

# Gay and Lesbian Subculture in Urban China

Loretta Wing Wah Ho



Routledge Contemporary China Series

# Gay and Lesbian Subculture in Urban China

This book contributes to a critical understanding of how Chinese same-sex identity in urban China is variously imagined, how it is transformed and how it presents its resistances as China continues to open up to global power relations. Equally important, the book will (1) sharpen knowledge of China's recent socio-economic change and political agenda, (2) build a greater awareness of Chinese cultural, sexual and ethical values, and (3) offer new perspectives on 'Chineseness' and Chinese same-sex identity.

Uniquely, it explores the emergence of Chinese same-sex identity through understanding the everyday, lived same-sex experience, amid China's opening up to cultural, sexual and economic globalisation. This understanding is based on a culturally sensitive framework that accommodates the diverse and sometimes paradoxical articulation of same-sex identity in urban China. It comes to the conclusion that same-sex identity in China is articulated in a paradoxical way: open and decentred but, at the same time, nationalist and conforming to state control.

This book will be of interest to scholars and students in Chinese Studies, Gender Studies, Sexuality and Cultural Studies.

**Loretta Wing Wah Ho** is a Research Associate in the School of Psychology at the University of Western Australia.

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*Loretta Wing Wah Ho*



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**Loretta Wing Wah Ho**



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## Note on the text

Throughout this book, the Hanyu Pinyin system of Romanisation has been used for Chinese words, names and phrases. All Chinese and non-English terms are italicised. These particular terms are also italicised: *gay(s)*, *lesbian(s)*, *les*, *lala*, *money boy(s)*, *T* and *P*. This is intended to demonstrate that these terms have their own linguistic history and dynamics, and that they are subject to the problematics of translation. Furthermore, the terms *gay* and *lesbian* are italicised to underline a point – that is, the two terms, however imposed, imported, borrowed, appropriated or adapted, are used by those same-sex attracted Chinese in urban China to assume a ‘modern’ identity and high social status. The use of italics for the terms *gay* and *lesbian* refers to those Chinese men and women who call themselves *gay* or *lesbian*, a naming that is not based on any external description. Elsewhere italics are used to attach emphasis.

All the translations from Chinese material into English have been produced by the author, unless otherwise stated.



# 1 Opening up to *gay* and *lesbian* identities

China has been caught in the web of national and global forces of ‘opening up’ since the late 1970s.<sup>1</sup> In contemporary China, the interplay of these national and global forces exists as a political and cultural reality. These forces sometimes converge, but at other times clash. Most significantly, the twin forces, among other things, represent a new direction in China’s strategic engagement with the outside world. Ultimately, this engagement is to combine socialism with global capitalism in order to elevate China into an economic superpower on the world stage. Steadily, the engagement has constituted not only a potent agent for augmenting a renewed sense of national significance and pride, but also renewed tensions between global/local and modern/traditional conceptions of Chinese identity. Many Chinese cultural traditions are thus threatened by a formidable global discourse. These tensions are deeply concerned with one fundamental question: how can an ‘authentic’ national Chinese identity be preserved in the face of China’s opening up to global practices that seek to extend their dominion.

This book takes up the challenge to examine how the national and global forces of opening up have come to articulate a fresh form of Chinese same-sex identity. Emphasis is placed on how this fresh form of Chinese same-sex identity is redefined not only by a heightened sense of nationalism, but also by increasing diasporic and global contacts. Its ultimate aim is to capture how Chinese same-sex identity in urban China is articulated in ways that are paradoxical: open and decentred, but at the same time, national and conforming to state control. This book represents a research area that is intimately linked to the importation of dominant, albeit often fragmentary, notions of Western gayness into China. It is also an area that demonstrates how Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities in contemporary China can be actualised without abandoning what same-sex attracted Chinese consider to be an ‘authentic’ Chinese same-sex identity.<sup>2</sup>

This book will add a new dimension to the understanding of Chinese same-sex identity in urban China.<sup>3</sup> It differs from other approaches to this topic in one specific way: it questions the position that the emerging gender and sexual identities in urban China are necessarily a symbol of modernity, the position that dominates current academic debates about the articulation of Chinese same-sex identity. In particular, it explores the emergence of seemingly modern and authentic Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities through understanding the processes of cross-cultural



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appropriation, amid China's opening up to cultural and economic globalisation. This understanding is crucial because the practices of cross-cultural appropriation present opportunities for many same-sex attracted Chinese, particularly those in urban China, to question institutions that often prescribe their everyday same-sex experience.

### **Terminology**

The term 'identity' is primarily drawn from Stuart Hall's (1985, 1991a, 1991b, 1996) conceptualisation of identity, which places identity in multiple practices and contexts, and is always in a state of reacting to prevailing power relations. Hall's conceptualisation of identity comes from a post-colonial perspective and focuses on issues of 'race' and 'ethnicity' in Britain. Moreover, Hall does not actively engage in the discussion of gender and sexual identity. However, by deferring to the work of Hall, it is possible to demonstrate that identity bears a close relationship to questions of power and appropriation. This relationship is central to understanding the ever-shifting dislocations of 'local' and 'global' identities across local, national and international boundaries. This is something that resonates with findings that seemingly modern and authentic *gay* and *lesbian* identities in urban China are enunciated through both national and global sentiments.

Along the same lines, this book seeks to make sense of the dynamic nature of identity. It recognises the significance of identity negotiation where individuals have to endlessly negotiate their multiple identities across different practices of power and representation. That said, certain aspects of identity are fixed and subject to the various contexts of social reality. In this light, Romit Dasgupta's (2004, p. 42) remark is helpful:

While it is important to appreciate the multiplicities, contradictions, ambiguities and fluidity inherent in the configurations, in the 'crafting of selves', there is a (shifting) limit to the extent to which identity can be a free-floating, dislocated signifier ... Inherent in this line of thinking is a notion of the 'ever-shifting' self that is continually crafted and re-constructed, but is still connected (however tenuously) to some concept of a life-path/trajectory. This life-path/trajectory is itself subject to wider historical, social, cultural, economic, and other structures and processes.

It should also be emphasised that, following Ken Plummer (1981, p. 54), the formation of gender and sexual identity is a process of *becoming*. Plummer (1981, p. 54) writes that the development of same-sex identity is part of the larger process of *becoming* homosexual and accepting homosexuality as a way of life. This process of *becoming* is, as Plummer (1981, p. 54) argues, often essentialised into *being* homosexual through what he calls 'categoric labelling'. This acceptance of homosexuality as a way of life, in Plummer's (1975) formulation, consists of four stages: sensitisation, signification and disorientation, coming out, and stabilisation.

Like Plummer (1975), Richard R. Troiden (1988, p. 35) has developed ‘an ideal-typical model’ to theorise same-sex identity formation. Troiden’s (1988) model proposes that same-sex identity formation typically goes through four phases: sensitisation, dissociation and signification, coming out, and commitment. As Troiden (1988, p. 38) himself points out, this model has its limitations: ‘It focuses only on males, fails to give a clear definition of homosexual identity, and neglects to distinguish between, and relate, the concepts of self-concept and identity.’

