.k.a. Xing Xing), an American who had been actively involved in China's gay identity politics, published an article titled 'What Is Queer Theory and How Does It Relate to China's *Tongzhi* Movement?' on Aibai, a Chinese-language gay website. In the article, Lu uses a biological-essentialist approach to explain homosexuality and argues against social constructivism; he further points out that queer theory, as a theory originated in the ivory tower of American universities and thus bearing no relevance to queer activism even in the USA, is harmful for China's LGBT Movement (Lu 2012). In October, Aibai published two public statements: 'Position Paper on Homowives and Homohusbands in Mainland China' and 'Position Paper on the Importance of Establishing Scientific Attitudes and Propagating Science at Work'.[5] The former document condemns gays and lesbians who enter into heterosexual marriages; the latter emphasizes the biological-essentialist view of homosexuality, which Aibai considers scientific and correct (Aibai 2012a, 2012b). Aibai's open endorsement of a Western type of gay identity politics as *tongzhi* politics was clear.

On 11 December 2011, a newly created weibo (China's Twitter) account named 'Pretty Fighter' (*meishaonü zhanshi lala*) published a manifesto beginning with the line 'we are *lala*; we are queer; we want

4.   *Lala* is a Chinese term for lesbians. The term has sometimes been used by queer activists to emcompass LBT (lesbian, bisexual and transgender) identities and an anti-identitarian queer politics.

5.   Homowives (*tongqi*) refers to heterosexual women married to gay men, knowingly or unknowingly; Homohusbands (*tongfu*) refers to heterosexual men married to lesbians, knowingly or unknowingly. An English slang term to translate heterosexual men or women who are married to homosexuals to conceal the latter's sexual identities is 'beard'.

our own voice'.[6] The manifesto claimed that as both a minority among women and a minority among homosexuals, *lalas* are China's queer pioneers. It also called on all marginalized sexualities, including lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, to fight against the homonormative and patriarchal hegemony of the queer movement. No one knows the real identity of the 'Pretty Fighter' but its open endorsement of an anti-identitarian and all inclusive queer politics is clear. In just two weeks, 'Pretty Fighter' twitted 360 times and attracted more than 300 followers (Nüquan zhisheng 2012). The issues raised started with the essentialism versus constructivism debate and later included gender, sexuality and strategies of social movements. Many queer activists in China participated in the online debate with great enthusiasm and sometimes even strong antagonism.

On 26 December 2011, the Chinese *Lala* Alliance published a declaration to support 'Pretty Fighter'. It emphasized the need to have a gendered perspective in the discussion of sexual identities and sexual rights, and the need to challenge the male hegemony in China's *tongzhi* movement:

> The *Tongzhi* Movement in Mainland China is developing prosperously. And yet we feel the pressing lack of a gendered perspective in the movement. Women *tongzhi/lala* are usually anonymous in the movement because of the lack of voices. When it comes to *tongzhi*, people often have male *tongzhi* in mind, and ignore sexual minorities such as female *tongzhi*, bisexuals and transgender people. Meanwhile, many statements in the *tongzhi* communities do not apply to female *tongzhi/lala*. (Chinese *Lala* Alliance 2012)

The Chinese *Lala* Alliance addresses lesbians as both female *tongzhi* and *lala*. While recognizing the fact that the label *tongzhi* is accepted by some lesbians and rejected by others, it still tries to articulate an inclusive coalitional politics based on the *tongzhi* identity.

The 'Pretty Fighter' debate lasted more than six months. In February 2012, Jianghui, Aibai's director, deleted his weibo account and withdrew from the debate. The debate continued within the communities. In April, the lesbian-led Bianbian Group distributed leaflets with the slogan 'For Sexual Autonomy and Against Hegemony' in a gay event led

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6.　The name 'Pretty Fighter' (*meishaonü zhanshi*) comes from a Sailor Moon manga created by Naoko Takeuchi, later adapted into a *tokusatsu* television series.

by Damien Lu. In June 2012, at a national LGBT Conference, lesbian activist Song Shiye took off her clothes and wrote 'Can you see me? You can't see me' on her body as a protest to the gender blindness of some gay activists. The conference brought in many sexual minorities and was seen as constructive. In response, Aibai tweeted 'Condolences to China's *Tongzhi* Movement' on weibo, openly declaring its discontent with 'Pretty Fighter' and her supporters. 'Pretty Fighter' disappeared from weibo after their last tweet on 26 July 2012.

In 2013, an online magazine *Queer Lala Times* (*Kula shibao*) was founded to give voice to LBTI people. Its first issue opened with the following declaration:

> We are *lala* (LBTI); we are not dissoluble under the umbrellas of 'women', 'gay', 'homosexuality'.
>
> We are queer; we are not content with the binarism of gay/straight, men/women, normal/pervert. We seek diverse narratives that speak to the complexity of the world, and we seek a more diverse reality.
>
> We are activists; with many others, we are committed to the gender/sexuality identity activism in China. The experience of changing convinces us that a change in mind is the ultimate pursuit in activism.
>
> We are narrators; we believe in the power of words. (Datou 2013)

This became the 'declaration of independence' for China's *lala* movement, and for the subsequent queer feminism represented by the 'Feminist Five'.[7] Instead of seeking coalition with gay activists, many lesbian activists started to form coalitions with women and other marginalized genders and sexualities. This sometimes meant unhappy collaborations with the sexually conservative and heteronormative All-China Women's Federation (*Zhonghua quanguo fulian*).[8] The articula-

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7. The 'Feminist Five' refers to five young Chinese feminists who were detained by the police on the eve of the International Women's Day in March 2015 before their planned feminist activism against sexual harassment against women on public transport the next day. Most of them were released a month later. They are: Wei Tingting, Li Tingting (Li Maizi), Wu Rongrong, Wang Man and Zheng Churan (Datu). For more information, see Zeng 2015.

8. All-China Women's Federation (*Zhonghua quanguo fulian*) is a women's rights organization established by the Communist Party of China in 1949. It has acted as the official leader of the women's movement in China since its founding. It is re-

tion between *lala* and feminism ushers in a new chapter in China's queer movement.

The 'Pretty Fighter' debate is the first influential debate in China's queer communities regarding the difference between gay identity politics and queer politics. It highlights the diversity of the queer communities, as well as the different needs and demands of sexual minorities in China. It articulates an inclusive anti-hegemonic coalition politics sensitive to the needs and demands of all marginalized groups. In this debate, *tongzhi* was articulated with gay identity politics; *lala* and *ku'er* were articulated with queer politics. While *tongzhi* was seen as an essentialist and homonormative identity, *lala* and *ku'er* were seen as radical identities that embrace gender equality, sexual diversity and radical politics that challenge sexual and social norms.

Nomadic Activism: Tongzhi *Organizing*

Since 2012, groups of young lesbians and gays have become more vocal about queer and women's rights despite China's increasingly strict political control. Born in the 1980s and 90s, they represent a younger generation of queer people. Contrary to the more cautious way of queer organizing in the past, the younger generations often challenge people's expectations. They are represented by the Changsha *Tongzhi* Pride organized by Xiang Xiaohan and the feminist activism carried out by the 'Feminist Five'.

On 17 May 2013, a public parade was held in Changsha to celebrate the International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT). More than one hundred queer people from different parts of China gathered in a scenic riverside area of Changsha's university district. They walked together with rainbow flags and a banner that proclaimed, '*tongzhi* are ordinary people' (*tongzhi yi fanren*). They also shouted slogans such as 'I am *tongzhi* and I am proud', 'mainland *tongzhi* conquer 2013', 'no more fear, we are the world!', and 'support *tongzhi*, fight discrimination' (Queer Comrades 2013). The day went on smoothly and ended with a queer activist experience sharing event in a café that evening. Four activists were later taken away by the police for questioning and all but one were released after a few hours. The

sponsible for promoting government policies on women, and protecting women's rights within the government.

organizer of the event, Xiang Xiaohan, director of a local queer NGO, was detained for twelve days. After his release, the 19-year-old Xiang expressed: 'Next time they might detain me for 15 days. If that's what it takes to hold another event, then that's fine by me' (Xiang in Queer Comrades 2013).

Celebrated as the 'first public parade in the country' (Engebretsen 2015: 103), Changsha Pride, together with other IDAHOBIT events held in different parts of the country on the same day, marked an important event in China's queer activism. It not only shows the political potential that *tongzhi* activism engenders, but also the possibility of success for a post-Stonewall type of identity politics characterized by visibility, coming-out and pride. However, most queer activists in China do not share Xiang's optimism, especially as the country comes under increasingly strict political control. Also, the 'success' of Changsha Pride must be considered in the context of its conditions and contingencies:

> By holding the parade in the scenic riverside streets in Changsha's university area, the organizers demonstrated a sensitivity to their appropriation of 'public space' that probably allowed the event to take place without being shut down. Had they attempted a Parade at the public square downtown, the outcome would likely be different and less positive. (Engebretsen 2015: 104)

Indeed, queer activists in China have been actively negotiating transnational queer activist politics of visibility and pride with acute attention to local conditions and contexts. They strategically make use of time, space and 'grey areas' in public policy to create a queer activist space. Rofel describes queer activists in China as 'nomadic subjects' because of their flexible use of spaces and *ad hoc* organizing strategies: 'They do not remain in a fixed relationship to power; they manoeuvre within and around the various powers that shape subjectivities, socialities, political beliefs and economic inequality in China' (2013: 158).

Meanwhile, queer activists, and lesbian activists in particular, have been making strategic alliances with other social groups to fight for more rights based on gender and sexuality. The Beijing Tongyu have collaborated with the All-China Women's Federation to fight violence against women; the Pink Space brings lesbian activism and feminism together by advocating 'sexual rights', understood in a non-heteronormative sense,

for all women (Rofel 2013). Young feminists such as the 'Feminist Five' advocate an affirmative woman's rights (*nüquan*) and pro-sex political stance; they create feminist consciousness by engaging the public with works of performance art such as Bloodstained Brides and Occupying Men's Toilets. They also champion international solidarity with women and sexual minorities from all over the world by participating, for example, in the anti-Trump Women's March in 2017.

Since 2014, queer activism in mainland China seems to be in a particularly difficult situation because of strengthened state control of media and politically oriented groups. In 2017, the Chinese government shut down numerous queer websites and social media; it also censored a lot of queer online content. Many activist campaigns were forced underground and some activists chose to go abroad. Filmmaker Fan Popo remarked on the end of a golden era in Beijing in the aftermath of queer artist Ren Hang's suicide (Xiang 2017).

At the same time, a pink economy is developing rapidly in Chinese cities. More and more queer commercial venues have mushroomed in urban areas. Shanghai Pride, with its emphasis on entertainment and consumerism, has been held annually since 2009 without much government interference. In September 2017, the first week-long Shanghai Pride Film Festival was successfully held, two years after the Beijing Queer Film Festival went underground. An increasing number of queer people are enjoying the freedom that has been brought about by consumerism and a middle-class lifestyle. 'In China, you can do anything in your own homes and in commercial venues, as long as you do not ask for political rights,' an interlocutor told me. Private/public, and cultural/political distinctions manifest themselves strongly in such statements. Queer identities can exist only as a private, individual, consumption-oriented and apolitical identity; any kind of mobilization in the name of political rights immediately becomes taboo.

Perhaps it is the nomadic activism happening now and then in various parts of China that should give us hope. Queer people in China have never ceased to challenge gender, sexual and social norms, and they have never given up hope for a better world. Queer activism in China will not stop, and activists will always come up with culturally sensitive and context-specific strategies to combat discrimination and to fight for gay rights.

As collective organizing gives way to individualism and consumer-ism, it is time to reinvigorate a Chinese queer identity, *tongzhi*, the most widely used term for queer self-identification in the Chinese-speaking world. In its century-long history, the term has been used to signify a political subjectivity, a solidarity among marginalized social groups, and a continuity with a revolutionary past. It is now time to think about the radical political potential of the term. This is not a call to arms for an uncritical adoption of a Stonewall type of confrontational politics, but a call for action: a call to keep experimenting with globalized and nomadic activist strategies and against the hegemony of the state and neoliberal capitalism. After all, 'the revolution has not succeeded; comrades must keep fighting!'

In this chapter, I have offered a genealogy of *tongzhi*, in the hope of re-inventing a radical political identity and queer politics by denaturalizing the present and drawing on the legacies from the past. I have highlighted some key historical moments of *tongzhi*'s politicization, including its political use in the Republican and Maoist eras to imagine an egalitarian and revolutionary subjectivity, and its queer use in the postsocialist era to articulate a transnational and postcolonial queer politics. Although the queer use of the term follows the revolutionary use chronologically, it does not supersede the latter. I wish to emphasize that the two types of subjectivities, comrade and queer, coexist in today's social sphere, and they work together to structure queer subject formation and queer poli-tics in specific ways. Although the 'comrade' subjectivity seems mostly hidden at the moment, its traces can still be seen and felt in moments of grassroot mobilizations. It is high time to bring out the comrade subjec-tivity and its radical political potential, i.e., to politicize and radicalize a sexual subjectivity.

In the next chapter, I will go back in history to the 1980s and 90s by looking at some gay men's diaries when they were receiving gay conversion therapies, in their hope to turn straight through medical interventions. I will demonstrate how these gay men negotiated sexual subjectivity with political subjectivity, and how the transformation of the self was made possible by multiple and shifting governmentalities. The gay conversion therapy case, controversial as it is, offers insights into some of the key factors required for the politicization of sexual subjectivity: affect and the friend/enemy dichotomy.

◂ **Figure 9**: Front cover of Liu Dalin and Lu Longguang's 2005 book, *Studies on Chinese Homosexuality*

Figure 10: Volunteers from the Beijing LGBT Centre protest in front of the Beijing Haidian Court during the first conversion therapy case hearing, Beijing, 19 December 2014 (photo courtesy of Peng Yanhui)

4.

How to Transform the Self
Lessons from Conversion Therapy

> To be modern is not to accept oneself as one in the flux of the passing moments; it is to take oneself as object of a complex and difficult elaboration … Modern man … is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself.
>
> <div align="right">Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment'</div>

> The political is the most intense and extreme antagonism, and every concrete antagonism becomes that much more political the closer it approaches the most extreme point, that of friend-enemy grouping.
>
> <div align="right">Carl Schmitt, The Concept of the Political</div>

In tracing a genealogy of *tongzhi*, I have demonstrated the dynamic interplay between sexual subjectivities and political subjectivities in modern Chinese history. I have also pointed to the possibility that a sexual subject can be politicized for anti-hegemonic purposes. In this chapter, I look at how a sexual subjectivity was politicized in the past, and what the process of politicsing it in the present might entail. The case study I draw on is conversion therapy, a controversial form of medical treatment which aims to turn gay people straight. The particular case of conversion therapy examined in this chapter is recorded in Liu Dalin and Lu Longguang's book *Studies on Chinese Homosexuality*, published in Chinese in 2005. It is not my intention to advocate this controversial practice. But by not forgetting the past and by drawing lessons from the past, I hope that similar tragedies will not recur. I also hope to move beyond the liberal rhetoric of humanity and morality as I start to think of the processes of subject transformation as political processes. I highlight the 'technologies' of governmentality

that underlie the expectation that subjectivities can be transformed and the 'technologies of the self' that might evade the regimes of subjectification.

In this chapter, I will first provide a brief account of how conversion therapy was practised in China in the 1990s by quoting from the diary a gay man wrote while undergoing this form of therapy. I then return to the historical and social contexts for the emergence of gay identity in post-Mao China. When reading these gay patients' diaries, I focus on the centrality of ideas about the self that are framed by the imperative of 'knowing the self' and 'transforming the self'. In order to put this 'self' into its historical context, I trace a genealogy of the self that foregrounds links between contending notions of self in the Maoist and the post-Mao eras. Following this, I discuss the importance of diary writing as an example of what Foucault calls 'technologies of the self'. In the course of this discussion I also want to stress the importance of affect in the process of such treatment of the self. This discussion not only reveals the social construction of the self as central to China's postsocialist governmentality, but also the central role that gender and sexuality play in processes of self-formation. It also points to the multiple ways that governing strategies might fail in their operations. 'Technologies of the self' and 'performativity' thus offer us ways to think beyond power and governmentality and see mundane and affective dimensions of queer subject formation.

Conversion Therapy in Postsocialist China

Homosexuality is widely considered to have been depathologized in China since 2001. However, such 'depathologization' is only partial. The CCMD-3 distinguishes between ego-syntonic homosexuality, i.e., those who feel comfortable with their sexual identity, and ego-dystonic homosexuality, i.e., those who do not. What constitutes 'feeling comfortable', or being 'in harmony with oneself' (*ziwo hexie*), has only been vaguely defined and is thus open to interpretation. The CCMD-3 stipulates that ego-syntonic homosexuality is considered normal and needs no treatment; however, an individual who feels 'anxious, depressed, conflicted' about their sexual identity, and one who 'seeks change of gender and sexual identity through treatment' are still considered to have a mental disorder (Zhou 2009: 125). This understanding of homosexuality is

still in use in China today and it provides justification for the medical and psychological treatments of homosexuality.

A recommended text for mental health education, *Consulting Psychology*, published by the Guangdong Higher Education Press in 2013, describes homosexuality as a 'disorder'. The textbook recommends four treatment methods: changing one's lifestyle and circle of friends to mark a radical break from the past; forming a platonic relationship with a person of the opposite sex; using heterosexual images and audio recordings to 'transfer' one's sexual desire to the opposite sex; and 'repulsion therapy', i.e., inducing nausea with forced vomiting or fear of electrocution when homoerotic thoughts emerge (BBC News 2017). The practice of using electric shock for conversion therapy on queer people in China has been widely documented, including by a Chinese queer community webcast documentary *Cures That Kill* (*Shenglai tongzhi*) (dir. Xiaogang Wei 2011), a UNDP and USAID report on queer issues in China (UNDP and USAID 2014), and a UK television documentary titled *China's Gay Shock Therapy* (Channel 4, 2015).

The medical, psychological, and psychiatric treatment of homosexuality in China resulted from a deeply rooted belief that homosexuality was a disease and mental disorder. This idea had its origins in the translation of Western theories of psychology and medical science in the Republican era (Chiang 2010; Sang 2003; Kang 2009), the Maoist understanding of homosexuals as 'hooligans' (*liumang*) incompatible with the socialist subjectivity required by the state, and an obsession among post-Mao Chinese intellectuals with a highly selective body of works in Western psychology, psychiatry and medical science that were imagined to be on the pinnacle of authoritative scientific objectivity. The governance of non-heteronormative sexuality is not only a matter of public health, with its agenda of producing modern, healthy citizens, but also a concern for the state to establish a heteronormative, family-oriented and socially conservative moral and social order (Jeffreys 2006; Jeffreys & Yu 2015).

Lu Longguang, a neurologist from Nanjing Medical University, was one of the first medical professionals to conduct medical research into homosexuality in post-Mao China.[1] In the 1980s, he developed a homo-

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1. Although the book is coauthored by Liu and Lu, it is clear that they were responsible for writing different chapters, largely because of disciplinary boundaries (Liu

sexuality treatment method, which he named *shudao jiaozheng xinli zhi-liao* (Guided corrective psychotherapy). His treatment was essentially a combination of psychological counselling and conversion therapy. Over a period of ten years in the 1980s and 90s, he treated 1,000 gays and lesbians (D. Liu & Lu 2005: 277). Based on the classic Pavlovian model of stimulation and response, treatment involving conversion therapy has proved one of the most controversial ways of intervening in the practices of human sexuality. Taking into account the various approaches to treatment, from electric shock to injections, the overall goal of the treatment of homosexuals is to associate homosexual desire with feelings of discomfort, sickness, disgust, even pain. Doctor Lu's method included giving patients homoerotic pictures to look at or even a model to have sex with. In the meantime, he injected his patients with apomorphine, a pharmaceutical drug that made them feel physically sick. He repeated the experiment until the patients were able to relate their homosexual desire to a feeling of abasement, which he interpreted as a signal that they were 'recovering' from the 'disease'.

Using conversion therapy to treat homosexuality was by no means exclusively Chinese. It was a widespread practice in the West in the 1960s and 70s, when homosexuality was considered by some as both a disease and a sin, and when the drugs central to such treatment were clinically available.[2] The clinical treatment I refer to in this chapter occurred during China's modernization drive in the 1990s, when Chinese medical professionals were especially committed to 'catching up' with the West by importing its 'advanced' medical science. In sharing these cases, I have no intention of assuming a position of intellectual and ethical superiority, condemning the doctors and patients for their 'ignorance',

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was a sociologist and Lu was a medical doctor). In one of the many prefaces of the book, Lu claimed authorship for the chapters on the medical treatment and prevention of homosexuality. There was no indication that Liu also participated in these treatments. Therefore, in this chapter, I refer to Lu alone when discussing the practices of conversion therapy.

2. Conversion therapy is still practiced in some parts of the world, but in 1994 the American Psychological Association declared conversion therapy a dangerous practice that does not work. Since 2006, the use of conversion therapy to treat homosexuality has been seen as a violation of the codes of conduct and professional guidelines of both the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association.

or entertaining readers with an orientalist image of a 'backward' China struggling with its 'belated' modernity. I am fully aware of the unequal power relations in a global political economy and the disjuncted flows inherent in the process of globalization (Appadurai 1996). I recognize that this inequality is not purely confined to everyday, lived social realities; it is manifest in medical knowledge production as well.

To contextualize the issue under discussion, an understanding of modernity based on a particular snapshot of Western scientific knowledge was central to the post-Mao narrative of 'open-up'. A sense of the time lag in modernization put China, and Chinese medical professionals, in a disadvantaged position in a world wherein 'human rights' have become an inalienable and unquestionable part of human social existence. Instead of ridiculing and condemning seemingly 'crude' behaviours that violate the 'human rights' that many people now hold sacred (especially when it proves useful for the criticism of others), I will try to put these conversion therapy cases in context and consider their rationale. I am not embarking upon a teleological historical narrative; rather, I am trying to unravel the historical context in which the rationale of this therapy became reasonable.

> Today, I had the first session of treatment. At the hospital, the doctor showed me pictures and videos [of gay porn] ... I immediately got a hard-on. The doctor injected me with medicine [apormorphine] ... After a while (about ten minutes), I suddenly felt sick. My head started to ache. I felt feeble and drowsy. I sweated all over. My mind went blank. I lost interest in the pictures and the videos. I didn't want to carry on, but the doctor insisted that I should. I didn't want to touch anybody. I couldn't stop throwing up when I saw pictures of anal sex ... This lasted about twenty minutes ... After the treatment, for about twenty minutes, I felt like vomiting as soon as I thought of anal sex. (D. Liu & Lu 2005: 295–6)

In his account of the second session, a model was introduced to assist in the treatment of this patient:

> When the model stripped off and came to me with his erect cock, I was so excited that I got a huge hard-on, especially as he stroked my cock and asked me to touch his. The doctor injected drugs into me. I soon felt sick. Every time he [the model] moved in and out of my mouth, I felt like vomiting. I threw up, more and more intensely. At that time, I

really hated him [the model] and did not want him in my mouth. The doctor insisted that I carry on and I did. I felt extremely uncomfortable and I only wanted to throw up … During the whole session, I felt disgusted and I was very weak; I kept sweating all the time. Deep in my heart, I didn't want to see him [the model], let alone desire to touch anybody with my hands and mouth … I feel that the treatment was very effective. I should say that I was treated successfully. I felt sick on the sight of any cock; I even have difficulty getting hard. … I am pleased that I am on my way to a normal life. (Ibid.: 296–7)

The following diary entry demonstrates the desired outcome of the treatment:

Yes, I have succeeded. I have walked out of adversity and suffering. Now my wife has been pregnant for three months and I will be a father soon … I used to think that I am a hopeless gay man. The experience has shown that nothing is impossible. Everything in the world can be changed, including my psyche. I feel deeply that I should not have a sense of inferiority; nor should I succumb to the frustrations and failures of the past. I have seen the hope of life. I will have the confidence to overcome any difficulty! (Ibid.: 290)

After the treatment, I felt most strongly that the doctors were really good to me. I am grateful to them from the bottom of my heart … The doctor and I talked a long time. I cannot express my gratitude to them. (Ibid.: 292)

Lu acknowledged that 'the treatment of homosexuality is very difficult' (Ibid.: 274). Among the 1,000 patients he treated during the study period, 32.8 per cent received conversion therapy. A one-year follow up survey revealed that out of 82 people treated, 11 were 'basically' cured (13.5 per cent), 11 made obvious progress' (13.5 per cent), 32 made 'certain progress' (39 per cent), and 28 did not evidence any change (34 per cent) (Ibid.: 277). The outcome of the treatment, as the doctor stated, was far from satisfactory.

Controversial as it was, and however questionable its justification or even its success, those who wish to change their sexual identity are required to engage in unconventional ways of thinking, outside the essentialist box, about sexuality, identity and the self.[3] This chapter

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3. Essentialism, as opposed to social constructivism, often characterizes identity as fixed, inherent, biological, and ahistorical.

considers how this goal of transforming the self might be pursued by means other than medical treatment. Posing this query of necessity requires understanding the relationship between homosexuality, medical science and the notion of the self in postsocialist China.

Homosexuality, Medical Governmentality and Critical Attitude

Lu explained his motives for conducting conversion therapy in one of the published book's four prefaces[4]:

> Homosexuality has been tinted with mystery in China for a long time. People regard it as taboo; they do not want to talk about it. In reality, this phenomenon has been in existence since time immemorial. Instead of avoiding it, all walks of society should pay attention to and care about it. Regretably, there are many disagreements in understanding the issue due to the lack of research from multiple perspectives in our country. From the perspectives of clinical psychology and sociology, we have analysed the cases of 2,500 [homosexual] patients who came to us for treatment … Psychologists have the responsibility to help patients recover from their suffering, to achieve psychological balance and to enjoy the pleasure of their lives … I think that conducting research on homosexuality from multiple perspectives can bring happiness to people; it can help society build a higher level of civilisation and eliminate unpredictable social problems. Meanwhile, it will also help people gain a better understanding of and more sympathy towards the suffering of homosexuals and thus provide them with good and effective medical guidance and treatment. (D. Liu & Lu 2005: 1–2)

When Lu wrote this preface in 2002, he was well aware of the social pressures confronting gay people and the challenges associated with conducting medical research into homosexuality. He not only advocates 'a better understanding of and more sympathy towards the sufferings of homosexuals' but also called for 'conducting research on homosexuality from multiple perspectives' (Ibid.: 1). After addressing the incompatibility between the existence of homosexuality 'since time immemorial'

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4. This book was published in January 2005. It contained four prefaces, written respectively by a German sexologist in February 2003, Lu at the end of 2002, Liu in July 2002 (revised in September 2004), and Liu in May 2004. It also ended with an epilogue written by Liu in 2004. According to the authors' introduction, the book contract was signed in 1994. The first draft was completed in the mid-1990s and the second draft between 2002 and 2004.

and 'the lack of research from multiple perspectives' in China, he notes with some regret that 'there are many disagreements in understanding the issue'. 'Disagreements', in this context, should be understood as with those who regard homosexuality 'as taboo and do not want to talk about it' and, by inference, those who do not support his research into homosexuality. Liu explained in his preface written in 2004 that the contract for their book was signed in 1994, but it was not until eight years later that the publication details were finalized 'for various reasons' (Ibid.: 7). The reasons are further explained in the book's epilogue:

> For a long time, sexual science has been a forbidden area. After twenty years of efforts made by numerous people, the taboo has finally been broken. However, the sexual problems of some social groups are still forbidden areas, and homosexuality is a good example. (p. 332)

Liu continued by summarizing the significance of the book: 'To understand homosexuality, we must study it. Some colleagues in the field of science have charged against this forbidden area. I feel that our charge this time is a forceful one.' (p. 332)

Liu and Lu shared the 'critical attitude' cherished by many of their colleagues in post-Mao China. By 'critical attitude', I draw on the words of Michel Foucault: 'a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking of feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task' (1991c: 36).[5] Drawing on Foucault, Catherine Driscoll (2010) contends that modernity is characterized by this 'critical attitude'. This departs from the conventional understandings of modernity as a historical period, as a mode of production, and as a rationality to organize society. In the above quote, Liu and Lu apparently situate themselves on a historical continuum and understand their role in relation to history. They are not satisfied with merely 'knowing' the historical and social context; they are eager to participate in the process of changing history and society. There is a sense of heroism in their narrative: they consider their work, however small it may seem to be, a necessary and significant part of China's nation-building and modernization project. In this way, they connect

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5. My theorization of modernity as a critical attitude is inspired by Professor Catherine Driscoll's Cultural Theory lectures at the University of Sydney and her 2010 book, *Modernist Cultural Studies*.

their mundane everyday lives to the nation-state and to the nation's history. They are not only concerned with the present, but also with China's past, when 'feudalism' and Maoism had 'impeded' China's entry into modernity and with a future that will see China become a stronger country with a greater degree of freedom, thanks to the promise of, and faith in, modern science. More importantly, they are concerned with the transformation of themselves through their heroic and quotidian practices. As Foucault elaborates, drawing on the example of Baudelaire, 'To be modern is not to accept oneself as one in the flux of the passing moments; it is to take oneself as object of a complex and difficult elaboration' (1991c: 41). In this sense, the doctors' attitude towards Chinese history and towards themselves is certainly modern.

