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Dynamic Cultural Specificities: Mediation of culture and emergent “gay” identity in China

by
Brandon Lynam

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion of the

Bachelor of Arts degree in International Studies

Croft Institute for International Studies

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Approved by

_____

Advisor: Dr. Minjoo Oh

_____

Reader: Dr. William Schenck

_____

Reader: Dr. Kirsten Dellinger

ABSTRACT:

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 2

LITERATURE REVIEW 6

Dennis Altman, "Global Gaze/Global Gays" 6

Michel Foucault and Western Sexuality 8

Identity Politics 9

Heteronormativity and Homonormativity 11

Intersectionality, Black Struggle, Cultural Consciousness 12

Postsocialist Government – Neoliberalism and Suzhi Discourse 15

The Chinese Family Unit 18

Mr. Xu vs. Fang Gang 19

Gay Linguistics 20

Cosmopolitanism 23

METHODS 24

History of Homosexuality in China 25

Present Study 28

ANALYSIS 33

Marriage pressures and recent shifts 33

Desires for Integration 36

Cosmopolitan Horizons 38

Lacking Options; Lacking Voices; Lacking Suzhi 40

Investigating government control and perceived "homophobia" 42

Indigenizing Homosexuality 48

CONCLUSION 52

BIBLIOGRAPHY 51

Introduction

When I was growing up in the South, me being gay meant me going to Hell. That was one of the main reasons I started learning Chinese – Escape. But when I reached Shanghai, I realized it wasn't as much as an escape as I hoped it would be; I still didn't run into a single other gay person and I still didn't feel comfortable being "out." So, that was my motivation for researching this topic – If it doesn't mean being condemned to Hell, but it doesn't mean being able to express my ("deviant") sexuality, what, exactly, does it mean to be gay in China?

When I first read about a "global gay identity" theory in Dennis Altman's "Global Gaze/Global gays", I was confused. I knew it was "bad" to give in to the idea that "everyone" wants to be like the West, but I also agreed with virtually everything about the theory. I agreed with the idea of a universal sexual identity that could be detached from context and other identities, that every gay person could understand what "being gay" means and the homophobia "we" collectively faced. In Shanghai, it seemed like most people's English was better than my Chinese, to the point they could quote *Big Bang Theory* on demand. When I read about family struggles that were universal, for example, it made sense – Sure, much more emphasis is placed on family values in China, but surely certain aspects of the family would eventually "ease up" to "allow" gay people in. I knew I was doing something "bad," committing some kind of "mistake," but I couldn't help but envision a future of China that included rainbow flags, gay pride parades, and uncloseted homosexuality when I read about a global gay identity.

Although I knew even at that time that I was committing some grave error in thinking that this was the reality of the world – that the West is some beacon of light and

hope that “dark” and “lost” nations like China could look up to for guidance, but I couldn’t trace my reasoning back to some point of inaccuracy that was misguiding me. Now I understand the range of assumptions Altman and I were both making that led us to the faulty conclusion that is a “global gay identity,” assumptions so deeply embedded in Western society that they are often not recognized even when they are directly pointed out.

First and foremost, I realized many of these assumptions related back to identity politics. Given the recent proliferation of identity politics and its foundation in Western ideology, the formation of an identity based on sexuality, gender, race, etc. appears to the Western eye as if it is a universal and naturally-occurring phenomenon. Assumptions made on this basic premise, coupled with colonial biases related to the homogenizing and assimilating nature of globalization, have given way to theories about globalized identities. With specific regards to (homo)sexuality, the “global gay identity” is one such theory (Altman 1997).

Certain investments preclude the development of such a theory. First is the idea that sexual identity can be separated not only from other (often competing) identities, but even from the historical and social context in which it emerged. This viewpoint, legitimized by the essentializing forces on which Western identity politics movements have been founded and have depended, presents sexual identity as if it is a universal truth that can be reliably analyzed in a vacuum. Assumptions about the nature of globalization, that it is simply the replacement of non-Western culture with that of Western culture, have been used in further validating such a claim.

Much effort has been made in disproving such theory. Researchers have focused on a range of different cultures and societies, typically those found in Southeast Asia, in order to point out major differences between gay identity found in these non-Western cultures compared to their Western counterpart (Manalansan 2007; Sim 2005; Yau 2010). This is the case for much of research focused on gay identity in China, and this focus has produced conclusions that present Chinese gay identity as being totally unique from Western gay identity (Chou 2001). Despite the merit of this research in bringing attention to the cultural specificities that characterize modern Chinese gay identity, its major shortcoming is that it neglects the role that globalization has played in "reconfiguring" non-Western identity (Rofel 2007).

In response to both of these images, even more research has been produced that conveys an image of a transnational Chinese gay identity that interacts with, but is not determined by, effects of globalization (Kong 2011, 2016; Rofel 2007; Liu 2010, 2015; Martin 2007; Ho 2011). This research includes attention to the effects of globalization, present in theory supporting a global gay identity, as well as the influence of Chinese culture that is present in theory supporting a unique and separate Chinese gay identity. They do not operate on the pretense of a coherent, unified (whether localized or globalized) identity; rather, they provide representations of a gay identity created in the inherently incoherent and fragmented nature of the postmodern world. Yet, even though many of these studies have been produced in quite recent times, there has been a recent flooding of new information, events, etc. related to homosexuality in China, a flooding which sometimes challenges the coherence of certain arguments produced by these researchers.

With these factors in mind, I review the history of Western (sexual) identity and the context in which it developed. I do so because assumptions about identity, identity politics, homonormativity, and their universal intelligibility are the root from which other improper assumptions are made and further inaccurate conclusions are reached. What causes Westerners to claim certain identities, and why does it feel natural to do so? What factors characterize(d) Western (sexual) identity development? How have these factors influenced modern conceptions of (sexual) identity in the West?

Another essential component of my analysis is the unique history of homosexuality in China, the position and overarching role of sexuality and the meanings attached to it, and the emergence of sexual identity in China. I explain the impact resulting from the following factors: China's varying social climate on homosexuality; the recent regime changes and ideological shifts that have occurred in China during the past century; and influence from Western cultural hegemony. This analysis, combined with an understanding of Western (sexual) identity, serves as a challenge to the eurocentrism commonly found in depictions of Chinese gay identity. How long has (homo)sexual identity existed in China? When, why, how and with what connotations did it emerge? What does it mean to Chinese society?

After deconstructing the eurocentric and colonial assumptions and investments commonly embedded in themes related to the nature and function of identity, sexuality, and globalization (among others), I consider the many overarching factors and forces that characterize and define gay identity in the context of postsocialist China. These factors are consolidated into three groups for analysis: The individual and the family situated in the context of the often-converging forces of neoliberal expansion and Chinese morality,

the role of the government, and emergent forces of homosexuality localization/indigenization.

I ultimately provide an image of Chinese gay identity as multiplicitous, heterogeneous and fragmented. This image captures its incoherent foundations, the conflicting and often contradictory social and cultural forces that directly and indirectly characterize and influence it, and the range of inconsistent and varying contexts in which personal meaning is created and attached to it. This image is both a conglomeration and a snapshot – It tries to make sense of an identity during a time that precedes and is preceded by chaotic and rapid change on a global and local scale; it incorporates a patchwork of theories, observations, and anecdotes in order to form connections between seemingly disconnected themes. This project collages fragmented images into a singular frame, frozen in time, seeking to provide a moment of clarity contained within an ever converging, mutating, and dissociating landscape.

Literature review

Dennis Altman - "Global Gaze/Global Gays"

Dennis Altman frames his central argument as the following:

> In much of urban Asia it is easy to see parallels with the West of several decades ago: existing ideas of male homosexuals as would-be women are being replaced by the assertion of new self-concepts; more men are attracted to the idea of primary homosexual relationships, rather than marrying and engaging in "homosex" on the side; there is a development of more commercial venues...in both organizations and media there is the emergence of a gay political consciousness (423).

This argument begins simply enough. Although I am skeptical about how accurate it is for the stereotyping of "male homosexuals as would-be women" to be applied universally, but otherwise, the connections seem relatively vague enough to be placed in a global context. As he continues his analysis, several problematic statements arise. I address the following in my paper:

First, "In a world where more and more cultural styles are imported and assimilated there seems no reason why a western-style gayness should not prove as attractive as other western identities" (420). This is a rather straightforwardly colonial statement that assumes all cultures want to express themselves through Western means, which, given the very actions of "western-style gayness" – individualistic and often confrontational – does not make sense in the context of Chinese culture.

Second, "Michael Tan and others have suggested that the absence of the sort of hostility towards homosexuality found in Anglo-Saxon societies may also retard the development of gay political movements" (426-7). This implies that all cultures require or desire a gay political movement and that the only path for increased rights is through reaction to violence, both of which I will strongly question.

Third, "In the past two decades there has emerged a definable group of self-identified homosexuals...who see themselves as part of a global community, whose commonalities override but do not deny those of race and nationality" (424). In the context of China, there appears to be the inverse happening, with cultural/national commonalities overriding that of sexual commonalities.

Fourth, "The claiming of lesbian/gay identities in Asia or Latin America is as much about being western as about sexuality, symbolized by the co-option of the word

"gay" into [several languages]" (430). I will use concepts such as cultural consciousness, indigenous linguistics, and cosmopolitanism to show why this is not the case.

Finally, "It is tempting to accept the Confucian and other Asian discourses about the significance of the family, and forget that similar experiences are very common for homosexuals in most countries...Yes, homosexuals in Asian cities are still likely to be more integrated into family roles and expectations than would be true in [Western cities]. But we are speaking here for graduations, not absolute differences" (423). A major portion of this paper is involved with showing how, despite ubiquity of "family struggles" themselves, these should not be viewed as "graduations" because the function of the family is inherently different.