By making use of aspects of the formulations by Troiden (1988) and Plummer (1975, 1981), this book intends to underline that identity is always in the process of formation. Stuart Hall (1991a, p. 47) writes: ‘identities are never completed, never finished; ... they are always as subjectivity itself is, in process’. However, this emphasis does not mean to suggest that the formation of same-sex identity in China, and elsewhere, is a straightforward linear process that has to be understood in the context of Western capitalist society. Neither is this formation necessarily organised against the background of social stigma. Rather, this very formation always overlaps and recurs in many different ways for different individuals. On the other hand, it is problematic that Troiden (1988) and Plummer (1975, 1981) read sexuality as a core essence of the self. Research has shown that the expression of gender and sexual identities in some societies (such as Chinese and Indonesian societies) does not necessarily entail an individual identity (Boellstorff 2000, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2005; Chou 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Berry 2001; Wan 2001; Boellstorff and Leap 2004; Fang 2004). Rather, this expression is dominantly understood in the broader context of the family and kinship.

## **Context and argument**

In this book, the articulation of Chinese same-sex identity in urban areas is situated within the broad political and cultural context of China’s ‘opening up’. This context is connected to a period of history that is often conveniently described as ‘the era of globalisation’.<sup>4</sup> By situating ‘Chineseness’ and ‘Chinese’ same-sex identity within the specific context of ‘opening up’ to mass globalisation, this does not mean to suggest a simple notion of ahistorical ‘Chineseness’. Neither should the conceptualisation of Chinese gender and sexuality be seen within a homoerotic/homosocial context.

On the contrary, the articulation of seemingly modern and authentic Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities in urban China is paradoxical. These Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities signify a quest for the Western experience of modernity and authenticity in a more self-conscious manner than ever before. They are not necessarily ‘modern’ or ‘indigenous’, but claim primacy to an individual’s social status, a fact that is often subtly manifested in one’s use of language. What is more, they are always in tension with older forms of Chinese same-sex identity.<sup>5</sup> To an extent, they are decentred from the local politics of identity and Chinese homoerotic/homosocial culture, and are often interpreted as a betrayal of ‘authentic’ Chinese traditions to the lure of global connections. Simultaneously,

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they are infused with a fresh form of Chinese nationalism and national identity.<sup>6</sup> These fresh identities have a great deal to do with China's recent ascendancy to the global stage as an economic power. It is within this context that the compelling question of *who* is to represent what is quintessentially Chinese, expressed in China's impressive economic performance, is in a state of ongoing contestation.

Let there be no misunderstanding. It is not being argued that nobody has ever pointed out that the articulation of Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities in urban China coexists with China's commitment to opening up, intertwined with the contingencies of local and international (sexual) politics. There has been a growing body of research on same-sex issues in China since the 1980s: Loretta Ho (2005, 2007, 2008), Fran Martin (2003, 2008), James Farrer (2002, 2006, 2007), Elaine Jeffreys (2007), Lisa Rofel (1999a, 2007), Li Yinhe (2006), Pan Suiming (2006), Wu Cuncun and Mark Stevenson (2006), Remy Cristini (2005), Elisabeth Engebretsen (2005), Hui Jiang (2005), Wu Cuncun (2004), Tze-lan D. Sang (2003), Chou Wah-shan (2000a, 2000b, 2001), Wan Yanhai (2001), Mark McLelland (2000a), Harriet Evans (1997), Chris Berry (1996a) and Bret Hinsch (1990). These are key researchers who have invested enormous research energy into the articulation of Chinese same-sex identity. Their research represents seminal English-language works in the field.

Guo Yaqi (2005), Pan Suiming and Wang Aili (2004), Pan Suiming and Yang Rui (2004), Tong Ge (2004), Zhu Chuanyan (2004), Cathy Cai (2003), Chen Liyong (2003), Xiaojie (2003), Li Yinhe (2002), Wu Cuncun (2000), Xiaomingxiong (1980, 1981, 1984, 1989), Fang Gang (1995), Li Yinhe and Wang Xiaobo (1992), and Zhang Beichuan (1994) represent important Chinese scholars and thinkers who have produced Chinese language monographs on same-sex life in China.

At the same time, there has been resurgence of gay-friendly Chinese-language literature since China's opening up in the late 1970s. For instance, *Sky (Tiankong/* with a focus on Chinese lesbianism) and *Friend Exchange (Pengyou Tongxin)* are gay-oriented magazines, which are partly funded by international bodies and are mainly distributed among local Chinese same-sex groups. Increasingly, there has also been popular literature on sex and sexuality in circulation in recent years. For example, *Renzhizhu* is a popular Chinese-language magazine that regularly covers a range of these topics: masturbation, extra-marital affairs, contraception, infidelity and HIV/AIDS. *Men Box*, which is a glossy magazine, often features photos of young masculine men who try to hide their nakedness. Some of my *gay* interviewees told me that they bought *Men Box* from time to time. *Sanyuefeng (Spring Breezes)*, a popular magazine, covered the topic of sex change in its sixth issue of 2004; Jinxin, a sex-change Chinese woman, was made to appear on the cover of *Sanyuefeng*. All this popular Chinese-language literature gives insight into the broader context in which discourses of (homo)sexuality are circulating in China today.

Nonetheless, past research has not recognised that it is the state discourse of 'opening up', propelled by mass globalisation, that has facilitated the development of a paradoxical Chinese identity, along with a paradoxical Chinese same-sex identity. It is an identity that is open and decentred, but at the same time, national

and conforming to state control. On the one hand, it is increasingly open to global and diasporic influences and is gradually divorced from local traditions. On the other hand, it is deeply rooted in a renewed form of nationalism, and is significantly shaped by political thought and action.

This book is articulated from three bodies of discourse: representations of same-sex identity in scholarly literature (both in Chinese and English), direct observations of the same-sex 'community' obtained from fieldwork in Beijing and, finally, manifestations of the Chinese *gay* scene on the internet. Originally though, it analyses the relationships among these three discourses: where they coincide; where they differ; and how their dynamic relationship is opening up to the intersections of both local and transnational identities. In addition, the study adopts the relatively new research method of 'cyber anthropology', with the aim of capturing the multitude of expressions of Chinese gender and sexual identities manifested on the internet.<sup>7</sup>

### 'Opening up' in China

When commenting on recent social change in China, Gary Sigley (2006, p. 70) speaks of 'the dramatic shifts in almost all fields of social life that have occurred in the People's Republic of China since 1949, and since the introduction of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms and Open Door Policy in December 1978, in particular'. Recent research shows that China's opening up in the late 1970s has provided its citizens with conditions, particularly in urban centres, to experiment with a sexual identity, including same-sex identity (Rofel 1999a, 2007; Wan 2001; Brownell and Wasserstrom 2002; Farrer 2002; Li 2002; Pan and Wang 2004; Pan and Yang 2004). Studies by Wan Yanhai (2001, pp. 47–64), Lisa Rofel (1999a, pp. 451–74; 2007) and Chris Berry (1996a, pp. 38–40) indicate that China's opening up has resulted in a proliferation of self-described *gay* individuals in Beijing and increased interactions between local and international same-sex networks, despite a degree of local resistance and indifference to both local and international networks.<sup>8</sup> Importantly, all these manifestations have come to signify ways of articulating Chinese same-sex identity that have apparently emerged anew, with a gradual break away from previously prevailing homosocial/homoerotic traditions.