The rhetoric of 'truth' is manifest in the doctors' narrative, entwined with their insistence on the importance of the progressive human acquisition and distribution of modern science. It is best understood in the context of modern Chinese history. It is generally believed that during the Maoist era, people in China were deceived by political ideology; they could not think critically in a social imaginary dominated by class struggle and every word that Mao uttered had to be taken as indisputable 'truth'. Two popular slogans in and immediately after the Maoist era conveyed this understanding as they were disseminated into China's public culture: 'taking class struggle as the guiding principle' (*yi jieji douzheng wei gang*) and the 'two whatevers' (*liangge fanshi*) – whatever Chairman Mao said is truth and whatever Chairman Mao said should be followed faithfully. The beginning of the post-Mao era witnessed heated debates concerning the criteria for 'truth' among the intellectuals. The 1978 Communist Party Conference stipulated that 'practice is the sole criterion for truth' (*shijian shi jianyan zhenli de weiyi biaozhun*). The significance of the slogan lay in the premise that 'truth' could be debated and had to be tested by 'practice', a notion not to be countenanced in the late Maoist period. It also established empiricism and pragmatism as the criteria to determine 'truth'.

Despite the widespread scientism that emerged in post-Mao China, contesting discourses, writ large, are a constant and continuous part of the Chinese experience. What is new in the post-Mao Chinese experience is the inclusion of sex and sexuality in these contests. Homosexuality was then considered by sociologists and medical doctors including Liu

and Lu as a problem that China needed to deal with. Some Chinese intellectuals considered all discussions of sex and sexuality politically dangerous, symptomatic of 'bourgeois liberalism' (*zichan jieji ziyouhua*) and incompatible with socialism and China. Others saw talking about sex and sexuality as adopting a 'scientific' approach to the pursuit of 'truth'. Indeed, discourses on sex and sexuality are often associated with China's continued pursuit of modernity: while some of China's elites preach maintaining 'traditional values' (which often involve a conservative attitude towards sex and sexuality) in China's new modernization process, others equate asceticism with 'feudalism' and modernity with 'the West'. In the post-Mao era, the 'West' has proven an ambivalent social and cultural imaginary: its material wealth and 'sexual opening-up' are both attractive to pursue and corruptive to fear. In the same way, homosexuality paradoxically becomes both a 'feudal remnant' and a 'Western import', both a benchmark for social progress and a symbol of moral degradation. The ambivalence of homosexuality as a social identity, therefore, manifests the ambivalence of post-Mao Chinese modernity.

Liu and Lu's book is clearly situated in this debate surrounding the medical nature of homosexuality. Despite the taboo on homosexuality that commonly prevailed in the medical field, indeed in the whole society at the time, Liu and Lu were brave enough to carry out their research. While their research on this topic was not the first to be undertaken in post-Mao China, it was certainly one of the most influential research projects of its kind. Their determination to discover 'truth' and to combat the bias against homosexuality in both the medical field and Chinese society in general is indicative of the 'critical attitude' shared by many Chinese intellectuals in post-Mao China. Moreover, the same attitude is required of and instilled in the subjects of this treatment. I shall deal with this issue in the following sections.

Narrating the Self in Post-Mao China

According to Lu, in order to achieve success when using 'guided corrective psychotherapy', the establishment of a rapport between doctor and patient is essential. A doctor should, above all, be sincere in his approach. When he speaks to the patient, he must 'consider how to light a fire in the patient's heart and touch the patient's optimistic string so that the patient's agency can be motivated and his confidence in the treat-

ment can be strengthened' (D. Liu & Lu 2005: 279). A patient should, moreover,

> understand the self in a correct way; analyse the essence of one's psyche; discover the basic rules for the development of the psychological disease; erase the mystery of the psychological disease and psychological treatment; find the right way to transform one's personality constantly and to develop the harmony of one's mind and body (Ibid.: 279).

The above extract, which appeared in Liu and Lu's book as a guide for doctors, outlines an understanding of homosexuality as a psychological disease that can be cured by psychological treatment. I see this description as a hybridization of Western medical/psychological terminology, traditional Chinese philosophy, and Maoist voluntarism. The idea of 'develop[ing] the harmony of one's mind and body' is derived from traditional Chinese medicine, which itself is informed by Taoist philosophy. The emphasis on the doctor's leading role in guiding and inspiring the patient's agency to 'find the right way to transform his/her personality constantly' is representative of the language of 'thought work' (*sixiang gongzuo*) widely practised in the Maoist era with the aim of transforming people's subjectivity. It is important to note that when Lu, along with other Chinese medical professionals, imported Western medical science to China, he did not endorse the Western model uncritically. Rather, he incorporated Western psychology and conversion therapy with concepts drawn from traditional Chinese medicine with the Maoist strategies for 'thought reform'. Another doctor even innovatively utilized Chinese herbs in the treatment of homosexuality (Fang 1995).

Lu's recommendations for other doctors highlight the centrality of the self in the modern era. The process of conversion therapy suggests a deeply-hidden 'self' that can be reached by psychological counselling and self-reflexivity. It also points to the possibility of transforming the self by these means. The 'self', in this context, is not simply a Freudian (or post-Freudian) psychic self with multiple layers of consciousness. It is a self that has constantly been mobilized in the continuum of the Maoist and post-Mao Chinese societies.

The ambivalence of the 'self' was particularly manifest in Maoist China. The individual self was considered antithetical to the 'collective' and emphasis on the individual self was synonymous with being 'selfish'

or 'anarchistic' and either way was largely a pejorative term. It was also related to modes of 'bourgeois liberalism' (*zichan jieji ziyouhua*), a popular term during the Maoist era that denoted an individual subjectivity incompatible with the socialist revolutionary hegemony that emphasized the collective and the public. For these reasons, the 'self' needed to be repudiated in the people's consciousness. At the same time, the complete erasure of the 'self' was neither possible nor desirable, as the 'self' was still needed to maintain the existence and superiority of the 'collective'. The 'self' thus became subject to constant criticism, reformation, and transformation.[6] The Maoist concept of 'permanent revolution' stressed the possibility and necessity of transforming the 'self'. The theory of 'permanent revolution', initiated by Marx and developed by Trotsky and Mao, was above all a 'formula for the continuous revolutionization of human consciousness and energies as the key to the achievement of the social and economic goals' promised by socialist revolution. In Mao's view, 'the emergence of the new society presupposed the emergence of a spiritually transformed people.' (Meisner 1986: 197–8) Two popular slogans, 'criticism and self-criticism' (*piping yu ziwo piping*) and 'serving the people heart and soul' (*quanxi quanyi wei renmin fuwu*), conveyed this ambivalence concerning the 'self' in the Maoist era. Although the self was the target of criticism by different parties (including by oneself), it was still necessary for the 'collective' to affirm its superiority. Numerous movements that proliferated in the Maoist era, including thought reforms, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution, all illustrated the regime's unrelenting efforts to transform the 'self' in the interests of the making of a new society.

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6. Professor Catherine Driscoll reminds me that this is exactly what a range of philosophers from Kant onwards say about the subject of Enlightenment and/or modernity. I take it to mean that the Maoist project of subject making is intrinsically modern. Although in the post-Mao era, 'modernity' has taken on certain associations, often with the West and the present, in public discourses in China, and the Maoist era is considered not modern, or less modern, compared to the post-Mao project of reform and opening up to the West. Yet, as far as the Maoist projects of nation-building, industrialization, anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism, restructuring of the society and radical politicization of everyday life are concerned, the Maoist era is a very modern era. Zhang Xudong names modernity in the Maoist and post-Mao China 'anti-modern modernity' in that it diverges from the type of hegemonic modernity dominated by global capitalism and opens up alternative political and social visions.

China's exposure to the West, together with the influence of consumerism, saw the resurgence of the 'self'.[7] The post-Mao 'self' is characterized by a shifting ambivalence from its Maoist predecessor. On the one hand, post-Mao hegemony required the emergence of the 'self' to mark its rupture from its past. The imagination of an increasing liberal governmentality shared by the Chinese state and people at large, along with the sweeping forces of the market economy, calls for the appearance of a new 'self'. On the other hand, communist polity still required the centrality of the 'collective', represented by the nation-state and the Party, to be prioritized over the 'self'. Thus, the 'self' is both being deterritorialized and reterritorialized continuously by the state and the capitalist market. Like sex and sexuality, post-Mao public rhetoric has ambivalently both hailed the self as manifesting the 'liberation of human nature' and cautioned this self as a 'threat' to Confucian and socialist values. The expression of one's 'true self' is also increasingly linked to romantic love, sex and sexuality. The new emphasis on modernizing medical science in the postsocialist era, especially its direct incorporation of scientific psychology and psychoanalysis, has reinforced this inter-relation of self, sex and sexuality. Many people in China, especially those among the younger generations of the Reform era, enthusiastically talk about finding a 'true' self and thus liberating sex and sexuality from its long history of suppression. Subjectivities and identities are widely perceived as other than inherent and fixed within this rhetoric. In fact, the self has to be understood as fluid and malleable and thus capable of being mobilized by the nation-state, when necessary, and of being comfortably situated, as rapidly as possible, in the context of the rapid development of the society. When anthropologist Xin Liu (2002) talks about the 'otherness of self' in the dominant personality of Reform-era China, he is recognizing a necessarily fluid subjectivity that is tailored for a rapidly changing society.

With this brief genealogy of the self, I suggest that the transformation from a Maoist society to a post-Mao society has given rise to an increasingly ambivalent public conception of the 'self'. This self is necessarily

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7.   The notion of the self was central to the late Qing and May Fourth intellectuals' imagination of a new society and a new humanity at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century (H. Wang 2000). Western psychology and psychoanalysis entered China's social discourse at the beginning of the twentieth century (Larson 2009). This is why I use the term 'resurgence' in the post-Mao context.

a historically contingent social construction, without many inherent qualities or origins. To consolidate hegemony, the dominant subjectivities of a society need to be constantly made and remade, reformed and transformed. If the Maoist revolutionary hegemony mobilized and constructed certain political subjectivities, the reform and opening-up in the post-Mao era required an even more rapid and dramatic transformation of subjectivity. Ordinary people's locations, occupations, philosophies of life and lived experiences have been drastically changed in the current era. From this broad historical perspective, it is not that conversion therapy arrives in the post-Mao era to transform gay people into straight. Post-Mao Chinese society has given birth to gay identity; after discovering this identity as one that is incompatible with post-Mao hegemony, methods of marginalizing or even expunging it were devised, often with the help of medical science. This helped construct gay identity as being antithetic to Chinese modernity. Indeed, it is the rapidly-changing post-Mao society that makes the transformation of subjectivities and sexualities possible.

Diary Writing as Technology of the Self

During Lu's psychological counselling and conversion therapy sessions, each patient was required to keep a diary to document the progress of their treatment. The doctor read and commented on these diaries and accordingly made or revised plans for further treatment. Liu & Lu published a selection of these diaries, together with the doctors' comments, as a part of their self-reflective report on their treatment programme. In this section, I examine some of the diaries written by some of these gay patients, in conjunction with the doctor's comments, in order to consider how their transformation of subjectivities and sexualities took place throughout the therapy.

Before I delve into the published diaries, I should point out that the diaries that the gay patients kept have inklings of the 'red diaries' during the Maoist era. At that time, people were required to keep a diary in which they reflected on their thoughts and conduct, and expressed their determination to transform themselves to be the subjects that the revolutionary hegemony required. These dairies manifested processes of subjectification. However, not all these dairies conformed to the requirements of the Party. Some non-political entries that detailed every-

day experiences evaded subjectification of political ideology.[8] Similarly, the diaries kept for conversion therapy also manifest varying degrees of resistance to the medical regimes that govern these subjects.

The following paragraph is taken from a series of diary entries written by a final-year university student after his first few psychological counselling sessions with Lu:

> I understand that the fundamental reason for the failure of my previous treatment is not that my brain is stupid or that I do not work hard, but that I do not have a strong mind. I must change my personality and improve my psychological condition if I want to live an easier life. To change my personality, I must first of all recognise all my weaknesses. Only by knowing myself correctly can I overcome my medical condition. I feel that I have the following weaknesses: 1. too careful in doing things and always aiming for perfection; 2. a very strong vanity; 3. not fitting into the collective; 4. a strong self-esteem; 5. cowardice; 6. often indulging myself in unrealistic fantasies. Of course I have other weaknesses too. They need to be discovered gradually through practising self-reflection. Meanwhile, I should overcome 'fear'. It is difficult to tackle all these problems, but I will try my best. (D. Liu & Lu 2005: 283)

Lu responded to the student's writing promptly when the latter expressed some 'doubts':

> We have dealt with his feedback in time. We have made him realise clearly that he has made some progress and that the treatment is effective. Although he still has doubts about himself, it is very important for him to keep on the practice [of taking conversion therapy]. We also pointed out to him that haste will not work in such a difficult process of transforming the self. He is very likely to have doubts and even go back to where he started. He should carry on. Both we and he should have confidence. There should not be any 'fear'! (Ibid.: 285)

Five days later, the student wrote:

> I have clearly realised that I still have many 'fears'. They are difficult to overcome. However, I should not have doubts on my process.
>
> In life, I find myself too naive. I am lacking in social experience and my circle of life is too narrow. I used to confine myself to my small world and indulge myself in all sorts of fantasy. Also, after I have realised

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that my disease is partly related to my poor body condition, I regularly (almost every day) go to the playground to play basketball and football as well as to fight and wrestle with other boy students. With regard to 'knowing the self', I am afraid that I may still have a misunderstanding. I hope that the doctor can give me some guidance. (Ibid.: 286)

The doctor commented on the student's progress:

The university student has experienced various and indeed alternating psychological conditions during the treatment: doubt, hope, joy, weakness and confidence. Sometimes conflicting thoughts emerge in a single entry. This is a hard process for him. To his and to the doctor's relief, he is on the right track. He has hope, after all. (Ibid.: 286)

Writing diaries is the kind of self-examination that Foucault discusses as a 'technology of the self'. While Foucault's essay on this topic traces the emergence of modernity in Western culture through the transformation of ethical relations to the self into the confessional, self-examining subject, we can see a related emergence in the self-interrogations of Maoist and therapeutic diaries. However, Foucault's delineation of the emergence of the modern self from the feudal/medieval 'confessional' self rather than the Greek notion of the self overlooks the coexistence and mixture of multiple modes of the self. While the self-examining, confessional self is central to the formation of the modern subject, there are still elements, and sometimes traces, of other regimes of the self in contemporary society. I am primarily interested in how these other modes of the self are manifested in the conversion therapy diaries. As I have suggested earlier in this chapter, the Confucian and Taoist modes of the self are all evident in these diaries, aside from the Maoist and post-Mao modes. For example, self-examination requires a conception of the self as both the subject and object of one's identity formation. But the 'faults' or 'weaknesses' that the student referred to in his diary also have strong Confucian and Maoist imprints, in that they encouraged collective conformity and discouraged individuality; they advocated working-class pragmatism and rejected 'petit bourgeois' (*xiaozi*) idealism. This mode of the self is apparently different from the modern neoliberal Western self.

The friend/enemy dichotomy in these processes of therapeutic self-examination is characteristic of Maoist governmentality more widely. Mao Zedong (1965) famously stated: 'Who are our enemies, who are our friends? This is the question germane to the revolution.' During

the Maoist era, extensive efforts were made to distinguish enemies from friends in international and domestic politics, in class struggles and in 'thought work'. To align oneself with friends and to fight against enemies was a crucial task required by the revolutionary hegemony. In this process one gets to know the self and construct an identity for oneself. Most important of all, through constant 'self-examination' (*ziwo shencha*), 'self-criticism' (*ziwo piping*), and 'struggle against selfishness and criticism of revisionism' (*dousi pixiu*), individuals were expected to internalize the self/enemy dichotomy. Michael Dutton glosses over Mao's line in his analysis of Maoist governmentality:

> The enemy was not just a problem for the collective revolutionary body but one that the individual body of the revolutionary must face. The external question of friends and enemies was internalized just as the collective question becomes the individual revolutionary's own existential one … That this question of the enemy could be both 'germane to the revolution' (Mao) and, simultaneously, one's own (ontological) question as a figure (Schmitt), indicates the degree of intensity and level of commitment necessary to drive this form of politics. It required sacrifice and sometimes that was given in blood. (2009: 35)

Dutton is referring here to aspects of what I call Maoist governmentality. In the post-Mao era, this type of governmentality still persists. Like a spectre, the friend-enemy dichotomy still hovers over people's everyday lives and plays a crucial role in constructing post-revolutionary subjectivities. The self-examination process required in the writing of confessional diaries as part of conversion therapy exemplifies a type of subject formation required by a continuity between Maoist and post-Maoist ideologies concerning the self. The transformation from gay to straight reproduces the strategies for constructing legitimate subjects that had been employed by the Maoist and post-Mao regimes.

Affective Communication in Conversion Therapy

One important factor that contributes to such self-transformation is the use of affect. I use 'affect' here to encompass a wide range of feelings and emotions. Affect 'affects' because it not only operates on human bodies but on the widely accepted notion of human 'souls'.[9] Liu and Lu

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9.   Here I am reminded of Foucault's warning against speaking about a metaphysical

attributed the key to the success of the treatment to 'guiding' (*shudao*), namely. guiding and channelling patients' emotions so as to change their minds and souls:

> A doctor should start with patients' emotions. Teach them the grave consequences of their sexual inversion on themselves and on their families, make them determined to co-operate closely with the doctor and determined to change the inner dynamic structure of their homosexual psyche and behaviour.(D. Liu & Lu 2005: 278)

Different techniques were devised to make the project of changing people's 'souls' possible, from the 'talking cure' to group meetings, from reading health manuals to writing personal diaries, from listening to tape cassettes to watching videos. Reading this selection of diary entries constituted one of the most unusual experiences of my life as a researcher: I could feel the suffering and pain of these individuals; yet I was also moved and inspired by their strong determination to discard the old subjectivity and embrace a brand-new one:

> I am determined to overcome the difficulties and carry on. I have encountered some difficulties in transforming my personality. I feel very uncomfortable; I have got a stomach-ache, poor appetite, headache, bad memory, depression and even worse psyche … I am pleased that I am now familiar with, and have mastered, a set of methods to combat the disease. I often told myself: 'Don't be afraid. This is a paper tiger (*zhi laohu*).[10] I will fight against it.'(Ibid.: 293)

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soul: 'the soul is the prison of the body' (1977a: 30). He further elaborates on the materiality of the soul: 'It would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect. On the contrary, it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished–and, in a more general way, on those one supervises, trains and corrects, over madmen, children at home and at school, the colonised, over those who are stuck at a machine and supervised for the rest of their lives' (1977a: 29). It is, therefore, possible for an atheist to talk about 'souls'.

10. 'Paper tiger' (*zhi laohu*), a phrase that Mao used in a 1956 interview with the American journalist Anna Louise Strong to describe the United States: 'In appearance it is very powerful but in reality it is nothing to be afraid of; it is a paper tiger. Outwardly a tiger, it is made of paper, unable to withstand the wind and the rain' (Mao 1965). Mao said that 'all counterrevolutionaries are paper tigers' in a 1957 speech at the Moscow Meeting of Representatives of the Communist and Workers' Parties (Ibid.). The term 'paper tiger' has been used in China to refer to enemies or obstacles that are seemingly strong and powerful but in reality weak and fragile.

This individualized process of guided self-transformation was never independent of its social contexts. One particularly effective element of the treatment was the 'tea parties' (*chahuahui*), attended by patients and their parents, friends and relatives, in which they shared success stories and encouraged each other. After one such meeting, a patient wrote:

> This was really moving. Who would believe that everything was so real without seeing it with their own eyes? I felt the glory of humanity from the mutual support between the patients. Xiao Hu used to be very shy. Now he is brave enough to stand on the stage and share his story. His father was wiping away his tears. Tears filled my eyes when I saw all those scenes. They reminded me of my heart-broken sister and my mother and father. With guidance from the doctor and support of my parents and relatives, I shall never lose heart. I am determined to conquer the disease. (Ibid.: 300)

In many ways, these meetings resemble the group meetings held in the Maoist era, when people were organized to 'tell bitterness' (*suku*) resulting from the old regime and to reflect on the benefits that the new revolutionary regime offered. The importance of 'telling bitterness' in public lay in its capacity to link the speaker's individual experience and emotions with those of the collective, forging an imagined collective identity and building an affective community that the revolutionary regime demanded (Hershatter 2002; Rofel 1999). The practice of holding 'tea parties' still continues in contemporary China: Communist Party branches organize these events to involve people in the community during festive seasons. At these 'tea parties' people are encouraged to share their personal experiences, often in relation to the Communist Party, and to seek emotional support from others. The process of sharing stories effectively constructs a group identity of socialist camaraderie. It is more appropriate to consider these 'tea parties' as ways in which the 'pastoral power' (Foucault 1990) of the Party State is exercised rather than seeing them as 'sovereign power' or creating 'false consciousness'.

Kenneth Plummer's (1995) symbolic interactionist theory demonstrates the importance of such collective story-telling activities in constructing identities and communities. Plummer points out that stories do not simply reflect practical and symbolic actions; they are also part of the political and ideological process. The question of power is essential to the

dynamics of such story-telling: 'The power to tell a story, or indeed not to tell a story, under the conditions of one's own choosing, is part of the political process.'(1995: 26) In this context, the patients have a strictly reduced capacity to refuse to tell a story, and the stories they tell are in many ways predetermined. These stories are imbued with ideologies of heteronormativity and familism, and mark a violent rejection of homosexual desire incompatible with the socialist and postsocialist governing rationalities.

In the doctor's report, Lu emphasized the moments of success in their treatment programme. One patient wrote:

> You have brought me new hope and you are the light of my life. Like God, you have brought sunshine and love to everything in the world, and your medical expertise and a warm heart to your patients. I am always indebted to you. (D. Liu & Lu 2005: 303)

This language may resemble that used by the Christian church, but in this case, the legacy of Mao is more manifest.[11] In her seminal work on gifts and *guanxi* (personal connection and reciprocity) in China, Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang (1994) elucidates a number of affective means developed by the 'Mao cult' by which Maoist subjectivity was constructed. The adoption of particular types of language and rituals to express certain emotions enhances a sense of community, identity and belonging. Dutton (2009) uses the phrase 'passionately governmental' to highlight the emotional intensity of the Maoist language. To quote Judith Butler: if, as Louis Althusser (1971) suggests, people are 'interpellated', or 'hailed', into subjects; then, what makes the process of 'interpellation' happen? What makes people 'turn around' when they hear the hailing? What makes people become 'passionately attached' to their identities? (Butler 1997: 5) Affect, it seems, is crucial to the transformation of identities in the Butlerian notion of 'passionate attachment'. Affect makes it possible for power to turn people into subjects and for new forms of governmentality to function. It also provides a means by which people can evade 'hailing' and find the 'middle range of agency' (Sedgwick 2003) that is not manifested by public resistance. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault (2002) lists ways in which the world is 'held together', including ideology, scientific knowledge and

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11. It is important to note Foucault's notion of the technologies of the self draws largely on the emergence of the Catholic confessional self and on the relation between faith and grace.

everyday experience. Ideology is often considered to be manipulated by political powers; scientific knowledge controlled by experts; people's everyday experiences may be outside the realms of both. Experience, embodied and affective, points to ways in which ordinary people's agency is located – not necessarily through political mobilization, or saying no to power, but through everyday lives. Research into the everyday life, according to Martin Manalansan IV, 'unveils the veneer of the ordinary and the commonplace to lay bare the intricate and difficult hybrid negotiations and struggles between hegemonic social forces and voices from below' (Manalansan 2003: 90).

Conversion therapy was an affective project. As Lu points out, conversion therapy requires that

> doctors should treat the patients sincerely, take good care of them, and devote all their attention to the treating process. In particular, a lot of homosexuals have been physically and psychologically traumatised. They require more respect and better care. (D. Liu & Lu 2005: 280)

In the process, affect was mobilized by doctors, nurses, patients and people with different modes and intensities of connectivity, acquaintances and strangers alike. All were active participants in the project, which also draws on numerous literary and medical texts, the mass media and multiple forms of cultural representations and articulations. Both Laurent Berlant (1997) and Rofel (2007) show how the nation-state mobilizes affect by creating certain national public culture to create particular types of citizenship. In this sense, the 'structure of feeling' (Williams 1961) is both structuring and structured. I suggest here that it is not medical treatment *per se* that turns gays straight in such treatment. It is the cultural intelligibility of heteronormativity and of an affect project that privileges heterosexual desire as necessary to participation in the regimes of family, marriage, and community that marginalizes any desire that threatens heterosexual normativity.

Performance and Performativity

The theatricality of the treatment process manifested in the records of the conversion therapy is well worth noting. First there is an enactment of same-sex eroticism, followed by an attempt to transform a patient's homosexual identity to heterosexual identity. Both the male model and the

gay 'patient' risk becoming too involved in the homosexual identity they perform. This risk is mediated by the doctor, who, like an experienced stage director, makes sure that the performance proceeds smoothly. Medical science, as a sovereign regime that governs the modern human body, imbues doctors with indisputable confidence and authority in such carefully delimited contexts. The most remarkable aspect about this programme of conversion therapy is that both the doctors and the patients seemed completely devoted to their roles, exuding great hope for the programme's success.[12] All performed their identities so seriously that there was no room to represent the absurdity of the performance.

In *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler (1990, 1993) links gendered and sexed identities with the notion of 'performativity'. According to Butler, gender does not describe something that pre-exists; rather, it is a form of 'doing' that brings a gendered subject into existence. Gender performativity is a 'stylised repetition of acts' enacted by the body within the cultural norms that define gendered identities. Cautioning critics and readers against a voluntaristic reading of the concept, Butler distinguishes 'performativity' from 'performance': while 'performance' presumes a subject, 'performativity' is 'the vehicle through which ontological effects are produced' (Butler, Osborne, & Segal 1993). In a collection of essays written by a number of scholars working in the field of gender studies and performance studies, Eve Sedgwick and Andrew Parker (Sedgwick, Parker, & The English Institute 1995) call for a reconsideration of the convergences, instead of the differences, between 'performativity' and 'performance'. Drawing on J. L. Austin (Austin 1962) and Jacques Derrida (1988), Parker and Sedgwick ask when and how 'is saying something doing something'. These questions, they argue, have created 'one of the most under-articulated, of such crossings … [namely] the oblique intersection between performativity and the loose cluster of theatrical practices, relations, and traditions known as performance' (1995: 1). Their collection marks an important intervention in performance studies. Indeed, by linking 'performance' to 'performativity', we are asking questions about how identities are formed through reiterated bodily practices, and, in so do-

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12. I thank Professor Catherine Driscoll for pointing out the conversion therapy's resemblance with psychoanalysis, which also relies on emotional attachment to function.

ing, reveal the instability of identities and the fictitiousness of our lived realities. By theorizing performativity and performance, Butler, Parker and Sedgwick draw our attention to the theatricality of the treatment and its relation to social norms.

If gender is the effect of reiterated performativity, then the whole society participates in this grand scene of enactment. In this social script, compulsory heterosexuality suppresses homosexual desire. Multiple social discourses, including medical, legal, media and popular culture, all contribute to prescribing and sustaining gender and sexual norms. Human bodies become sites wherein different social discourses intersect and are contested. As Foucault points out in his account of the emergence of a modern disciplinary power which is the necessary precursor to governmentality, 'the human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it … Thus discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, "docile bodies"' (Foucault 1977a: 138).