Michel Foucault and Western Sexuality

The aspect of Western sexuality and gay identity most relevant to this paper is the eurocentric assumptions about their universality. First, I reference Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* and his theory of *scientia sexualis* to question the "naturalness" with which sexual identity is seen to be claimed and the "organic" emergence of the hetero/homo sexual binary. In challenging common eurocentric assumptions, I hope to present images of sexuality, the sexual binary, and sexual identity that are less natural than they may seem.

Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* is essential in understanding the historical context of Western sexual identity. Most importantly, Foucault describes what is known as "*scientia sexualis*," a uniquely Western approach to understanding sexuality that involves the molding the findings of "scientific" discourse of (homo)sexuality in a way that fits Christian themes, namely the "confessional" nature of sexuality (67-8).

He makes two important arguments about *scientia sexualis*: First, that the hetero-/homosexual binary, a concept that will be incredibly important throughout this paper, was created within the context of Western *scientia sexualis*; second, that "homosexuality" did not organically come into existence in the form of an identity, but rather that sexual identity itself came into existence specifically in Western culture through persecution of homosexuality; third, that homosexuality is not the result of "essentialized biological differences," but rather genealogy of homophobic oppression (Foucault 53) – yet, in the emergence of identity politics, members of the gay rights movement rallied around the idea that they were "born this way," a (scientifically unproven) theme that continues today. The conclusions drawn here are relevant to this thesis in that they show how what Western society perceives to be a universal truth – sexuality and sexual identity – has actually been created in a very specific context.

Identity Politics

Cressida Heyes describes identity politics as such:

> The laden phrase 'identity politics' has come to signify a wide range of political activity and theorizing founded in the shared experiences of injustice of members of certain social groups. Rather than organizing solely around belief systems, programmatic manifestos, or party affiliation, identity political formations typically aim to secure the political freedom of a specific constituency marginalized within its larger context. Members of that constituency assert or reclaim ways of understanding their distinctiveness that challenge dominant oppressive characterizations, with the goal of greater self-determination (2002).

Identity is not something that is claimed naturally or automatically by a group. For example, white people in the West rarely feel a need to "claim" their racial or cultural identity. In that same vein, Western gay identity and group "consciousness" around that identity was not created by their common sexuality alone. If common sexuality was the only "ingredient" in a cohesive and universal sexual identity, then the Western non-heterosexual community would not be divided into the "gay" and "queer" camps, for example.

In America's equal rights movements, including the civil rights movement, women's rights movement, and gay rights movement, identity politics has been employed as a means of empowering a marginalized group of people through collective reclamation of an identity that was originally defined and manipulated by a dominant group. These new identities are reactionary – alluding to Foucault's "reverse affirmation" (1992) – and are developed in direct response to systemic oppression.

Ultimately, Western gay identity is a political one, resulting not from human nature but rather in direct opposition to the injustice sustained by social inequality. Identity politics tactics are an effective vehicle for social change because they create a cohesive group that simultaneously provides individuals with protection against violence and oppression and produces a sense of solidarity and morale. They are also often problematic because they create an identity that only includes one singular aspect of the self, i.e. race, gender, sexuality yet still make claims to supposedly represent a group composed of people from a range of different races, classes, and location.

Heteronormativity and Homonormativity

These two concepts are instrumental in the development of both Western gay identity and non-Western forms of gay identity. Lovaas and Jenkins say the following on "heteronormativity":

> By *heteronormativity*, I mean the principles of order and control that position heterosexuality as the cornerstone of the American sex/gender system and obligate the personal construction of sexuality and gender in terms of heterosexual norms. Heteronormativity assumes, for example, that there are two sexes and therefore two genders. Heteronormativity then requires that all discussions of gendered identity and opportunity be framed strictly in terms of this dichotomy (2007: 98).

From this quote, it can be seen that dominant sexual groups (i.e. heterosexuals) gain power from heteronormativity not only through heterosexual/homosexual binary but also through the heterosexist institutions, i.e. monogamous marriage, that instigates it. Yet, in the American gay rights movement's fight for equality, heteronormativity and its related institutions remained unchallenged or can even strengthened (i.e. through gay marriage legalization).

Homonormativity rests in non-heterosexuals' acquiescence to (or, as is frequently the case, their approval of) these heterosexist phenomena. In *Heteronormativity and Homonormativity as Practical and Moral Resources*, Dana Rosenfeld describes this phenomenon:

> Studies of heteronormativity have emphasized its normative content and repressive functions, but few have considered the strategic use of heteronormative

> and homonormative precepts to shape sexual selves, public identities, and social relations...Viewed through a homonormative lens, heteronormativity provided the tools for personal survival in a hostile society and for the collective production of a respectable homosexual culture. Informants' strategic use of heteronormativity can help explain heteronormativity's survival despite the incoherence and fragility of its content (2009: 617).

Furthermore, Mark Stern correctly states that homonormativity "elevates particular identities and normative behaviors" within the gay community; implicit in this elevation of certain (dominant) identities is the suppression of comparatively marginalized identities (2015: 171-2). This intra-community status disparity produces the "good gay/bad gay" dichotomy (Lipton 2014; Rofes 1998: 144) that seeks to divide its members along lines of competing identities even as identity politics rhetoric "confirms" their solidarity.

Intersectionality, Black Struggle, Cultural Consciousness

A major premise of global gay identity theory, as described in Altman's "Global Gaze/Global Gays", is the existence of a political "global community" or consciousness for gays, "whose commonalities override but do not deny those of race and nationality" (1997: 424). This approach to sexual identity not only suggests the Western context that frames it is universally intelligible – i.e. there is a universal and uniform oppression of homosexuality that a politicized and globalized "gay community" has formed around – but also that this sexual identity is "placed before" other identities. To explore the validity of this claim, I employ the theory of "intersectionality" and its application in conceptualizing "Black struggle" and cultural consciousness.

Intersectionality theory, coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, a woman of color, refers to the need for mutual respect and regard for Black and feminist movements. Explanation of intersectionality often includes the following quote from Crenshaw: "When feminism does not explicitly oppose racism, and when anti-racism does not incorporate opposition to patriarchy, race and gender politics often end up being antagonistic to each other and both interests lose" (1996: 827).

Although the term was developed in the context of the civil rights and feminist movements, it is still especially relevant to Western gay identity (developed through the gay rights movement) because all three of these movements share the use of identity politics that primarily relies on shared experiences of oppression – which is the "political" aspect of "global" "gay consciousness" that Altman refers to. Unlike Altman's global gay theory, this call for intersectionality suggests that oppression is not a kind of "mosaic" that can be "dissected" and neatly separated into categories; rather, it claims that oppression is a holistic phenomenon, with its sources (identities) blended together unevenly.

In reference to an "uneven" blending of identities, I present the concept of "Black struggle" to show the potential for "prioritization" of other identities over that of sexual identity. Black struggle, which is used in Darnell Moore's "An Interrogation of the Black Presence in the Queer Project", suggests that Black identity must be prioritized – but should not be considered entirely exclusive of – over other forms of identity because other movements are inherently non-inclusive of Black identity (2011: 163-6). This is relevant to gay identity because, whereas Altman suggests a universal "override" of

racial/national/cultural identity by sexual identity, this is a specific example of the opposite, an example that exists within Western society itself.

In *On China's Cultural Transformation*, Yu Keping describes a shift in China's approach to traditional culture during modernization: First, there was a "cultural debate" in which traditional culture was criticized (with the "superiority" of Western culture being the source of its criticism); this was (is) followed by the "revival of Chinese culture" (2016: 4). According to Yu, this revival is based on two premises: First, that "the flourishing of Chinese culture and the prosperity of the Chinese people are directly linked" and that "the destiny of Chinese culture and the destiny of Chinese people are, for better or worse, linked"; second, that "Chinese culture is innately superior to Western culture" (6-7).

Renewed focus on the traditional elements of an increasingly transnational Chinese culture is reflected in the term "cultural consciousness," which was coined in 1997 by 费孝通 (Fei Xiaotong), one of China's most prominent researchers ever in the fields of sociology and anthropology and author of 《乡土中国》(*From the Soil*), an incredibly well-known book in China which describes Chinese society's moral framework (费孝通 1947; Yu 2016: 10). Postmodern anxieties in contemporary China (Anagnost 2004; Rofel 2007) are the epitome of the call for cultural consciousness: As nations reach a more and more equal level of economic development, *social* development is predicted to be (and, thus far, has appeared to be) the major determining factor of a nation's competitive ability (Yu 2016: 10-13). Given this scenario, cultural consciousness is an obvious necessity in securing China's position of superiority in the twenty-first

century; surely, this reemphasized cultural/ethnic identity has far-reaching impact on sexual identity in China.

Postsocialist Government – Neoliberalism and* Suzhi *Discourse

After the period of Maoism, postsocialist China, with its open market, increased privatization, decreased government control, and increased individual freedoms (Rofel 2007; Kipnis 2007) is often considered to be in a state of neoliberalism similar to that commonly found in the West. Yet, in its development of a "socialist spiritual civilization" (Bai 2014: 39), the government has retained a large degree of influence in shaping the lives of its citizens. The government permeates the social sphere and exerts its influence through "*suzhi* discourse" (Rofel 2007; Anagnost 2004; Kipnis 2007; Hsu 2006; Bray and Jeffreys 2017; Yu 2016; 上海民政 2016).