As signalled earlier, central to this analysis is the pervasive concern with 'opening up'.<sup>9</sup> 'Opening up' is a quality that many citizens in China, whether *gay* or otherwise, take on for self-identification. This begs the question of what 'opening up' means and why ordinary citizens in China embrace it so ardently. The *Ciyuan* (a Chinese dictionary of etymologies) has it that *kai fang* (the term now used for 'opening up') has been used historically to denote a range of meanings: liberate, set free, release, expand, blossom, come loose, or be open to traffic or to the public (Guangdong 1987, p. 1762). In modern Chinese, *kai fang* is usually used to mean the lifting of a ban, opening up or being open-minded. At present, *kai fang* is also used diversely to indicate a sense of being 'modern', 'receptive to change', 'Westernised', 'materialistic' and 'morally loose'. In short, the term

*kaifang* is multi-layered. It generally refers to a state of openness and acceptance to the outside world; it is as much about the acceptance of an identity as about the acceptance of an ideology.

The metaphor of ‘opening up’ has been used in association with ‘reform’ (*gaige*), especially since the early 1980s (Gamble 2003, p. 18). Government authorities and ordinary citizens in China speak of ‘reform and opening up’ (*gaige kaifang*) with particular reference to the process of opening up Chinese society to rapid social and economic transformation. To better understand the nature of this process, it is useful to bear in mind the famous remark by Deng Xiaoping, who once described ‘reform and opening up’ in terms of ‘feeling the boulders to cross the river’ (*mozhe shitou guohe*) (Gamble 2003, p. 17). Deng seems to suggest that ‘reform and opening up’ in China is a process of finding one’s bearings, exploring opportunities and anticipating risks. Generally speaking, ordinary citizens in China speak of *gaige kaifang*, and especially *kaifang*, in many elusive senses, and sometimes in radically different ways. However, they would often agree that *kaifang* is associated with the opportunities and risks that bring about both economic benefits and undesirable foreign influences to Chinese society.

In contemporary China, *kaifang* is also used to suggest ‘modern’, ‘Western’ or ‘permissive’ sexual attitudes and behaviours. The Chinese term *xingkaiyang* (sexual openness) is used to describe such attitudes and behaviours, manifested particularly in the younger generations residing in the large cities of China. James Farrer’s (2002) research indicates that *xingkaiyang* is a recent term that has begun to circulate since political and social reforms in the late 1970s. Significantly, what is built into *xingkaiyang* is the assumption that it embodies outside influences. According to Chou Wan-shan (2000a, 2000b, 2001) and James Farrer (2002), *xingkaiyang* often points to stereotypes of foreigners as decadent or promiscuous. *Xingkaiyang* in China is often seen as a threat to ‘socialist morality and, potentially, socio-political stability’ (Sigley 2006, p. 71). Conservative party-state authorities have always warned their citizens to be wary of undesirable foreign or Western cultural and social practices. Authorities are concerned that China’s opening up enables sexual globalisation of an undesirable ‘Western’ variety to literally invade Chinese homes and wombs. For example, James Farrer (2002, p. 26) informs us that Deng Xiaoping himself once declared: ‘When you open the door, a few flies are bound to enter’ (*ba chuanghu dakai nanmian hui you cangying wenzi pao jinlai*). These flies refer to, among other things, ‘corrupt foreign ideas about sexuality’ (Farrer 2002, p. 26).

Moreover, China’s sexual openness has been, and still is, subject to a bio-medical construction of sexuality. For instance, in the public mind, same-sex practice is almost automatically associated with HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases. Public discussion of (homo)sexuality tends to appear predominantly in sexual health or psychological publications. Indeed, an understanding of sexuality in contemporary China is generally shaped by a medicalised framework, which is further governed by tight political control and strict obscenity laws. Today, sex shops in China’s major cities, often known as *baojian zhongxin*, are burgeoning at a rapid rate.<sup>10</sup> These sex shops are selling a variety of medical aids, herbal

aphrodisiacs and other sexuality-related products that claim to enhance sexual pleasure and potency, and to cure sexual dysfunction.

It should be noted that there has always been a social and political conservatism accompanying China's sexual openness. It is within the context of the more recent political and economic 'opening up' and a deep sense of conservatism that debates have been raised as to whether China has really opened up over the past two decades. One general criticism is that contemporary China is an open economy, but a closed society. This criticism is directed at two main concerns. First, despite China's tumultuous economic growth, some segments of Chinese society have not prospered during the past two decades. Second, while there has been change as a result of opening up, China remains an authoritarian communist party-state that is not prepared to give up its political leadership or control over the public media. Neither does the party-state want to lose its influence over the family or private life. It is thus of paramount importance not to make rash assumptions about how much China's opening up has contributed to practices of 'capitalism', 'democracy' or 'the rule of law'.

### ***The importance of 'opening up'***

The popular view in Chinese society is that it is important for China to open up, regardless of the influx of undesirable foreign influences. The rationale behind this is that China's opening up is thought to be able to bring about practices such as 'capitalism', 'civilisation', 'democracy' and 'the rule of law'. From the Chinese perspective, it is only by opening up that China can develop its economy and society, and thereby ensure its sovereignty and independence. Perhaps equally important is that 'opening up' embraces the spirit of change. This is in resonance with Deng Xiaoping's call for Chinese people, as Jos Gamble (2003, p. 23) reports, to change their thinking (*huanhuan naojin*), literally to 'change brains'. Opening up is a fact of life in China that both policy-makers and citizens live and breathe. It operates as a much-cherished and foreign (or Western) characteristic of progress and modernity. It is also concerned with individual satisfaction and social stability. The momentum of opening up is inevitable and will carry on, as China has a stake in the social and economic success of *kaifang* (Ho, L. 2005). Robert Gamer (1999, p. 391) comments: 'All factions of China's leaders – even those most culturally and politically conservative and its army – are deriving extensive benefits from China's economic dealing with the outside world that began with the 1978 reforms. So are its people.' China's opening up is also accelerated especially by overseas Chinese and its key trading partners who have a strong vested interest in ensuring continued prosperity for China (Gamer 1999, p. 392).

Clearly, 'opening up' does not mean that Chinese society is open to all foreign practices, but rather, to possibilities and opportunities, which refer primarily to allowing 'an inflow of foreign capital, technology, expertise, and goods and to promoting export of the latter' (Gamble 2003, p. 18). In practice, 'opening up' represents, as reported by James Farrer (2002, p. 25), 'the official politics of economic, social, and cultural liberalisation that have governed China since

the late 1970s'. In effect, China's recent history of reform and opening up has witnessed tension between reformists and conservatives. The reformists are represented mainly by students, academics and certain social elites. These groups tend to press for human rights, social justice and freedom, something that is often seen by the ordinary citizens in China as an intellectual concern. The conservatives are mainly represented by certain Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members and some prominent intellectuals. These groups seem to be more interested in preserving authoritarian rule and privilege than in China's opening up. In doing so, they take a cautious approach (Xiao 2003, p. 60). Thus, the social reality of 'opening up' is at times criticised as favouring the intellectuals or producing 'fat officials and skinny citizens'. In a nutshell, there are growing tensions between opening up and guarding the door. Nonetheless, both reformists and conservatives are questioning to what extent, and at what pace, Chinese society should open up to the outside world.