The reality was that these proper performances of gendered sexuality did not prove successful. In fact, the majority of these conversion therapy cases failed and the doctor did not detail the course of the 'failure stories'. However, from the 'success stories' recorded in his book, we can catch a glimpse of the possible failures of such a treatment. Despite their 'good cooperation' with the doctor during the therapy, the patients on occasion expressed doubts regarding the treatment:

> The numerous cases that the doctor showed me have made me come to an easy conclusion: some of them suffered from the disease longer and more severely than I do. Since they can be cured, I can certainly be cured. However, thinking of the backward psychotherapy in our country, I still have some doubts about the doctor's words. I still think that my behaviour has not done any harm to society. What mistakes have I made? Some people think that it [homosexuality] is a sign of human civilisation. Gay people like da Vinci and Plato have all made great contributions to humanity. (D. Liu & Lu 2005: 283)

In this extract, the patient made some references to the West, such as Plato and da Vinci. This demonstrates the multiple and often contradictory discourses concerning homosexuality circulating in Chinese society at the time. Homosexuality was at once considered a disease and 'a sign of human civilization'. After all, social discourses are never singular, and

nor are they coherent. It is the coexistence of these contested discourses that offers space for people to negotiate and to contest them.

The patients' doubts took the forms of subversion and parody at times:

> I do not know how other patients got cured. I do not hold out much hope for my treatment. Long-term spiritual torment has made me wonder if I am a human being or a ghost. If it is really difficult to change, I may as well find a boyfriend as soon as possible. It will help me recover from my psychological trauma and develop a healthy personality. Otherwise, I am genuinely worried that my personality will become even more abnormal. Doctor, if you do not mind, will you please help me find a boyfriend? (Ibid.: 285)

In the midst of all these questions, doubts, despair and irony, the myth of a perfect performance and a coherent gender and sexuality began to collapse.

Conclusion

These diary entries written by Chinese gay men receiving conversion therapy manifest both the transformation of subjectivities and the construction of a political self through conversion therapy. Both processes are built on the violent rejection of homosexual desire, which is intrinsically located in the post-Mao Chinese project of making governable citizens who are defined in significant ways by having legitimate desires. Many techniques of Maoist governmentality, such as the 'friend/enemy' dichotomy and the political use of affect, were explicitly at work in this therapeutic project. Bodies, sexualities and desires often act as sites for state intervention. The conversion therapy diaries bear witness to the remaking of both bodies and subjectivities by the social engineering project of post-Mao China and by the pervasive medical governmentality of modern society more widely.

This chapter highlights the significant role that affect plays in subject formation and transformation. Indeed, affect has also been used by the state as governing strategies. As Michael Dutton's research on affective governmentality in the Maoist era demonstrates, the mobilization of affect was a political project for Mao. One of the means to create emotional intensities was to resort to the friend/enemy dichotomy. This chapter has demonstrated the continuing existence and powerful impact of

the Maoist friend/enemy dichotomy in the transformation of the self from gay to straight. The socialist forms of power, governmentality and subjectivity still impacts on contemporary queer subject formation in significant ways.

However, a sole focus on governmentality, be it socialist, medical or affective, does not do justice to the complexity of these gay men's narratives of the self. Another way to look at these diaries is to use Foucault's notion of the 'technologies of the self' developed in his later works. For Foucault, governmentality is about technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and make them subjects, 'technologies of the self', however, are not so much about domination and subordination; technologies of power and technologies of the self are connected and intertwined, but they also denote different modes of relations and subjectivities. Technologies of the self 'permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and ways of being, so as to transform themselves in order to obtain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality' (Foucault 1988b: 18). Foucault's notion 'technologies of the self' allows us to see the subject not simply as the product of discourse and power, but as a process of 'becoming', a sophisticated artwork that one makes and remakes ceaselessly, and a 'way of life' full of creative possibilities and potentialities. As Foucault remarks in the second volume of *The History of Sexuality*, the 'arts of life', which also applies to homosexual 'practices of the self',

> are those voluntary and deliberate practices according to which men [sic] not only set themselves rules of conduct but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria (1990b: 10–11)

Foucault was talking about the practice of the self in ancient Greece. The gay patients receiving conversion therapy treatment seem to be in a very different historical and social context. Yet how do we know that they were *not* experiencing the joys and the pains of self-transformation, as ancient Greeks did? Seen from the lens of the technologies of the self, we can actually marvel at the gay patients' determination and perseverance in transforming the self. They manifest both the 'critical attitude',

which characterizes modernity, and the 'limit attitude', which points to the historical situatedness of the modern self.

I have also introduced the notion of performativity in this chapter. Performativity primarily deals with the relation between the subject and power, but it also points to sites of resistance. These sites of resistance are mostly unconscious. But it is the iterability, that is, parallel but not identical repetition, that offers ways to deviate from the norms over time. From the diaries, we see the failures and slippages of such performances, and these point to possible resistances to regulating regimes of power and governmentality.

In the next chapter, I will focus on the life and work of Cui Zi'en, China's leading queer filmmaker and activist. I will show how Cui uses digital video films to articulate his queer politics, and how he turns from making art-house auteur films to making activist documentaries. Cui's 'digital video activism' provides us with a way to think about queer activism in a context where political confrontation in public spaces is not possible or is considered problematic, and where queer activism does not have to replicate the post-Stonewall model of visibility and pride.

Figure11: Queer filmmaker Cui Zi'en (photo courtesy of Cui Zi'en)

5.

Cui Zi'en the Queer

Portrait of A Filmmaker

I have a sense of fear every time when I travel to the US and see the boundless private mansions or properties. No one needs such a large space. Public ownership of property has its own problems. But human beings cannot cease to challenge private ownership of property simply because of the setbacks encountered in the socialist phase. In my opinion, it takes a lot of courage to pursue the ideal of communism. I visited an anarchist community in Copenhagen two years ago, where drugs are traded freely and no one is leader. You see a different form of society there. One often feels that dictatorship is unbreakable in socialism, and money is unbreakable in capitalism. The fear is the same. The world does not need a fixed framework, and I question all such frameworks. In my opinion, humanity needs to find a utopia.

<div align="right">

Cui Zi'en in 'Queer Filmmaker Cui Zi'en:
Everyone Is Marginalised in China'

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With music beginning to play and credits starting to roll, the two-hour-long documentary came to an end.[1] Lights went on, showing a modestly equipped auditorium with approximately one hundred people. The audience burst into applause. Their eyes followed a man walking up to the front. The host introduced the man as the director of the film. Holding the microphone, the director began his speech with a routine list of acknowledgements. He had hardly finished reading the list when he began to sob. A young woman walked up to the front, placed her arms around him and hugged him. All of the audience were moved by the scene.

The man was Cui Zi'en, China's leading queer filmmaker and activist, and the film was his 2008 documentary *Queer China, 'Comrade' China*

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1. The film has two versions: a one-hour version and a two-hour version. In most screenings, the one-hour version is used. The screening discussed in this article used the two-hour version.

(Zhi tongzhi), the first film documenting the history of the queer move-ment in China. The event was the premiere of the film at the Songzhuang Art Gallery, Beijing, in November 2008. Despite the fact that the film was not allowed to be publicly shown in China because China's media censors do not allow public screening of homosexuality-themed films, it has still been circulated in China and abroad through unofficial channels, including underground community screenings and bootleg DVDs. The film has won some critical acclaim in and outside of China, including the audience award for best documentary at the 2009 Torino LGBT film festival. Audience responses to the film inside China's queer communities have been varied: while most describe it as the best and the most accessible film Cui has ever made, some have lamented the 'mainstreaming' of Cui's films and politics: Cui has been known for his avant-garde films created for a small art-house cinema audience as well as his uncompromising queer minoritarian politics; this film seems to cater to an ordinary queer audience and a 'homonormative' gay identity politics. Has Cui changed his film aesthetics from queer films to gay films? Has he changed his politics from queer politics to gay identity politics? Why does the film use *tongzhi* in its Chinese title (*Zhi tongzhi*, meaning 'an archive for comrades')? If the film is, as its Chinese title suggests, a queer archive, what type of queer history, identity and poli-tics has the film archived?

In this chapter, I look at Cui's films and politics. Instead of focusing on the queer representations in his films, I focus on Cui as a person: his life trajectory, his worldviews and beliefs, as well as his filmmaking activities and his queer activism. In other words, I try to establish an organic link between a person's life experience, his *Weltanschauung* (worldview) and the works he produces (Lukács 1978).[2] In doing so, I reject a text-focused approach; that is, seeing films as closed texts whose meanings become clear only through an elite critic's careful reading and interpretation. I also part with an auteur-focused approach, which at-tributes all the technical and aesthetic merits of a film to a mystical and somehow coherent figure of a film director. This chapter can be best thought of as a 'portrait', which tries to capture a fleeting moment of a

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2. *Weltanschauung*, literally 'worldview', expresses Lukács' conception of a Marxist worldview and refers to the concentrated and generalized sum of a writer's life experiences.

person but can under no circumstances offer a comprehensive picture of the person's life. A portrait is the work of an artist, another individual whose subjectivity is often called into question. A portrait is always incomplete, and it does not strive to encompass all aspects of a person's life. A portrait is necessarily subjective, therefore not without bias.

I have assembled materials, mostly my own and other people's interviews with Cui, to piece together a relatively coherent picture of the filmmaker. In this chapter, I quote Cui's words extensively to let him speak for himself, aware of the impossibility of an unmediated representation and the intricate politics of such a representation. In many ways, I am reconstructing a seemingly coherent person as a foil for my articulation of a particular type of politics, knowing that Cui himself would probably object to treating his ideas as static, dogmatic and stripped of their context. I hope that I have done justice to his ideas, which, admittedly, have had a great impact on me and many queer activists in China.

Cui the Queer

Born in 1957 into a Catholic family in northeast China's Harbin city, Cui is a person that defies definition; perhaps it is his refusal to be defined by gender, sexual and social norms that makes him intrinsically queer. Officially, he is associate professor at the Film Research Institute, Beijing Film Academy, China's lyceum film academy. However, as part of an 'administrative penalty', he has not had the opportunity to teach undergraduate students ever since he 'came out' as gay. He is a film director, producer, literary and film scholar, screenwriter, novelist, and queer activist, all in one. He is Catholic but seldom goes to church: 'I believe in Christ, not the churches' (Cui in Qi Wang 2004: 185); Christian symbols and ideas, however, appear frequently in his early fiction films. He is not a communist and he adamantly rejects official communist bureaucracy in China, and yet communist principles and practices feature strongly in his films, and he even speaks of building a 'communist international of queer films' (Cui and Liu 2010). He was born in China but does not believe in 'Chineseness'; he takes pride in being an internationalist and a citizen of the world (if not the universe, as his science fiction films often involve extra-terrestrials). He identifies himself as gay but is against LGBT identity politics. He describes himself as polyamorous and particularly attracted to straight men. He is

often dressed in gender neutral clothes. Most of people call him 'Teacher Cui' and his friends call him Cuizi. He challenges every definition and boundary, and in this sense, he is truly queer.

Cui describes his adult life trajectory as consisting of several decades, each with its own focus: the first decade was devoted to writing, during which he published prolifically as a novelist and a literary and film critic; the second decade focused on making more than a dozen fiction films;[3] the third was spent on making three queer documentaries and participating actively in queer activism, including being a principal organizer of the Beijing Queer Film Festival.[4]

Cui's fiction films have to date received the most scholarly attention and because of them he is celebrated as 'queer auteur'. He is often compared to international queer auteurs such as Pedro Almodóvar, Rainer Werner Fassbinder and even Andy Warhol (Fan 2015: 259). Chris Berry compares him to pre-Stonewall underground independents Kenneth Anger and Jack Smith and describes his films as embodying an unholy trinity of themes: 'the sacred, the profane, and the domestic' (2004: 196). Helen Leung (2004), following Tony Raynes, sees his films as representing 'new queer Chinese cinema' and 'Queer Third Cinema'. Audrey Yue (2012) considers his film exemplar of a 'queer sinophone film'. Paul Pickowicz (2006) suggests that Cui's films index a new chapter of Chinese film history. All these critical reviews highlight the significance of Cui's fiction films in Chinese and queer film histories.

Cui's later films, i.e., the three documentaries, have so far received limited critical attention (Bao 2015; Robinson 2015; Rofel 2010; J. Zhang 2013). Part of the reason may lie in the popular opinion that his documentary films seem to have lost their 'queer' edge and instead model mainstream documentaries more closely. Why did a queer auteur

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3. The fiction films Cui has made include *Enter the Clowns* (2002), *The Old Testament* (2002), *Feeding Boys, Ayaya* (2003), *Keep Cool and Don't Blush* (2003), *An Interior View of Death* (2004), *The Narrow Path* (2004), *Shitou and That Nana* (2004), *Star Appeal* (2004), *My Fair Son* (2005), *WC Huhu Hahei* (2005), *Withered in a Blooming Season* (2005), and *Refrain* (2006). He was both director and screenwriter for most of the films mentioned above.

4. The documentaries Cui has made include: *Night Scene* (2005); *We are the … of Communism* (2007) and *Queer China, 'Comrade' China* (2008). *Night Scene* is a docudrama, in which Cui experimented on blending documentaries and fiction films. For a critical analysis of the film *Night Scene*, see Zhang Jie 2012.

change his style and start to go 'mainstream'? Did Cui betray his 'queer-ness', or is he simply being consistent with his queer politics? To answer these questions, we need to look at Cui's understanding of queer and queer politics.

Queer as Relations and Ethics

In a published interview, Cui explains his understanding of sex and sexuality:

> If I ever had a chance to publish my theory, I would say that actually every single person might have a sexuality of his or her own. I'm totally against the concept of sex. This can be seen in my science fiction se-ries: Earthlings travel to a moon of Jupiter; they are required to present their passports and visas. The beings there discover to their surprise that the earthlings have a section called 'sex' on their passports. The distinction between male and female is beyond their comprehension. (Cui 2004: 184)

Cui emphasizes the multiplicity and polymorphousness of sexuality; he also sees sex itself as a social construct, hence its absurdity and un-necessariness. There are other ways to understand human subjectivity and sex does not have to be a category that defines a person. In fact, Cui is against any kind of categorization and definition: 'I think that appear-ance of many existing nouns is an unfortunate result of the limited scope of human beings' imaginations' (Ibid.). Cui's fiction films precisely aim to open up people's imaginations: what would a world without gender and sexual binaries be like? Can people love each other freely, without the constraints of gender, sexual and social norms? Can brothers fall in love with each other? Can a father fall in love with his son? Can one love more than one person? How do people relate to the ones they love? Is there any obligation, responsibility, or duties of care between people who love each other? All these questions point to issues of human rela-tions and the ethics of these relations.

In Cui's worldview, fixed sexual identities do not exist. Instead of seeing gay sex as having a 'cathartic motive' or 'catering to others' voyeuristic de-sires', he sees sex as a way for people to establish ethical relationships with themselves and others: 'I'm more interested in discovering and revealing the relationship between gay lovers, how they deal with each other, what their sense of responsibility is, and so on' (Cui in Qi Wang 2004: 184).

Sex becomes social relations and is given an existential significance: 'The point is mutual respect. Respect each other's nature. Love involves pain; that is not because someone intends to hurt, but because of a person's nature. We just need to be more understanding and forgiving.' (p.183)

The ethics of sex, love and relationships has been explored in many of Cui's early films. It is not clear where he draws these ideas from: Foucault, Levinas, his Christian belief, his interpretation of Buddhism, or perhaps a mixture of them all. One thing is certain: more than an identity or a cathartic moment, sex for Cui is a mode of becoming and a way to establish and negotiate ethical relationships with oneself and others.

Cui understands the constructive nature of language on social identities. As he critiques identity categories, he also uses these categories for counter-hegemonic purposes. Cui warns against the restrictiveness of identity categories. He uses terms such as gay or *tongzhi* or homosexual as a rhetorical strategy to produce counter discourses, or to 'present it as a beautiful name' (Cui 2004: 184). He is one of the pioneers and strongest advocates of the term *ku'er* (queer) in the mainland Chinese context. He sees 'queer' as part of a transnational body of knowledge and practice and acknowledges the importance of queer theory for China's queer activism, In comparison to LGBT identity politics:

> It [Queer] has another state of being; it does not aim to achieve equal rights. It doesn't see human emancipation and gay rights as its ultimate goal. It is sceptical about life after gaining equality of rights … we are doing queer things; but it is because of our queerness that the world becomes a more beautiful and diverse place. (Cui in Wang and Fan 2010: 186)

Although Cui is against marriage as a social institution and dismisses the possibility of getting married himself, he supports the same-sex campaign in the queer communities because it poses a challenge to the current system of heteronormativity (Cui in Qi Wang 2004: 183). He compares entering into heterosexual marriages to investing in shares: 'there should be equality: since straight people can use marriage as investment, so should gay people' (Cui in Ifeng 2012).

Queer As Deconstruction

Widely read in literary and cultural theories and well acquainted with poststructualism and postmodernism, Cui casts his doubt on fixed

categories such as gender, sex and sexuality and grand narratives such as truth, kindness and beauty. He calls his philosophy a 'Christian postmodernism' that is capable of disrupting and challenging any artificial norms. For him, God is a revolutionary figure and the first postmodernist, as He can destroy old social orders and rebuild a world. Cui sees his work as a deconstructive force to established literary, cultural and social norms, and he sees deconstruction as necessary and constructive:

> I think the process of deconstruction itself is a new outcome, not that something new and different will arise and replace the deconstructed ones. If I kick this table here and it falls apart, the ruin is already a new outcome … Actually, this so-called deconstruction is not deconstruction. It's really my own innovation. The system we are confronted with is so big that every independent innovation on our part is read against it. (Cui 2004: 193).

Indeed, most of Cui's works break cinematic conventions and they adopt an experimental mode of film aesthetics, including the use of extremely long takes and the lack of a coherent narrative. Zhou Yuxing (2014: 132) summarizes the features of Cui's films as: minimal editing, lack of *mise en scène*, minimal film narrative, and unstable camera work. All these stylistic and aesthetic decisions are in line with Cui's deconstructive politics:

> In terms of making moving images, I would say that the deconstruction is on the whole Jesus-like, as if demolishing the temple – to destroy something and rebuild it within three days, that kind of feeling. Actually, the fact of demolition is far more important than the fact of rebuilding. (Cui in Fan 2015: 249)

Although Cui was talking about his film aesthetics, in his deconstruction of all the conventions in commercial and state filmmaking, this explanation is also helpful in understanding his life philosophy: rejecting gender, sexual and social norms is in itself constructive and innovative, as it brings in new ways of life. Cui considers life as an ongoing process of 'becoming' rather than a fixed 'being'. Life is a 'draft' (*caogao*), in the same way that the world is an unfinished 'draft' that God keeps working on. In his own words, 'a draft is revised over and over again according to the change of time and space' (dGenerate Films 2010). He sees writing novels and making films closest to his idea of 'draft', as there is no perfect novel or film, and all the versions are necessarily draft versions. Cui likes

the sense of contingency and fluidity that the notion of 'draft' entails, and refuses to pin himself down to a fixed identity, and his life to a fixed status.

'Queer' (*ku'er*) seems to be the more appropriate word to capture the sense of contingency and fluidity embedded in the notion of 'draft'. Cui prides himself on being a 'queer' and describes most of his films as 'queer-oriented', instead of gay or *tongzhi* films. He sees gay or *tongzhi* as restrictive identity categories. Queer films, on the other hand, embody radical aesthetics and a revolutionary potential:

> Using traditional film categorisations, queer works would tend to fall into the category of the experimental or have an experimental quality to them. They break the style of the linear narrative, and in breaking that linear narrative, they smash our sense of rational truth, our perception of movement. (Cui in Fan 2015b: 247).

Despite being a Christian and queer, Cui consciously keeps a critical distance away from Christianity and the *tongzhi* movement. He explains the reason for doing so as an act of 'breaking out' in a centralized Chinese society:

> For one thing, we're all being suppressed in this system of centralised society, but we are breaking out every day. Doing this work of breaking out, striving to break out every day, none of us belongs to that group of people who don't. This is the first thing … Actually, each of us in this centralised polity are doing this kind of work, this work of digging out or destruction. (Ibid: 261)

Being queer, making queer films and participating in queer activism thus constitutes one of Cui's 'breaking out' practices. In highlighting the politicized nature of queer existence, Cui is also politicizing queer for a radical and progressive Left politics.

Queer Films as Political Practice

In explaining why he makes queer films in the way he does, Cui articulates a very clear critique of the film industry. Cui had already established himself as a novelist before he went into filmmaking, and his novels and essays are usually praised for their refined language and literary merit. Not so with his films. Although Cui started his teaching career at the Beijing Film Academy as a fan of maestro filmmakers' works, when he realized the close link between capital and film, he made a conscious decision:

As a matter of fact, anyone who has ever picked up a camera to shoot a film would know that – that indeed from every emergence of moving pictures themselves – films have always had a relationship with capital … when I realised these things, when I was making my first picture, I started to understand that I would be resolute in rejecting this path, that I wouldn't submit to capital and tradition, including European art-house or commercial traditions. (Cui in Fan 2015: 250)

In many ways, the experimental and avant-garde type of filmmaking best articulates Cui's politics. Cui deliberately goes against conventions of classic and commercial filmmaking. First, he ignores narratives: 'I have always tried to eliminate the narrative component in my films. Although the script is narrative based, when it is presented in visual form, the narrative becomes almost invisible' (Cui in dGenerate Films 2010). Second, he considers himself the only member of audience for his films, and, in doing so, completely ignores other audiences:

When I watch my own film, I feel that I am watching someone else's work. I'm always surprised by the sense of unfamiliarity. I would think that this director's work is so revolutionary. Everyone likes quick cut, but he uses long take. Everyone else is trying to make the picture more delicate, but his images are getting rougher and rougher. He must be someone really special. (Cui in dGenerate Films 2010)

Cui refuses to cater to the audience, contrary to what commercial filmmakers do. His early films are explicitly labelled 'queer films', and for a non-cinephile audience they can be very difficult to watch. Cui's films often seem made by an amateur filmmaker who is not familiar with film techniques. They feature incoherent storylines, monotonous narratives, long takes, hand-held cameras, and ambient sound – a style akin to Italian neorealism and *cinéma vérité*. Cui is certainly more radical than many of his peer filmmakers in China in terms of cinematic techniques and aesthetics: his films are extremely slow, featuring plenty of long takes, and 'anti-aesthetic', by using discontinuous editing. Watching his *Man Man Woman Woman* (1999) reminded film critic Chris Berry of 'post-Stonewall, earnest talking heads documentaries and depressing, low-budget, realist dramas' (Berry 2004: 195). Cui, however, justifies himself by characterizing his films as 'zero rhetoric' (*ling xiuci*), which he describes as a radical departure from traditional filmmaking:

> I hope to make a brand new type of films, films without rhetoric. When Zhu Rikun asked me why I chose to make films, I told him that this is a way for me to break away from the language and rhetoric that I have been familiar with since my childhood. I have finally found a way to give up that language and to create something new with a different type of language: an unsophisticated language. The new language points to a new life. Sophisticated language only conceals, romanticises and aestheticises social realities. It makes us sound literary and artistic, but not strong. (Quoted in Jia'ni 2008)

'Zero rhetoric' should be understood in opposition to the highly manipulated filmmaking techniques and film language used in state sanctioned 'main melody' (*zhu xuanlü*) films and market-oriented commercial films. By reducing film techniques to a minimum or, rather, by opting in certain types of filmmaking techniques, Cui hopes to create a more honest and straightforward way of representation in relation to his filmed subjects.

Although influenced by China's New Documentary Movement (Berry 2010), Cui's films differ greatly from the many independent documentarians in China who draw heavily on the 'direct cinema' tradition and are obsessed with 'objectivity'. Cui's films have a strong personal imprint. He often appears as an actor in his own films. In the docudrama *Night Scene* (2005), he deliberately blurs the boundaries between documentary and drama, and between objectivity and subjectivity. The whole film can be seen as a dialogue with, and critique of, China's visual discourses (Jie Zhang 2012). Together with other queer filmmakers in China, Cui has rewritten China's history of documentary films not only by putting sex and sexuality at the centre of the film, but by placing an embodied, gendered and sexed self in the film making process (Robinson 2015).

Digital Video Activism

Cui uses a digital video (DV) camera to make films. For him, DVs have an intrinsically democratizing and liberating potential compared to traditional film cameras. Professional filmmakers frowned upon DVs when they first appeared in China, but Cui embraced the technology immediately. He even wrote an article titled 'the age of analogue films is coming to an end; and the age of digital videos has begun'. Along with China's sixth-generation filmmakers and those who participated

in China's New Documentary Movement (Berry et al. 2010), he celebrated the 'small medium' (Sreberny-Mohammed 1994) and the 'lightness' (Voci 2010) of DVs in facilitating ordinary people's participation in political life.

Cui prefers to refer to his DV films not as films (*dianying*) but as moving images (*yingxiang*). For him, the old fashioned term 'film' has too much historical baggage and is often associated with hierarchical, elitist or commercial modes of cultural production. The new term 'moving image' can best describe the ontology of all the screen and narrative media and is open to technical, formal and aesthetic innovations. Cui has even coined the term 'digital video activism' (*yingxiang xingdong*) to describe a type of mediated political and social activism enabled by the active use of digital video images.

Cui explains 'digital video activism' as follows: 'We do not think that we should advocate and promote those so-called standard, artistically refined and excellent films. We call for acting with digital videos and changing the world' (Cui 2009a). He attributes a 'soft' and 'flexible' texture to films and juxtaposes this quality with the 'hard' and 'stiff' (*yingxingde*) world. 'It is convenient and direct to connect films to the hard times and to change society' (Cui 2009a).

Although Cui uses a DV camera to make his own films, he is not obsessed with endless technical innovations. He refuses to use big DV cameras and the HD format. This technical choice has certain aesthetic and political implications:

> I want to preserve the natural and rough quality of the DV camera, which better presents the scene of China's development today. I want to show the dust of Beijing Station, not a perfect visual experience made up with artificial light. So, I still haven't tried HD yet. (Cui in dGenerate Films 2010)

For Cui, the rough quality of the DV best captures China in its process of development and Beijing before its sweeping scale gentrification. This also results from Cui's refusal to 'produce quality films' for a middle-class audience. He confesses his changing conception of filmmaking candidly in a 2009 interview:

> I have come to a new understanding in the last couple of years. I don't think art is superior; nor can art be separated from politics. I think that the most important artworks are all politically oriented, and they are

created to liberate or suppress certain groups of people. The boundary between politics and art is actually rather blurred. The best artworks are not those exhibited in museums or art galleries for the privileged few, who have time and money to enjoy these artworks; they are the ones that can have an impact on, or even liberate, repressed people at a particular time and place. (Cui in Zhao 2009)

This statement is clearly Marxist. Cui has associated his filmmaking unambiguously with the liberation of marginalized and repressed people in a society. Queer people, sex workers and migrant children are just some of them. In other words, Cui is not interested in making queer films for a middle-class gay audience; nor does he wish to cater to the international film festivals. He makes films about China's queer people because these people are marginalized in contemporary Chinese society; making films about their lives can potentially empower them. This philosophy is reflected not only in the subject matter of his films, especially in his documentaries, but in the filmmaking process as well.

The Prefigurative Politics of Filmmaking

Cui's filmmaking practices also reflect his socialist and anti-capitalist political ideals. He aspires to live in an egalitarian society and in a utopian world where there is no power hierarchy and no capitalist exploitation. For him, utopia does not exist elsewhere outside of this world; rather, it exists in the world and is brought into being by committed social practices. Cui approaches his utopian world not simply by representing the utopia in his films, but by strategically practicing a 'prefigurative politics' in filmmaking.

Cui's filmmaking style draws heavily on the idea of 'prefiguration'. In anarchist communities and the alterglobalization movement, prefiguration refers to modes of organization and social relationships that strive to reflect the future society sought by individuals and groups (Boggs 1977; Graeber 2009; Maeckelbergh 2009, 2011). Rather than waiting passively for an egalitarian and democratic world to arrive, individuals and groups actively practise the core principles and values that constitute an egalitarian and democratic society. Some of the most important principles and values for prefigurative politics include:

participation, an aversion to representation, horizontality, diversity, decentralised notions of power, *autogestion* [workers' self-management],

consensus, carnival as subversion, rejecting individualism, an accept-
ance of conflict as constructive, critical reflexivity, non-reified approach
to knowledge, an emphasis on the importance of the 'grassroots', an in-
ternationalism based on strong solidarity and communication between
activists all over the world. (Maeckelbergh 2009: 8)

In putting these principles and values into practice in lived experi-
ence, individuals and groups can achieve the goal of 'creating new, exist-
ing, diverse, and horizontal structures of democratic decision-making in
order to replace existing structures of global governance' (Maeckelbergh
2011: 15). Prefigurative politics is performative (Austin 1962), in the
sense that it brings a desired society into being through active enact-
ments of the society.