Anagnost contextualizes *suzhi* discourse:

> In the movement from a planned to a market economy, the representation of value has undergone a reorganization in the realm of the biopolitical in which human life becomes a new frontier for capital accumulation. This changing relationship between value and bodies is encompassed by the term *suzhi*, which roughly translates into English as "quality"...Anxieties about the low quality of the Chinese people entered into the culture fever (*wenhua re*) of the late 1980s, in which intellectuals debated the cultural impediments to modernization...[By the early 1990s,] as economic reforms increased privatization and dismantled the institutions and entitlements of state socialism, *suzhi* appeared in new discourses of social distinction and the discursive production of middle classness (189-190).

Kipnis claims that the major difference between Western and Chinese "neoliberalism" is that, unlike "Reagan-esque" neoliberalism, with its "blame the victim" mentality that redirects the blame of inequalities from the government back to the individual themself, in the Chinese "neoliberal" system, structural inequalities are justified by the state (2007: 388-9). He even refers to the Chinese system as "anti-liberal," comparing it to (a much less extreme version of) the Indian caste system (390-1). Kipnis provides an example that clarifies such similarities between the two systems (specifically their social immobility) by analyzing the work of Carolyn Hsu in Harbin:

> The difference [between getihu and shangren] is often conceived in terms of suzhi, defined primarily in relation to educational attainment. No matter how much money they made, getihu were imagined as peasant traders with both low levels of education and questionable morality. No matter how little money they made (or how much they lost), college graduates who attempted to start businesses were conceived of as high suzhi shangren of considerable moral status (391; Hsu 2004).

Suzhi is an abstract (and political) concept – Everyone is born with a certain potential, a *suzhi* "ceiling", and it is up to the individual themself to reach the top of that ceiling; *suzhi* can seemingly be applied to most everything, and there is not necessarily a consensus on what it should and should not be applied to. Although the meaning and usage of *suzhi* is often not unanimous, a theme that is repeated across discourse of *suzhi* is that the socioeconomic class discrepancy between the low-class migrant worker and the upper-/middle-class (single child) urbanite serves as a reification of the high/low *suzhi* binary. Ann Anagnost specifically describes this reification: "The discourse of

suzhi appears most elaborated in relation to two figures: the body of the rural migrant, which exemplifies *suzhi* in its apparent absence, and the body of the urban, middle-class only child, which is fetishized as a site for the accumulation of the very dimensions of *suzhi* wanting in its 'other'" (2004: 190).

As earlier, Kipnis describes the "justified" nature of migrant workers' low *suzhi* capacity in reference to *suzhi* discourse's anti-liberal nature: "Very few urbanites would suggest that the 'peasants' do not try hard enough or do not work hard enough. Rather, the implications are that no matter how hard they try...they will never overcome their peasant lack of quality" (2007: 389). In both of these examples, the urbanite is labelled as the central site for desire – its existence, pursuit, and fulfillment.

Focusing on *suzhi*'s implications for gay identity, Loretta Ho expands the focus of *suzhi* beyond the migrant worker and urban single child: "This invisible, and yet extensive, power of *suzhi* is simultaneously attached to discourse on morality...This moral concern is specific to China's commitment to the attainment of cultural capital, with emphasis on the development of people's *suzhi* – for example, cultural quality (*wenhua suzhi*), psychological quality (*xinli suzhi*), quality of consciousness (*sixiang suzhi*), and quality of morality (*daode suzhi*) (2008: 93).

Haiqing Yu also refers to Ho's *suzhi* analysis, but shifts the focus to marginalized peoples, alluding to the heteronormativity implicit in *suzhi* discourse along the way:

> [Poverty, disease, and marginalization] are associated with individual failure in educational, cultural, and financial attainment...Such failure, in turn, as the logic of *suzhi* discourse goes, leads to 'bad' choices in personal behavior. This kind of logic is applied not only to migrant workers, but also to the 'less desirable'

> urbanites such as...men who have sex with men. Similarly, men who have sex with men, homosexuals, and money boys [gay rural sex workers] are often stigmatized for their non-normative sexual behavior...These marginalized 'most at-risk' groups are presented in mainstream discourses as posing a threat to the 'imagined immunity' and 'imagined solidarity' of the dominant majority of Chinese population (2016: 191).

In *Desiring China*, Lisa Rofel makes specific reference to *suzhi* discourse's relationship with the Chinese government, positioning it as the means through which the Chinese government dictates "proper" and "improper" desire. In describing the government of postsocialist China, she proposes a conceptual "triangulation" of "repression" (inhibition of human nature), "interests" (self-regulation), and "passion" (excess). She states, "Between repression and passion lies socialism, while between passion and interest lies capitalism. The dilemma for China is to find the proper balance between interests and passions" (2007: location 2486). Essentially, Rofel is referring to how passions and interests are totally unrestrained in Western neoliberal capitalist expansion, but that, although China is experiencing similar capitalist expansion, *suzhi* discourse is being employed in determining whether homosexuality as a desire or passion is proper or improper. Most importantly, it seeks to determine in what ways (if any) homosexual desire can be rendered "proper" in Chinese society.

The Chinese Family Unit

As Altman suggests, dealing with family struggles is a (virtually) universal aspect of being an individual with same-sex desires. Yet, the mere existence of family struggles does not validate Altman's framing of family struggles as a "graduation," as if they exist

on a spectrum ranging from “oppressive” to “not oppressive” on which all cultures follow a linear path.

Unlike its typical Western conception, with its distinct separation between individual and family, I refer to the Chinese family as a “unit” because in Chinese culture it is “the most basic and profound institution” in which “everyone is, first, a daughter or son of her/his parents” (Chou 2001: 33-4; 曾仕强 2004). This de-centering of the individual in relation to the family, a concept relatively alien in Western culture although not totally nonexistent, and his position, duties, and desires in relation to that decentering equates not to a more restrictive version of the Western-style family; rather, it is a totally separate definition.

The role of the individual within the family unit is best understood through the duties the individual (i.e. the “daughter/son of his/her parents”) owes to their parents, specifically the duties of marriage and (male) offspring-production (Kong 2016: 497). The duty of child-bearing is conceptualized in “传宗接代” (*Chuan zong jie dai*), the Confucian principle which bestows the duty of continuing the bloodline onto each family’s male heirs. In modern times, this duty persists, evident in the maintained adherence to Mengzi’s “不孝有三，无后为大” (《河北師范大学学报》1993). The actual meaning of this phrase is contested, but in modern, mainstream Chinese society it is understood to mean “There are three duties a child must fulfill for his family, otherwise he is unfilial” – *Chuan zong jie dai* is one of these three duties.

Mr. Xu vs. Fang Gang

The court system is a key tool for the government’s moralizing efforts. A key aspect of the Chinese court system is its lack of “precedence” – which is more relevant to

the “bottom-up” (i.e. beginning with the individual and then recognized by the government) nature of social change in Western society. Instead, Chinese courts function on a case-by-case basis, indicating the increased prevalence of “top-down” social change (Rofel 2007: location 2439). The active and flexible role the Chinese government plays in this “moral socialization” is evident in this fundamental difference. One major instance of this specificity with regards to homosexuality is the case of Mr. Xu vs Fang Gang.

Lisa Rofel describes this case in *Desiring China*. In 1999, a case was brought by “Mr. Xu” against a man named Fang Gang, who claimed that Mr. Xu was gay in his book *Homosexuality in China*. Mr. Xu brought the case against Fang Gang for libel, not because he was called a homosexual, but because he lost his job, fiancée, and friends as a result of being called a homosexual. The judge ruled in favor of Mr. Xu, and included in his ruling that “homosexuality is seen as an abnormal behavior.” Psychologists weighed in on the case, such as Zong Zhong, who made the (accurate) claim that “foreigners medicalized homosexuality, not Chinese.” Fang Gang appealed the case, requesting that that part of the ruling be deleted, and the court, despite still finding him guilty of libel, found him in favor and retracted the statement that homosexuality is abnormal (2007: location 2413-2452).

Gay Linguistics

Linguistics plays a relevant role both in developing and articulating identity – The terms attached to an identity gives insight into the goals, values, and beliefs of the community organized around that identity.

In *Speaking in Queer Tongues: Globalization and Gay Language*, Leap and Boellstorff write analyze the specific cultural and historical phenomena that shape “gay

men's English": "The politics and symbolics of the Stonewall riots, the imperatives of the coming-out experience, and ideas of gay community and gay ghetto as well as rainbow flags, pink triangles, and other material markers of gay presence and gay pride" (2004: 2). For the American gay liberation movement, given its roots in the 1969 Stonewall Riots, started by (primarily) trans women of color throwing bricks at police in response to (another) police infiltration of New York's Stonewall Inn, along with its confrontational identity politics tactics, the reclamation of "queer" and its incorporation into the non-hetorosexual vocabulary is hardly surprising, and although the more recent reclamation of "faggot" can be jarring at first, that word's incorporation into the vocabularies of trans and "femme" (i.e. feminine-presenting or non-binary) people is also not surprising, especially given the routine murdering of trans people (especially trans women of color) that continues today with little to no media coverage (Schmider 2017).

Leap and Boellstorff turn to address the uneven international stage of linguistics and the importance of developing a localized (culturally-relevant) gay vocabulary:

> Frequently, discussions of globalization assume a Western source, and a one-way movement of material and intellectual commodities from that source toward a recipient framed as "more distant," often through the term third world. As the essays in this collection indicate, speech communities located "over there" and "away from" assumed centers of political, economic, and cultural domination are not the only groups of speakers affected by the global circulation of same-sex-related linguistic practices...Gay linguistic practices that seem to originate in the West can compound the dilemma of authenticity, a problem that several contributors to this volume explore in terms of sexual citizenship,

> transculturation, and belonging. What is needed is a processual approach that avoids defining ahead of time what will count as authentic in favor of investigating the cultural logics through which authenticity is shaped in particular setting (2004: 2, 7).