### ***'Opening up' and nationalism***

China has been experiencing rapid and radical socio-economic transformations that have greatly outstripped political reforms. These transformations have opened up a public space for Chinese from diverse backgrounds to create new visions of China's future and Chinese identities. Indeed, the gathering pace of social and economic change symbolises a fresh form of nationalism and national identity, amid China's emergence as the fastest-growing economy of our time.

Significantly, China's 'awakening' has fuelled a rising nationalism.<sup>11</sup> At a moment of profound change, there is a search, with some urgency, for a 'new' sense of self-importance and national pride, as China's opening up continues to gather momentum. Research shows that China's opening up coincides with a strong desire to rebuild 'a new China' imbued with a drive to seek out a new national consciousness or a unique Chinese spirit (Goodman 2007). Geremie R. Barmé (1995, p. 209) argues that China's increasing openness has triggered the re-emergence of an anti-foreigner nationalism, a sentiment that is strongly expressed in some segments of the Chinese intelligentsia. As Chin-Chuan Lee (2003, p. 3) notes, this anti-foreigner sentiment 'has historically been associated with perceived domestic weaknesses'. This sentiment, for Barmé (1995, p. 210), is synonymous with a form of 'Chinese narcissism'. Barmé (1995, p. 234) also notes that China has publicly considered itself 'the most "progressive" force on the international scene' since the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and that there are new imaginings of China's national revival and supremacy in this 'Asia-Pacific century'.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, Benedict Anderson (1991, p. 2) is correct in pointing out that:

Since World War II every successful revolution has defined itself in national terms – the People's Republic of China, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and so forth – and, in so doing, has grounded itself firmly in a territorial and social space inherited from the prerevolutionary past.

***'Opening up' and a national identity***

'China' is often reduced to 'a single, homogenous, and undifferentiated group' (Gamble 2003, p. xiv). 'Chineseness' is typically framed in terms of its geopolitical boundaries. In everyday discourse, most people tend to identify something or somebody as 'Chinese' in a collective manner. This collective description of China or Chineseness is also favoured by the Chinese government, as Jos Gamble (2003, p. xiv) argues, because it is in the Chinese party-state's interest to produce a collective of disciplined citizens that positively identify with the nation-state. In a provocatively titled article, 'Fuck Chineseness', Allen Chun (1996, p. 111) writes that 'China' is often understood or perceived as 'an unambiguous and unquestionable entity' or 'an unquestioned object of gaze'. Suzanne Z. Gottschang (2001, p. 90) argues that the assumption of a single Chinese culture is built on a set of Confucian values, upholding 'stability, collectivity, and patriarchal authority'. As these studies suggest, there is a deeply entrenched notion of China as a unified culture or people – a notion that is understood on the basis of shared traits and traditions among the Chinese.

This perceived unity is a political and historical construct. It is a form of essentialism that presupposes a fixed and homogenous Chinese identity. It is an approach to identity that should be rejected. As Allen Chun (1996, p. 114) points out, 'China' has never been clearly defined in terms of 'material culture, ethnicity, or residence'. Likewise, as Wang Gungwu (1991, p. 1) notes, 'Chineseness' is so unclear and elusive that the Chinese government 'will find conscious discussion of Chineseness embarrassing unless it can define it to fit its present situation'. Wang (1991, p. 1) notes that the concept or rhetoric of Chineseness is indefinable 'without reference to time and the processes of change', which have been part of Chinese history and culture. That is to say, for Wang, it is essential to consider Chineseness in terms of its historical identity. In Ien Ang's (2001, p. 24) *On not speaking Chinese*, she states that the notions of 'precariousness' and 'indeterminacy' are significant markers of her Chinese identity. By this, Ang means that it is dangerous to construct a fixed position from which one can speak as an ethnic Chinese. Tu Wei-ming (cited in Chun 1996, p. 124) suggests that a new category of Chinese diaspora has emerged, under a vague description of 'cultural China'. Cultural China, according to Tu, is ambiguously represented by three groups: (1) ethnic Chinese (mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore), (2) overseas Chinese communities, and (3) intellectuals and elites who are concerned about Chinese culture and society. What Tu argues is that essential Chineseness is located more outside than inside the People's Republic of China.<sup>13</sup> The title of Tu's article, 'Cultural China: the periphery as the centre', is meant to capture this argument. At the same time, Larissa Heinrich and Fran Martin (2006, p. 14) propose 'a dispersion of China and Chineseness' to encapsulate 'the shifting, plural, and internally discontinuous meanings of Chinese identity' in the contemporary world.

As this body of research illuminates, notions of China or Chineseness are not fixed or homogenous categories. What it means to be 'Chinese' is a compelling



notion, which is grounded in ever-changing local and international contexts of power and meaning that cannot be neatly organised under the all-encompassing banner of China or Chineseness.

Given the competing arguments over what constitutes 'China' or 'Chineseness', a study of China is timely and imperative. China offers a productive site for exploring increasing openness to global connection, economic viability, mobility, division and flux. This is the site where the emergence of what appears to be modern and authentic Chinese identities, including Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities, are constantly negotiated and experienced. It is thus essential to examine how the multiple and ever-shifting identities of China and Chineseness are central to making sense of Chinese gayness in China, while acknowledging 'a greater China' identity at the same time. In doing so, this study serves to explain how the articulation of same-sex identity in urban China is actively influenced by a host of interlocking factors. They are local *gay* activism, an increasingly globalised *gay* culture, the same-sex movements in the diasporic Chinese communities, and the emergence of a *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace.

### ***Becoming and being gay and lesbian***

While same-sex attracted individuals have a strong desire to represent an 'authentic' or 'indigenous' same-sex identity within a specific cultural context, the effects of hegemonic global gayness cannot be overlooked. For example, dominant practices, ideas and signs of global gayness that developed in the West have certainly arrived in China. As a result, it is often said that a 'modern', Westernised gay and lesbian culture has recently been absorbed and copied by the 'out' Chinese individuals who tend to employ a Western gay and lesbian agenda to subvert heteronormativity and discriminatory practices in society.

There is, however, little copying of the mainstream Western gay politics of employing the rhetoric of human rights as a claim to assert the legitimacy of sexual diversity, and push for visibility and social change in China. This is because this politics, central to Western constructions of gay and lesbian identities, is considered by some non-Western gay activists, including some of those in China, to be in conflict with local cultural traditions. Furthermore, same-sex politics in contemporary China is complicated by rivalry and conflict among elite same-sex groups. There is a competition for foreign funding and international representations among these local networks: gay-oriented website operators, *tongzhi* (a same-sex attracted Chinese man or woman) hotline organisers, NGOs, a few voluntary groups and informal social groups.<sup>14</sup> On the whole, the politics of identity in China rejects the 'confrontational' idea of disrupting family and community ties as a result of coming out<sup>15</sup> – that is, Chinese traditions prescribe that primacy should be given to family ties and social harmony over an individual's sexual identity or pleasure.