Noting the traditionally close relation between filmmaking, the state
and capital, Cui champions independent filmmaking; in the Chinese
context, this means, making films free from official ideology and com-
mercial intervention (Pickowicz & Zhang 2006). Because of Chinese
censorship of films on homosexuality related issues, Cui's films cannot be
officially shown in public screening venues and sold in DVD stores; the
circulation of his film relies largely on online streaming and community
screening, both of which are vulnerable to government intervention. Cui
has spoken vocally against film censorship; he encourages the use of the
slogan 'we want to see queer films' for queer community activism against
film censorship. Besides the state, his other concern is capitalism, and
how capitalism has led to commercialization of the film industry:

> Since [Zhang Yimou's] *Hero*, I refuse to see commercial films. This is
> because of their production processes. After acquiring some investment,
> a commercial film director will organize a group of people chaotically
> and abuse those who live at the margins of the industry. Among those
> who participate in making a big scene, the extras get the least amount of
> money and they can barely survive. A few stars benefit the most. In this
> way, the box office is guaranteed. Such a model of filmmaking should be
> trashed. (Cui in Ifeng 2012)

Cui's films are small budget independent films, primarily funded by
himself and his friends, and sometimes by international foundations and
non-governmental organizations. He often makes films quickly and on
shoestring budgets (X. Wang 2009: 95). Making films within one's means
is the single most important financial consideration for Cui. He dismisses

the extravagant way of filmmaking in the film industry, which he sees as part of the 'mainstream' he refuses to identify with. As a staff member at the Beijing Film Academy, Cui has easy access to digital video cameras, professional actors and actresses and editing equipment, and this has certainly helped him reduce production costs. This can be understood as a 'poaching' (de Certeau 1984) practice that strategically appropriates resources from the state and the commercial film industry for alternative uses. But eventually it is the horizontal, collective and affective method of filmmaking that enables him to produce low-budget films.

Cui's filmmaking method often appears spontaneous and *ad hoc*:

> Sometimes a friend will tell me I can shoot in his place for two days and eat anything in the fridge, use what I want. Sometimes another friend will give me 5,000 *yuan*. Some will treat us for a meal, or treat the crew to a couple of meals. Some will provide cameras. The cast and crew naturally feel like they're just coming to a party and wouldn't think about what rewards they can gain – they're just coming to have fun. It's basically like that. (Cui in Fan 2015: 253)

Cui relies heavily on the good will and kind help from his friends. Everyone contributes their own resources to the filmmaking process and limited resources are pooled together to keep the filmmaking process going. This is a do-it-yourself type of filmmaking that relies on sharing. Filmmaking becomes a collective endeavour and it functions on the basis of a 'gift economy', which is a non-capitalist mode of economic formation that places great emphasis on collectivity, intersubjectivity, generosity and reciprocity.

Cui attaches great importance to the autonomy and creativity of the individual. He also emphasizes the role of each individual in participating in decision making and artistic creation, and the role of the community in forging friendship, trust and solidarity. He clearly sees the organizational form as horizontal instead of vertical. He articulates the anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian nature of these practices in the following words:

> When I get a general idea about what I want to film, I start to call my friends and ask if they would be interested in that. The process is always very simply and quick, no rehearsal, script or professional actors. We discuss the idea together and then I just need to have a few words with my cameraman about how long and how wide each take should be. I

don't really know about what we'll get, but I do know that the friendly and harmonious environment of our film crew, the freedom beyond the capitalist pursuit for profit and the censorship of the Communist Party will lead to something extraordinary. My successful experience is based on a cooperation bound by our friendship, not by profit. (dGenerate Films 2010)

Instead of focusing on the final product, Cui places more emphasis on the *process* of filmmaking. The process is more important than the outcome. Cui describes his filmmaking process as having a 'party' or 'get-together' (*juhui*), in which his friends bring in their own resources to participate in a collaborative and affective event:

> I see myself more as an organizer than a director. Forming a film crew is almost like having a party with my friends. My role is to gather people for a big twenty-day party, like a party host. Everyone brings cheese and wine. Of course in our party they bring a DV camera, tapes and costumes. (dGenerate Films 2010)

Cui has completely reimagined the relationship between a director, the cast and the film crew in filmmaking. Refusing to reproduce the vertical and hierarchical power relations in the production team common in the film industry, he treats everyone in the team as equals and as friends, and tries to involve everyone in the decision making process. His films are often unscripted, or with minimal script, and the filmmaking process is often open and contingent. This effectively brings out each individual's autonomy and creative potential:

> I've always thought of my creations as doing and thinking at the same time. I couldn't complete a script and go shoot it. Since I started making moving images, none of them have [*sic.*] been made with a completed screenplay in advance. They were all made on site with a script and a rough outline, according to the resources we had available and the composition of the crew. So, for example, whether we shot in three days or five, what sort of location we used, all was *ad hoc*, and the dialogue was improvised. Or on a morning I would write an approximation for the daytime actors and then send them off to find their own method of dialogue, and shoot it that way. No piece I've shot has relied mechanically on a script. (Cui in Fan 2015b: 252)

Cui is certainly practising a prefigurative politics in making his films: he has transformed a traditional hierarchical director-cast/crew

relationship into a horizontal one, in which decisions are made collectively and everyone's individuality and creativity is respected. In doing so, he not only challenges the central role of capital in cinema, but the hierarchical and exploitative production system in the film industry. For a prefigurative politics, the process is more important than the result. That is why Cui describes his films as made for himself and his friends and 'neighbours'. In imagining what a utopian world should be like, Cui brings utopia into this world through his filmmaking practices.

It is perhaps more appropriate to understand Cui's version of utopia as 'heterotopia' (Foucault 1986), that is, an alternative, but actually existing, social space that does not conform to political and social norms in a society. Heterotopia does not exist outside this world; it exists in this world and is usually brought into being by alternative social practices that do not conform to the structured and hierarchical ordering of a society. When it comes to filmmaking, this means, rejecting the capital, rejecting the industry model of filmmaking practices, and embracing a collective, collaborative and egalitarian mode of independent filmmaking.

Reimagining the 'Male Gaze' and Challenging Identification

Cui does not have a popular audience in mind when he makes most of his films. He considers himself 'the first audience' of his films (dGenerate Films 2010). He claims that he only makes films for himself and his friends, or his 'neighbours':

> My filmmaking definitely has to do with my neighbours. My neighbours are mostly men; they are usually the object of gaze and subject of representation. This is the best part of independent films: your films are what your neighbours are like. (Cui in Ifeng 2012)

Cui's use of the term 'neighbours' has a biblical reference: 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12:31). Cui treats the line literally as one should love and desire one's neighbours. In this way, he queers Christianity by injecting queer desire into the notion of universal love. Cui also 'queers' the 'male gaze' in film studies (Mulvey 1975; Tse 2013), as he disrupts the mode of men's voyeuristic and objectifying gaze for women common in the heteronormative commercial cinema and creates a world full of homoerotic gaze by men and for men. The

male gaze, in this case, can be egalitarian and liberating for queers, and it does not have to be titillating, objectifying or misogynistic. In reformulating the male gaze theory, Cui also articulates a queer ethics of filmmaking: the relationships between a filmmaker, the actors and the audience should be based on gender equality, friendship, trust and mutual care; such relationships can create new forms of families and kinship that are not heteronormative and bloodline based.

Cui also resists the type of identification popular in commercial cinema: audience members identify with particular characters in the film, thus affirming their own subjectivities. Cui often creates a Brechtian sense of alienation effect to destroy the illusion that cinema often creates. He does this in four ways: destroying the linear narrative, refusing drama and climax in story-telling, fast cutting, and inserting himself and the production process in the story. In one scene, for example, Cui, also a character in his film, is shown to have a discussion with a sound engineer about the type of music that should accompany his on-screen appearance. In revealing the production process of the films to the audience, Cui effectively reminds the audience of the 'artificiality' of the cinema apparatus and, in doing so, conducts a critique to the film industry. The disappearance of the 'aura' of artworks, according to Walter Benjamin (2007 [1968]) can help to trigger people's critical consciousness about their living conditions, thus opening a space for creative resistance.

Cui refuses to turn his films into gay or popular films in which nudity and sex are intended to cater to the tastes of a popular audience:

> Many commercial directors consider nudity a tool for provocation, while I would rather present it for exactly what it is. So, many viewers, if they were exposed to nudity from start to finish in my films, would get no erection from it, even if the actors were all good-looking. That's because my orientation wouldn't at all be towards sex as a provocation, or as sex for consumption. (Cui in Fan 2015: 254)
>
> I'm aware that many queer films emphasize on aesthetics, sexual desire etc. I intentionally work against this trend of queer cinema that gradually evokes your sexual desire first and then satisfies you. We call it double ejaculation, which means crying and masturbating at the same time. My films are always very straightforward without evocation for either sexual desire or tears, and I'm personally very critical about this so-called double climax. This is the trick of commercial films or popular films. (Cui in dGenerate Films 2010)

Men in Cui's films are often nude, but nudity is portrayed as a fact of life and to convey a belief that everyone is naked and equal before God and that everyone is poor (as in the notion of the proletariat, meaning people who have no property in Chinese). Whenever sex is about to appear on screen, the camera swiftly moves away; and whenever a dramatic story-telling element seems to be imminent, the scene is cut abruptly. In doing so, Cui avoids the audience's 'double ejaculation', i.e., shedding tears as an effect of dramatic narratives, and feeling aroused by gay sex scenes. As a result, a lot of gay audience members complain that Cui's fiction films are disappointing and even frustrating to watch. But this is exactly Cui's point: he wants people to ask questions and to reflect critically on cinematic and social norms, instead of taking things as they are.

By not privileging the audience reception and by refusing cinematic identifications, Cui is able to produce films that reflect his own philosophy as a queer auteur. He also contributes to film theory with his performative enactment of the male gaze and 'against identification'. He is effectively putting his film criticism into practice through his films and through his filmmaking. For Cui, making films is at the same time a way to construct film theories and conduct film criticism. As Petrus Liu aptly points out, Cui's films are not simply fiction or entertainment; 'they are philosophical statements reminiscent of the fables, allegories, and aphorisms of continental theosophy' and, indeed, 'Cui creates queer theory through his films' (2015: 49).

Queer International Communism

In his interviews, Cui often speaks highly of the anti-capitalist model of the US independent cinema and anarchist communities he visited in Copenhagen (Ifeng 2012; Fan 2015). His filmmaking practice aims to bring out a communist utopia, and he sees this task as particularly pressing in today's China: 'capitalism is continuously eroding contemporary China, which makes me feel that humanity really must find a new ideal that comes close to Utopianism, or communism, or heaven and the like, different from capitalism.' (Cui Zi'en in Fan. 2015: 253). He calls for the urgency of communist ideals in another interview: 'Public ownership of property has its own problems. But human beings cannot cease to challenge private ownership of property simply because of the setbacks

encountered in the socialist phase. In my opinion, it takes a lot of courage to pursue the ideal of communism.' (Cui in Ifeng 2012).

These very communist ideas come from someone deeply sceptical about official Marxism and the communist bureaucracy in China. Cui's understanding of communism bases the concept on the principles of international solidarity and mutual sharing of ideas and resources. In a speech titled 'the Communist International of Queer Film' given at a queer studies conference held at the University of California, Berkeley in 2005, Cui pointed out two problematic forms of globalization: the Chinese government's official endorsement of 'globalization of Marxism' in 1949 and 'the strategic promotion of Americanism' in today's world. Cui then traced two moments of 'alternative globalization' pertaining to queer culture in China: the first 'Communist International', which consisted of 'queer revolutionaries' from the Sinophone world and the West who came to Beijing and engaged in queer activism in the 1990s; and today's international queer cultural exchanges between Chinese queers and queers from other parts of the world. These exchanges include circulation of bootleg DVDs, attendance at international queer film festivals and screenings, and participation in academic workshops and conferences. Cui sees such unofficial and grassroots-led cultural exchanges based on principles of equality and reciprocity as a a more genuine form of communist internationalism. He concluded his speech with the following remarks:

> We originally thought that foreign queer movies brought a ray of light into China, and we are now glad to see that this has been a two-way street … Through international communications, and films, we are forming a new international alliance that will bring queer existence into the light. I rejoice at this kind of globalisation. (Cui 2010: 423)

Cui's notion of 'communist internationalism' is based on the principle of the free sharing of cultural resources, reciprocity and international solidarity; it is unofficial, grassroots-led, and used for the common goal of human emancipation. It forms a sharp contrast with the unequal relations between countries and cultures in global geopolitics and a profit-oriented global media industry. This undogmatic understanding of communism as an ideal and as a form of social relations goes beyond the official version of communism as a bureaucracy or as an ideology. Just as Cui's communal and collaborative mode of filmmaking defines 'queer', it 'queers' communism.

Cui's queer 'communist internationalism' may seem utopian and it may gloss over the importance of power relations between queer knowledge production and cultural formation in China and the West. Nonetheless, his belief in internationalism and cosmopolitanism is genuine. He is well read in Western literature and film and well acquainted with critical and cultural theories; he sees being queer, being Christian and being an intellectual as belonging to an international community and contributing to a shared body of knowledge, the Commons. He does not see himself as typically 'Chinese'; he takes pride in the fact that reviewers of his novels and films do not restrictively label his work as 'Chinese'. He is a citizen of the world, and even of the universe through his science fiction creations, whose imagination and creativity goes beyond the narrow confines of national and state boundaries. He sees the world as a totality that is dominated by global capitalism; the job of intellectuals is to dismantle inequalities and injustices of the capitalist system, wherever they are found. In this sense, he is a real Marxist and communist.

Queer Vitalism

For many international critics, a central imagery in Cui's films is the figure of the proletariat, or 'class with no property' (*wuchan jieji*) in its Chinese translation (Cui in Fan 2015: 253). Cui does not agree with the proletarian interpretation of his films. He believes that his films should be seen as an illustration of his views of the world, society and human existence.

Cui often presents his characters as naked, poor and not attached to traditional types of family, kinship and property. For example, in his 2006 film *Refrain*, which he describes as his favourite film, Cui shows two brothers with no parents, home or personal property. One lives with learning disability and the other has to sing and beg in order to support his brother. Their only chance of survival is to rely on each other's support. The younger brother wants to commit suicide with the older brother in case he dies before the other one. International film critics have commented on the film as Cui's 'concern for the extremely poor', but Cui sees the main characters' nudity as simply expressing 'a feeling of being stripped down or bare': 'Actually they are not necessarily proletarian but are people with absolutely nothing' (Cui in Fan 2015: 253).

'People with absolutely nothing' is Cui's observation of the existential condition of all human beings:

> We should acknowledge that life itself is bare and we own nothing. We are like bubbles, which will eventually burst and disappear, at least physically. The best insight is therefore to acknowledge that every bubble will eventually disappear. Before our bubble disappears, we should treat the world and ourselves nicer, instead of depriving other bubbles of their right of existence. (Cui in Ifeng 2012)

Using the metaphor of bubbles, Cui articulates a Buddhist worldview about the emptiness of the world and insignificance of individual lives, as well as an ethics of how people should relate to each other. Cui sees poverty and bareness of life in everyone, and that is his main reason for representing nudity and poverty in his films:

> In a manner of speaking, we are all poverty-stricken, we all find ourselves impoverished. In terms of our lives, they have limits; they will forever have limits. When it's over, it's over; when it's let go, it's let go; it's gone. I think no matter what kind of people see my pieces, they could be that impoverished person, but they might not think they are … I'll always choose the situation of poverty, or bare, stark nudity, to present my understandings of the world. (Cui in Fan 2015: 254)

Cui often strikes people as an 'exceptionally peaceful and honest person' (Qi Wang 2004: 191). He seldom complains about the discrimination and unfair treatment he experiences as a gay man in China, because he sees almost everyone in China as marginal in one way or another: 'Everyone has a reason to shed tears. Homosexuals are no different' (Ibid.). He is more interested in shedding light on the common conditions of human existence in a society undergoing dramatic transformations under the influence of global neoliberalism.

Cui is sceptical about contemporary Chinese society, in which many people seem to be obsessed with money and power. He identifies himself with socially marginalized people, such as lesbians and gays in *Queer China, Comrade China*, sex workers in *Night Scene*, and the poor migrant workers' children who are deprived of the opportunity to go to school in *We Are the … of Communism*. At the same time, surprisingly, he also sympathizes with China's government officials, who may be corrupt but are equally vulnerable:

> I once made a speech titled 'Everyone is marginalised in China', because all the people, including government officials, worry about being rejected by the mainstream. That's why some officials are so corrupt:

they have to make the best use of their positions while they can. The society is very cruel. One will be kicked away immediately when they are deemed useless. In this society, everyone is at the margin. The so-called centre of power is in fact constructed. No one can reach the centre. Everyone is close to the centre, but the centre itself is a fabrication. (Cui in Ifeng 2012)

In this interview, Cui constructs a society in which there is no centre and the hypothetical centre is effectively imagined by all the people. This breaks the myth of a strong and powerful centre, often imagined as the State or the government, and points to the vulnerability of power. Cui also describes a harsh condition of human existence which follows the rules of social Darwinism under the domination of capitalism and state power. This is a dystopic society in which human beings lose their autonomy. Through representing the 'bareness' of human existence, Cui hopes to make people reflect on themselves and the society, thus devising individual and collective ways of creative resistance.

Religion, especially Christianity, shapes Cui's worldview in significant ways. He confesses that he believes in Christ, but not the churches, and that is why he does not go to church. He thinks that 'human destiny is at God's disposal' (Cui in Wang 2004: 185), and he therefore tries different approaches to understanding God's existence in his novels and films. One of his realizations is:

> The God that earthlings believe in is only one image of Him. God is not finished, complete, or omnipresent, as we think. He doesn't finish his Creation of the world and put it up there for show as we think. I tend to view God as a writer. He is still writing the universe. He has written a certain chapter, which is the present world, but the job is not finished. He might give a review and make some changes here and there. The unfortunate or the destitute might just be His unfinished works. (Cui in Wang 2004: 185)

In this unorthodox view of God as a writer and the world as a 'draft', Cui also sees fundamental agency in human beings. Despite his pessimism about human society, Cui is still optimistic about life, in which he sees a fundamental vitalism: 'One has to live, simply because we are living beings. Look at the birds in the sky and lilies on earth, they all live tenaciously. They die when it's time to die. We need to respect this fact.' (Cui in Ifeng 2012)

Cui seeks solutions from religions. For a period in his life, he was interested in Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism but ended up finding himself 'either desperate or depressed'; he eventually went back to Christianity, because it 'contains an affirmation of life and being' (Cui in Ifeng 2012).

It is the affirmative attitude towards life, that is, life as being natural and unconstrained by social norms, that best characterizes Cui's life philosophy and explains his understanding of queer. Being queer does not have to entail a sexual identity; it is simply about living life in one's own way and refusing to be constrained by societal norms. Cui thus develops his own version of queer theory by drawing heavily on Christianity and Western philosophy, including the philosophies of Bergeson, Foucault, Deleuze and Marx, central to which are autonomous human beings that refuse to be constrained by societal norms and reified by capitalism.

Film Festivals as Queer Activism

Cui sees exhibition and circulation of queer films as 'digital video activism', that is, using digital videos as medium as social activism to make an impact on society. He sees the role of films in making social changes: 'it is convenient and straightforward to connect the film track to the stiff era and to change society' (Cui in Wang and Fan 2010: 189). He links the changing representations of the queer people in Chinese society to the positive role that the queer film festivals play: 'In fact, our film festivals have changed our times and have contributed to social progress.' (Ibid.)

Since 2001, Cui and other Chinese queer filmmakers and activists have been organizing the Beijing Queer Film Festival. In 2001, some Beijing-based university students organized China's first 'Homosexual Film Festival', later renamed as 'Beijing Queer Film Festival' (*Beijing ku'er yingzhan*).[5] Cui was invited to serve as the festival's art director. The festival also screened Cui's film *Old Testament*. With the goal of public education and social enlightenment in mind, the organizers chose Peking University as the film festival's venue. The forced early closure of the first festival and the complete cancellation of the second right before its opening night made the organizers aware of the risks and pressures that they had to face in organizing such a politically sensitive public event.

5. The Beijing Queer Film Festival website http://www.bjqff.com (accessed 1 September 2017). For a detailed analysis of the festival, see Bao 2017.

Cui and other organizers changed strategies by incorporating the 3th and 4th festivals into the Songzhuang-based Beijing Independent Film Festival and by positioning queer filmmaking as 'avant-garde' and 'non-political' artistic expressions. This subsequently raised the question of community engagement: who are the festival's target audience and how can the festival best support the queer communities? In later editions of the festival, the organizers tried to address the audience question by striking a balance between community building and public education, often running the risk of forced closure by the police.

Each year of the Beijing Queer Film Festival presents feature films, documentaries and shorts, most of which are produced in China. It also showcases films from other parts of the Sinophone sphere, Asia and the world. The film festival programme often looks transnational and cosmopolitan, without losing its cultural specificity and political stance. The festival has adopted a 'guerrilla' type of organizing strategy by selecting multiple screening venues and designing contingent screening plans: when one screening venue is shut down by the police, the festival continues at another venue. In recent years, the festival has experimented with online streaming of films and with screenings aboard a travelling bus or train. New technologies and changing material conditions have contributed to the development of some context-specific and culturally-sensitive forms of queer activism.

The Chinese term for the 'film festival' (*yingzhan*, literally 'film exhibition') articulates a particular type of cultural politics: instead of embracing a vertical and hierarchical cultural form, the festival celebrates a horizontal and egalitarian cultural politics. Cui summarizes the organizing principle of the Beijing Queer Film Festival in the following ways:

1. Rotating chairperson-on-duty system: there is no permanent chairperson; members of the organizing committee take turns to be the chairperson of the BJQFF. The organizing committee is open to new committee members.
2. Democratic selection of films: festival programmes are decided by voting from committee members.
3. Inclusivity in the festival programming: films of different genres, topics and styles are selected, with the technical quality playing a less important role. (Wang & Fan 2010: 188)

The Beijing Queer Film Festival champions a type of social activism and cultural practice: as it broadens the definitions and practices of film festivals, it also initiates an open, democratic and egalitarian form of public culture.

In recent years, as part of its outreach programme, the Beijing Queer Film Festival has sponsored audience members from small cities and remote regions in China to attend the festival. The Beijing-based queer filmmakers have also organized the China Queer Film Festival Tour (*Zhongguo ku'er yingxiang xunhuizhan*) and screened queer films all over China through their connections with local queer NGOs, bars, clubs and university campuses.[6] Queer film festivals and screenings are no longer limited to Beijing, Shanghai and other big cities. As young queer filmmakers gain more opportunities to screen their films, the topics and the styles of their films have also undergone changes, often from urban and cosmopolitan-centrism to more diversified queer representations, and from a sole emphasis on gender and sexuality to an intersectional approach that attends to multiple coexistent and interacting social relations and identities, as well as the political economy of queer.

The Beijing Gender Health Education Institute, a queer NGO, organized the 'Queer University' (*Ku'er daxue*) programme, which trains queer community members to use digital video and make their own films.[7] The films made in this programme include *Brothers* (*Xiongdi*, dir. Yao Yao 2013) and *Comrade Yue* (*Xiao Yue tongzhi*, dir. Yue Jianbo 2013). They cast their attention to the marginalized transgender populations and the rural queer in the queer communities. The Rainbow Villager Project and the China Queer Digital Storytelling Workshop have organized digital video training workshops for queer people all over China. More and more queer people have started to pick up digital video cameras to explore their identities and to build their communities.

In a country where both independent filmmaking and public expressions of homosexuality are considered problematic, the mushrooming of queer films and queer film festivals demonstrates the potential for the development of queer culture in China. Films and filmmaking do not have to be political, but in a social context where queer representations and sexual

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6.   For more information about the China Queer Film Festival Tour, see Fan Popo's (2015a) chapter in *Queer/Tongzhi China*.

7.   For more discussions about the Queer University, see Deklerck 2014 and Deklerck & Wei 2015.

rights are limited, queer filmmaking can take on a political edge. Sitting together to watch a queer film becomes an important way to construct identities and to build communities; organizing a queer film screening despite the state ban may have the same political significance as organizing a pride march. The Fifth Beijing Queer Film Festival organizer Yang identifies the 'greatest value and ultimate goal' of holding a queer film festival' as 'challenging and opposing this mainstream ideology'. (Yang 2011: 7) Matthew Baren and Alvin Li, coordinators of the first ShanghaiPRIDE Film Festival in 2015, locate the significance of the queer film festival in the intimate experience of viewing and sharing films:

> There is no shared experience like sitting in the dark room of a cinema … Watching in the darkness, those who gather are not merely an audience, but performers. They reach out and touch, feeling and sharing every fibre of their experience … a film festival demands engagement, collaboration and intimacy. (Baren & Li 2015: 2)

The Beijing Queer Film Festival's politicized approach and the ShanghaiPRIDE Film Festival's depoliticized and intimate touch represent different types of queer politics in China today, both with historical and geographical specificities. Cui comments on the role of the Beijing Queer Film Festival:

> It is convenient and straightforward to connect films with the hard times and to change society. The Beijing Queer Film Festival was founded before the digital video era. The festival has since taken an active part in China's development. The festival has set agendas on queer issues and has impacted on media representations and public opinions. Indeed, the festival has already changed the times and effected social changes. (Cui in Wang & Fan 2010: 189).

Cui echoes many filmmakers from China's Sixth Generation Filmmakers and the New Documentary Movement in emphasizing the importance of the digital media in representing new subjectivities and effecting social changes. Digital video, with its portability and affordability, helps break the monopoly of the state media censorship and commercial media, and celebrates a democratic way of artistic and political expressions.

Queer Audibility

Refuting that there is no queer movement in China, Cui points out the cultural specificity of the queer politics in China and the central role

that queer films play in enabling a type of context specific and culturally sensitive queer activism:

> Some people think that there is no queer movement in China. Indeed, we may not have queer movement in the Western sense: we do not hold demonstrations and protests; we do not take to the streets and hold parades; we don't appeal or protest to the government; we don't demand gay rights directly … we advocate acting with digital images and changing the world with digital images.

Cui illustrates the impact of film on people and society through his 'sound' and 'echo' metaphors:

> This is called 'making sounds'. Echoes always follow sounds. The effects of sounds differ on walls. Walls in China are particular good at absorbing sounds. However, there are still echoes and there are still people who can hear the echoes. Sounds act like sparks of fire. They make burning flames as they accumulate. Sounds do not disappear completely as if they were in a complete vacuum. Sounds always have some effects on society. [Queer] films and film festivals are channels to transmit sounds. The sounds echo in a society. We may not hear the sounds immediately; they may still be far away from us. However, we can hear the echoes. From the first [queer film festival] to date, we have heard the echoes and these echoes cannot be underestimated. (Cui 2009c)

Cui's 'making sounds' metaphor is reminiscent of the late Lu Xun's (2009: 19) 'iron house' (*tie wuzi*). Lu Xun was one of the most influential writers in 20th-century China. In his 'Preface' to *Outcry* (*Nahan zixu*) written in 1922, Lu Xun compared early 20th-century China to an 'iron house' where all the people inside fall asleep and risk being suffocated to death without being aware of their situation. Lu Xun wondered whether he, or enlightenment thinkers like himself, should 'make sounds' to 'wake up' the Chinese people. He seemed to be quite hesitant about making sounds and at times ambivalent about what sounds to make. He eventually decided that writing is the best way to 'make sounds' and to 'wake people up'. In a similar vein, Cui, adopting the approach of an intellectual and social activist, considers media an important way to enlighten people. Cui seems more determined than Lu Xun in his 'sound-making' practice. While Lu Xun hesitates to make sounds and ponders on the effect of the sound-making practice, Cui resolutely raises the slogan of 'digital video activism' and engages in making queer films and organizing queer film festivals.