As such, in my analysis I will not only be considering the development of a Chinese gay vernacular but also the ways in which Chinese navigate the frameworks of – but do not "uncritically adopt" – an unequal, colonial globalized gay vernacular in efforts of cosmopolitan legitimacy, personal validation, etc. To speak on the latter, I quote Martin Manalansan, a prominent researcher of Filipino sexuality: "What do we mean when we say 'gay' in a world where hybridity and syncretism provide the grist for cultural production, distribution and consumption?" (2004:1).

"同志" (*Tongzhi*), often used in the Chinese gay community to describe a person (male or female) with same-sex desires, is a concept that is referenced across virtually all research produced on Chinese gay identity. *Tongzhi* is "a Chinese translation from a Soviet communist term 'comrade,' which refers to the revolutionaries that shared a comradeship" and was first used by the gay community in 1997 (Chou 28). Chou references the specific meanings attached to and intentions behind *tongzhi* identification:

> *Tongzhi* adopted the most sacred term in Communist China as their identity, signifying both a desire to indigenize sexual politics and to reclaim their cultural identity. The reappropriation struck the community for its positive cultural references, gender neutrality, de-sexualizing of the stigma of homosexuality, its politics beyond the homo-hetero binarism, and its indigenous cultural identity for integrating the sexual into the social...*Tongzhi* achieves a similar political

> contribution as 'queer politics' does, but whereas queer politics confronts the mainstream by appropriating a formerly derogatory label, *tongzhi* harmonizes social relationships by taking the most sacred title from the mainstream culture (27-8).

Interestingly, just as "queer" emphasizes and memorializes the aggressively homophobic history and structure of Western society, *tongzhi*, as if in reflection of a history and society lacking such homophobia – or in reflection of a different social justice process – serves to redirect the focus away from confrontational identitarian politics and towards harmonization in Chinese society.

Cosmopolitanism

Finally, cosmopolitanism is a concept (directly or indirectly) considered in virtually all research on modern identity. This is because the core ideal of cosmopolitanism – that "all human beings, regardless of their political affiliation, are (or can and should be) citizens in a single community" (Kleingeld and Brown 2002) – is closely related to the effects of globalization. Evaluation of the reality of cosmopolitanism and its effects determine how researchers envision the influence of globalization.

For instance, after making specific reference to Altman's global gay identity, Kong says "These newly emerged identities uncritically embrace the reign of cosmopolitanism and nascent capitalism" (2016: 505). This "uncritical" embrace of "the reign of cosmopolitanism," closely linked to George Ritzer's "grobalization" theory, is referred to in his book *The Globalization of Nothing*. Ritzer states the globalization of "nothing" – grobalization theory – entails five points: Lacking in distinctive substance,

generic, no local ties, time-less, and dehumanized (2004: 53). On the other hand, however, over-emphasis of cultural specificities – glocalization theory – with its focus only on unique localities, is similarly "uncritical," despite producing "something" rather than "nothing" this time – "Something" that has totally distinctive substance, is totally unique, only has local ties, is entirely temporally specific, and is completely founded in human relations (53). This viewpoint entirely disregards the role and value of cosmopolitanism.

Methods

I review case studies of China for my methodology. I chose China as a case for two major reasons: First, I can read and speak Chinese (to a degree); second, China is an emergent economic, political, and cultural power that will increasingly influence transnational meanings and directions of "gay" identity and queer theory in the coming years. I examine a range of studies and documents including ancient stories, historical research, an online same-sex community, laws, entertainment media, news media, sociological studies, and emergent (Chinese) queer theory in understanding order to provide a background on the history of and current reality of homosexuality and "gay" identity in China.

As a note, any information found in my research that includes the original statement in Chinese indicates that I have translated it myself. Citations that use Chinese characters for the author indicate that I read the source in Chinese and am relying on my own translations of that source. Additionally, I should make it clear at this point that my research is almost entirely exclusive to males. Although I would prefer to include research on lesbianism (as well as analysis of a range of "alternate" genders and

sexualities), including the element of gender would require a degree of understanding about its intersectionality and influencing factors, a degree of understanding which I do not (yet) have.

History of Homosexuality in China

Dating back to ancient China, there are a few stories that document same-sex sexual encounters between two males. These stories include 《断袖之癖》(*The Passion of the Cut Sleeve*) (班固: 111 BCE), 《分桃之爱》(*The Love of the Half-Eaten Peach*) (说难: mid-3rd century BCE), and 《龙阳之癖》(*The Passion of Longyang*) (战国策: 5th – 3rd century BCE). A clear social hierarchy is evident in each of these stories: A socially dominant figure (i.e. an emperor, a military leader) has a sexual encounter with a social inferior (i.e. "男宠," literally "male pet") that does not entail any long-term relationship. Throughout ancient Chinese history, Chinese society maintained a "tolerant" view (of varying degrees) towards same-sex encounters, but these encounters did not imply (homo)sexual identity because sexuality was not a "separable category of behavior and existence" and thus not conceptualized as an identity (Chou 2001).

During the Republican Era (1912-1949), sexual identity "emerged" in Chinese society. Contact with the West resulted in the importation of a medicalized (pseudo-scientific) form of homosexuality during a time in which Chinese people placed great value on Western scientific and medical theory during this period: "Chinese scholars, 'enlightened' by Western scientific discourses, began to see homosexuality as a temporary aberration and mental disease" (Chou 2001; Kong 2016).

During China's shift to Maoism (1949-76), the 1950 Marriage Law invalidated traditional marriage practices and proliferated the institution of monogamous

heterosexual marriage (Kong 2016). Furthermore, there was a repression not just of homosexuality, but of sexuality, sexual desire, and "passion" in general. Homosexuality was forbidden under the law of "流氓罪" ("Hooliganism") along with extra-/premarital sex and even non-sexual moral "deviance" such as vandalism (Liu 2015; Rofel 2007; Zhang 2005).

Following Maoism and entering postsocialism (1980-present), the status of sexuality and sexual desire underwent a massive transformation. Maoist repression of sexual desire – the most relevant out of a plethora of repressed desires – was heavily criticized. In response, there was a "sexual revolution" during which sex in general, from premarital and extramarital sex to homosexuality, proliferated (Zhang 2005; Kong 2016; Rofel 2007; 潘绥铭 2006). As China neared the 21st century, AIDS went through both its "introductory phase" (1985-1988), "spreading phrase" (1989-1994), and was beginning its "expansion phase" (1995-present) (Lo 2015). Meanwhile, sociological studies such as 《他们的世界——中国男同性恋群落透视》 (*Their World: A Study of Male Homosexuality in China*) (李银河 1993) maintained a biomedical approach to (medicalized) homosexuality, attempting to "diagnosing" its causes (Kong 2016).

Time period	Year	Homosexuality & gay identity status
Ancient and Imperial China	~1500 BCE –1911 CE	Relatively large variation, typically "tolerant" (Chou 2001); no "sexual identity"
Republican Era	1912 – 1949	Importation of Western (medicalized homo)sexual identity; homosexuality increasingly labelled as mental illness
Maoism	1949 – 1976	Homosexuality morally pathologized as "Western decadence" and labelled under "hooliganism"; repression of sexual desire in general; exaltation of monogamous (heterosexual) marriage
Pre-21st Century Postsocialist China	1980 – 2000	Renewed attention to and encouragement of sexual desire and passion; AIDS reaches China; homosexuality maintains medicalized and pathologized status
Post-21st Century Contemporary China	2000 – Present	Continued "sexual revolution"; homosexuality declassified as mental illness (2002) but retains moral pathologization; new shifts in research on homosexuality

Present Study

In compiling qualitative primary source data, I have extensively examined the website 知乎 (*Zhihu*, "Did You Know?") *Zhihu* is a Chinese "question-and-answer" website in which individuals pose questions and other people can respond. Previously, only qualified scientists or researchers could respond, but now anyone has the ability to provide input. The website is conceptually categorized – there is a 同性恋 (*tongxinglian*, "homosexuality") "subdivision" or "community" that is frequented by thousands of Chinese-speaking netizens and contains questions that have been viewed an upwards of over two million times. In my research, I have analyzed answers to the following questions – only some of which are directly referred to in my later analysis – that are contained within three overarching themes relevant to (homo)sexual identity:

1. 出柜 (*chugui*, a direct translation of "Coming out of the closet"):
    a. "出柜是种怎样的体验？" ("What is coming out like?") – Viewed 331,497 times.
    b. "出柜到底有多难？" ("How hard really is it to come out?") – Viewed 387,869 times.
    c. "你是如何出柜的？" ("How did you come out?") – Viewed 2,876,806 times.
    d. "怎么告诉爸妈自己是同性恋的现实？" ("How do you tell your parents the truth about you being gay?") – Viewed 115,011 times.
2. 形婚 (*xinghun*, "Fake marriage"):

a. “成功‘形婚’是怎样的一种体验？” (“What is a successful fake marriage like?”) – Viewed 410,786 times.

b. “你是如何看待形婚的？” (“How do you view fake marriages?”) – Viewed 8,487 times.

c. “在国内环境下形婚是否可行，可能面临怎样的困境？” (“Are fake marriages acceptable in China? What challenges might one face?”) – Viewed 63,419 times.