Instead of an overt politics of identity, gay activism in China is often linked with Western-operated sexual health groups. For instance, the Ford Foundation and the World Health Organisation, among other international groups, conduct

programmes on sexual health and HIV/AIDS in China. Nonetheless, these Western groups have little direct impact on the formation of same-sex identity in China, despite their participation in local programmes, 'where Western values and interests can exercise their influence and constitute a check-and-balance power against local dominion and control' (Ho, J. 2005, p. 152). One criticism among some Chinese gay activists concerns the utilitarian nature of these foreign groups, whose primary aim is to obtain experience and data through collaboration with local networks, rather than enhance awareness of gay rights in China. The other criticism concerns the ways in which gay rights in China are often associated with the claim for human rights represented by foreigners/Westerners. Thus, Chinese gay groups are generally cautious of the politics of cross-cultural (mis)representations of same-sex identity in China.

In this connection, Lisa Rofel (1999a, 2007) and Chou Wah-shan (2000a, 2000b, 2001) indicate that 'global' gayness fails to represent same-sex identity in urban China. They stress that the articulation of Chinese same-sex identity is not necessarily subject to the hegemonic influence of Western gay and lesbian networks, despite an apparent global convergence of same-sex culture in urban China. Today, a number of *tongzhi* still resist a Western or a modern gay and lesbian identity. They deliberately do not associate with foreign gay or lesbian networks partly because they are wary of foreigners, and partly because they believe that the global influence of homosexuality is tainted with un-respectability.

Chou Wah-shan's argument for the culturally specific identity of Chinese *tongzhi* may be seen as growing discontent with the dominance of global gayness. As Chou (2000b, p. 1) stresses, the emergence of *tongzhi* politics in the diasporic Chinese communities symbolises a sentiment to establish an 'indigenous' Chinese same-sex identity and culture that 'need not reproduce the Anglo-American experiences and strategies of lesbigay liberation'. Chou represents an important voice of resistance to the imposition of a Westernised *gay* or *lesbian* identity in China.

Typically, the recent emergence of Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities in urban China has been seen as a sign of modernity. The dominant perception is that the individuals who call themselves *gay* or *lesbian* and appear in gay-oriented places in China are 'out', well-off, cosmopolitan, university educated and internet literate. All these qualities assume a desire to be part of the affluence and freedom associated with the rich modern, Western world. However, these manifestations should not be reduced to a representation of a modern, Westernised gay and lesbian identity, but may be interpreted as the appearance of a fragmented identity. In reality, the notion of a modern, Westernised homosexual identity has not saturated China. What appears is, to paraphrase Tom Boellstorff (2004a, p. 185), merely a host of 'fragmented concepts of [globalised] homosexuality gleaned through the mass media'. There are elusive images and ideas about the Western-style gay world, communicated primarily through the commercialised media and the internet in China. For instance, there are no pride parades in China. Many Chinese *tongzhi* are not aware of the significance of rainbow flags or pink triangles. The mainstream Western gay agenda is almost non-existent or disallowed. Only a few

gay-run groups organise activist-like events or activities in a low-profile manner. The political context of Chinese gayness is compounded by an ambiguous legal system. The phrase *tongxinglian* (same-sex love) does not appear anywhere in Chinese law.<sup>16</sup> The articulation of Chinese same-sex identity in urban China is gradually divorced from traditional family and community ties and an ancient Chinese history of homoeroticism.

In short, many same-sex attracted Chinese in China are still exposed to great vulnerability. It is this vulnerability that both binds and splits the local Chinese and global same-sex networks, and witnesses a struggle for representing an 'authentic' Chinese same-sex culture among the diasporic Chinese same-sex communities. This vulnerability reinforces the formation of a decentred identity, expressed through an incomplete but dominant model of Western homosexuality, which is overlapped with culturally determined notions of Chinese gayness.

### ***The impact of 'opening up'***

Prior to the introduction of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms and the Open Door Policy in the late 1970s, the subject of same-sex relationships was basically taboo. According to Tze-lan D. Sang (2003) and Harriet Evans (1997), there was no mention of same-sex relationships in official discourse between the 1950s and the 1970s. Neither was the subject mentioned in China's laws, mass media or scientific reports (Wan 2001, p. 49). Although there were no laws against homosexuality before 1980, sodomy was treated as a crime if it was implicated with 'non-consensual and/or violent homosexual acts, and acts of same-sex with minors', according to an interpretation made by the Chinese Supreme Court in February 1956 (Li 2006, pp. 82–3). During the Cultural Revolution period (1966–76), same-sex attracted Chinese were not entirely victims of social or political oppression, but many of them lived in fear of ill-treatment and persecution (Li 2006, p. 83). Consider Wan Yanhai's (2001, p. 49) comment on same-sex life before opening up:

During those times when the ordinary people of China were completely ignorant of homosexuality, we have [sic] no way of knowing how many misunderstandings and personal tragedies occurred. All lesbians and gays were effectively forced to lead double lives, and the great bulk of the rest of the population were unaware of their very existence.

Since the introduction of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms and the Open Door Policy in the late 1970s, a degree of openness to same-sex relationships has gradually emerged (Wan 2001, p. 49). This is evident in several landmark developments. In 1981, the health specialist Zhang Mingyuan wrote an article for a medical magazine on same-sex relationships expressed in the classical Chinese novel *Hongloumeng* (*A dream of red mansions*). This article probably represented the first public discussion of same-sex relationships in contemporary China (Wan 2001, p. 50). In 1997, the law was revised to the extent that it could no longer

penalise private same-sex conduct in the name of 'the crime of hooliganism', which referred to a range of actions that were condemned as being 'immoral', 'antisocial', 'anti-socialist' or 'perverse' (Wan 2001; Li 2006).

In 2000, Cui Zi'en and Shi Tou came out publicly to discuss same-sex relationships with Li Yinhe on a programme aired on Hunan Satellite Television, a first of its kind in China (Sang 2003, p. 172).<sup>17</sup> More recently, in 2001, homosexuality as a mental disorder was officially deleted from the Chinese Psychological Association's list of mental disorders.<sup>18</sup> In 2003, the School of Public Health of Fudan University in Shanghai offered a course, 'Homosexuality, Health and the Social Sciences', for graduate students.<sup>19</sup> This was the first time such a course was made available at a Chinese university. In 2005, a Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* film festival was successfully held for the first time, despite the fact that it was forced to relocate from Beijing University to the Dashanzi art district of Beijing. The festival included gay-oriented films from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and France.

The *gay* rights movement in greater China has also provided inspiration for exploring 'Chinese' same-sex identity in mainland China. For instance, the first *lesbian* activist group, *Women Zhijian (Between Us)* was founded in Taiwan in 1990.<sup>20</sup> The First Hong Kong Gay Film Festival was held in 1998, and has been held again since (Sanders 2005 p. 46). The first pride parade was held in Taiwan in 2003, in support of government plans to legalise same-sex marriage.<sup>21</sup> In 2006, Ang Lee, the Taiwanese-born film-maker, won the Best Director Oscar for his movie *Brokeback Mountain*, which told a story about male same-sex bonding. By and large, these developments have given hope and confidence to social groups and gay rights activists across Chinese societies, and are evidence of an increasing openness to same-sex experience in China.