'Making sounds', or 'queer audibility', can be seen as an alternative way of conceptualizing queer politics away from the dominant paradigm of 'queer visibility', which often privileges representation and by extension raises questions of who represents whom and whether the representation is sufficient and accurate. Digital video activism affects Chinese society by making sounds and producing echoes. Sounds and echoes are not individualistic; they are intersubjective and effectively connect actors, media and the audience without privileging each actor. They recognize the importance of media and the heterogeneity of media effects; they are historically sensitive and context specific and refuse to impose a single criterion; instead of being rigid and top-down 'strategies', they are flexible and bottom-up 'tactics' (de Certeau 1984: 34); they are not repetition of the same but repetitions with differences. It is through the metaphor of sounds and echoes that alternative imaginaries of queer politics become possible.

Conclusion

While many people see Cui's turn from making fiction films to documentaries as discontinuity and rupture in his filmmaking career, I see continuity in his queer politics: a commitment to Marxist and socialism. Through his community documentary, he not only brings a queer China, but also a radical queer subject and politics, into being.

Cui is ambivalent about what this radical queer subject should be called. Most of the time, he uses 'queer' (*ku'er*) to describe his films and politics. He is highly critical about the gay men-led LGBT identity politics in China, but he is also increasingly aware of the elitist association of the term 'queer' in the Chinese context, which is somehow at odds with his later politics of 'reaching out' to the public. When he made his community documentary *Queer China, 'Comrade' China* (*Zhi tongzhi*), he chose to use the term *tongzhi* to refer to sexual minorities in China. He asked his interviewees in the film, mostly queer scholars and activists, to explain the history and meanings of the term *tongzhi* to show how the term has been resignified in the past. He seems to hope that *tongzhi* can be once more resignified to get rid of its homonormativity, and that a radical political subjectivity and queer politics can be reinvigorated through a collective identity of *tongzhi*.

In the next chapter, I will turn to a group of young queer filmmakers who bring their films to cities other than Beijing and Shanghai. As they

practise 'digital video activism', they also try to make their works and their activism more relevant to ordinary queer people's lives. The film screening events are at the same time processes of identity and community building. As the young filmmakers and activists transform the local queer communities with their films and activism, the communities they engage with and the activism they engage in also transform these filmmakers and activists. Together, they bring a performative and affective queer identity and a queer public sphere into existence.

Figure 12: *Queer China, 'Comrade' China* DVD cover

Figure 13: Fan Popo sues the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, China's media regulator, over the banning of his film *Mama Rainbow* from online streaming websites, Beijing, 2013. His T-shirt says: 'We want to see queer films' (photo courtesy of Li Hua)

Figure 14: Filmmakers Shitou and Mingming work together (photo courtesy of Shitou and Mingming)

6.

'To the People'

TRAVELLING QUEER FILM FESTIVALS

Our literary and art workers must accomplish this task and shift their stand; they must gradually move their feet to the side of the workers, peasants and soldiers, to the side of the proletariat, through the process of going into their very midst and into the thick of practical struggles and through the process of studying Marxism and society. Only in this way can we have a literature and art that are truly for the workers, peasants and soldiers, a truly proletarian literature and art.

Mao Zedong 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art'

The objective of artistic practices should be to foster the development of those new social relations that are made possible by the transformation of the work process. Their main task is the production of new subjectivities and the elaboration of new worlds.

Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*

'The humid South is the seedbed for gender diversity'. I repeated the line to myself as I read the programme of the China Queer Film Festival Tour (*Zhongguo ku'er yingxiang xunhuizhan*) on the train from Beijing to Guangzhou. Born and brought up in North China, I share a certain pride and prejudice with many other Chinese from the North. In my cultural imagination, infiltrated by state ideology, the North is the origin, the centre, and the quintessence of Chinese culture. Its long history and rich cultural traditions represent the most 'authentic' version of the 'Chinese culture'. Conversely, the South is seen as a land of materiality, carnality, pragmatism and a 'cultural desert'. Its increasing material wealth does not eclipse its past and present image of being business-oriented, profit-seeking and philistine. After living in the North for thirty years, I finally

embarked on my first trip to the 'real' South with mixed feelings of anxiety, uncertainty and anticipation.

I was not alone in this trip. I travelled with Shitou and her partner Mingming, two lesbian filmmakers. Shitou, the first 'out' lesbian public persona in mainland China, was trained as a painter. After being cast in a major role in one of mainland China's first lesbian films, *Fish and Elephant* (directed by Li Yu) in 2001, she became interested in making her own films. Equipped with a digital video camera, Shitou and Mingming travelled to different parts of China and subsequently made several films related to the lives of lesbians and women. They also became actively involved in China's queer movements, together with some other queer filmmakers including Cui Zi'en, Fan Popo and Xiaogang. During my fieldwork in Beijing in November 2008, I met them at an independent Chinese film festival held in the Songzhuang Artist Village, where I was conducting interviews. In conversation they mentioned that they had been organizing 'travelling' queer film festivals in different parts of China since April 2008. Until then they had screened their films in Beijing, Shanghai, Changsha, Wuhan, Zhengzhou, Anshan and other Chinese cities. Their next stop would be Guangzhou in four days' time. Curious about how queer film festivals in China were organized, I expressed my interest in following them to Guangzhou to attend the festival. They looked at me as if I were mad but did not say no, largely out of politeness, I presumed. Three days later, while they were wandering (and perhaps wondering, too) in the crowded waiting room of the Beijing West Railway Station, I appeared in front of them with a suitcase and a single ticket to Guangzhou.

This chapter describes my experience of attending the China Queer Film Festival Tour screenings in Guangzhou, with a particular emphasis on space, place and identity.[1] I first situate my chapter in the academic debates concerning the public sphere in China, highlighting the spatial dimension of the public sphere. Then I introduce some key concepts and debates concerning space in the Chinese context. My theoretical discussion is followed by a brief introduction to queer film festivals in China. My ethnographic account here will document two screening events at the festival: a gay film screening in Guangzhou University City,

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1. For an account of the China Queer Film Festival tour from a festival organizer's perspective, see Fan 2015a.

and a lesbian film screening at a lesbian bar in downtown Guangzhou. I will also use these accounts to raise some theoretical issues that I consider to be interesting and important to larger questions about public sphere theory in the Chinese context.

Gendered and Sexualized Public Sphere

In his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jürgen Habermas (1992) traces the emergence, transformation and disintegration of a bourgeois public sphere in eighteenth-century Western Europe. Despite its influence on political and social philosophy, the Habermasian public sphere has been criticized by many scholars for its Eurocentrism and elitism, as well as for its racial, class and gender biases. In addition, postmodern theorists have criticized its uncritical endorsement of modern rationality, and cultural studies scholars have expressed discontent with its pessimism about new forms of mass media and his dismissal of popular culture. In *Spaces of Their Own: Women's Public Space in Transnational China*, Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang (1995) notes the spatial implications of Habermas's notion of the public sphere, as well as its close relationship with gender. Yang writes, 'lacking a gender analysis, he [Habermas] missed an opportunity for a spatial critique of the male domination of the public sphere and the relegation of women to a modern private domestic sphere' (p. 5). Indeed, as Doreen Massey (1994) suggests, spaces and places are always gendered; some spaces are marked by the physical exclusion of particular genders and sexes. Unfortunately, apart from one chapter about lesbian activism in Taiwan, Yang's book offers few discussions about sex and sexuality, or how these are manifest in relation to spatial inclusions and exclusions. Michael Warner (2002a), in his *Publics and Counterpublics*, links the public sphere with queer culture and considers queer culture in the context of 'the counterpublic', understood as people or groups with a subaltern consciousness. Inspired by Warner's problematization of the public and his theoretical vigour in bridging public sphere theory with queer theory, the major aim of this chapter is to develop the notion of the 'queer public space' with a special emphasis on the construction of queer spaces in urban China. The question I ask is not whether the concept of the public sphere fits into the Chinese context, a topic on which many Chinese and Asian Studies scholars hold different views. Rather, I am

interested in what new knowledge and understandings we will generate if we apply the analytical category of the public sphere to the Chinese context, and how my case study of the travelling queer film festival in China might inform our understanding. As I share Yang's optimism for the 'performative, utopian, emancipatory, and critical dimensions' (1999: 17) of the Habermasian theory, I also have great sympathy for the 'obstacles and difficulties' entailed in the process of bringing such a public sphere into existence. I have even greater admiration for the people I met during the travelling queer film festival for their ingenuity, creativity, determination and perseverance, as well as the tactics, in an everyday and thus also Certeauian sense (de Certeau 1984), that they employed in creating an imperfect but inspirational queer public sphere.

Social Space in China

Foucault's depiction of the panopticon has inspired many political theorists in China Studies. For Foucault (1977a), the social organization of space produces subjects and bodies. For instance, the Benthamite Panopticon produces the subjectivity of the prisoner and the 'docile bodies' of the prisoners *en masse.* In *Social Space and Governance in Urban China*, David Bray traces the genealogy of the *danwei* (work unit) system from the Maoist era to the Reform era. Drawing on the Foucauldian notion of the space and the subject, Bray dismisses some Chinese Studies scholars' ahistorical celebration of individual subjectivities in contemporary China. He maintains that the collective subjectivity that has been constructed through similar spatial configurations as *danwei* will continue to dominate the reform-era China for a long time and 'hover spectre-like, haunting the present with the once hopeful dreams of socialism' (Bray 2005: 201). While I support Bray's challenge to the simple reduction of 'an institutional formation made of many disparate and even contradictory practices' (p. 15) to a mythical party-state that seems to have the power to dominate every social space and hence subject formation, I also seek to develop a more considered theorization of people's lived experiences and their agency in those everyday spaces depicted by Bray. Ordinary people's ingenuity and tactics may change the established meanings of the urban spaces mapped out by state politicians and urban designers. This chapter calls for an examination of people's lived experiences within the continuity, transformation and

disintegration of Bray's collectivized socialist spaces and in the making and remaking of collective identities.

One of the most important theorists on space is Henri Lefèbvre (1991). In his work, *The Production of Space,* space is a complex social construction which affects spatial perceptions or social practices. Space and society produce each other. The social production of space, especially the urban space, is fundamental to the reproduction of a society, hence of capitalism itself. Although Lefèbvre has been criticized for being too structuralist and spatially-deterministic, he actually points to the agency of ordinary people in his use of the Gramscian notion of 'hegemony'. The Marxist class struggle, for Lefèbvre, becomes the struggle for social spaces and for the hegemonic signification of spaces. In her article about religious practices in rural Wenzhou, Yang (2004) gives an interesting account of the dynamic process of negotiating power and space between the secular communist state and local religious people over the construction of a local deity temple. In juxtaposing the state and the civil society, Yang focuses on the agency, or 'tactics', of the local people in reappropriating spaces of the secular state to create spaces of the divine. Her vivid depiction of the politics of spatial struggles, especially of the 'furtive' space, is helpful to my conceptualization of the queer public space.

Yang also notes the importance of the geopolitics of Wenzhou to the success of the local people's struggle against the state: 'Unlike many other places in China, especially northern China, Wenzhou managed to keep much of its 'placeness' throughout socialist state deterritorialization' (2004: 728). Yang's discussion urges me to look at the geographical location of Guangzhou in the construction of a queer public space around the film festival that travelled through it. In a way, the location of Guangzhou is similar to that of Wenzhou in that they are both cities located in the economically-developed and yet politically marginalized South. They both share the characteristic of 'off-centeredness', if not 'marginality', in the cultural representations of the PRC. Paradoxically, the two cities' centrality in China's economic development as China's first cities that 'opened up' to the West in the Reform era, together with their relative geographical proximity to capitalist Hong Kong and Taiwan, problematize their marginality in China's geopolitics. The cultural image of these cities and of the South in China may not be precisely accurate representa-

tions but they sometimes yield unexpected outcomes. For instance, it is generally believed that because of this 'off-centeredness' or 'marginality', newspapers and magazines in Guangzhou, represented by *Southern Weekend* (*Nanfang Zhoumo*), enjoy greater freedom in reporting politically sensitive issues. The overly romantic and utopian catch-phrase 'the humid South is the seedbed for gender diversity' used as a blurb for the travelling queer film festival can also be seen as a utopian and performative representation of the South viewed as the antithesis of the North. If the North is dominated in China's cultural imaginary by strict state control and rigid Confucian values, the South is imagined as relatively free from them. In this sense, the South becomes a cultural trope for free expression of gender and sexualities.

Let me wed Lefèbvre to Foucault in this context and try to unfold a clearer picture of the mutual imbrications of space, society and identity. I would also like to foreground the importance of politics to these imbrications by considering how the Habermasian public sphere might be used to approach it. If the Habermasian public sphere is inseparable from civil society and liberal democracy, its utopian dimensions might be deployed to suggest ways in which the 'queer public sphere' celebrates a long-awaited 'queer politics' associated with 'democratization' in China. Approaching this theoretical terrain through the queer film festival I want to ask the following questions. In what types of physical and material spaces did the film festival take place? How is a queer social space produced through such public cultural events as the film festival? How did such a queer space engage with other social spaces including transnational spaces, local spaces, the spaces of the nation-state, and commercial spaces, among others? How does queer space relate to queer identities and communities? To put it in another way, I am interested in the possible conditions in which a queer public sphere might come into being, as well as the precariousness and contingency of such conditions.

Queer Film Festivals in China

Queer film festivals in mainland China started in Beijing in 2001. While the first one, held on Peking University campus, was a relative success, the second one encountered enormous difficulties. Immediately before the opening, the venue provider rescinded his agreement to provide the venue. The opening ceremony and the film screenings that followed

had to move to an art gallery. These festivals were organized by Chinese queer filmmakers and activists including Cui Zi'en, Fan Popo and Yang Yang. Each festival differs both in terms of its content and of its success relative to different interests, as well as in terms of its articulation of the publics who are and are not being called on to attend. In 2001 and 2003, the festival was called Beijing Homosexual Film Festival (*Beijing tong-xinglian dianyingjie*), but in 2007 and 2009 the festival was advertised as the Beijing Queer Film Exhibition (*Beijing ku'er yingzhan*).

Pragmatism is the major reason for calling a film festival (*dianyingjie*) a 'film exhibition' (*yingzhan*) in Chinese, although a politics of aesthetic is also involved. Cui stresses that 'film exhibition' appears more academic and artistic. It also sounds less politically sensitive, which is an important consideration in China. 'Film festivals' are always understood to be state-sanctioned events that have considerable symbolic power in contemporary China (Berry & Robinson 2017). But any organization or individual, usually those associated with the art community, can hold an exhibition. 'Film exhibition', as opposed to 'film festival', therefore denotes a more pragmatic attitude on the part of the organizers.

The change from 'homosexual' to 'queer' usually suggests a conscious shift from gay identity politics to queer politics. Indeed, the film festival tries to encompass a wide range of topics regarding gender and sexuality, including homosexuality, heterosexuality, transgenderism, sadomasochism, and other fluid gender identities and non-identities. But in this case, 'queer' was used primarily to avoid the political sensitivity of *tongxinglian*. In China, 'queer' is not generally considered to be a political identity, and in fact most straight people, government officials included, have no idea of what it implies. The term *tongxinglian*, on the other hand, is not only often related to pathological and legal discourses but to human rights (*renquan*) discourses as well. The adoption of the term 'queer' (*ku'er*) in naming the film festival is certainly strategic.

The Third and Fourth Queer Film Festivals invited scholars engaged in queer film studies to hold forums or seminars (*ku'er dianying luntan*) to emphasize the festival's academic dimension (*xueshuxing*). In June 2009, queer film scholars and filmmakers from Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China were invited to participate in panel discussions. The decision to hold the third Beijing Queer Film Festival in a gallery in Songzhuang drew heavily on the political difficulties of the second but

also more closely imbricated the idea of queer with artistic and scholarly practices that give a different affective dimension to such politics. The 'Queer Film Forum' (*ku'er dianying luntan*), rather than 'homosexual film festival' (*tongxinglian dianyingjie*), proceeded smoothly.

In early 2008, China's state media administration, SARFT (State Administration of Radio, Film and Television), stipulated that media representing homosexuality, pornography and violence cannot be shown on public media in China (Zhao 2009). The first travelling queer film festival started in response to this regulation. Some young Chinese queer filmmakers, including Fan Popo and Shitou, showed eighteen queer films in twelve cities from 2008 to early 2009. They also wore T-shirts displaying the characters 'we want to see queer films' (*women yaokan tongxinglian dianying*) (Y. Yang & Fan 2009). The second round of the travelling queer film festival started in Beijing in October 2009. Shitou, Mingming and Fan Popo again were the major organizers of what they called the 'China Queer Film Festival Tour' (*ku'er duli yingxiang xunhui zhan*). The operation of the festival followed this model: invited by NGOs and queer groups in different cities, the three filmmakers took a number of queer films made by themselves and other independent filmmakers to screen in those cities. Neither the filmmakers nor the local queer groups earn a profit from the screenings. The screenings are usually sponsored by an international NGO which supports HIV/AIDS prevention and queer community building. The screening venues are usually university classrooms (which are free for student organizers) and commercial queer spaces including bars and clubs. The local organizers will usually pay for the filmmakers' train fares from Beijing to the destination city, and then from that city to the next city to which the 'travelling' film festival will proceed. The filmmakers will sometimes stay with local hosts to help save costs (Fan 2015a).

Travelling Queer Film Festival

Seventeen kilometres from downtown Guangzhou, covering an area of 43.3 square kilometres and home to ten universities, Guangzhou University City (*Guangzhou daxue cheng*) claims to be one of the largest 'university cities', which have mushroomed since the late 1990s. With the development of China's 'education industry' – which for many people roughly translates into increasing university tuition and increasing stu-

dent numbers – city planners, real estate developers and university administrators agreed that it was a good idea to move university campuses from city centres to suburban and rural areas. In the process, universities obtained larger campuses and state-of-the-art buildings and facilities, and real estate developers acquired more land for commercial use. This also coincided with the soaring of house prices in the city, and a new 'campus economy' (*xiaoyuan jingji*) developed in the new 'University City'.

Travelling to Guangzhou University City involved two subway transfers and a bus ride from downtown Guangzhou. Chinese-style roofs neighboured Greek Corinthian columns. Futuristic glass buildings reflected dilapidated construction workers' sheds. The smell of fresh soil was mixed with the smell of fresh paint. The university campus was quiet. Everyone who seemed to be a student was headed in the same direction. Following them, I arrived at my destination: a classroom on the sixth floor of a teaching building on the campus of South China Science and Technology University (*Huanan ligong daxue*). One screening session for the Guangzhou Queer Film Festival would be held here.

Half an hour before the screening began, the organizers were still preparing the venue. The classroom had a seating capacity of about 60 people. It did not have curtains. Two young men were trying very hard to put a rainbow flag on the window to make a temporary curtain and a banner. As they did not have sticky tape and had to rely on the gap between the windows to fix the rainbow flag, the simple task became a bit challenging but intrinsically interesting for both actors and spectators. Two other young men were distributing small packets of snacks, including oranges, candies, peanuts, sunflower seeds and large bottles of Coke, to each desk. One man was preparing the sign-up list and collecting the entrance fee (10 *yuan* for wage-earning participants; 5 *yuan* for students) at the door. Every participant was given a gift pack including condoms and booklets that featured information on the Chi-Heng Foundation, the ABCs of HIV/AIDS prevention and a collection of stories and letters by local queer people. Another man was working on the computer and data projector in the front of the classroom. He recognized me and smiled. His name is Fan Popo, a queer filmmaker who recently graduated from Beijing Film Academy; he is also one of the organizers of the film festival. We had exchanged emails before meeting at a queer film screening in Beijing several weeks before.

This newly acquired identity of being a 'friend' of the film festival organizer helped me greatly in establishing credibility for this section of my fieldwork. Popo introduced me to other organizers of the event, including the head of the Chi-Heng Foundation Guangzhou Office and the organizer of the 'Same-City Community' (*tongcheng shequ*). The 'Same-City Community' is a queer student NGO that organizes events in the Guangzhou University City's queer communities. It has an online blog and several Internet messenger groups (*QQ qun*) through which information about such events as queer film screenings are disseminated. The Chi-Heng Foundation, a Hong Kong-based international foundation dedicated to HIV/AIDS prevention, sponsored both the 'Same-City Community' and Guangzhou portion of the travelling film festival.

Before the screening began, the classroom was packed with people. Some volunteers who helped set up graciously gave up their seats to other audience members. Most people arrived with their friends and a few came by themselves. There were a couple of female students but most people in the audience were male. People talked to each other good-humouredly, offering each other candies and eating sunflower seeds skilfully. Their conversation topics varied widely, from routine life as a university student to someone's new date or boyfriend. Noticing that I was sitting alone, a university student greeted me and involved me in a conversation with his friends. It seemed that attending the screening was not so much about the films as an excuse to get together with friends and meet other queer people. Indeed, the organizers themselves also saw the creation of a sense of being at 'home' as an important purpose for the event.

After some brief speeches and acknowledgements made by the organizers, the screening began. The first film, *Tangtang*, was a film about transgender people's lives. The filmmaker seemed interested in problematizing gender and sexual identities. The film challenged the boundary between reality and simulacra when the film crew entered the scene at the end of the film.[2] Apparently this type of film style and language did not appeal much to most audience members. Five minutes into the film, some of the audience began to talk quietly to people sit-

2. For an excellent analysis of the transgender representations in Chinese queer documentaries, see Shi-Yan Chao 2010b and Luke Robinson 2013; 2015.

ting next to them. The impulse to speak soon affected everyone. Their conversation shifted from the film to other topics of mutual interest. Despite the conversations and the noise of eating sunflower seeds, a few people still managed to concentrate on the 90-minute film. It seemed that everybody had fun: some by watching the film; some by engaging in conversations; some by enjoying food and drink; and others by shifting intermittently between all these activities. People gave the film a loud applause when it ended.

The next film was a documentary about a Taipei Gay and Lesbian Festival (*Taibei tongwan jie*). It was made by Fan Popo and only ten minutes long, followed by a Q & A session with the filmmaker. The audience seemed to be more interested in this film. Most people seemed quite envious of the gays and lesbians' lives in Taiwan, which were obviously highly concentrated and exaggerated in the ten-minute film. A couple of people expressed their confusion about the first film, *Tangtang*. Some talked about their understandings of the film, but most agreed that this was an obscure film and was too 'far' from 'real life'.

The afternoon screening ended at five thirty, followed by a one-hour dinner break before the evening session. One of the organizers told everybody that he had booked several tables at a restaurant near the campus and those who were interested in having dinner together were welcome to participate. He added that the dinner would be paid for by splitting the bill (*AA zhi*) and emphasized that people should walk out of or into this teaching building in small groups instead of in large crowds so as to avoid suspicion from the security guard at the entrance.

Only with this special note did I realize that there was no poster in this building to advertise the film festival. Homosexuality and the idea of a queer film festival were still issues of political sensitivity in China. The audience, like myself, would be aware of many reasons for and facts related to this moment, from the widespread social prejudice against homosexuality in China to the state ban of films with homosexual and prostitution themes, the state prohibition of public demonstrations and protests, and the general fear of university students as a potentially dangerous social group. It seemed that every member of the audience understood the situation and was very cooperative. People walked in twos and threes out of the building. I tried to appear natural when I passed by the security guard but he did not even look at me.

The security guards on campus were mostly recruited from the local population in the region. Apart from being janitors, they were also given the responsibility of reporting any suspicious people or events to the university authorities. Together with the numerous closed circuit television cameras distributed around the campus, they constituted what Foucault (1979) calls a 'carceral society'. This may seem to many Chinese studies scholars a good example of how the Chinese state controls people with both its 'repressive state apparatuses' such as the police and the law as well as the 'ideological state apparatuses' such as social norms and moral codes (Althusser 1971). While the Foucauldian model of the panopticon and the carceral society may seem pervasive, I want to argue against seeing China as a mythic and apparently omniscient state. Whether these security guards embody the state power is at least questionable. Certainly, they were not especially interested in us. More importantly, the agency or 'tactics' of the ordinary people, manifested in the way they attended the queer film festival without causing the security guards' suspicion, should not be overlooked. Foucault would of course stress that this self-observation is precisely that kind of discipline which the carceral society is expected to produce, but other social dimensions of the pleasure taken by these people in an event which required careful tactical responses to social norms might easily be missed.

At the dinner table, everyone started to relax, getting ready for some good food and sex talk. Food and sex, as Mencius says, are part of human nature (*shise xingye*) (Farquhar 2002). I do not know if Mencius himself really said that or if he really meant how we understand the sentence today. The quote has become a catch-phrase for people in China to legitimize carnal practices in everyday lives and to produce food and sex as what could be called 'technologies of the self' in the Foucauldian (1988) sense. As Probyn argues, eating and sex are important ways in which we perform our identities (2000: 21). In popular cultural representation within China, the Cantonese are known for their ability to enjoy material life and culinary delicacies. My ethnocentrism, as someone from the supposedly more 'cultured' North China, was dismantled completely in front of the delicious Cantonese food. After a few glasses of beer, my sense of a separate identity as Northern Chinese began to disintegrate. The boundaries between my body and other bodies also started to blur. Talking gaily with my new friends and laughing loudly together, I sud-

denly had the striking feeling that queer is not about sex, nor identity, nor politics. In that moment it seemed that queer is more about meeting old and new friends, having wonderful conversations, tasting palatable food and drinking more than enough beer, enjoying everyday lives and consuming carnal pleasures. This idea of queer is not anti-social; it is, as Lauren Berlant (2000) suggests, about friendship, intimacies, socialities, relationalities and new ways of connecting with people.

At another table, the filmmaker's political activism seemed to have waned. After several glasses of beer, his face began to turn red and his hand gestures increased. Sitting with him at a round table were a group of local queer people, including Ah Qiang and Aunt Wu, both of whom are well known public personas in the local queer communities. Ah Qiang was as talkative as usual and Aunt Wu was as easy-going as usual. The dinner looked rather like a family dinner. Ah Qiang was well-known for his blog, started years earlier, that records his family life with an (ex-) boyfriend. This blog, 'The Life of Two Husbands' (*fufu shenghuo*), has become one of the most popular queer blogs in China. His hospitality and generosity in helping others as well as his courage to speak about queer-related issues in public had won him respect in Guangzhou's queer communities. Aunt Wu is the mother of a gay man in Guangzhou. She not only supported her son in coming out but also helped other gays and lesbians by running a hotline and a blog. People call Ah Qiang 'Brother Qiang' and Ms. Wu 'Mother Wu' or 'Aunt Wu' out of love and respect. To address people in an intimate and familial way is at the same time to place oneself in an imagined sociality that resembles a family. Families in China, heterosexual families by default, have often been considered as incompatible with gay identity. But gays and lesbians in China often imagine and form such families in creative ways. For instance, addressing each other as family members is a way of creating an imagined kinship for oneself. There are other forms of families in China such as the 'pro forma marriages' (*xingshi hunyin*) or 'mutual-help marriages' (*huzhu hunyin*) voluntarily formed by gays and lesbians themselves by marrying a gay man to a lesbian. These new forms of marriages, families and relationalities are not simply the resubscriptions of heterosexual norms *per se*. They encourage us to conceptualize new possibilities of connectivities, relationalities and socialities that queerness may entail.

Now let us turn to the lesbian film screening event. The travelling queer film festival promoted its lesbian screening as follows:

> Independence means that one says what s/he wants to say and one is responsible for what s/he says. With *lala* (lesbian), it means that apart from having an independent spirit, there should be two other essential criteria: made by lesbian directors and featuring lesbian lives. We do not seek for commercial gains; nor do we cater to the imaginations of the mainstream heterosexuals about lesbians. We simply wish to show the beauty and complexity of the lesbian world in China. Remember, the films that you will see are not from Europe and America, or made in Hong Kong and Taiwan. They are films made by and for ourselves, mainland Chinese lesbians. (China Queer Film Festival Tour programme, Guangzhou 2009)

Located in an old apartment building within an old residential block in downtown Guangzhou, Loushang Les Bar was hardly visible to people not in-the-know. After speaking through the intercom on the security door, I followed Shitou and Mingming into the building and onto the second floor. Like many bars and restaurants in Guangzhou, Loushang Les Bar was renovated and refurnished from an apartment. It was dark, despite the glow from some coloured lights. I had to stand at the door for a few minutes to accustom my eyes to the darkness. Then I was able to see a young woman behind the bar, some colourful pictures on the wall, some chairs and sofas in the lounge, several people sitting and talking at the back, a desk at the door where I was standing, and two young women behind the desk. The two young women were collecting the entrance fee: 30 RMB per person for two screening nights. They explained that the film screening was a non-profit community event. In order to reimburse the two filmmakers' train fare from Beijing to Guangzhou they had to charge a certain amount of entrance fee. Each participant was given a bottle of mineral water for free. The two women at the door also advertised T-shirts, souvenirs and the *LES+* magazines that were being sold by their colleagues, who were standing at another desk at the other end of the lounge. About fifty people turned up on that evening. The income from the entrance fee went far beyond the two filmmakers' train fare. I guessed that the organizer (Same-Heart Lesbian Group) and the venue-provider (Loushang LES Bar) would share the income.