3. 骄傲活动/同性恋游行 (“Pride parades”):

a. “Apple 大力支持的骄傲游行 (Pride Parade) 是个怎样的活动？” (“What was Apple’s pride parade like?”) – Viewed 32,701 times.

b. “同性恋游行（LGBT PRIDE）是否会在实质上造成更大的负面效果？” (Don’t pride parades have more of a negative effect than positive in reality?”) – Viewed 30,560 times.

c. “为什么同性恋游行，都把自己打扮得很特别？” (“Why does everyone at pride parades dress so strangely?”); “为什么同性恋要举行同性恋游行？. . . 为什么要我们大家都去支持你们的行为？” (“Why do homosexuals hold pride parades?...Why do you want all of us to support your actions?”); “为什么同性恋游行那么夸张？” (“Why are pride parades so exaggerated?”) – Viewed 876; 60; and 447 times respectively.

Zhihu is an incredibly useful data source for a couple of reasons. First and most obviously, the entire website is in Chinese and so (virtually) the only participants are

people who can speak Chinese. Second, it is a public platform for discourse on homosexuality in Chinese society (and internationally) that has the potential to encompass views from a range of classes, locations, ages backgrounds, etc. Third, users can anonymously participate (and do so a majority of the time), and this detachment from personal identity allows users to freely participate and provide more "honest" answers – or, at least, answers that are more reflective of their personal desires, hopes, and goals.

Loretta Ho's assessment of same-sex online communities in *Gay and Lesbian Subculture in Urban China* (2009) pulls from a range of studies and her own experiences in same-sex "cyberspace" communities (e.g. *Gaybyte*) to present conclusions that correspond strikingly well with my *Zhihu* data. On one hand, we both agree that these communities are (in my opinion, incredibly useful; in her opinion, relatively unimportant) self-help groups which can "provide imaginative resources for urgent and intense local struggles"; on the other, however, Ho writes a justified warning that these communities can also "(re)produce certain universal myths, stereotypes, and misrepresentations about the 'Western' gay scene as a gay haven" (2009: 101-105).

In addition to this danger, *Zhihu* as a data resource does have a couple distinct limitations. *Zhihu* inherently fails to fully and comprehensively capture voices across all classes, ages, and locations for two reasons: First, its prerequisites for Internet access and participation in mainstream online culture; second, as is often the case for "self-help" groups, a user's entry onto the website is typically – but not always – predicated by feelings of alienation or dissociation from family, friends, society, etc. Furthermore, there is a rating system attached to the comments; individual users can "upvote" a comment they agree with or like or "downvote" a comment they disagree with or dislike. The result

is that comments are ordered on the basis of their upvotes, with the comment with the most upvotes being the first one that is seen. Essentially, this voting system regulates the visibility of certain opinions and voices. Opinions that represent divergence from the group mentality shared by the dominant demographics of the website are pushed to the bottom, while those that support dominant ideologies easily rise to the top, creating an ideological echo chamber despite the actual existence of a range of (often competing) ideologies.

In addition to *Zhihu*, I also consider homosexuality in mainstream media. I analyze an episode of the popular contemporary debate show 《奇萌说》 ("U Can U BiBi") that deals with the question "该不该向父母出柜？" ("Should you come out to your parents?") (2015). Evidence of the strong grip the Chinese government has on the media is in its implementation of 《电视剧内容制作通则》 ("General rules for TV drama content production"), which makes direct reference to homosexuality in its statement that "表现和展示非正常的性关系、性行为"等内容不得出现在电视剧中，如同性恋等。" ("Expression and display of abnormal sexual relations, sex itself, etc. cannot be displayed in TV dramas, e.g. homosexuality") (观察者 2016; 中国电视剧制作产业协会 2015).

Furthermore, "新媒体时代下同性恋群体形象去污化初探" ("A Preliminary Investigation into Homosexuality's Increasingly Ameliorated Image during the Age of New Media"), provides a look into how homosexuality, which had a negative reputation during the reign of "traditional" media, is being rebranded in a more positive light by modern media sources (张格 2016). Also, one week ago as of writing, gay news source

淡蓝 (Danlan) released the headline “华中科技大学操场出现‘反同性恋横幅’” (“‘Homophobic banner’ raised on sports field of Huazhong University of Science and Technology”) (2017), which was immediately followed the next day by the headline of “同志妈妈现身华科大：别让恐同者伤害孩子” (“Mothers of gay students appear in person at Huazhong U: ‘Don’t let homophobes hurt our children’”) (2017).

In addition, I pair a new survey and law for further research. Researchers who conducted “The One Child Policy and Its Impact on Chinese Families” claim that in the six years between 1988 and 1994 there was approximately a twenty percent drop – from 44.8 percent to 24.5 percent – in the percentage of people over sixty years old who supported “living together with at least one married child” (Settles and Sheng 2008). They neglected to recognize, however, that the 1988 survey was conducted nationwide, whereas the 1994 survey was only conducted in Beijing. That important piece of information helps give insight into why last year 上海民政 (Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau) announced that it would begin enforcing 《上海市老年人权益保障条例》 (“Protective Regulations for the Rights and Interests of the Elderly”). The fifth stipulation of these protective regulations states: “督促落实家庭赡养义务，维护老年人的合法权益。《条例》对赡养人在经济供养、生活照料和精神慰藉等方面的义务都有明确的规定。 ” (It “urge[s] the fulfilling of [elderly] care responsibilities as well as protecting their legal rights and interests”, further stating that “‘regulations’ with regards to economic support, daily care, ‘spiritual comfort,’ and other responsibilities are all clearly defined") (上海民政 2016). In an interesting example of “legislating” filial piety, this law states that children must fulfill obligations such as “常回家看看” (“Return

home to see your parents regularly"), otherwise they can be sued by their parents for negligence (参考消息 2016; 上海民政 2016).

Finally, I present two recent sociological studies of homosexuality in China: "家庭视角下中国同性恋者缔结异性婚姻的伦理探求" ("Ethical Exploration of Heterosexual Marriage by Chinese Homosexuals from the Perspective of Family") (赵御辰 2014) and "隐匿与显现：J 市男同性恋者社会互动研究" ("Hidden and Visible: A Gay Social Interaction Study in J[ilin] City") (吴维 2015). These studies analyze methods of interpersonal communication between gays in China (such as through the Chinese gay "dating" app "Blued" or public cruising) and approaches to mediating personal desire and marriage pressures from family. Neither study concerns itself with cross-cultural comparison between "Chinese gays" and "Western gays"; rather, they are focused on capturing the heterogeneity of gay life situated within China. Furthermore, although they discuss different "micro topics" (i.e. communication and ethics), they share a correlation with one specific "macro concept" – coming out.

Analysis

Marriage pressures and recent shifts

Naturally, "importation of Western sexuality" – at the risk of oversimplifying a relatively complex process – included the Western marriage system. Previous marriage systems permitted (within reason) a man with primarily same-sex desires to simultaneously participate in heterosexual marriage and use extramarital sex to fulfill (homo)sexual desire (Kong 2016; Chou 2001). Maoist repression of excessive sex, however, resulted in the intolerance of extramarital sex, which continued during the postsocialist period (Liu 2015; Rofel 2007).

Postsocialist pursuit of desire, influenced through both exposure to Western ideologies and through efforts to "correct" Maoist (sexual) repression of passion and human nature, shifted the primary function of marriage away from reproduction and de-legitimized arranged marriages (Rofel 2007). Emphasis on "romantic love" replaced its primary function of reproduction. Romantic love, combined with condemnation of extramarital sex, resulted in a consolidation of marriage and (hetero)sexual desire. For heterosexuals, being able to choose one's partner meant that this consolidation had little impact on their quality of life. For homosexuals, however, this resulted in a dramatic drop in quality of life, as, unlike heterosexuals, marriage became strictly exclusive to, rather than inclusive of, sexual desire.

This phenomenon has had devastating implications for gays within the context of the Chinese family unit. Those who truly do not feel sexual attraction towards the opposite sex inevitably end up in a lose-lose situation. Either they can choose not to marry, "failing their role" as the "son/daughter of his/her parents," or they can marry a woman, implicating an unknowing victim and denying her an aspect of marriage and life – sexual fulfillment – that, in a modern context, should be guaranteed (Chou 2001). Traditional Chinese culture dictates that he should choose the latter because his success in the family unit depends on both marriage and (male) offspring production, but the recent proliferation of "desire" of all types (which is quite a personal and subjective feeling (Rofel 2012)) through neoliberal capitalist experiments has inspired a range of approaches in dealing with, coping with, mediating, responding to, even confronting, the "inevitability" of their heterosexual marriages.

Furthermore, feelings on homosexuality are quickly shifting in China. The debate show 《奇葩说》(“U Can U BiBi”) is rife with “out” gay debaters, especially on the “你该不该向父母出柜？” (“Should you come out to your parents?”) episode. *Zhihu* users on a thread titled “ 《奇葩说》中有几个 gay？” (“How many gays are on ‘U Can U BiBi’”?) have posited the show contains a cast of somewhere between five to nine gays or lesbians, out of a crew of about fifteen (2015).