### ***Gay-friendly spaces***

The emergence of urban gay-friendly spaces in China is thus a recent social development, which coincides with a number of emerging discourses. One is the urgent appeal for HIV/AIDS education within China itself. The second is the spread of Westernisation, capitalism, and Western gay and lesbian practices and activism. The third is the proliferation of international HIV/AIDS networks and gay-oriented websites in China. As Lisa Rofel (1999a, 2007) indicates, recent enormous shifts in China have facilitated the emergence of self-identified *gay* individuals and gay-friendly spaces. Rofel (1999a, p. 451) writes:

In the past five years in China, for example, cosmopolitan cities have witnessed a veritable explosion of people who call themselves gay. Semipublic spaces marked gay have proliferated. Beijing has at least five gay bars; weekly salon discussions; a national hotline; books, magazines, and videos from abroad; conferences; and informal gatherings in people's homes.

As Rofel (1999a, 2007) points out, the spread of the Western-oriented concepts of 'gay assertion' and 'gay identity' in urban China has been extraordinary. In

close connection with this is the growing phenomenon of a visible *gay* scene in almost every Chinese city since the late 1990s (Berry 1996a, 1996b; Wan 2001; Sang 2003; Fang 2004). More specifically, there has been increasing visibility of Chinese *gays* and, to a lesser extent, *lesbians* in urban China.<sup>22</sup> On the whole, research reports that gay-friendly spaces in urban China are increasingly open to transnational flows of gay people and practices. These spaces facilitate the formation of gay-friendly networks, and yet are often short-lived, scattered and low-profile, and formed mainly for social purposes. There are no political or formal same-sex organisations to represent the interests of the same-sex community in China. For many same-sex attracted Chinese in China, these spaces signify the start of their coming out and involvement with the same-sex community.

### **Coming out in Chinese cyberspace<sup>23</sup>**

The emergence of urban *gay* scenes in China has been, and is still being, facilitated by the advent of the internet. For those who have access, the internet in China opens opportunities of various kinds. The internet signifies a critical movement for Chinese netizens (*wangmin*) to cross cultural and national borders in cyberspace.<sup>24</sup> At present, there are about 300 to 400 gay-oriented websites allowing Chinese *gay* netizens to search, with caution and urgency, for a sense of identity and community, not only in China, but also elsewhere (Zhu 2004; Cristini 2005). *Gay* netizens in China are increasingly exposed to the transnational gay scene via the internet, where notions of ‘coming out’, ‘gay rights’, ‘gay marriage’ or ‘individualism’ are widely promoted. These notions enhance general awareness of identity and community, and yet they tend to lead some *gay* netizens in China to imagine the Western gay world as a gay haven, where gender or sexual variation is the norm.

The same-sex population in China arguably faces an uncertain future, despite Chinese society’s increasing openness to same-sex experience. This openness is highly strategic. On a national level, the Chinese party-state’s relative openness always demands political subservience. The party-state will not tolerate any activities that threaten its moral leadership in shaping a ‘healthy’ (*jiankang*) society. Such a ‘healthy’ society, as propelled by the momentum of opening up (*kaifang*), is allowed to contest certain social boundaries while still having to adhere to the party line. After all, homosexuality in China will not be openly and officially accepted, as it is still seen in some quarters as an unhealthy expression of gender and sexuality. Having said this, the twenty-first century has seen Chinese authorities open channels with local and international sexual health groups in an effort to curb an increase of HIV/AIDS infection in China, which is supposedly linked with homosexuality.

On a social level, homophobia has certainly not disappeared, although China’s opening up is thought to have changed people’s attitudes and behaviours, allowing Chinese society to be more tolerant of same-sex experience. In contemporary Chinese society, gender or sexuality is still not commonly understood as an

individual's identity. Along similar lines, the (same-sex) population in China is stratified by massive differences between urban and rural regions. The reality of being *gay* in the countryside is extremely complex and is often complicated by traditional patriarchal values and reproductive imperatives. This reality is also compounded by a legal ambiguity towards same-sex relationships.

Today, the laws in China neither prohibit homosexuality nor protect its legal status. There is no law prohibiting same-sex sexual intercourse between two consenting adults in mainland China. According to Li Yinhe (2006), those who were arrested were not arrested because of same-sex practice, but because of social discrimination. To quote Li (2006, p. 82):

[T]he most serious threat to same-sex sexual conduct between consenting male adults comes neither from legal sanctions nor from police arrest in the name of public security, but rather from social prejudice, which has resulted in the arbitrary imposition of administrative penalties and Party disciplinary sanctions.

On a personal level, only a few same-sex attracted Chinese, mostly cultural elites, are open about their sexuality. But they also see coming out as problematic. In *Beyond the closet*, Steven Seidman (2004, p. 7) writes that 'simply coming out does not rid us of feelings of shame and guilt, and that visibility alone does not threaten heterosexual privilege'. It is thus vital to ask what happens to them after they have come out. Indeed, some same-sex attracted Chinese are open only to the extent that their traditional and social identities are protected from intolerance and discrimination. Many of them reject the need to be 'out'. As Chris Berry (1996a, p. 40) remarks: 'It is still impossible to be publicly gay and retain respectable employment [in China].' Frequently, they reconcile their personal identity with the social obligations to maintain family ties and social harmony, an approach that is appreciated as an avoidance of confrontation or conflict. In most cases, same-sex identity in China is concealed. It is the identity that dare not speak its name; whereas the central strategy of Western gay assertion is to render it speakable. What follows is an attempt to illuminate how the multitude of 'local' and 'global' politics of identities plays a vital part in constructing same-sex identity in urban China.

### **The imaginary power of globalisation and global gayness**

The world we live in today is characterised by a new role for the imagination in social life. To grasp this new role, we need to bring together the old idea of images, especially mechanically produced images (in the Frankfurt School sense); the idea of the imaginary (*imaginaire*) as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations, which is no more and no less than the collective representations of Emile Durkheim, now mediated through the complex prism of modern media.

(Appadurai 1996, p. 31)

Arjun Appadurai's (1996) *Modernity at large* is a critical resource of contemporary discourses and ideologies. It provokes thoughts on some of the ways in which the imaginary power of globalisation is becoming more pronounced in the modern world than ever before. As Appadurai (1996, p. 31) suggests, 'the image', 'the imagined' and 'the imaginary' are critical terms, albeit filled with paradoxes and resistances, that help individuals better understand the collective representations and aspirations in this 'new' global order. Significantly, the imaginary power of globalisation is central to all forms of power relation and, in its collective form, has come to drive many individuals into seeing the world with different visions.