The lounge became crowded and some had to sit on the floor. I was one of the few men in the audience, no one seemed interested in talking to me. The only thing I could do was to look at people, overhearing fragments of their conversations and match-making people in my mind, and practising my gaydar by guessing who might be T (butch), who might be P (femme) and who might be *bufen* (interested in performing both roles).[3] Before my enthusiasm in this mind game waned, the organizers called everybody's attention and introduced the two filmmakers.

Shitou and Mingming had their black T-shirts on that day. A red sign symbolizing an official ban and some Chinese characters in white were printed on the T-shirt, which said 'we want to see queer films' (*women yaokan tongxinglian dianying*). They explained to the audience the reason why they wore this T-shirt and the purpose of the travelling queer film festival, especially emphasizing the state ban on queer films. One of the organizers also encouraged audience members to buy T-shirts in order to support queer filmmaking and queer activism in China. The audience suddenly became quiet. Noticing the atmosphere to be a bit tense because of the political sensitivity of the topic, Mingming told a story that triggered some laughter. Once she was followed by a stranger from the fifth floor to the ground floor of a shopping mall, only to be asked a question about the words on her T-shirt: 'why do you want to see queer films?'

The organizer who hosted the opening session explained that lesbian films were very rare and extremely difficult to make in mainland China, and that it was very encouraging to see the films made by Chinese lesbian filmmakers for the lesbian communities in China. She also expressed a wish that more lesbian films would be made in the future and more people would have the opportunity to see these films. She quoted the film festival brochure:

> We hope that, one day, those lovely smiles can be passed on freely in the sunshine, and that more and more films can be accessible to all the lesbians in China. What a pleasure it will be. On that day, perhaps, our love will be free from control and become totally independent. (China Queer Film Festival Tour, Guangzhou 2009)

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3. For a detailed discussion of the gender roles in China's lesbian (*lala*) community, see Lucetta Yip Lo Kam 2013 and Elisabeth Engebretsen 2014.

She read the sentences slowly, softly and emotionally. After she finished, Shitou and Mingming gave her a hug and the audience was evidently touched by the scene. Someone began to applaud, and others joined in. While political statements created tension, sharing emotions brought the audience together in an affective community.

The screening began with a short documentary made by Shitou, featuring the lesbian pride march in San Francisco.[4] The lively music and engaging scene raised the spirits of the audience. For two minutes, Shitou was in the scene celebrating with her American friends on the festival float. In this way, Shitou's subject-positions as a filmmaker and as participant, between 'in the scene' and 'out of the scene', between in San Francisco and in Guangzhou, were blurred. The audience members looked at the screen with fascination, wearing smiles on their faces, and some even waved their bodies slightly to the music. The communal practice of watching the film constructs particular types of female subjectivity, which was clearly experienced in this moment as empowering for these women participants. A lesbian couple sat on the couch, hugging and kissing each other as they watched the film. For one moment, I could also imagine myself to be on Castro Street, dancing with the people in the film and sharing their joys. The film constructed imagined communities of queerness by suturing lesbian identities in San Francisco and in Guangzhou. The differences in time, space, race, ethnicity and language were temporarily unimportant. Everybody seemed to feel, as I did, that he or she belonged to this queer nation by sharing an identity on which it depends. In this context perhaps Dennis Altman is correct in coining the phrase 'global queering'. After all, both globalness and queerness are imagined. Digital video films, along with other forms of media, undoubtedly, play a significant role in the process of imagining identities and communities. However, I also agree with Lisa Rofel (1999) that different people, in different places and at different times, imagine identities and communities in divergent ways. It would be naïve to conclude that everybody considers themselves to be part of the transnational queer communities; not even in this room once this film was finished. After the screening, I heard comments such as 'look at how fantastic being abroad is' or 'I wish we could be like them'. The

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4. The film, titled *Dyke March* (*Nü tongzhi youxing ri*), is nicely discussed by Shi-Yan Chao (2010a).

China/abroad and we/they dichotomies perpetuated and reinforced the boundaries in imagining transnational queer spaces.

What is Queer?

I saw other films and participated in a few other film-watching spaces in the course of my fieldwork, but I want to use these two as exemplary, and return in this context to some key issues drawn from these scenes that shape their relevance to public sphere theory.

The metaphor of the film is fascinating to me as it finds affinity with Enlightenment rhetoric: the film is essentially about bringing light into darkness and exhibiting a world full of hope through a framed screen and moving pictures. According to Immanuel Kant (2003) the Enlightenment also names something which aims to bring light into the darkness and to bring people from immaturity into maturity. Both these aims convey an elitist attitude. The Habermasian public sphere, based in discourses on Enlightenment, has been criticized for its elitist stance. Indeed, those who talked about politics in coffeehouses and salons were heavily restricted as to class, gender and race. Most importantly, at least as imagined by Habermas, they considered themselves in one sense to be social elites – intellectuals who knew better than ordinary people and thus could lead social movements and initiate social changes.

In my account of the queer film festival, the filmmakers and the organizers of the event consider it important to make the audience understand what is 'queer' and queer politics. Their films are not only meant to 'entertain' people, but to 'educate' people, a philosophy of art that has its traditions in classical Chinese literature and in modern Chinese literary history (M. Anderson 1990; B. Wang 1997) and is compatible with the relationship between art and enlightenment Habermas presumes. After the film screening in Guangzhou University City, I heard one of the organizers explain apologetically to the filmmaker that the audience were mostly science and engineering students and most did not have a good arts education, and that was why some of them could not understand the films. This was meant to make the filmmaker feel better as he probably also realized that the audience did not appear very enthusiastic about the obscure art-house type of queer films. But this 'apology' also manifested an attitude of treating the audience as those who need to be 'educated' and 'enlightened'.

A caveat is necessary here. Despite my reference to Habermas and to other European thinkers I am using the term 'Enlightenment' in a Chinese context. Many scholars have referred to the May Fourth Movement at the beginning of the twentieth century as China's Enlightenment, which was largely characterized by the pursuit of 'Mr Democracy' (*de xiansheng*) and 'Mr Science' (*sai xiansheng*) as well as a strong nationalism (Schwarcz 1986). This was a top-down movement led by Chinese intellectuals as the European Enlightenment was led by philosophers, theologians and artists. The writings of Lu Xun, one of the most prominent writers in modern China, for instance, were full of images of wandering and spiritually tormented intellectuals trying to find solutions for ordinary people. Films, along with literature and art, have been considered important ways to 'educate' people by both progressive filmmakers in the Republican era and the Communist Party leaders in and after the Maoist era. Filmmakers bring their films to Guangzhou and other places in China in the hope of their films being viewed by more people and their political activism also shared by more people. They are Enlightenment intellectuals in this sense, or at least 'organic intellectuals' in the Gramscian sense (1992).

The use of the word 'queer' offers an interesting example of the discrepancy between filmmakers' intentions and the audience reception. In the brochure, the filmmakers wrote:

> In the past thirty years, no word has created so many confusions and paradoxes as *ku'er*. As the term challenges traditional gender binaries, it also ignores clichéd lesbian and gay theory. As it tries to establish new gender identities, it also insists on subverting its own identity politics. As it refuses to submit to the mainstream, it wanders within the mainstream. (China Queer Film Festival Tour programme, Guangzhou 2009)

Well-read in queer theory, the filmmakers explicitly wish to publicize queer politics instead of gay identity politics among the audience. The themes of the films are mostly about challenging identities and binaries. For instance, the film *Tangtang* as described by its director Zhang Hanzi is a film centred on the idea 'there is nothing certain in this world … the more you want to approach reality, the more you will be surrounded by simulacra' (festival programme). Most audience members did not get this Baudrillardian (1994) reference. They seemed more interested in finding out the main character's sexual orientation: is Tangtang gay or straight? If he is gay, how can he fall in love with a woman?

Most audience members seemed puzzled by the topics of these films. They were more comfortable with Hollywood or with what in Japanese might be called the *bishonen* (beautiful boys) type of gay and lesbian films. Many films featured at the festival were not in fact about gays or lesbians, quite apart from the relative obscurity of their narrative style. These other films focused on transgender people's lives, commercial sex, multiple sex partners and one-night stands. It was clear that the audience could not help wondering how such films could be called 'queer films'. They wondered whether the filmmakers were aiming to expose the 'darkness' of the queer communities, or even encouraging those lifestyles in the queer communities. One male student complained to me that those films did not reflect the 'real life' of gays and lesbians in China.

My point here is not to criticize these films, nor to make any judgment on the audience's reception of them. Indeed, a film text, like any other text, is polysemic. The instability of signification I accept for sexual and national identities must extend to the meanings that can be made from these films: no sign can become absolutely stabilized in its dissemination and thus free from the indeterminacy Jacques Derrida (1978) calls *différance*. But I do wish to highlight some contextually important discrepancies between the filmmakers' intentions and the audience's reception. Well trained in film academies and well acquainted with theories on postmodernism, the filmmakers have their own preoccupations which seem vastly different from the agendas of their viewers. Most audience members seem more interested in the stabilization of identities that the films wanted to question, including: am I gay? How shall I live my life as gay? How do I deal with the social pressure for heterosexual marriage? And, should I come out to my parents? The poststructuralist deconstruction of gendered and sexed identities seemed too far away from many people's everyday experiences.

In this sense, the queer film festival in China can be seen as an elitist discourse and a top-down movement which the filmmakers apparently approach as an 'enlightenment' project. The paradox lies in the fact that their mission of enlightenment encourages them to engage in political activism which their postmodern philosophy prevents them from enthusiastically embracing. When asked about Li Yinhe's proposal for same-sex marriage in China, Shitou's answer demonstrated her dilemma as an enlightenment activist and as a postmodern filmmaker: 'Personally

I won't get married even if we can marry each other in China. But I support the same-sex marriage proposal in China'.

The filmmakers stated in the lesbian film festival programme, 'Remember, the films you will see are not from Europe, America, or made in Hong Kong and Taiwan, they are lesbian films made by lesbians in mainland China' (China Queer Film Festival Tour Programme, Guangzhou 2009). If their films did not always reach their audience in the ways they intended, the filmmakers were nevertheless quite successful in creating an imagined community based on the 'Chinese' identity. In this, however, the politics of language betrayed the precariousness of the 'Chineseness' they referred to, again paradoxically given their questioning of stabilized identity of other kinds. The filmmakers are mostly from North China and they all live in Beijing, the widely acknowledged political and cultural centre of China. The characters in most films speak Mandarin Chinese. But the audience members for this section of the travelling film festival were largely Cantonese speakers, although many of them speak Mandarin as a result of school education shaped by China's linguistic and education policies. They clearly felt more comfortable talking to each other in Cantonese when there were no 'outsiders' (people from North China who do not speak Cantonese). At the dinner table after the queer film screening I felt sorry that the people who were sharing the table with me had to make the effort of speaking Mandarin because of my presence. I was amused too when they struggled to find a word in Mandarin when explaining the dishes to me. For my part I understood their explanations most of the time but not all the time, but I had to nod in order to show my appreciation for my local hosts' hospitality even when I was confused. The regional and cultural differences as Northerners and Southerners and as Mandarin speakers and Cantonese speakers became distinct at times, no matter how problematic those generalizations might be. One local lesbian complained that she did not quite understand the Mandarin dialogues in the film and had to rely on reading the English subtitles during the screening.

Queer Public Space

In *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1979), apart from the scenario of the cruel execution of Damien, which vividly demonstrates old forms of punishment, and the Benthamite model of panopticon, which best

exemplifies new techniques of discipline, nothing is more unforgettable than Foucault's depiction of the 'chain gang'. Foucault writes: 'In every town it passes through, the chain gang brought its festival with it. It was a saturnalia of punishment, a penalty turned into a privilege' (1979: 261). The spaces of discipline and punishment are deeply affective. The execution of Damien arouses fear and disgust in the spectators; the panopticon creates feelings of alienation, paranoia and helplessness in the prisoners' mind; the chain gang creates carnivalesque joys and cathartic laughter that were mutually shared by both the spectators and the convicts. The previous research on space to which I referred above mostly focuses on the external spaces, be they physical or social spaces, absolute space or abstract space (Lefèbvre 1991b). I wish to highlight internal and psychic spaces, as well as the affective dimension of spaces. As Joyce Davidson and Liz Bondi's (2004) term 'emotional geography' suggests, emotions are crucial to negotiating difference and identity in the human experience of space.

The queer film festival is deeply emotional. Despite the discrepancies of meaning-making between production and consumption, despite the linguistic and cultural politics that betrayed the precariousness of seemingly coherent 'Chineseness', the film screenings in Guangzhou proved successful and most of the audience enjoyed the experience. Affect, I suggest, plays an important role in the construction of queer spaces. Whether from the poetic language used in the event publicity or from the lively interaction between the film, the filmmakers, and the audience, the queer film festival experience was centred on the affective creation of shared spaces; on an emotional geography. Even when the attraction of the films failed, many audience members still enjoyed meeting old and new friends and engaging in interesting conversations that extended the shared space of the film screening to, for example, the group dinner with its familial friendly atmosphere. The presence of some well-respected and loved public personas, including Brother Ah Qiang and Aunt Wu, intensified feelings of community as an imagined shared space defined by relations between people rather than physical space. The trope of family was in fact frequently used in my interviews with film festival organizers and participants. One organizer told me that she wished everyone to feel at home during the festival and one should not feel left alone in this big family. Indeed, as the message from

the filmmakers printed in the film festival programme demonstrates: 'we hope that this festival is not only about sex and sexuality, nor simply about queer; all the art has to be about heart' (China Queer Film Festival Tour Programme, Guangzhou 2009).

Yang's reading of Habermas on the importance of mass media in relation to space is relevant here: 'While [Habermas] mourned the collapse of the public sphere in the era of mass media and commodification, he did not examine the novel qualities of mass media, and how they have a different spatial form from that of the face-to-face interactions and print media form of the classical public sphere' (1999: 5). The relation between media and space tend to be overlooked by many public sphere theorists. I use a different approach to theorize the relationship between media, space, identity and community by drawing on Benedict Anderson's widely cited book *Imagined Communities* (1983). I find Anderson's notion of 'imagination', later developed by Arjun Appadurai (1996) and Lisa Rofel (1999b), useful in that, instead of being utopian Anderson's conception of imagination translates dreams, fantasies and wishes into social realities and lived experiences. Furthermore, it bridges the spaces between subject and object and sutures the psychic and the social. In this way, not only are nations imagined, but identities, communities and social spaces are also products of imagination. In other words, the act of imagining spaces is performative. The practices of enacting and re-enacting spaces make political as well as affective spaces possible. Queer identities and communities are imagined through the shared experience of seeing films and through attending such public cultural events as the queer film festival. In fact, it is not media *per se* that has the miraculous function of constructing identities and communities, but they do provide a symbolic space in relation to which people configure and reconfigure the contingent and fragmented social 'realities', thus articulating a coherent identity and a unified community (Donald 1999).

I want to consider this queer space as a transient or 'fugitive' space that can perhaps best be understood as a rhizomatic queer public sphere.[5] In theorizing the public sphere, people always look for the ontology, or being, of public space. In the Habermasian account, he detects public spheres at coffeehouses or saloons in eighteenth century

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5. I would like to thank Professor Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang for her suggestion of a 'fugitive' public sphere.

Europe. In Wang Di's (2008) local history of Chengdu, the teahouses in the first half of the twentieth century can be called the 'public space'. Both studies have located the public sphere in a concrete physical space. In my previous account of the queer film festival, if this can be called a 'queer public sphere' – to which my answer is yes – then a university classroom (as in the case of the Guangzhou University City) as the queer public sphere becomes interesting. Indeed, for Habermas, the public sphere is not a kind of physical space but a set of practices and attitudes. And it is not exhausted by the superiority of leading people in the right direction. It is in fact a conceptual space in which matters of common interest, of public good, are democratically debated. It is only in this particular context that this classroom becomes a queer public sphere. And as soon as the film screening is over, the classroom ceases to be a queer public sphere. In other words, the queer public sphere is fleeting, transient, contingent and somewhat fugitive in China. This is largely due to the political sensitivity of queer issues in China. But this recognition also suggests for me that such furtiveness is characteristic of every *social* space. If, following Lefèbvre we acknowledge the 'social' is open, contingent and dynamic rather than a fixed and closed entity, the socially constructed space should also be placed in motion and remain definitively unstable and transformational. Habermasian scholars seem trapped in the 'ontology' of the public sphere, trying to find a visibly or at least materially stable location for it. Instead of asking whether a place is or is not a public sphere, I am more interested in asking, when and under what circumstances does a particular space become a public sphere? In other words, public sphere is not a matter of being but of becoming. It is always in the process of formation, reformation and transformation.

At this point I find Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's (1988) notion of the 'rhizome' useful. According to Deleuze and Guattari, a rhizome is a model for apprehending the constitution and reception of a cultural form, exemplarily a book or a story. They distinguish rhizome from both the traditional 'aborescent' model and from a rhetorically but not practically multiple 'fascicular' model. A rhizome is a multiplicity rather than 'the One' as a unitary form or as a collection. The rhizome is dynamic rather than static. A rhizome is 'made only of lines: lines of segmentary and stratification as its dimensions, and lines of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes

metamorphosis, changes in nature' (1988: 23). A rhizome refuses meta-physics and also Hegelian dialectical analysis with its oppositions and resolutions, on which Habermas's public sphere is based. The rhizome frees us from the tyranny of linear, teleological, binary and structural ways of thinking. Indeed, if we consider queer public sphere as something transient, fleeting, contingent and furtive, we may envisage a 'rhizomatic queer public sphere' that is constantly being folded or unfolded in today's China.[6]

My critique of the Habermasian public sphere focuses then on two aspects. First, the elitist aspect of the Enlightenment model of the public sphere and its exclusions with linguistic, classed and other cultural boundaries. As many critics have noted, notably Nancy Fraser (1989), the utopian and celebratory public sphere does not include or address the needs of everyone. The discrepancies and divergences within the public sphere itself may be intrinsic to what Habermas mourns as the failure of modernity as an 'incomplete project'. Second, by considering the public spheres dependence on static ontological location and intro-ducing to it such concepts as emotional and affective space, imagined and performative space, transient and furtive space, I wish to contribute to the public sphere theory attention to theorizing different types of spaces that are neither concrete nor static. The moment that we think about, ask, or attempt to answer the question of whether there is a queer public sphere in China we bring a queer public sphere into existence. As the queer film festival and other events addressed to a queer public in China suggests, such a sphere is both contested and definitely imaginary, but it does come into existence, even if that existence is problematic, transient and contingent.

In this chapter, I have documented two screening events at the China Film Festival Tour. Young filmmakers including Fan Popo and Shitou have brought their films out of Beijing and Shanghai and to second tier and small cities, in the hope of making a greater impact on the communi-ties with their films. Even though their films may not appeal to every member of the audience, the film screening events have helped construct queer identities and communities in different parts of China. In the process, the filmmakers themselves have learned from the communi-

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6.   See Rofel 2013 for a brilliant discussion of Chinese queer activism as 'nomadic activism'.

ties and from what they see in different parts of China. This has helped them to connect to the communities and more urgent social issues. As these films help change the lives of the audiences, the engagement with the audience also help shape the filmmakers' films. In a context where political protest is not possible and more grounded community work needs to be undertaken, film screening events become an affective form of queer activism that can potentially bring a queer public sphere into existence.

Cui Zi'en's filmmaking practices, described in Chapter 5, and Fan Popo and Shitou's travelling queer film festivals, described in this chapter, offer us examples of queer media activism and conscious community building by activists. Much as these filmmakers pride themselves on being 'organic intellectuals' (Gramsci 1992) and much as they try to approach the 'people', they may still seem elitist, and their critical consciousness as queer filmmakers and artists may not be shared by everyone in the communities. In the next chapter, I will focus on ordinary queer people cruising in public parks and examine how they can potentially mobilize themselves at a critical historical juncture. I will also highlight the role that the Internet plays in facilitating queer subject formation and activism in China today.

Figure 15: People's Park, Guangzhou (author photo)

Figure 16: Sun Yat-sen University student Qiu Bai (centre) campaigns against stigmatised depiction of homosexuality in university textbooks, Guangzhou, 2016 (photo courtesy of Peng Yanhui)

7 .

'Comrades Are Also People'

Tongzhi in Mobilization

The people, and the people alone, are the motive force in the making of world history.

Mao Zedong 'On Coalition Government'

There is no hegemony without constructing a popular identity out of plurality of democratic demands.

Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*

On 25 August 2009, an unarmed clash between five policemen and fifty gay men over the use of public space occurred at the People's Park in south China's Guangdong Province. The police asked the gay men to leave the park, claiming that 'this is The People's Park; it is not for homo-sexuals'. They threatened to arrest those who refused to leave. The gay men in the park usually complied, but not this time. Some argued back 'Comrades are also part of the people. Why can't we stay here?' They insisted that they had done nothing wrong and should have equal rights to others enjoying the park. Non-queer identified passers-by gradually also became involved in the dispute. With about a hundred people challenging their action, the police had to retreat. The crowd cheered as they left.

Most Chinese-language mainstream media in China remained silent about this event, largely because of well-established media censorship in China. But *China Daily*, China's leading English-language newspaper, covered the event on 29 August 2010 with the title 'Homosexuals clash with police in park' (Qiu 2009). Over the next few days, reports about this event filled the international press and China's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender websites. In cyberspace, many discussions condemned

the police violation of gay rights in China. There were also debates regarding whether queer people should have sex in public places. Ah Qiang (2009), a local queer activist, spoke to the public in his blog: 'We need to say no to discrimination; we must say no to discrimination.' Many people have drawn parallels between this event in China and the Stonewall Riot, when a clash between the police and a group of gay men at the Stonewall Inn in New York City on 27 June 1969 triggered, or at least made more visible and active, the gay rights movement in the United States and around the world. Stonewall has been discussed as the 'mythical origin of gay liberation' (Jagose 1996: 32); 'the shot heard around the homosexual world' (Cruikshank 1982: 69).[1] People began to ask questions about the possibility of a Stonewall Riot in China. Tongzhige, a queer NGO leader, even stated on a gay website that China needed its own Stonewall Riot.[2]

Tongzhige's sentiments resonate with the concerns of many transnational queer groups and international media. For a long time, gays and lesbians in China have attracted the attention of the West and become a trope for homosexual subjects repressed by an authoritarian regime. The call for a Stonewall Riot in China, therefore, reflects popular sentiment in China and in the West regarding the prospects of such 'universal' values as 'democracy' and 'human rights' in China, a sentiment that needs to be contextualized by the complexities of globalization.

In analysing the event at the People's Park, I want to pose the question: will there be a Stonewall Riot in China? But I want to ask this question in the context of themes raised by my discussion in earlier chapters and so my discussion focuses on: the changing meaning of *renmin* (the people) insofar as it informs citizenship and governmentality in China; the spatial politics of queer identities in China; a personal account of the event provided by one of the participants; and finally, the impact of the event exemplified by online discussions regarding the event. This event offers a new perspective on the dynamics of queer culture in China and

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1. Many historians have problematized this reductionist version of the genesis of the gay liberation movement. See, for example, Manalansan 1995.

2. Most Chinese queer activists use pseudonyms or English names in public. In this article, I use people's self-chosen pseudonyms for Chinese queer activists in order to protect their identity. Both Ah Qiang and Tongzhige are self-chosen pseudonyms.

the cultural specificity of queer politics in China today. It also demonstrates the potentials of Chinese *tongzhi* self-mobilization under specific historical conditions and the role that the Internet and new media play in contemporary queer subject formation and queer activism.

Renmin: *Citizenship and Governmentality in China*

Renmin (the people) is a 'keyword' in understanding citizenship and governmentality in China. In many ways, *renmin* has assumed the meaning of the state and the nation. Although the widespread use of the term has been most closely associated with the Maoist era, the term had acquired significant linguistic and social significance even before the founding of the People's Republic. Some popular uses of the term include: China's official name is the People's Republic of China (*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo*); the Chinese government is called the People's Government (*Renmin zhengfu*); the Chinese police are called the People's Police (*Renmin jingcha*); the Chinese army are called the People's Army (*Renmin jundui*); the postal service in China is called the People's Post (*Renmin youzheng*); and education in China is called People's Education (*Renmin jiaoyu*). So, who exactly are *renmin* in China? Why is the category of *renmin* so important?

To answer this question, one needs to revisit some key political texts in China, including the Chinese constitution and writings by Mao Zedong, both of which have had a profound impact on modern Chinese history. Article 1 of the Constitution states: 'The People's Republic of China is a socialist state under the *people's* democratic dictatorship led by the working class and based on the alliance of workers and peasants.' Article 2 states: 'All power in the People's Republic of China belongs to the *people*.' (National People's Congress 2004, emphasis added) According to these two statements, *renmin* are the legitimate subjects of China and comprise mainly workers and peasants. In different historical eras, however, the composition of *renmin* differs. *Renmin*, who constitute legitimate subjects in China, enjoy full citizenship rights, rhetorically rule the country through a 'democratic dictatorship', that is, exercising democracy vis-à-vis those who fall into the category of *renmin* and exercising dictatorship over those who fall outside of the category. The underlying logic is that people within China are divided into two oppositional categories: those who are *renmin* and those who are not.

'Intellectuals' (*zhishi fenzi*), for example, are usually considered a part of the working class, hence a part of *renmin*. But during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), some 'intellectuals', especially the 'rightists' who refused to support the revolution, were excluded from the *renmin* category and therefore had to be 're-educated' and punished.

As discussed in Chapter 4, Mao's questions, 'Who are our enemies? Who are our friends?', gave birth to revolution in China (Dutton 2005). The Maoist/Schmittian friend/enemy dichotomy was used in numerous political campaigns in modern China to unite supporters of the revolution and to punish political dissidents. Its impact can still be felt today, especially when the police, representing the interests of *renmin*, crack down on criminal individuals and groups who are considered *diren* (the enemy). Within this rhetorical frame, people should treat *renmin* with the 'warmth of spring' and *diren* with the 'cruelty of winter' (Lei 1973b). The friend-enemy dichotomy thus constructs highly cohesive and deeply affective communities, and effectively serves revolutionary and post-revolutionary political hegemonies. Both *renmin* and *diren* are contingent social categories, the meanings of which have shifted over time.

Included in the category of 'enemy' is the sub-category *liumang* ('hooligans' or 'hoodlums'). Literally 'the flowing common people', *liumang* signifies the idea of the 'outsider', the unsettled and, by implication, the unreliable. The term encompasses people and behaviours that do not fit into social norms and are thus 'without a place' in Chinese society (Dutton 1998: 62). *Liumang*, as a subject category, also has strong spatial implications. It 'flows'; that is, it does not occupy the fixed place desired by the state. 'It is an embryonic alternative culture,' John Minford explains, and the category includes the 'rapist, whore, black-marketeer, unemployed youth, alienated intellectual, frustrated artist or poet' (cited in Barmé 1999: 64). In everyday usage, drawing on these implications, the term has strong sexual connotations: any illicit sexual practices, including rape, adultery and homosexuality, are labelled *liumang*.

As stated in previous chapters, prior to 1997, homosexuality was often criminalized under the charge of 'hooliganism' (*liumangzui*) (Y. Li 2006). After 'hooliganism' was deleted from China's Criminal Law in 1997, homosexuality also took on an ambiguous status. It is not illegal but it certainly is not recognized; it is simply not mentioned in official documents. While queer people are no longer criminalized as *liumang*,

their rights are not recognized either (X. Guo 2007). The police assault on queer people at the People's Park may be better understood as the residual trace of 'hooliganism' in the eyes of the police, as well as representing the ambiguous position that queer people occupy (or do not occupy) in China's political life. They are present in society, but they do not exist in legal terms. They are in this sense what philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1988) calls *homo sacer*, people excluded from rights to citizenship. In this sense, the debate over whether queer people are part of the 'people' is a battle for citizenship.