Despite the Chinese government’s “oppression” of homosexuals (the nature and severity of which I will analyze in the coming chapters) and its “authoritarian” control of the media, a growing number of examples of an improving social climate towards homosexuality are available even on Chinese media sources, a trend that is analyzed in “新媒体时代下同性恋群体形象去污化初探” (“A Preliminary Investigation into Homosexuality’s Increasingly Ameliorated Image during the Age of New Media”) (张格 2016). An extremely recent example in the media of such, in this case of supportive family members, is the mothers of gay students at Huazhong University of Science and Technology who took direct action for the protection of their children (淡蓝 2017). In response to photos of two members of Huazhong University’s women’s basketball team holding a banner that read “维护中华民族传统伦理，捍卫社会主义核心价值；抑制西方腐朽思想侵蚀，让同性恋远离大学校园”(传送门 2017) (Protect Chinese traditional morality, defend socialism’s core values; curb the erosion of morals that has been brought on by the decadence of Western thought, make gays go far away from this university”), the mothers of gay university students at Huazhong University gathered in

person on the campus, holding a banner[1] that read “别让恐同者伤害我们的孩子！” (“Don’t let homophobes hurt our children!”) (淡蓝 2017).

As I will point out in later chapters, such stories of unconditional love and acceptance are not always the case. Not coming out to family members at all still remains a common choice. Regardless, the importance of these stories and events are found in their reflection of an increasing acceptance of homosexuality that has not required the use of any kind of “confrontational” or overtly political “liberation” tactics.

Desires for Integration

In navigating this troubling situation, one concept stands at the heart: Coming out. One example comes from a meeting in the 1990s at one of Beijing’s gay cafes recorded by Lisa Rofel. Ah Zhuang, a man in his forties who was an “elder” in the group and was known for running a gay hotline in China and being a mentor for many young Chinese gays, said the following in a debate about family: “In my experience, dealing with so many Chinese gays, it is wrong to tell your parents. This is not part of Chinese culture. We Chinese must look after our parents and not bring them so much grief...It is selfish to only think of yourself. Perhaps that kind of thing works elsewhere, but not here in China” (2007: location 1762).

Comments on *Zhihu* do not correspond with such an “unconditional rejection” of coming out that Ah Zhuang suggests, but do strongly maintain the need for considering the wishes of one’s parents before coming out. The popular strategies produced on *Zhihu* typically involve non-confrontational “family mediation” methods. One such comment in

[1] (A banner that was also in the color red, just as the homophobic one before it was -- a small detail but an interesting choice given that red is the classic symbol of Maoist socialism, an ideology clearly being used as a homophobic tactic such in the first banner)

response to “怎么告诉爸妈自己是同性恋的现实？” (“How do you tell your parents about the reality of you being gay?”; over one hundred thousand views); this comment, which is by and far the most popular comment on the thread with a “vote ratio” of positive six hundred eighty-two – over six times that of the next highest comment – reads:

> You definitely need to be extremely, extremely careful with how you approach coming out. Although it’s true that you’re doing nothing wrong, you just want to be honest with your parents about it, but you have to remember how many years they spent raising you, so you should be extra careful in making sure you minimize the damage done to them. What I’m trying to say here is that the biggest difficulty actually isn’t related to any kind of psychological barrier [i.e. Western-style homophobia], parents’ love is extremely powerful, the issue isn’t really them accepting you. But, even if they accept that their son is gay, you can’t protect them from the negative comments they will receive from people around them, and those comments will hurt them. The latter is the worst of it (Anonymous User 2012).[2]

Unlike in the interaction between Western family (whose goals and desires are typically seen as being secondary to that of the individual) and gay identity in Western society, which frames the family’s resistance to gay identity as “homophobic” and “their own fault”, socially positioning the individual who came out as “overcoming adversity”

[2] 出柜这件事情，请一定带着一万分的小心去做。虽然你确实没做错什么，只是诚实地告诉父母一个事实，但是看在他们养育你那么多年的分上，多花点心思让他们少受伤害，绝对没错。在这里我想说的是，最大的困难其实不在于他们的心理障碍，父母的爱是很博大的，他们接受你没有想象中那么困难。但是，即使他们接受有一个同性恋儿子，周围人的非议却是不能阻挡的，而且会对他们造成伤害。后者更为可怕。

and “staying true to one’s self,” this example reveals a different approach to dealing with family. Although Western and Chinese families both regularly pose major challenges to expression of gay identity, the Chinese family, unlike the Western family, is not viewed by the gay individual as the “source” of homophobia or oppression, but rather it is the social “Other” or the “周围人” (which the above user makes reference to; i.e. the people who their parents regularly interact with) that is the source.

Cosmopolitan Horizons

If integration or mediation strategies are not possible or are ineffective, neoliberal capitalist expansion has provided a few contemporary routes for Chinese gays: Mobilization and/or becoming “high *suzhi*”. Recent advancements in mobilization have paved new paths for modern Chinese gays who refuse both confrontational modes of coming out as well as the family’s (heterosexual) marriage duties. Comments found on *Zhihu* reveal the impact of new mobilization opportunities. Answers often suggest moving to a different city: “虽然说起来有点残忍，但是劝你最好最好不跟父母在一个城市” (“Although it’s rather cruel, I still suggest your best, best option is to not live with your parents in the same city”); (Anonymous User, +682 vote ratio, (“How do you tell your parents about the reality of you being gay?” 2012). Assumptions of independence (economic or otherwise) characterizes this new mobility: “首先，你的父母也只是人罢了。他们可以有自己根深蒂固的观点而不接纳你，那是他们的选择。而你的人生，本可以无需他们的成全。” (“First of all, your parents are just people. They can go ahead and have their conservative, stubborn point of view and not accept you. That’s their choice. But your life, it doesn’t depend on your parents’ help”) (User 支元叹, +185 vote ratio, “How difficult is it to come out?”, ~388,000 views 2016).

Suzhi dynamics are intimately related to the expanding horizons of mobility. Cultivating *suzhi* as holding promises for future family integration is a theme quite evident on *Zhihu*: “成为一个让人称颂的人。用给他们一方面的心理满足去弥补另一方面的缺憾。” (“Become someone that people praise. Give [your parents] one aspect of psychological fulfillment so that they can overlook your shortcoming [i.e. homosexuality]”) (Anonymous User, +682 2012). General trends of who can and cannot, does and does not, “reveal” their homosexuality are reflective of *suzhi* dynamics. Consider three major non-heterosexual icons in Chinese society: Kevin Tsai, 金星 (Jin Xing), and 李银河 (Li Yinhe). These people are all involved in drastically different pursuits – Kevin Tsai is a popular TV show host in Taiwan, 金星 is an internationally-acclaimed dancer, and 李银河 is the “mother” of sexology and queer theory development in China. Furthermore, they even all have different labels for their sexuality: Tsai is “gay,” 金星 is “trans,” and 李银河 is “bi”. Yet, in all three of these instances, their non-heterosexual identities were not “publicized,” i.e. made visible and conscious to greater society, until *after* they had already amassed their massive followings for their success in other fields totally unrelated to their personal sexuality.

For the modern, cosmopolitan Chinese gay, the future still seems brimming with opportunities despite their (homo)sexuality. From family acceptance of homosexuality (the dream) to studying or working out-of-state or out-of-country (the alternative) to being able to outright reject family duties (the luxury), this range of possibilities and options colors the lives of cosmopolitan gays in China. Yet, despite all of the glamor and allure found in cosmopolitanism, lives exist beyond its borders – lives that are often invisible, especially to the Western gaze.

***Lacking Options; Lacking Voices; Lacking* Suzhi**

Up until this point, very little consideration has been given to (inherently) low *suzhi* individuals who have no independence and cannot "risk" failed family integration or mediation attempts. It is in this arena – an arena that is drastically underrepresented in virtual cosmopolitan communities and is the target of disdain in physical cosmopolitan areas (surely, there is a correlation) – that 形婚 (fake marriage) becomes a relevant area for consideration.

The voices of these people are silenced not only by the (morally- and even state-justified) classism inherent *suzhi* discourse, but also by the intersection of pervading Western homonationalism (i.e. that the West and especially America is inherently more "gay friendly" than non-Western countries because of relatively arbitrary signifiers such as pride parades and gay marriage legalization) and lasting colonialism in China, both of which produce a psychic anxiety within Chinese gay communities (especially obvious online) about producing the "proper" Chinese gay images and representations (Rofel 2007; Anagnost 2004; Kipnis 2007; Ho 2011). Yet, there are extremely niche areas in which this voice can still be heard, even online: For *Zhihu*, that area is found in discourse on fake marriages.

If one were to analyze the top comments provided on questions such as "在国内环境下形婚是否可行，可能面临怎样的困境？" ("Are fake marriages acceptable in China? What challenges might one face?") (With around sixty thousand views, this post nearly has more views than the combined view-counts of every single post on pride parades), they would find not only a denouncement of fake marriages (The first sentence of the first comment: "大部分情况下，不可行。" ("In most cases, it's definitely not

acceptable.")) (User 温和又清真2015), but also an obvious lack of lived or shared experiences.

Scrolling down the page, into the "downvoted zone", into the area of the "incorrect" and "improper," however, means venturing into stories of such lived experiences. One user (who received a "vote ratio" of a whopping positive four votes, in comparison to over one to two hundred amassed by top comments), says the following (the original script reproduced in the footnotes):

> My answer might not help you because my reason for fake marriage is very simple, so our situations might be different. I was married for fourteen years. If you want to find a spouse for a fake marriage, you have to make clear guidelines for the marriage…Mine were as such: First, the marriage is short-term; second, we won't live together; third, I don't want kids...For me, the hardest part has been having to lie...Facing co-workers, friends, family members...I'm always lying. It makes me tired. My heart is tired[3] (User 从、 2016).