Marshall McLuhan and Bruce R. Powers (1989), together with others, pronounce that the world is becoming 'a global village'. To a degree, the electronic mass media are able to offer sources of transformation of human relationships and perceptions across time and space, allowing people to connect with each other and live on a global scale. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) seek to conceptualise the world as a 'rhizome'.<sup>25</sup> They stress the conditions of rootlessness, fragmentation and alienation in modern society, which is increasingly shaped by the globalisation of electronic mass media. Benedict Anderson (1991) speaks of the modern world as 'an imagined community' where members of the community appear to have a mental image of a community or a nation that is organised in ways that are cohesive and united. As Anderson (1991, p. 6) explains, a nation 'is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'. Indeed, there are multiple imaginaries of globalisation that have come to create sources for imagining identity, nationalism, tradition, modernity and community. All these imaginaries are rigorously pursued to represent shifting sites of the east/west divide, global/local claims to knowledge, and clashes of culture. These imaginaries, following Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (2005, p. 3), offer us a space to make sense of the 'friction' that is highly unpredictable and is inevitably (re)produced in global encounters. 'Friction', in this sense, is meant to underline 'the importance of interaction in defining movement, cultural form, and agency' (Tsing 2005, p. 6).

Conversely, there are resistances to the imaginaries of globalisation as a dominant cultural form. On this point, Anthony Giddens' (2003) *How globalisation is shaping our lives* encapsulates three recurring themes of (anti)globalisation. They are anti-Americanism, anti-corporation and anti-inequality. One view held is related to the spread of American influence around the globe. To put it simply, this may be considered a backlash against American cultural imperialism. The second is largely concerned with the presence of large corporations. There is a sentiment of anti-corporation that is also often associated with the complex process of Americanisation. Another view finds its expression of globalisation through a concern for world inequality. The problem of inequality has recently been pushed to the forefront of academic debates. Increasingly, many academics and researchers note that globalisation has intensified the uneven distribution of resources between developed and developing nations.

Of course, globalisation cannot be reduced to a simple recapitulation of any single historical process. Neither is globalisation parallel to Westernisation/Americanism, nor an aggrandisement of international corporations. This point is made by considering that it is important not to dismiss American dominance particularly in three domains: 'the economic, the geopolitical and the cultural' (Giddens 2003, p. xxii). Another important consideration is that globalisation is far from global and is inevitable. Amartya Sen (2001), a Nobel Prize laureate in economics, once spoke of globalisation as a process 'from which there is no escape and no great reason to seek escape'. Sen seems to suggest that globalisation is highly uneven, but inevitable, and that this uneven distribution of globalisation is part of the larger process of globalisation. In a nutshell, globalisation is fraught with contradictions and conflicts. To an extent, globalisation is, as Chin-Chuan Lee (2003, p. 23) comments, 'a paradoxically universalising and localising, homogenising and heterogenising, centering and detentering process'.

The discourse of globalisation is unquestionably an immense subject. It is hard to locate a departure point from which to examine the ever-shifting discourse of globalisation, a discourse that is changing even at this point of speaking. Hence, the imaginary power of globalisation is singled out as a mitigating factor in the present analysis. In other words, globalisation is a *factor* in, rather than the *focus* of, this analysis. This approach is intended to illustrate how identity is vigorously imagined in the context of the ever-increasing globalisation of cultural products and ideologies. It is based on this approach that the background knowledge of globalisation is wedded to the following discussion of 'global gayness'.

There has been extensive research that examines how 'global gayness', in conjunction with the influence of economic and cultural globalisation, is exported to, and may have been appropriated by, non-Western cultures (Adam, Duyvendak and Krouwel 1999; Rofel 1999a, 2007; Martin 2003; Sang 2003; Altman 2004; Boellstorff and Leap 2004; Jackson 2004). As this body of research demonstrates, researchers take great pains to comprehend the 'new' ways in which globalisation has made an impact on the construction, regulation and imagination of gayness in non-Western societies. They all ask a pointed question – that is, how have Western notions of gay and lesbian identity been appropriated in non-Western societies as a result of increasing global interconnectedness? The heated argument about the subject matter indicates that there is no consensus as to what the answer might be.

One line of argument is that globalisation brings about sexual and cultural 'hybridity' in non-Western societies (Martin 2003). 'Hybridity' is a malleable concept. This book thus offers to interrogate some of the parameters of how hybridity can be understood and contested. For example, hybridity is interpreted by Marwan M. Kraidy (2005) as a complex cultural and historical effect of globalisation. According to Kraidy's (2005, pp. vi–vii) conceptualisation, hybridity is:

an association of ideas, concepts, and themes that at once reinforce and contradict each other ... . Hybridity must be understood historically in a



triple context: (a) the development of vocabularies of racial and cultural mixture from the mid-nineteenth century onward; (b) the historical basis of contemporary hybrid identities; and (c) the juncture at which the language of hybridity entered the study of international communication.

Another key researcher of hybridity is Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2001), who asserts that hybridity challenges the processes of homogenising, modernising and Westernising, but attaches importance to a multi-dimensional study of the subject. Pieterse (2001, p. 220) writes: 'What hybridity means varies not only over time but also in different cultures, and this informs different patterns of hybridity.' Both Kraidy and Pieterse help me identify the ways in which hybridisation is entwined with contradictions and actively resists hegemonic discourses of Westernisation, modernity and homogenisation. Kraidy and Pieterse make me keenly aware that a hybridised same-sex identity is not simply a mix of 'local' and 'global' identity. It is rather enacted by a measure of agency and subjectivity, and is constantly negotiated through the interplay between mimicry and resistance. On the subject of a hybridised same-sex identity, consider Chris Berry's (2001, pp. 212–13) argument:

Hybridisation consists in their simultaneous appropriation of the Western model of gay identity and its re-writing into established local (and possibly already hybrid rather than pure or authentic) narrative patterns. In this way they counter both local and neo-colonial forces and discourses that objectify, oppress, or are simply blind to the existence and specificity of East Asia gay identities and cultures.

This line of argument is put forward by a group of sociologists, anthropologists and cultural theorists who have foreign language skills or/and extensive ethnographic knowledge of a culture studied. They view ethnographic research as an important tool to gain insight into issues of sexual and cultural hybridity in non-Western societies. They are particularly concerned with how 'local' and 'global' identities blend into hybridity, and how cultural appropriations are selectively carried out.

For instance, Fran Martin (2003) argues that cultural appropriations are inevitably selective when cultural exchanges are taking place among various societies. Martin (2003, p. 28) writes that 'the specificities of cultural location continue to matter for the practice and conceptualisation of diverse sexualities, even in a world more than ever transnationally connected'. There is a general consensus among this group of scholars that there are significant variations in the way societies organise cultural and sexual identities. This consensus is largely based on a model of diversity and pluralism that is considered a key to the coexistence of various cultural and sexual identities. Today, the rhetoric of diversity and pluralism seems to have become a mandate for gay and lesbian activists and researchers of same-sex issues.

Another line of argument, linked to the first, is that globalisation has brought about a crisis of authenticity, re-producing conflict and division among and within

same-sex communities around the globe (Boellstorff 2004a; Jackson 2004). Many non-Western researchers stress that Western-oriented notions of gay identity and rights do not have the same meaning in non-Western societies as in the West. Others argue that Western discourses of homosexuality are insufficient to explain aspects of same-sex culture in some non-Western societies, which often allow for a richer sexual diversity than that in the West (Altman 2004, p. 63). It is evident that there is great concern for how same-sex identity can be 'authentically' represented in each culture and nation (Boellstorff and Leap 2004; Jackson 2004). This concern primarily refers to the hegemonic control of one culture or identity over another. For instance, current transgender identities, *kathoey* or *tom-dee*, in Thailand are indigenous categories, which 'largely ignore English and continue to reflect long-established Thai terminologies for same-sex eroticism' (Jackson 2004, p. 203). The term 'gay' does not adequately substitute for such local identities as *kathoey* or *tom-dee*. However, segments of Western community tend to simplify and identify these categories with gay or homosexual in Western discourse, without recognising their unique cultural heritage. This presents serious problems for researchers in the realm of global gender and sexual expression. With these problems in view, this book concentrates on these important issues. How are local gender and sexual identities recognised within the broad framework of sexual diversity? In how many diverse ways can individuals express their gender and sexual identities? Are these identities traditional or modern? And are they fading away or evolving?