Steven Seidman stresses the importance of citizenship rights, which 'make it possible for individuals to protect themselves against social threat, to participate in public decision-making, to make claims about national policy and culture, and so on' (1998: 189). In the case of the People's Park, citizenship means the right to stay in the park without being harassed by the police. If *gei-lou*, an often stigmatized local queer identity which used to be equated to *liumang*, are not part of the 'people', then *tongzhi*, as the new term appearing around the same time as *liumang* lost its legal status, should connote rights to citizenship.

Citizenship rights should not be confused with 'human rights'. In the Chinese context, concepts such as 'democracy' (*minzhu*) and 'human rights' (*renquan*) are heavily loaded with Cold War history and ideological battles between China and the 'West', and for these reasons, they have become politically sensitive terms. Such terms are often used by Western countries (especially the US) to level accusations against China, and by the Chinese government to argue in defence of itself. Queer NGO leaders in China have been quick to learn a new vocabulary, and 'citizenship rights' (*gongmin quan*) is one of them. The term 'citizenship rights' encompasses most of the demands that 'human rights' entail. But rather than the universal 'human rights' that are often deemed to transcend history and geographical boundaries, the notion of 'citizenship rights' recognizes the sovereignty of a state and the specificity of a culture, and it avoids the universalism and Eurocentrism embedded in the notion of 'human rights'. In this sense, queer people's claims to 'citizenship rights', that is, to the category of the 'people' without recourse to the 'human rights' discourse, is a culturally-sensitive strategy for queer politics in China.

The concept of citizenship has been tied to the nation-state. Recently scholars have started to pay attention to the relation between sex and

citizenship, or what is known as 'sexual citizenship' (Bell & Binnie 2000; Berlant 1997; Farrer 2006) or 'intimate citizenship' (Plummer 1995). Kenneth Plummer (1995) describes 'intimate citizenship' as rights and responsibilities around issues of sexual partner choices, control over the body, reproductive rights, intimate bonds, and sexual identities. To be gay or lesbian is itself, at one level, a claim to 'intimate/sexual citizenship'.[3] Jeffrey Weeks situates the sexual citizen in the dynamics of the private and the public:

> The sexual citizen … makes a claim to transcend the limits of the personal sphere by going public, but the going public is, in a necessary but nevertheless paradoxical move, about protecting the possibilities of private life and private choice in a more inclusive society. (1999: 37)

As queer people struggle for rights to public spaces such as parks, they are also claiming more rights for their 'private' selves. In making such a claim it is important to acknowledge the different meanings of 'public' (*gong*) and 'private' (*si*) in the Chinese context. There has not always been a clear division between the private sphere and the public sphere in China, especially in the Maoist era. But the division between the private and the public has been increasingly manifest in the post-Mao era during which the conception of Chinese society, citizenship, and sexuality have been transformed.[4] As David Bell and Jon Binnie suggest, an examination of sexual citizenship has to pay attention to 'the role of the market, the city as a site of citizenship, the place of notion of love, family and the social, the globalization of sexual identities and politics' (2000: 1). It is important to contextualize this event in the People's Park in relation to urban space as the frame in which the media and the transnational queer movement have shaped 'sexual citizenship' for gays and lesbians in China.

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3. I use the two terms 'sexual citizenship' and 'intimate citizenship' interchangeably in this chapter as the two notions encompass similar sets of rights and claims (Farrer 2006: 103).

4. For a detailed discussion about the notion of the 'public sphere' (*gonggong kongjian*; *gonggong lingyu*) in the Chinese context, see Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang 1999.

The Queer Geography of the People's Park

Many scholars have linked modern queer identities to urban life (Bech 1997; Delany 1999; Eribon 2004). This may be because cities provide sexual minorities with spaces in which they can construct their identities and communities, an accommodation that could prove difficult in rural or small town settings. Henri Lefèbvre highlights the importance of space to identities in his seminal work *The Production of Space* (1991b). For Lefèbvre, the struggle for the right to space is an integral part of the struggle for identity. For Engin Isin and Patricia Wood, the concept of citizenship must recognize the relevance of space, that is, 'the locations from which people exercise their citizenship rights' (Isin & Wood 1999: viii). Henning Bech maintains that the city is not merely a place where pre-existing sexualities are acted out; it is a place where sexualities are constructed (1997: 118). Space, in the case of the People's Park in Guangzhou, allows a particular type of queer identity and community to form and to articulate itself.[5]

A brief history of the People's Park will shed light on the close connection between public space and state governance. While imperial gardens (such as the Summer Palace) and private gardens (such as the Zhuozheng Garden in Suzhou) were commonplace in ancient China, the concept of parks as public space only emerged in modern China at the beginning of the twentieth century, concomitant with China's nation-building and urban development projects. In imperial China, government offices (*guanshu*) were located on the site of the People's Park. They were places of hierarchy and privilege that saw ordinary people denied access. In 1921, Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the Republic of China, changed the site to a park and opened it to the public (*minzhong*). It was then called the No. 1 Municipal Park (*Shili diyi gongyuan*), a name that stressed the concepts of the city and 'publicness'. In 1925, during the Nationalist Party's (*Guomindang or Kuomintang*) rule, the park's name was changed to the Central Park (*Zhongyang gongyuan*). It was called 'central' both in terms of its geographic location (in the centre of the city) and because of the political significance of the city of Guangzhou wherein the Nationalist government was located at that time. In 1966, the Communist Party changed the name of the park to

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5. For an ethnographic account of the queer use of urban space in a northeastern Chinese city, see Fu 2015.

the People's Park (*Renmin gongyuan*), a name that reflected the People's Republic's obsession with *renmin* as a political category.

In Chinese language, a park is known as a 'public garden' (*gongyuan*). Apart from its publicness, the term also emphasizes its aesthetical dimension. Building parks in China is part of the nation-building project, which is in turn part of a modernization project for the nation. Ruth Rogaski (2004) and Maurizio Marinelli (2009) demonstrate the significance of such notions as hygiene and visual aesthetics to China's modernity. Central to the notion of modernity is the concept of order, which roughly translates into 'cleanness' and 'beauty' in vernacular language, and is often juxtaposed with the lack of order in both 'premodern times' or 'postmodern conditions'. To maintain order, state governance is necessary. Central to such modernizing projects is the cultivation of modern, law-abiding and self-regulating citizens. Foucault (1977b, 1978, 1988a) sees modern history as marginalizing and excluding the 'abnormal' and producing 'docile bodies' through such technologies. The nation-state is at the core of the modern technologies of governmentality. The 'People's Park' can legitimately be read as a metaphor for China as a modern state implementing its modernization projects, in whose process aesthetic order is maintained through the creation of legitimate subjects and the exclusion of illicit subjects and desires (such as homosexuality). So, peaceful and beautiful as the park is, it is also full of exclusion and violence.

People's Park is a public space for *renmin*. Every day, ordinary people, mostly local residents, go there to take a walk, sing, dance, exercise, and meet friends. The park is also known as one of the most popular queer cruising places in Guangzhou and even in the whole Pearl River Delta region in South China. The cruising area is not big: it is located in the western area of the park, between the two public toilets, along a 200-metre-long path lined with trees and benches.[6] In the daytime, this place is as ordinary as other places in the park. But when night falls, neatly-dressed and flamboyantly-behaved men begin to gather here. They talk to each other and some have sex in the public toilets. The People's Park as a queer space is defined by time and by the people who use the space. Queer people call this place the 'fishing pond' (*yuchang*), a place where people come to 'fish' for sex partners. Frequent patrons to this area, especially transgender people, have their 'stage names' (*yi-*

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6. For a more detailed account of the queer use of the People's Park, see Qian 2017.

ming) to use in this space. People address each other by their nicknames, and no one seems to care about other people's real names or work units (*danwei*). The People's Park is a 'heterotopia' in Foucault's sense (Foucault 1986b), one where queer people can forget their other social identities temporarily and create a world of their own outside of, but also positioned within, heterosexual social norms. It is a place where local queer people meet, make friends, have fun and forge a sense of shared identity and community.

In many queer people's memories, the time before 2009 was 'the age of innocence' (*chunzhen niandai*), when queer people built up affective communities relatively free from police interference. A middle-aged gay man nicknamed Alice recalled: 'That was an innocent time', a time when queer people got along well with the security guards in the park.

> In 2006, people could stay overnight in the park. Later, the security people began to clear people out of the park after midnight. Often gay men didn't leave the park until a security guard shouted 'Clear up now! Time to go!' After the security guard was gone, they came back. It was happy hour after midnight. There was nothing that queer people didn't talk about. They even sang songs loudly when getting excited. Some cheered with falsetto: 'Bravo! Encore!' When the noise got out of control, the security guard reappeared and shouted 'Time to go! Stop making so much noise!' (H. He 2009)

For many locals, the park was an emotional space. Local gay men narrated the details of their everyday lives at the park with deep sentiments and nostalgia. Even their negotiations with the security people over the use of the space were described as 'fun'. A zone for 'contact' and 'networking' in Delany's (1999) words, the park was mapped out by 'networks of love and friendship' (Bell & Binnie 2000: 94) and tinted with joy and optimism. As historians remind us, memories are not only personal, they are collective and intimately linked to the social and the political (Halbwachs 1992). Narratives about the past do not necessarily reflect what really happened in the past. Rather, they reflect where the narrator is and their present concerns. In this sense, the gay men's reminiscence of the 'good old days' can be seen as an expression of their dissatisfaction with the present. Story-telling, in this case, serves as a resistance to hegemonic discourses and is certainly political (Plummer 1995). But the past of this park was not perfect. There were problems, as

many gay men acknowledge, in the form of prostitution, theft, robbery and bullying. Also, some local residents complained that they had been 'harassed' by 'sex predators' in the public toilets and that the homosexual behaviour in the park threatened public security and social order. The police, who received frequent complaints from the local residents, had to take action: 'If we did not take action, the citizens would blame us for neglecting our duty.'(H. He 2009)

From early 2009, echoing the event with which I opened this chapter, many cruising queer people were arrested and questioned at the local police station. Most of them were released after questioning or a few hours of detention at the station. They were warned not to go back to the park. The police often asked the same question: 'Are you a homosexual (*tongxinglian*)?' They also gave the identical warning: 'Don't go to the park again. This is not a place for you.' Tony, a gay man who experienced arrest, asked angrily: 'The People's Park belongs to the people. Why can't homosexuals (*tongxinglian*) go there?' (H. He 2009)

Many gay men pointed out that the police assault was part of the 'hard strike' (*yanda*) campaign launched by the police to 'create a safe society' in preparation for the sixtieth anniversary celebrations of the People's Republic planned for October 2009, and the 16th Asian Games in Guangzhou in 2010 (Xiaomu 2009). These frequent assaults did not stop gay men from visiting the park. Instead, a 'cat and mouse' game ensued between the police and the cruising gay men, who launched 'guerrilla warfare' against the police intervention. This contested use of space might be understood in Michel de Certeau's (1984) terms as a conflict between authorized 'strategies' and the 'tactics' which do not have any structuring authority behind them. When the police came, the gay men fled. But when the police left, they returned. Aware of the situation, the police had little room to manoeuvre. Both parties seemed to be able to gain great pleasure from the game. This is a game between state power and queer pleasure. As Foucault (1977c) points out, power and pleasure do not oppose each other. Rather, they are mutually constitutive and mutually enhancing. Power induces queer pleasure and transgressive pleasure reinforces power. Despite sporadic police intervention, there had not been an open confrontation between the police and the gay men before the night of 25 August 2009. The event at the People's Park was the first time that queer people had stood up to the police in many years.

'I am not sure for how many years queer people have used this place as a cruising venue. But this was certainly the first time that they expressed their anger without restraint.' (H. He 2009)

'We Want to Sing'

Xiaomu, a gay participant in the event, wrote about his experience of this clash under the title 'We want to sing' (*Women yao gechang*).[7] In this section, I use his personal account of the event published online to re-construct what happened on that night. I am fully aware of the limitaions of Xiaomu's narratives but I am also interested in seeing how the event was presented to the queer communities in a particular way to mobilize certain queer subjectivities and politics. Xiaomu does volunteer work for a local queer NGO; he often goes to the park to engage in commu-nity outreach programmes. His duties include making friends with local queer people, publicizing knowledge about HIV/AIDS prevention, and distributing safe-sex pamphlets and packs. On that evening, he and two other volunteers, nicknamed Doctor Tang and Mouse (*haozi*) re-spectively, went to The People's Park for community outreach. Xiaomu states that 'The park is a part of the *tongzhi* life in Guangzhou. People's Park is also *tongzhi*'s park.' (Xiaomu 2009)

While he was talking to a gay man visiting Guangzhou from another city, several policemen asked them to leave. He would have followed the order as before. However, this time he decided to argue. He justified his decision as follows:

> In as short as one year, the history and memory of discrimination has been intensified at the People's Park. This is an inversion of the progress of civilisation. It is said that the police intervention in the People's Park is to prepare for the 60th Anniversary of the country and the Asian Games. This must be a lie. How can violence and discrimination help an internationally celebrated sports event and the progress of a country? We don't believe it! (Xiaomu 2009)

Using a linear historical narrative and a social Darwinian rhetoric, both of which have been frequently deployed by the mainstream discourse in

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7.   The original website where Xiaomu published his article is unknown, since his article was published on many queer websites at the same time. I quote the article from *Guangtong*, a gay web portal in Guangzhou, www.gztz.org. The article was posted on the website on 27 August 2009.

China, Xiaomu considers the event 'an inversion of the progress of civilisation'. His questioning of history and progress is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin, who states in his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' that 'There is no document of civilisation that is not at the same time a document of barbarism' (2007 [1968]: 256).

Xiaomu walked up to the police and asked them: 'Why can't we stay here? We are talking to each other and taking a walk here. Is that a problem?' Mouse echoed: 'What rights do you have to drive us away? I will report this to the media.' (Xiaomu 2009)

Two issues are particularly salient in this account: the citizenship rights discourse and the role of the media. As I suggested earlier, in contemporary China, while the notion of 'human rights' (*renquan*) is still more or less taboo due to its specific discursive history during and after the Cold War era, the notion of citizenship rights (*gongmin quan*) has been increasingly popular among urban dwellers and the university-educated. At the same time, the media have become an important force that mediates between the state and society. On occasion they play a role in bringing social justice to the people, exemplified by the success of the news programme *Focus Interview* (*Jiaodian fangtan*) on China's state television station. The *South China Daily* and *South China Weekend* are two popular newspapers based in Guangzhou: that have had nationwide impact and have courageously flouted official bans to address social injustices.[8] Ordinary Chinese people are becoming increasingly aware of their rights, as well as of the means to defend their rights, the use of media being among them.

According to Xiaomu, the policeman replied: 'We won't allow you *gei-lou* to stay here … if you don't go I will send you to prison … this is People's Park. You *gei-lou* shouldn't be here.' And Xiaomu retorted:

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8.   I wish to emphasize the importance of locality for this event. Situated in southern China and branded as a 'special economic zone' (*jingji tequ*), Guangzhou was one of the first cities to 'open up' to the West in post-Mao China. Its city government has more autonomy than most in China. The particular commercial and leisure culture in the city also allows more freedom of expression. The city has had a vibrant gay culture since the 1980s. Apart from numerous queer NGOs and commercial venues, Guangzhou also has an active queer media watchdog organization and a PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) organization. The story I am discussing here would have been different had the People's Park event occurred in a different Chinese city. For more discussions of news media in Guangzhou, see Sally Chen 2015.

> Since you know that this is People's Park, and since *tongzhi* are also law-abiding citizens, why can't we stay here? Ask the city mayor, he wouldn't say that *tongzhi* are not people and *tongzhi* can't come to People's Park. (Xiaomu 2009)

In this conversation, the exchange of terms, *gei-lou* and *tongzhi* refer to different conceptions of gay men concerned in relation to the state. While the local term *gei-lou* conjures up a sense of parochialism, with its close associations with a specific locality, together with class and stigmatized social history attached to it, the term *tongzhi* is used here to suggest universalism and urban cosmopolitanism, with its connections with the national and the transnational. *Gei-lou* may not be part of *renmin*, but *tongzhi* certainly is, at least *tongzhi* in the sense of 'comrade'. The claim '*tongzhi* is also part of the people' thus contains a pun in its reference to both *tongzhi* in the sense of socialist camaraderie and to *tongzhi* in the sense of sexual subjectivity. Irrespective of the different terms being used, it seems that the police and the queer people, had no difficulty understanding in each other. However, the police in this context typically refuse to use *tongzhi* to refer to queer people (they may use *tongxinglian*), as the old usage of *tongzhi* as 'comrade' is still common in their everyday lives. Queer people in turn refuse to be called *gei-lou* and insisted on calling themselves *tongzhi*. These linguistic politics of addressing same-sex subjects manifest different attitudes towards homosexuality, and how people use language to negotiate their citizenship rights.

Neither the police nor the gay men gave in. They started to argue in an increasingly antagonistic manner. At the same time, people began to gather round and they joined in the verbal battle against the police:

> Is The People's Park yours?
>
> This is gangster's logic. The mayor wouldn't stop *tongzhi* from coming here.
>
> What's the charge?
>
> You can stop theft, robbery or other criminal behaviour. We haven't done anything wrong. Why can't we stay here?
>
> Who do you think you are? (Xiaomu 2009)

The scene is in many ways carnivalesque and cathartic, with about 100 people challenging five policemen. Xiaomu's description is highly emotional and performative. He captures the sudden eruption of anger and

the community solidarity that was temporarily formed: 'The long-time repressed anger, together with the courage and team spirit, triggered by the ignorance of the police culminated into joyous riot.' (Ibid.)

When the police left, the crowd burst into loud applause. 'We cheered; we cheered for ourselves.' Xiaomu concluded his account by saying: 'We want to sing in the People's Park in Guangzhou. People's Park is also *tongzhi*'s park.' (Ibid.) While some may be sceptical about Xiaomu's motives for writing such an account, and of course about the accuracy of some details of the story, the impact of this event, especially when the news was disseminated on the Internet, proved more significant than the event itself.

Online Public Sphere

After Xiaomu's account of his experience was posted on a *tongzhi* website, a queer NGO member from Shanghai wrote online: 'Congratulations from Shanghai on the success of "defending the right to sing". We should sing out loudly. We like singing the song that everybody in China knows: "Arise those who refuse to be slaves."' He was quoting from the national anthem of China. Another queer NGO member quoted the *Internationale*: 'Let's sing the song that everybody in the world knows: "Arise ye starvelings from your slumber."' The queer appropriation of the mainstream political discourses (as represented by the Chinese national anthem and the *Internationale*) is particularly revealing. De Certeau (1984), who compares spatial practices to textual practices, claims that readers are not passive receivers of texts but are active 'poachers' of texts; in other words, they take whatever they need from texts and appropriate them in their own ways and for their own purposes. 'Poaching' is a 'tactic' of the dominated in society as much as the evasive spatial practices of the gay men in their park. In many ways, the gay men's appropriations of these canonical texts are 'poaching' practices that register a sense of queerness.

Tongzhige, an queer NGO leader, responded to the event with a bold claim: 'strategically, China's queer movement cannot solely rely on the majority of the "reformists" in the communities. On many occasions, according to the requirement of the movement, we need to have "revolutionists". Simply put, China needs its own Stonewall Riot'. Tongzhige here conjures up some critical moments in China's revolutionary his-

tory when there were divergent opinions towards political activism. By 'reformists' (*gaige pai*) he is referring to those people who advocate the 'Chineseness' of queer politics, and those who tend to be critical about issues such as 'coming out' and 'gay rights'; by 'revolutionists'(*geming pai*), he refers to people who embrace a Western style of progressive queer politics. But Tongzhige has also taken the Chinese context into consideration. He added, 'We should have our own tactics. Every action must be done within the limits of the law.' Most people who participated in the online discussion did not seem very interested in Tongzhige's revolutionary politics. One reply to his call came from a queer NGO leader from another province: 'I agree with the suggestion that this friend has made. The most important aspect of a movement is that it must fit into local conditions. [We need to ask:] What is our ultimate goal? What is our rationale? How do we gain more support from the government and more understanding from people?' Nobody talked about the Stonewall Movement in China after that. It seems that the idea of a 'movement', let alone a 'riot', had little appeal to queer people in China. Queer people seemed quite content with the 'small victory' achieved at the People's Park and did not wish to take further action.

In cyberspace, the focus of the discussion of the event was in fact on whether queer people should have sex in public. On the Guangtong website, a local queer web portal, a person using the pseudonym 'struggle against social norms' (*Heshisukangzheng*), wrote:

> Should we also have some self-reflection: why have the police only started to intervene recently? Last year and the year before last, such things didn't happen. This is because some of us went to such extremes that they made these things happen. To gain other people's support, we should change ourselves and stop doing things that other people dislike (for example, cruising in public toilets). Only in this way can we gain more respect and understanding. (Heshisukangzheng 2009)

Another netizen agreed with him:

> The most important thing for a *tongzhi* is to love and respect himself. The conduct of many *tongzhi* is shameful to the community … Don't do anything shameful in public any more. If you need it, go home and do it. If we only do civilised things in public, such things [as police intervention] won't happen. Let's make public toilets and bathrooms clean … (Huayan qiaoyu 2009)

There has been a strong call in the *tongzhi* communities for 'civilized' behaviour and being good citizens. In this way, they would hopefully fit into the mainstream and gain acceptance from the wider society. However, not everyone in the communities agreed. A gay man told the Associated Press under the condition of anonymity: 'We can't afford to rent a room, and many of us live with our parents. Where are we supposed to have sex [if not in public toilets]?' (Foreman 2009)

The gay man's question conjures up the spectre of the proletarian in the socialist era. The 'proletarian' is translated as 'people without property' (*wuchan jieji*) in Chinese. According to Marx and Mao, this is the ideal subject to initiate and to participate in the revolution because they have nothing to lose. Here I am not suggesting that these gay men will lead a revolution, or at least, a Stonewall Riot, in China. Rather, I am suggesting that these gay men were empowering themselves with revolutionary languages with which they could speak against the authorities. This points to the major argument of the book: in contemporary China, the socialist 'comrade' subjectivity and the postsocialist 'queer' subjectivity are *mutually constitutive*. Gay identities and queer politics in China can be best understood through the metaphor of 'queer comrades'. That is to say, the socialist past lays a foundation and provides inspiration for contemporary Chinese gay identity and queer politics, which are both produced by and pose resistance to the Chinese state and transnational capitalism.

This question also highlights the importance of space in the construction of queer identities and communities. For many queer people in China, cities such as Guangzhou provide them with opportunities to meet other queer people. But, such opportunities are not equally distributed. Certainly there are commercial spaces such as gay clubs and saunas, but not everyone can afford to frequent such expensive commercial venues. Furthermore, queer life is more than a mere meeting. A place to have sex and to share private life with others is also indispensable. As a result of soaring house prices in Chinese cities, many young people either live at home with their parents, or live in school or university dormitories with their friends, or in flats distributed to them by their 'work units'. Under these circumstances, wide-ranging public surveillance has made people's private lives, let alone socially-unacceptable sexual practices, almost impossible. Many older queer people who

have entered into heterosexual marriages have to 'sneak' out to have sex with their same-sex partners. Virginia Woolf's (1929) wish to have 'a room of one's own' in order to reflect on and express one's gendered self is as pertinent to queer politics as to feminist politics. Thus, the gay man's question is valid: transnational neoliberalism has produced queer subjects and desires in China, and the market economy has given rise to commercial queer spaces. But if one cannot afford the above, can one still be queer? If being *tongzhi* means observing all of the social niceties and fitting into mainstream norms, can *tongzhi* still be sexual subjects?

Ah Qiang, the outspoken local queer activist, addresses this issue in his blog:

> Some people say: the police assault was caused by a few homosexuals (*tongxinglian*) who behaved badly in public. We should teach *tongzhi* self-discipline. This view sounds reasonable. In fact, it contains a big trap. Underlying the view is the ignorance of one's own rights. Can I ask: if some homosexuals do not care about social opinions, should all homosexuals pay the price? If some homosexuals commit crimes, should all homosexuals be sent to prison? There is also heterosexual prostitution in the park, should the police drive away all the straight people? For what reasons should homosexuals observe higher moral standards than heterosexuals? (Ah Qiang 2009)

Ah Qiang notes the heteronormativity inherent in the police action and in the public outcry for normalizing *tongzhi* practices. Many people on the website supported Ah Qiang's comments, agreeing that discrimination against queer people was the key issue.

The Internet has provided a participatory and reflexive public sphere for queer people in China (Ho 2007). On the night of the incident at The People's Park, a gay man recorded a short segment of the argument between the police and the gay men using an MP3 player. He subsequently uploaded the recording online. There was considerable online response condemning the conduct of the police as represented in this recording, and especially their arrogance. Queer people in China, in line with an increasing awareness of their rights, are learning how to be queer through online discussions and the peer support of the online communities. The online public space and affective communication in that space are constructing a particular type of queer subject. Such

queer subjects and politics can accommodate China's social and cul-
tural context and thus constitute visible forms of 'sexual citizenship' in
China.

This case study demonstrates the dynamics of queer culture in
China. It also raises significant questions about the nature of Chinese
queer identities and about indigenous queer politics. Despite some
calls for a Stonewall type of response in China, most queer people seem
to agree that queer politics in China should be non-violent and non-
confrontational. Increasing awareness of citizenship rights is a shared
goal among many queer activists in China, as Xiaomu wrote at the
end of his account: 'There is a slogan in Hong Kong anti-homophobic
movement: education guarantees the future; legislation provides the
support. Ignorance generates fear; understanding enhances toler-
ance.' (Xiaomu 2009) In place of confrontation against the police in
public spaces (which does occur under some rare circumstances, as
the People's Park incident demonstrates), queer people are creating
an online public sphere. Through online discussions, they not only
communicate knowledge about gay rights but support each other with
encouraging news reports and emotional support. This affective online
communities is vitally important for China's queer community building
and could prove more practical and effective than attempting to defend
one's rights through confrontations with the police.

This case also highlights the impact of transnational queer identi-
ties and politics on China, including the appropriation and subversion
of and resistance to these identities and politics. In his analysis of the
homoerotic practices in Africa, Joseph A. Massad points out the damage
that the 'Gay International', a US-based transnational queer NGO, has
done to indigenous forms of intimacies:

> When the Gay International incites discourse on homosexuality, it
> claims that the 'liberation' of those it defends lies in the balance. In
> espousing this liberation project, however, the Gay International is
> destroying social and sexual configurations of desire in the interest of
> reproducing a world of its own image, one wherein its sexual categories
> and desires are safe from being questioned ... In undertaking this
> universal project, the Gay International ultimately makes itself feel
> better about a world it forces to share its identifications. Its missionary
> achievement, however, will be the creation not of a *queer* planet, to use

Michael Warner's apt term, but rather a *straight* one. (2007: 189–90, original emphasis)

In the case of China, it is very hard to place blame solely on the transnational queer practices and ideologies. In fact, China's reception of the Western discourses of homosexuality (and indeed, the modern concepts of gender and sexuality) started at the beginning of the twentieth century (Sang 2003). Chinese modernity has been closely intertwined with the modernity project worldwide, including with colonialization by the West and the processes of globalization in the twentieth century. It is thus difficult to talk about a Chinese modernity and the 'Chineseness' of homosexuality without putting them in a global context. Indeed, the term homosexuality, along with other terms such as 'gay' and 'queer', came from the West through other Asian countries and regions. It is thus also part of China's nation-building and modernization project stretching across the twentieth century. At this historical juncture, instead of mourning the loss of 'local traditions', which themselves are modern inventions, it is perhaps more useful to ask: how have the queer subjects, desires and politics been translated into the Chinese context and what kind of inflections have there been in the process of 'cultural translation'? How do we use these inflections as a strategy to 'decolonise' queer cultures in the non-Western context? Meanwhile, how do we conduct an effective cultural critique to the 'cultural essentialism' (for example, *tongzhi* as law-abiding citizens) that is often manipulated by the nation-state?