Another comment, this one containing a glaring criticism of top comments, similarly received a positive three "vote ratio." He writes:

> Look at all these people saying fake marriages means gays are going and hurting people. Please go think for a second, go understand what fake marriages are and then come back, alright? Look at you guys, 'Do fake marriages have positive

[3] 我的回答可能帮助不到你，因为我型婚的目的很简单，咱们情况可能不同。我是 14 年结婚的，如果你寻找型婚对象，你们必须所有的目的要求一致，很重要。我就是想要一个婚姻，不接受孩子，所以条件就是 1. 短期型婚 2. 不同住 3. 不要孩子，就以上三个硬性要求对方也是这样的，所以我们合适。见面，谈细节，统一各种口径。对我来说，最难的事情，就是谎言，因为事先有约定，双方不干涉对方生活，只应付各种节日见父母，朋友。所以面对同事，朋友，家人的询问，是我最不想面对的，总是在不停的编着谎言，累，心累。

> effects?' 'What problems are faced?' Also, the preliminary consideration isn't just simply what country you're in; but rather, you have to make decisions based on the reality of yourself, your partner, your parents, etc. You're assuming that American gays don't have any problems just because America legalized gay marriage, but I believe they still face huge problems. If you want an opinion that is against the general consensus here, I personally think fake marriages are acceptable...[4] (Anonymous User 2016).

Both of these comments reflect an unfortunate reality for many gay men in China, a reality whose images and meanings can rarely transgress their localized boundaries. This is the situation for gay men who are caught in-between competing and conflicting notions of the very meanings of life and homosexuality's place within those meanings. Yet, unlike those mentioned in previous chapters, these men lack access to mobilization and the tools for *suzhi* cultivation, and their alternate routes reflect those differences.

Investigating government control and perceived "homophobia"

As neoliberal expansion and experiments continuously "reconfigure" the desires of China's (gay) citizens, the government continues to employ *suzhi* discourse in a range of arenas in order to (in)directly guide those capitalist and cosmopolitan desires (Rofel 2007; Anagnost 2004). Most evident in 上海民政's (Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau's) recent "常回家看看" regulations (essentially anti-negligence laws) (2016), these

[4] 看到有人说形婚是同性恋出来害人。拜托过过脑子，弄明白什么是形婚再出来逼逼好吗？形婚是不是有效，会面临什么问题。前提不是在哪个国家，而是要根据你自身的，伴侣的，形婚对象的，双方家长甚至四方家长的实际情况来判断，就算是在美国同性恋婚姻合法的大环境下面，我相信还是有很多的同性伴侣会面临各式各样的问题。如果非要来个笼统大概的意见，我个人觉得可以形婚. . .

emergent cosmopolitan and neoliberal desires (along with accompanying economic development) appear to be challenging the feasibility of certain cornerstones of Chinese culture and morality, leading the urban citizen "morally astray" – a phenomenon that is distinctly manifested in the massive regional discrepancies evident in social climate surveys on three-generation households (Settles and Sheng 2008).

Threatened by the erosion of the previously cohesive and physically-rooted family structure in the face of cosmopolitan expansion in postsocialist China, the government seems to be taking an increasingly proactive role in constructing a "socialist spiritual civilization" (Bai 2014: 39) that is specifically targeted at maintaining the family structure and other traditional cultural elements. Guiding the social sphere through "top-down" change, the Chinese government is exerting its far-reaching influence in the realms of legislation (上海民政 2016; 中国电视剧制作产业协会 2015) and media (Bai 2014; 中国电视剧制作产业协会 2015; Fox 2016; 《奇葩说》2015) through moral appeals to family and the elderly in a way that questions the "*suzhi* status" of its objectors.

The messages that are transmitted (or are not transmitted) through the government and *suzhi* discourse are especially relevant in understanding the direction of homosexuality's moral, social, and cultural status, and recently these messages have been rather confusing and inconclusive. As it challenges on one hand pathologized foundations of homophobia, such as the famous court case between Mr. Xu and Fang Gang, wherein the court ruling originally referred to homosexuality as "abnormal" behavior but later retracted its statement (Rofel 2007), and Chinese-language articles that suggest "new media" portrays homosexuality in a much more positive light than previously (张格

2016); on the other, the government has made decisions in the entertainment sphere that directly challenge homosexuality's supposedly "purified" image. It has created laws specifically forbidding displays of homosexuality on TV – and it has enforced those laws in a rather unforgiving manner (观察者 2016; 《奇葩说》2015).

Although these instances of "inadvertent" homophobia, which seem to be primarily employed in the government's preservation of overarching traditional themes, are relatively understandable; unfortunately, just as the American military often "inadvertently" kills innocent people by dropping bombs to kill "terrorists," the Chinese government's relatively nonspecific and vague preservation of "morality" and "family unit cohesion" is inadvertently harming the gay community.

It might seem odd that I choose the word "inadvertent" in describing the Chinese government's recent "attacks" on homosexuality – after all, the government's official proclamation of its new TV drama law specifically targets *tongxinglian* as an example of "abnormal sexual relations" (观察者 2016); also, homosexuality was clearly an underlying cause for 《奇葩说》's ("U Can U BiBi"'s) debate on coming out (which contained no displays of homosexuality beyond their debate topic and, well, the presence of actors and actresses who are homosexuals) being taken off the air.

Yet, despite widespread, even cross-cultural, condemning narratives produced by news media on these two phenomena (观察者 2016; Fox 2016) (such as in the sickeningly homonationalist display produced by (Western and English-based) news source The Independent, its headline reading "China bans depictions of gay people on TV in crackdown on 'vulgar, immoral and unhealthy content'," accompanied by an image of two gay Asian males kissing, holding rainbow flags, and wearing politicized "equal

rights" shirts (Fox 2016) – the headline and photo obviously some subconscious reification of a eurocentric imaginary that (mistakenly) claims to capture the "reality" of "the Chinese psyche" – as if Chinese gays are totally entranced by an ephemeral Western dreamscape overflowing with promises of utopian social equality, a utopia that stands just an arm's length away from their "reality" of Chinese authoritarianism and homophobic oppression – if only they could reach it), I am hesitant to make similar condemnations. With regards to the TV drama law, the law itself – not the short snippets published by the media – is actually a laundry list of restrictions that spans eight pages. The full list, which is available in Chinese on 中国电视剧制作产业协会's (China Television Drama Production Industry Association's) website, involves requirements such as "坚持以现实题材为主" ("Prioritize an adherence to themes or concepts that are rooted in reality"), and it expressly forbids "损害人民军人、武装警察、国安、公安、司法人员等特定职业、群体，以及社会组织，团体的公众形象" ("Depictions of harming members of the military, armed police, national security, public security, judicial personnel and similar special occupations, groups, as well as social organizations and the collective public") (2015: 2, 3).

The law is certainly bizarre and does indeed mention disapproving of homosexuality, but I find it hard to believe that the Chinese government's "true" motives were rooted in direct homophobia. As for the "coming out" episode of 《奇葩说》("U Can U BiBi"), LeTV's (and/or the government's) censorship undeniably contains homophobic connotations. Yet, I feel there were other elements present in that episode that all contributed to its ultimate censorship. One element is the prevalence of contested gender presentation norms, both in the presence of 金星 (Jin Xing), a trans woman, as

well as a general theme of androgyny and gender nonbinarism among the cast: 邱晨 (Qiu Chen) begins the show with a self-introduction; after she is done, the host immediately tells her “邱晨，刚刚高晓松老师真诚地问一下我说‘她是男生女生？’” (“Qiu Chen, just a second ago Mr. Gao Xiaosong [a host] honestly asked me “Is that a girl or a boy?”) (“该不该向父母出柜？” 2015: 4:00). Five minutes into the show, the second person to give an introduction was 轰叔 (Hong Shu), who is similarly androgynous, if not more so than Qiu Chen.

Obviously, this gender nonbinarism was not uniformly embodied nor expressed on the show, but a general environment of gender nonbinarism was clearly present. With regards to “transgression” of (imaginary) gender “boundaries,” Rofel and Liu both agree that there is a “dominant perception” of Maoist socialism in postsocialist China that relies on a distorted, “revisionist history” in explaining Maoism’s shortcomings, tracing all of its failures back to a single source: “Maoism’s suppression of ‘natural’ humanity” – a production of women who were too masculine and of men who were “unable to find their true masculinity”; both researchers conclude that this imagined historical narrative encourages postsocialist China to “reject [its] socialist past” and, as a result, also encourages distinct gender binarism (Liu 2015: 4; Rofel 2007: 272-294).

Furthermore, both overt and/or implicit encouragement for coming out to parents (either through integrational or confrontational strategies) permeated communications to the audience (communications orated by a staggeringly large amount of “already out” actors and actresses), even by those actors/actresses supposedly given the role of “opposing” that position. Westernized, confrontational modes of coming out were prevalent – especially blatant in Hong Shu’s narrative: Reproduction of the Western

closeted/out binary in which one is either openly gay or is a liar: “你不出柜，你就得骗呗” (“If you don’t come out, then you have to lie”) (14:18); assumptions of universal mobility and economic independence as well as self-centered (in comparison to family-centered) characterization of the parents as being oppressive by default and accepting by choice: “可以挺直腰板跟你爸妈说：‘你的幸福不建立在繁殖恋，俗称异性恋的基础上。’你有权利去选择你认为对的人生. . . 那你是想，麻烦一时还是麻烦一世？” (“You can stand with your back straight and say to your parents: ‘[My] happiness doesn’t depend on my ability to produce offspring, that so-called foundation of heterosexual love.’ You have the freedom to go choose whoever you think is right…[If you’re worried about coming out,] then just think – do you want to carry a burden for a little while or carry it for the rest of your life?”) (14:30-15:00).