In other words, when we ask 'should there be a Stonewall Riot in China', either a simple 'yes' or a 'no' is insufficient. To say 'yes' is to fall into the trap of a singular model of queer identity and queer politics oblivious to historical and cultural differences; to say 'no' risks inventing a romantic, and often orientalized, version of queer identity and politics without taking into consideration the interlocking relationship between the global and the local. Martin F. Manalansan's caution is pertinent here: 'In the shadows of Stonewall lurk multiple engagements and negotiations. Conversations about globalizing tendencies of gay identity, politics, and culture are disrupted by local dialogues of people who speak from the margins. These disruptions need to be heard.' (1995: 438). Indeed, it is important to hear the disruptions of the global by the local as of the local by the global. It is also important to bear in mind

that global and local are not static categories – they are not even singular and coherent narratives – and both are subject to transformations and mutations at all times. In this respect, it is perfectly all right to talk about 'internationalizing' queer politics as academic and political practices, bearing in mind that while internationalizing queer politics is meritorious in many aspects it may also give rise to serious discontent. One should, therefore, exercise caution against both its universalizing and particularizing tendencies.

Through the study of the People's Park case, this chapter also demonstrates the contingencies and potentials of *tongzhi* self-mobilization. At certain historical junctures, queer self-mobilization is possible, but it is, and should rightly be so, exercised with careful consideration of local conditions and contexts. The possibility for ordinary people self-mobilizing at critical historical junctures, the facilitating role played by queer activists, together with the contingency of the social, should give us hope for imagining a radical queer politics.

8.

Conclusion

> The future is queerness's domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalising rendering of reality, to think and feel a then and there. Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds.
>
> Jose Esteban Munoz, *Cruising Utopia:*
> *The Then and There of Queer Futurity*

In this book, I have traced the emergence and development of a politicized queer subject, *tongzhi* or queer comrades, and the potential for a radical queer politics in contemporary China. The *tongzhi* subject and politics are still in the process of formation and therefore difficult to define at the moment. Meanwhile, they have been unmade and remade in different ways. My account of gay identity and *tongzhi* activism is not meant to be complete or definitive; rather, I try to capture critical moments in which sexual identities have ceased to be seen as purely individual pleasure or personality traits, and, instead, they have become modes of political articulation. When a group of people lay claim to rights and citizenship based on an identity, politics becomes possible. This book has thus examined different political formations surrounding the *tongzhi* identity, together with their various articulations in contemporary China.

This book consists of two parts. Part 1, covering Chapters 2–4, focuses on the emergence of *tongzhi* identity and its possible articulations. Chapter 2 offers a brief overview of gay identities and queer spaces in urban China, using Shanghai as a case study. *Tongzhi* identity, in this context, takes the form of a homonormative, and even homonationalist, subject that tries to distinguish itself from other queer subjects such

as *tongxinglian* and gay. I argue that neoliberalism and the Chinese state have combined to make the *tongzhi* subject and define legitimate desires. Chapter 3 traces the genealogy of *tongzhi* from a revolutionary and political subjectivity ('comrade') to a sexual subjectivity ('queer'). I suggest that the socialist 'comrade' subjectivity still resides in the postsocialist queer subjectivity, and that by reinvigorating a recent past, the contemporary *tongzhi* subject has the potential to be politicized and to articulate a radical queer politics. Chapter 4 looks at the processes and conditions for the transformation of subjectivities in the case of gay conversion therapy. Modes of governmentalities and techniques of subjectification, such as friend-enemy dichotomy and the effective use of affect, can enable the politicization of sexual subjectivities.

Part 2, consisting of Chapters 5–7, focuses on media and cultural activism. Chapter 5 presents a portrait of Cui Zi'en, China's leading queer filmmaker and activist. His queer filmmaking and queer politics are representative of what Petrus Liu calls 'Chinese queer Marxism', which challenges a Euro-American-centric and liberal mode of queer theorization. Cui uses digital video cameras to practise his queer politics. His 'documentary turn' suggests a queer intellectual's commitment to praxis. Chapter 6 examines travelling film festivals organized by young queer filmmakers including Fan Popo and Shitou. By 'going to the people' and getting connected to the communities, they contribute to the construction of queer identities and communities. In doing so, they also change their own life-worlds as queers and organic intellectuals. Chapter 7 looks at ordinary gay men's self-mobilization offline and online surrounding a clash with the police over the use of public space at the People's Park in Guangzhou. This case study not only shows the possibility of *tongzhi* self-mobilization, but also demonstrates the role of the Internet and social media in shaping gay identity and queer politics in contemporary China. I also use the case to reflect critically on the uses and limitations of Western queer theory and queer activism in the Chinese context. Queer activisms in China are informed by transnational queer discourses but they also take local contexts into careful consideration to devise context specific strategies.

Taken together, this book has shown that a politicized queer identity and a radical queer politics is possible in contemporary China. Such an identity and politics can strategically draw on, but does not

have to follow, the post-Stonewall model of queer politics. Apart from transnational influences, gay identity and queer activism in China also gain inspirations from China's socialist past in their subject formation and organizing strategies. Indeed, one of the most important insights from this book is the importance of China's socialist past in informing and shaping postsocialist identities and social movements. Studies of contemporary Chinese society would be incomplete, if not flawed, if they failed to consider the continuing and persistent influences on the present from China's socialist past. The past is often seen negatively in popular discourses but it should not merely be seen as 'burdens' of history that needs to be buried and forgotten. History can provide useful resources and insights for the present; and it can have an impact on people's lives and everyday practices in unpredicted ways.

In the next few sections, I will reflect on some theoretical issues that arise from the discussion of queer comrades. In doing so, I delineate some of my theoretical concerns and highlight the contributions that this book can potentially make to multiple disciplines and academic fields. I will also identify some limitations of the book and point to possible directions for future research.

The Use of History in Cultural Studies

This book is an interdisciplinary project that speaks to multiple fields and disciplines, including cultural studies, media studies, film studies, gender/queer studies, China/Asian studies, sociology, anthropology and political theory. I see the project as primarily a cultural studies project. Whether cultural studies constitute an academic discipline, or whether it should be more cautiously called an 'intellectual formation' (Rodman 2013), is open to discussion. However, I do share many cultural studies scholars' central concern with the links between culture and power and their imagination of cultural studies as a 'democratic space of cultural exchange' (Couldry 2000). The Ph.D. thesis, upon which this book is based, was done in a Gender and Cultural Studies department. I am currently based in a department combining cultural studies, media studies and film studies. All these contingent institutional affiliations and cultures have an impact on this project and they articulate the project in a particular way. Cultural studies has a liberating effect on this project, as it allows me to explore issues, theories, debates and methodologies in a

non-dogmatic manner. It is the thematic, theoretical and methodological hybridity (or infidelity if you like) that distinguishes this project from other studies on queer culture in China. However, cultural studies also leaves other significant marks on this project that I will delineate below.

Gilbert B. Rodman summarizes key characteristics of cultural studies as (1) an overtly political nature, (2) interdisciplinarity, (3) constructivism, and (4) radical contextualization (2013: 344). While few people would disagree with Rodman on the value of interdisciplinarity and a constructivist approach in modern humanities, some may have reservations about the 'overtly political nature' and 'radical contextualization' that Rodman identifies. While I do not think that these two 'characteristics' may, or have to, manifest strongly in many cultural studies work, they certainly feature in this book and make this project distinguishable from similar projects. It is therefore useful to see what Rodman means by these terms and how I use them in my research.

Rodman suggests that cultural studies begins from a very different set of assumptions than those commonly underpinning traditional disciplines:

> Cultural studies is not driven by a sort of encyclopaedic desire to produce 'knowledge for knowledge's sake', or to amass an exhaustive body of scholarly information in the abstract belief that such a storehouse of research will eventually prove itself useful to somebody somewhere … Instead, cultural studies is driven by the desire to intervene productively in the social, cultural, and political struggles in the larger world, especially insofar as it is able to do so on behalf of (or alongside) those segments of the population who are unjustly disenfranchised, oppressed, and/or silenced. (p. 345)

The 'overtly political nature' of cultural studies has significant implications for this project: although I have documented some key moments in the history of China's queer communities, I do not consider my documentation complete or objective. My purpose is, rather, to reconstruct a radical history of gay identity and queer activism in China, with the understanding that other narratives about queer identities and activisms in China are also possible and are likely to be true. My research is driven by a Leftist politics, a politics that embraces empowerment of marginalized individuals and social groups and the democratization of culture. Having lived in China and participated in queer activism, I

consider myself part of the queer comrades I write about, and I consider my book part of the ongoing queer activism in which *tongzhi* engage. My identification with *tongzhi* and my participation in China's queer activism in the past decade shape the project as it is. This book should be seen as a constructed community history and a critical reflection of what happened in the *tongzhi* communities in the past decades. It encourages *tongzhi* to reflect on what we can learn from past experiences in preparation for more innovative and effective articulations of *tongzhi* identity and politics in the future; it also inspires non-*tongzhi* to learn from *tongzhi*, to form alliances, and to continue to fight against various forms of social inequality and injustice. In this sense, this book is certainly a political project.

The 'radical contextualization', according to Rodman, refers to how cultural studies scholars treat the 'contexts' – historical, political, social, cultural etc. – in their research: to recognize the importance of contexts but not to use them dogmatically:

> She [the cultural studies scholar] also recognises that 'the context' is not an objective phenomenon that is simply 'out there' somewhere, waiting to be recognised for what it is by the savvy researcher. Instead, 'the context' has to be actively constructed by the researcher. In other words … the cultural studies scholar recognises the same historical facts can be stitched together to create very different stories depending on the context(s) in which the scholar chooses to place those facts … and that there are always a multiplicity of 'legitimate' contexts available for the scholar to choose from. (Rodman 2013: 350)

In this book, I have not only constructed a specific type of queer subject and queer politics, I have also constructed the contexts of their emergence. In doing so, I have traced the emergence and development of the *tongzhi* subject in the past decades; I have also painted a dynamic picture of Chinese society open to change and experimentation. It is the openness of the social that provides the best opportunities for the articulation of *tongzhi* identity and politics.

The 'radical contextualization' that Rodman talks about is sometimes framed as the place of 'history in cultural studies' (Morris 1998). Cultural studies has sometimes been narrowly viewed as engaging only with contemporary culture and thus lacking in historical depth. The study of contemporary culture often immediately raises a methodologi-

cal question: 'What do you do when every event is potentially evidence, potentially determining, and at the same time, changing too quickly to allow the comfortable leisure of academic criticism?' (Grossberg 1989: 144)

The major part of the fieldwork for this book was conducted in 2007 to 2009, when it seemed a 'golden era' for *tongzhi* identity and activism and when there seemed endless energy and dynamism in China's queer communities. This had to do with many aspects of political economy, including the availability of international HIV/AIDS funds, the relaxation of government controls on queer issues, and the mushrooming of queer NGOs all over the country. However, such a situation would change in a few years' time, when HIV/AIDS funds ran out, Chinese government tightened its control, and many queer NGOs disappeared because of lack of funding and resources. In many ways, the book has painted an optimistic picture of the 'golden era' of *tongzhi* activism in China in the 2000s, under historical conditions that cannot be reproduced. However, documenting and remembering the history is important and we have a lot to learn from history, even if it is a recent past. As Meaghan Morris suggests,

> My preference is to turn to history for a context prolonging the life of the ephemeral item or 'case': saturating with detail an articulated place and point in time, a critical reading can extract from its objects a parable of practice that converts them into *models* with a past and a potential for reuse, thus aspiring to invest them with a future. (Morris 1998: 3)

I hope that my history of 'queer comrades' can serve as a 'model', not in a normative sense but in its performative mode, for the articulation of a radical identity and politics in the future. I also hope that we can learn important things from this short history, including the continuing relevance of the socialist past, to inform an egalitarian and democratic politics in the postsocialist present dominated by neoliberalism.

A Non-Media-Centric Media Studies Approach

The assertion that this book is also a media studies book may come as a surprise to some. It is true that the second part of the book focuses heavily on media: I have painted a portrait of a filmmaker in Chapter 5; I have documented two community screening events during the China

Queer Film Festival Tour in Chapter 6; I have also followed some activists' online discussions about queer activism in Chapter 7. The first part of the book, in contrast, looks remotely like a conventional media studies project, in the sense that it does not feature mass media or media technologies heavily. I use this section to clarify my understanding of media and my methodology of a non-media-centric media studies approach.

According to Terry Flew (2007), the term media is usually understood in a three-fold sense: first, it refers to the technological means of communication (p. 1). This is the most common understanding of media; when we talk about media, we often think of film, television, mobile phones, the Internet, and so on, the 'hardware' so to speak. Queer filmmakers in China remind us that technological affordances are important: digital video cameras have made queer filmmaking possible for ordinary individuals because of their 'lightness' and relative affordability. Cui Zi'en even manipulates the technical quality of digital video images to articulate his aesthetics and politics. The Internet, computer, portable hard drives, DVD disks, data projectors … all these technological infrastructures have made communication in the queer communities much easier and more efficient. There are, of course, political and technical barriers which may restrict the free flow of information, such as the state ban on queer films and the existence of the 'Great Firewall'.

Secondly, media can also refer to 'the institutional and organizational forms through which media content is produced and distributed' (p. 2). In this study, queer film festivals, however informally organized, function as media institutions that produce and disseminate queer films. They form part of the 'alternative media industries' that exist alongside the state and official film industries. Chris Berry and Lisa Rofel suggest seeing independent Chinese films in China as 'alternative' film culture: 'alternativeness can produce significant change but not through the route of direct opposition' (2010: 137). This insight is useful: it reminds us of the co-existence of parallel film cultures and media industries in China; it also sheds light on different forms of politics and different ways of engaging with publicness.

The third sense that media can be understood is as 'the informational and symbolic content that is received and consumed by readers, audiences and users' (Flew 2007: 3). In Chapters 5 and 6, I have offered brief discussions about the meanings of some film texts, and how they are

interpreted by the filmmakers and the audience. Without completely rejecting textual analysis, which I consider an important research method despite its limitations, I have intentionally resisted the temptation of reading a text thoroughly so as to find its 'deep' meanings. I have instead focused on a filmmakers' life and politics so as to see how they may exert an influence on the films; and how these films, in turn, shape the filmmaker's life and queer politics. I have also focused on the activities of filmmakers and audience in film screening events to see what they do surrounding the films. In these scenarios, films are simply nodal points to connect filmmakers, audience, gay identity, and queer activism. Together they form contingent 'assemblages' (Deleuze & Guattari 1988) that can be disassembled and reassembled. 'Media as text' must, therefore, be used cautiously and with a deep understanding of how the text engages with the personal, the social and the political.

The aforementioned three ways of understanding media are common in media studies. However, they are not sufficient. The key problem with them is that they see media as primarily referring to 'mass media'. In order to go beyond the 'mass media-centrism', we also need an understanding of the mediation of culture and media as practice.

We live in a modern world saturated with media. This does not simply mean we are surrounded by different media forms. But more importantly, the world we live in is always already a mediated one, and everything we know is full of pre-existing meanings and significations. To understand the world is to understand how it has been mediated by signs and is full of meanings and ideologies. The *tongzhi* identity is a good example: the term *tongzhi* as an empty signifier does not have any meaning. It is only through hegemonic articulations that the term begins to make sense, and these articulations shape identity and politics in specific ways. Gay identity and queer politics have always already been mediated, through medical, legal and expert discourses, through discourses of transnational queer movement and national cultures, and through discourses of socialism, postsocialism and neoliberalism. The first part of this book is therefore about the mediation of an identity primarily though hegemonic discourses. The second part is about how lesbians and gays seize opportunities to remediatize their identities through representational practices such as filmmaking, film festival organization, as well as offline and online debates,

and how they create new discourses about *tongzhi*, queer and cultural citizenship.

Media should also be seen as 'practice', in the Bourdieusian sense (1977). Nick Couldry suggests seeing media not as text or production economy, but first and foremost as practice; that is, to study 'the whole range of practices that are oriented towards media and the role of media in ordering other practices in the social world' (2004: 115). Seen in this light, we are less concerned about what queer films have to say, but what filmmakers and the audience say about a film, and what they do surrounding the film, including event organization, meeting people, killing time, having dinner, building up their symbolic, cultural and social capitals, and feeling the sense of belonging to a community, as I have demonstrated in Chapter 6.

This then leads to a bigger methodological concern. Media studies has been known as an academic field that studies 'the media': newspapers, films, television, the Internet … what would happen if we undermined the role of media and shift our attention from media to mediation or practice? Are we still doing media studies? The answer is yes. Media studies has been reinvigorated with a broader and less restrictive understanding of media, a 'non-media-centric media studies' (Morley 2007, 2009; Moores 2005, 2012):

> A common misconception … is … that media studies are simply about 'studying media' … they are not, or, at least, I want to argue very strongly that they should not be … Instead, it is necessary to appreciate the complex ways in which media of communication are bound up with wider institutional, technological and political processes in the modern world. (Moores 2005: 3)

The same principle is succinctly articulated by Morley: 'we need to "decentre" the media in our analytical framework, so as to better understand the ways in which media processes and everyday life are interwoven with each other' (2007: 200). Indeed, the mutual constitutions of media processes and everyday life should be the centre of our attention, and the key to a reinvigorated media studies.

In this book, *tongzhi* illustrates 'the ways in which media processes and everyday life are interwoven with each other' with its emphasis on the signification and mediation of *tongzhi* culture, and with acute attention paid to how *tongzhi* activists and ordinary *tongzhi* articulate their

identities in relation to a mediated culture in everyday life. With due attention paid to media but without privileging the media, this study demonstrates the value of a non-media-centric media studies approach.

Queer China/Asia as Critique

This book has been informed by a body of scholarship known as queer theory. My research has been inspired by queer theory's potential to point to the 'the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically' (Sedgwick 1993: 8). The relationship between China and queer theory has been brilliantly addressed by Petrus Liu (2010: 2015) and Engebretsen & Schroeder (2015). This book carries on the discussion with yet another example of how queer theory is engaged in the Chinese context. It demonstrates that, instead of mechanically and uncritically borrowing queer theory from the West, queer activists in China develops queer theory and queer politics in their own ways and with consideration of glocalized contexts. In doing so, it demonstrates the agency of the local in translingual and transcultural practices (L. Liu 1995).

In a book about queer China, the use of Western theories, such as the works of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Jürgen Habermas, and Ernesto Laclau, seems to be in need of justification. I am deeply aware of the politics of knowledge production, in which the West dominates a large part of the knowledge production in a transnational context because of their linguistic and cultural hegemony. It is very easy to say no to Western theories and discuss them as 'not fit for the Chinese context', as some scholars in China studies do, but I still wish to resist the impulse of saying no to Western theories. China studies used to be a utopian enterprise: in its efforts to keep away from Western modes of knowledge production, it falls victim to essentialism, empiricism and a dogmatic social science paradigm. In its refusal to use Western theories and to engage in critical dialogues with Western academia, China studies serves to consolidate the intellectual division of labour in global capitalism and thus leads to its further marginalization in universities.

In response to the comment that 'every time we speak or write in English, French, German, or one of the more marginalised European lan-

guages we pay homage to Western intellectual and political hegemony' (JanMohamed & Lloyd, cited in Chow 1991: xi), Rey Chow responds: 'But if "the West" as such has become an ineradicable environment, it is not whether we "pay homage" to it but how we do it that matters' (1991: xv). Indeed, in today's globalized world where academic knowledge productions in different parts of the world are interconnected, a total rejection of 'Western' theories is hardly commendable; nor is it possible. Besides, those so-called 'Western theories' or 'Northern theories' are never coherent and self-sufficient; they are full of gaps, contradictions and ambivalences in themselves. They need to be revised and rewritten by taking into account knowledge and experiences of people from different parts of the world. It is this incoherence and inconsistency that offer spaces of deconstruction; it is also the attention to cultural specificities and lived experiences that offers a researcher opportunities to rewrite, challenge and develop theories.

In an article titled 'Why Does Queer Theory Need China?', Petrus Liu (2010) observes the implicit logic of 'Chinese exceptionalism' that structures many works in Chinese queer studies – usually historical, contextual and empirical, and often lacking in theoretical engagements with queer theory. In contrast, the Euro-American centric queer theory often attempts to make metaphysical and universal claims about human sexuality or queerness. Liu attributes the difference to the 'intellectual division of labour between the gathering of raw materials in area studies and the production of universal or monolithic paradigms in (queer) theory' (p. 297). Indeed, if paradigms in area studies are shaped by the post-Cold War geopolitics, such paradigms must be changed. Chinese queer studies has to engage with queer theory, in the same way that China studies cannot refuse to speak to 'Western theories'. In the same way that what is 'queer' is constantly expanded, supplemented, and revised by what is 'Chinese', what is China, Chinese and China Studies, should also be revised by what is 'queer' (p. 297). Such efforts have begun in the field with queer scholars' theorizations of 'transnational Chinese male homosexualities' (Kong 2011), 'queer Sinophone cultures' (Chiang & Heinrich 2014) 'queer Marxism in two Chinas' (Liu 2015), 'queer/*tongzhi* China' (Engebretsen and Schroeder 2015), 'queer Asia' (Berry et al. 2003; Chiang & Wong 2016, 2017; Erni 2003), and AsiaPafiQueer (Martin

et al. 2008). This book joins the list of scholars and works to reimagine and reshape queer, China and Asia.

For Kuan-Hsing Chen (2010), 'Asia' is used as a method for Asian countries to deimperialize from the West and to engage with each other based on shared historical experiences. Howard Chiang and Alvin K. Wong (2017) push Chen's argument further by using queer Asia as a critique: 'If queer theory needs Asian Studies to overcome its Euro-American metropolitanism and continual Orientalist selective inclusion of Asia and the non-West into self-critique, so too can Asian Studies revitalize itself through the queer disentanglement of the older versions of "area studies" and its complicity with the nation-state form' (p. 2). They imagine 'a "broader transborder project of queer Asian studies" that is truly comparative, trans-regional, global and in many ways, Inter-Asian' (p. 3). This book, with its emphasis on the transnational *tongzhi* subjectivity and politics, contributes to the queer Asian critical project of decolonialization, deimperialization and democratization.

Directions for Future Research

A book is a product of its time. It is inevitably limited by its historical and social context, by the author's knowledge, expertise, and experiences, and by the political economy of knowledge production. To recall Cui Zi'en's analogy of 'draft', a book is always a draft that can never be completed, in the same way a person's life, and even the world itself, is a draft that needs continual reworking. If I, or someone else, had time to rework the draft, the following issues, among others, would need to be addressed:

The Gender Bias of Tongzhi

Although *tongzhi* was designed to be a term to encompass all sexual minorities, and it includes both gays (*nan tongzhi*) and lesbians (*nü tongzhi*), in reality, the term is often used synonymously for gay men. Lesbians prefer to call themselves *lala*. In my genealogy of the term *tongzhi* in Chapter 3, I have examined some of the complications of the *tongzhi* identity in the past decades in mainland China, exemplified by the 'Pretty Fighter' debate in 2011–12, which further separated gay identity and activism from lesbian identity and activism. The process of contingent articulations between gay and lesbian identity, together

with other gender and sexual identities, would be the topic of another research project. Lesbian activism, in particular, queer feminist activism represented by the 'Feminist Five', which has captured a lot of media attention in recent years, certainly deserves more scholarly attention. More research should also be conducted into other marginalized groups including bisexuals and transgender people. We must exercise caution against a further reification of these identities: instead of casting voyeuristic and objectifying gazes into these communities, it is more productive to use a constructive approach to unravel how these identities have been constructed and how people negotiate with these identities in their everyday lives. Also importantly, we should create an environment so that people from these marginalized communities are able to speak for themselves, rather than being represented and 'spoken for' by experts and outsiders. This takes time but we must be committed to the goal. As this book demonstrates, the power to represent oneself is an important tool for individual or collective empowerment.

Beyond Urban and Han Ethnocentrism

Most Chinese queer studies research, this book included, has focused on big cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. This is understandable because they are the cities with the most prominent queer profiles, with booming pink economies and more organized communities. In recent years, ethnographic research has also been conducted into the queer communities in Chengdu (Wei 2007, 2015), Shenyang (Fu 2012, 2015) and Hainan (Cummings 2013), and this research sheds light on facinating local/regional/national/global dynamics. More ethnographic research needs to be conducted into the queer lives in second-tier or third-tier cities, small towns and even the countryside. Besides, we need more grounded research about queer lives in non-*Han* ethnic minority communities (Kehoe & Hall 2017).[1] But caution must be exercised in the following aspects: (1) we must resist the impulse of finding queer in every location and every community, as if queer is a transgeographic and ahistorical category; (2) we must reject all the cultural essentialism and sexual orientalism often associated with the study of sexualities in economically underdeveloped locations, which see these sexual practices

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1. *Han*, or *Hanzu*, is the largest ethnic group in the PRC. Other ethnic groups are often referred to as 'ethnic minorities' (*shaoshu minzu*). Officially, there are 56 ethnic groups in China (X. Zhang 2015).

and identities as primitive, unmediated and authentic; (3) we must also resist mechanically applying the Foucauldian sexual behaviour/sexual identity dichotomy, as if only big cities and capitalist modernity could turn sexual behaviours into sexual identities. We should pay acute attention to the lived experiences of ordinary queer people and see how they understand and negotiate their identities.

New Media

As this book demonstrates, the Internet and new media have played an important role in the queer identity and community formation in contemporary China. The *Time* magazine reports that the Internet has done to Asia's gay and lesbian communities in five years what Stonewall enabled in the West over twenty-five years (Martin et al. 2003). Despite the Chinese government's continuing censorship and constant crackdowns of the Internet and social media sites, queer people in China still find ways to make use of the vast amount of resources that the cyberspace have to offer. In recent years, many queer people have used various social media apps including Blued, LeDo, Zank, LesPark and the L to make friends (Wu 2015). Some queer people have made short films (also known as micro-films, *wei dianying*) with their smartphones and digital video cameras and have shared them on the video streaming websites. Without risking techno-determinism, I suggest that new media and a booming pink economy are likely to provide more social space, online and offline, for queer people in China. Meanwhile, a reified neoliberal and consumption-oriented queer identity is also emerging in urban China with the help of the Internet and social media, and is producing new forms of homonormativity and homonationalism. More research needs to be conducted into how neoliberal economy, government policy, and technological development combine to shape queer identities in China.

Summary

In this book, I have offered a brief account of gay identity and queer activism in China today, with a specific focus on the development of urban queer communities between 2007 and 2009. Such an account is of necessity incomplete, subjective, and with my own omissions and lapses. However, apart from having documented a specific period in

China's queer history, which I consider to be an optimistic moment in China's queer activism, I have also delineated the formation of a specific type of gay identity and queer politics. Such an identity cannot be simply described as 'global' or 'local', as 'neoliberal' or 'socialist'. Rather, it is the hybrid nature of such an identity, together with its internal contradictions and ambiguities, that characterizes the queer subject formation in China today. Notably, queer activism in contemporary China draws both on the transnational queer movement and on China's historical experience and revolutionary traditions. Queer activists in China are negotiating different discourses in their own ways; meanwhile, they have created ingenuous ways to construct their identities and communities, to make rights claims, and to fight against authoritarianism and neoliberal capitalism. As contemporary Chinese history shapes gay identity, queer people also participate in the formation of a postsocialist society, with all its hopes and precariousness.

In this book, 'queer comrades', a creative translation of the Chinese term *tongzhi*, has been proposed as an analytical framework to capture the historical anachronism and ideological complexity in queer identity formation and social movements in China today. If 'queer comrades' have taught us something, it is their refusal to accept the status quo, their dedication to a queer future, and their optimism, perseverance, and ingenuity in living out everyday lives despite the constraints of the present. Indeed, as Jose Esteban Munoz suggests, 'Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world' (2007: 1). Another world is possible. Through queer people's unrelenting efforts and unyielding struggles, we can imagine and even bring into existence a queer future. This book has been inspired by the countless queer comrades' lives, dreams, struggles, and their refusal to give up hope for a better future, and I dedicate this book to them.

Figure 17: Queer activists sign a rainbow flag at a lesbian party and film screening event organized by the Ji'nan Les Group, Shandong, 18 August 2011 (photo courtesy of Ma Xiaoji)

Figure 18: Two queer activists walk into a Marriage Registration Office in Beijing to register for same-sex marriage on a Valentine's Day, with their request to marry subsequently rejected by office staff. This is a same-sex rights advocacy campaign organized by the Beijing LGBT Centre. Beijing, 14 February 2012 (photo courtesy of Fan Popo)

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Index

Bold = extended discussion or long list; f = figure; n = footnote or caption