Given the Chinese government’s dual management of both an eroding family structure (which, at the micro-level, is potentially challenged or even destroyed by coming out) and a desire to produce the “proper” type of citizens (“citizens” meaning not only, for example, Hong Shu but also the people across China who look up to and are influenced by him), I am not at all shocked – although still disappointed – that the episode was censored. Whether this is direct homophobia or is a more general moralistic trend enacted by the “post”-socialist government that, in this case, had unfortunate homophobic implications, I think either position could be argued because of the case’s lack of information, but it is dangerous to follow the eurocentric, homonationalist assumptions inherent in using these two cases to portray the Chinese government as unequivocally “hateful” of gay people in China. In fact, while the government is

censoring the media in ways that implicate the status of homosexuality, it is also producing knowledge on homosexuality that is directly improving its social status.

Indigenizing homosexuality

In between all of the confusing and contradicting narratives produced by the government stands an undeniably optimistic shift in the focus of queer theory and sociology. The government regularly plays a direct role in the production of knowledge that exists in a range of arenas – this is absolutely the case for sociology. Kong writes, "Sociologists can get jobs through only two means: state universities (under the Ministry of Education) or the Academy of Social Sciences (under Ministry of Propaganda), both of which are under the ideological control of the government" (Kong 2016: 501). Queer theory in China, closely guided by the government, once sought to "diagnose" the "causes" of homosexuality (e.g. 李银河's 《他们的世界》– Li Yinhe's "Their World" – which investigates the reasons gay men and women "become" gay such as through sexual encounters in childhood and adolesence (1993)). Recently, however, there is clearly an increased attention given to analyzing cultural specificities and their influence on and/or interaction with gay identity. This shift is evident in all of the following: Documenting non-normative sexualities and the "true" history of (homo)sexuality in China (Kong 2012; 2016), analyzing the ways in which gay individuals mediate personal (culturally-centered) morality and family obligations (赵御辰 2014), compiling data on interpersonal communications between "masked" and "unmasked" gay individuals (吴维 2015), or any other aspect covered in the myriad of recent Chinese queer theory studies. In all of these cases, researchers in this field have the potential to drive discourse and provide potential solutions on "how" to be gay in China.

In determining “how” to be gay in China, there is an absolute requirement to indigenize certain aspects of gay identity. This is not necessarily to the benefit of gays in China themselves, to whom concepts such as “gay” and “coming out”（“出柜”）are relatively easy to interpret because of shared struggles experienced by the very nature of being non-heterosexual (i.e. gays from all cultures experience general alienation from society and family), (although this research is certainly useful to gays as well), but it is especially to the benefit of heterosexual society in that the challenges faced by gays are made intelligible in the context of Chinese culture. This is evident in the parallels between sociological/anthropological researchers from a range of backgrounds who suggest there are “differences” in “being gay” across different cultures and the language used by native Chinese researchers on homosexuality in China.

A key example of this is “coming out”. Within Chinese gay communities, “出柜” (literally leave-closet) is by far the most ubiquitous phrase used to describe the process of “publicizing” or “actively recognizing” one’s homosexuality (《奇葩说》2015; 知乎). Yet, sociologists who study homosexuality in China repeatedly suggest that, despite often using the same phrases, the meanings attached between Western and Chinese cultures are simply not the same (Chou 2001; Martin 2007). Following Chinese queer theory and sociology’s recent shift, studies produced on homosexuality by native, often non-international Chinese researchers reproduce those theoretical differences in a range of ways. I provide evidence of the correlation between these “theoretical” differences and “experienced” differences with two recent sociological studies on homosexuality in China:

The first study is “家庭视角下中国同性恋者缔结异性婚姻的伦理探求” (“Ethical Exploration of Heterosexual Marriage by Chinese Homosexuals from the Perspective of Family”) (赵御辰 2014). It is concerned with how modern gay men in China mediate “ethics” or “morality” (“伦理,” a phrase that, notably, also appears on the homophobic banner waved at Huazhong University stating “维护中华民族传统伦理” – “Protect Chinese traditional morality”) in facing the specter of fake marriage, either with a heterosexual woman or with a lesbian woman, because of family pressure. 赵御辰’s research makes a distinctive appeal to “伦理,” a concept which can technically be directly translated into the English language – “ethics” or “morality” – but does not smoothly retain its meaning unless there is a mutual understanding of the cultural context in which it takes on that meaning (曾仕强 2004). Considering the impact of “伦理” means taking an affective route to understanding the myriad ways in which Chinese gays make sense of their conundrum; it suggests a multidimensional and interactive approach to a topic that is typically rendered unidimensional and linear by the eurocentric assessment that “different choices” equates to “different levels of individualism” (and thus “different levels of freedom/oppression/happiness(/Westernization)”); it rejects the claim that such a eurocentric assessment is sufficient in “explaining” any and all non-Western socio-cultural shifts.

The second study is “隐匿与显现：J 市男同性恋者社会互动研究” (“Hidden and Visible: A Gay Social Interaction Study in J[ilin] City”) (吴维 2015). In their assessment of interpersonal communications, 吴维 “replaces” the Western-imported

"out"/"closeted" binaric imagery with a binary that is culturally-connotated: "隐匿" ("hidden" or "masked") and "显现" ("visible" or "unmasked"). In doing so, the imagery of the closet, which is rooted in Western cultural and historical context (i.e. the clear and distinct separation of public and private spheres and the positioning of sexuality as a "hidden truth" that can be "unlocked") is replaced by imagery that carries culturally-intelligible connotations of "shame" versus "status" and "social enactment" (Martin 2007: 203-4). This kind of imagery corresponds with central concepts of Chinese culture such as "面子" (*mianzi*, "face"), concepts which continue to deeply pervade Chinese society despite the so-called "massive upheaval" of culture implicated in neoliberal capitalist development.

Some (Westerners) might (understandably) find it difficult to conceptualize how exactly the tropes of "closet" and "mask" differ from each other while still describing a similar phenomenon. Indeed, Fran Martin, who proposes a "隐"/"显" binary (which contains the same characters as 吴维's "隐匿"/"显现" binary), also admits that there is a degree of similitude between the two concepts, but suggests that, instead of focusing attention towards their perceived similarities, "More productive questions are about how 'the mask' works to produce knowledges of *tongxinglian* [homosexuality] in its specific, situated developments" (2007: 204).

As such, it is important to consider that heterosexual Chinese society, despite sharing a (supposedly) "separate" sexuality from its homosexual communities, is much more capable of intelligibility and empathetic understanding towards concepts that arise indigenously and are situated in a relevant (often localized) cultural context, rather than imported concepts that rely on a shared struggle in producing cross-cultural intelligibility.

As such, production of localized, indigenized vocabulary and concepts, especially in developing fields like sociology and queer theory, will without doubt be incredibly useful tools in combating social and structural "homophobia" in China, homophobia which is primarily directed at its perceived "non-Chineseness" rather than some (socially, historically, and culturally constructed) "inherent evil/inferiority".

Conclusion

Ultimately, I have found that the challenges being faced by Chinese gays are experienced in a range of ways and are mediated and navigated by a range of methods. There appear to be more and more opportunities for Chinese gays to integrate same-sex relationships into the family, even in families that "disapprove" of homosexuality. If integration methods fail, capitalist developments have provided ways for Chinese gays to negotiate family pressures and sexual desires, especially through mobilization, economic independence, and *suzhi* cultivation.

Despite this image of China as growingly cosmopolitan, an image which is commonly reproduced in virtual gay communities, the specter of fake marriages are still a reality for many gay men, even for those who have opportunities to mobilize but refuse to do so. Addressing the issue of fake marriage, not of a lack of pride parades or legislative equality, is at the forefront of concerns within the gay community.

Although the image of the Chinese government in relation to gay rights often appears unclear, oppressive, or nonsensical, as it seems to "randomly" support or deny privileges to Chinese gays, I do believe there is a greater focus that can be used to understand this supposed randomness. It may entirely be possible that the government is "hatefully" "homophobic" towards Chinese gays, but I have also shown how specific

instances of this homophobic legislation also contains cultural preservation efforts or other elements of fear about China's "moral erosion," especially in the form of family structure. Despite the presence of homophobic legislation, the recent trends in queer theory and sociology, which have been guided by the government and increasingly deal with "indigenizing" homosexuality, seem incredibly positive.

Unfortunately, a major research limitation for this thesis has been the non-comprehensive nature of Chinese gay identity expression on *Zhihu*. First, gays in China who successfully integrate into the family unit typically would not go to *Zhihu* in seeking advice on homosexuality – thus, it is mostly frequented by those who have already been alienated by family/friends/society. Second, the very act of browsing such a niche webpage implies a certain degree of class, education, and Internet-savviness. Third, the upvote/downvote system produces a "mob mentality" that regulates and restricts the visibility of certain ideologies, e.g. comments that even hint at the acceptability of "outdated" concepts such as *xinghun* or even indirectly suggest that coming out to one's parents might not always be the best option are often shoved to the bottom. Finally, there is a degree of romanticization of Western "sexual equality" that is perpetuated on these websites and may not exist in offline communities.

The horizon of future research, however, is quite bright. First, as queer theorists (and, by extension, the government) further research gay identity in China, a wider range of voices could emerge that have previously been silenced at places such as *Zhihu*. Second, indigenization of homosexuality to Chinese culture could help make the challenges faced by gays in China more intelligible to mainstream heterosexual society. Third, a topic totally unmentioned until now because of its newness, as the technology of

childbirth continues to develop and proliferate, such as in vitro fertilization, integration of same-sex relationships into the traditional family system could be made much easier. While I no longer necessarily envision a future of China that contains replication of Western themes such as rainbow flags, gay pride parades, and “uncloseted” homosexuality, I do see a future in which gays have a valid place in China.

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