A further line of enquiry examines the emergence of a global politics of gay and lesbian identities. This discussion finds expression among many Western academics of gender and sexuality studies, as well as Western-based diasporic researchers. For instance, some researchers note that gay and lesbian cultures and movements have 'flourished in (or been impeded by) various national environments' (Adam, Duyvendak and Krouwel 1999, p. 7). Dennis Altman (1996, 1997, 2000, 2001a, p. 86) states in *Global sex* and in other work that 'globalisation has helped create an international gay/lesbian identity, which is by no means confined to the Western world'. Some recent work reports that 'global' sexual norms have given rise to multiple meanings around identity, through a dominant understanding of neo-colonial powers (Weeks, Holland and Waites 2003). On the whole, these researchers view the presence of global (homo)sexuality as an opportunity for diverse expressions of gender and sexual identities among and within different cultures. This line of argument follows that the West equates with the global, and that 'global', 'national' and 'international' are used interchangeably. Western gay and lesbian identities are thus seen as global identities, travelling from the West across national and transnational borders. In this reading, the processes of globalisation and Westernisation are automatically thought to violate and penetrate non-Western cultures, bringing about homogenisation and Western cultural penetration. The result is that non-Western societies will naturally lose their authentic traditions or local identities, and systematically become Westernised, globalised or penetrated.

Nevertheless, there is a competing discourse to that of cultural penetration by Western imperialism or global practices. Researchers of this view counter-argue

that it is problematic to interpret globalisation or Westernisation as ‘rape’ itself. Drawing from Sharon Marcus’s theory of ‘rape scripts’, Gibson-Graham (cited in Boellstorff and Leap 2004, p. 6) states in a provocative way that globalisation may ‘lose its erection’. As these authors point out, it is problematic to assume that globalisation signifies a simple violation or penetration of non-Western cultures by capitalism or a renewed sense of Western imperialism. The assumption, as they argue, is erroneously built on the basis that emerging gender and sexual identities in non-Western societies are simply earlier forms of Western developments, or that identities are always subject to appropriation and imposition.

This simple positioning of cultural penetration by global or Western forces needs to be resisted (Appadurai 1996; Rofel 1999a, 2007; Boellstorff 2000, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2005; Jackson 2004). ‘Global’ sexual practices and identities are often predominantly framed in terms of Western notions of gender and sexuality. It is crucial to rethink the perception of a ‘global’ gay identity, as it is predicated on the assumptions of ‘the similitude of identity’ and ‘the homogeneity of values’ (Rofel 1999a, p. 470). ‘Local’ and ‘global’ patterns and identities are necessarily incomplete and problematic. Moreover, there is a need to deconstruct the blurring boundaries between ‘local’ and ‘global’ as a more engaging way to understand gender and sexual cultures around the world. The point is that it is essential to problematise the blurring boundaries between local/global, same/difference and authentic/inauthentic, as they are constantly being contested and traversed. That said, it is important to be mindful that boundary-traversing is not arbitrary. As some boundaries are transgressed, others remain or will be reintroduced. The reality is that international institutions and governments seem prepared to carve out new spaces in controlling and shaping the formation of cultural identities.

### **The structure of the book**

In Chapter 2, ‘The problematics of storytelling’, special attention is given to investigating how storytelling confronts the question of power which can be challenged by the discourse of seduction. In this chapter, the central argument is that, for many same-sex individuals in Beijing, storytelling is collectively imagined as a step towards self-exploration or even self-liberation. By extending this argument, the chapter proposes that, for many of them, storytelling can be seen as a political form of coming out of the hegemonic narrative of ‘same-sexness’ in Beijing society. Ultimately, the chapter seeks to underline how the representation and performance of stories about the same-sex community in Beijing are closely tied to the national and global imaginings of China’s opening up.

Chapter 3, ‘Fieldwork: filtering the field’, offers an ethnographic analysis. This chapter is the product of fieldwork. Its concern is to problematise how the anthropological gaze, together with the reflected and reflective gaze of the same-sex community in Beijing, co-creates narratives about the everyday lived same-sex experience in urban China. This problematisation seeks to highlight how these narratives are the results of various assumptions, imaginaries and ‘friendships’

that are endlessly (re)negotiated around the volatile power relationships between the researcher and the researched in the field. The chapter argues that it is challenging for the fieldworker to discern what is altering the power dynamics during ethnographic interaction, as the gaze involves a constant struggle over meanings that are significantly intersected with the problems of representation, legitimation and self-reflectivity.

Chapter 4, 'Speaking of same-sex subjects in urban China', is a study of the reciprocal relationship between language and identity. Consideration is given to how Chinese same-sex articulations, which are loaded with Western cultural and historical specificities, are enacted by a particular group of same-sex attracted Chinese who call themselves *gay* or *lesbian* in urban China. The aim of this chapter is to enunciate how language is performed as an instrument of action and power that is implicated in the creation and exclusion of identity. This chapter argues that Chinese same-sex articulations signal a language of social stratification within the Chinese (same-sex) community.

Chapter 5, 'The *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace: self-censorship, commercialisation and misrepresentation', investigates *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace. The chapter has two main goals: first, it analyses how the internet is employed as a system of state control and a sphere of limited freedom; second, it interrogates how some of the Chinese gay-oriented websites are increasingly (self)-censored and commercialised on the internet in China. The chapter argues that the growing commercialisation of the *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace marks a paradoxical development of the Chinese internet, where state control, a degree of freedom of expression and (self)-censorship coexist. This argument is also extended to propose that the complexity and dynamism of Chinese cyberspace ensures misrepresentation of same-sex identity, but can also produce as much homogeneity as diversity. In doing so, the chapter engages with the ever-changing processes of state surveillance, (self)-censorship, commercialisation and identity invention taking place in Chinese cyberspace.

Chapter 6, 'Modernity and authenticity', serves to develop a critical understanding of two discourses: 'modernity' and 'authenticity'. Its objective is to rationalise how 'modernity' and 'authenticity', as markers of identity, find expression in Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities in urban China. This chapter contends that same-sex attracted individuals in urban China selectively (re)appropriate patterns of gayness through a Western model of modernity, while still continuing to defend an 'authentic' Chinese same-sex identity and sense of belonging. Essentially, the chapter is premised on a framework that explores how 'modernity' and 'authenticity' shape, but do not determine, a paradoxical articulation of same-sex identity in urban China.

Chapter 7, 'Conclusion: the internal paradoxes in Beijing', gathers analyses from the preceding chapters to draw some conclusions about the local character of an emerging same-sex identity in urban China. It is an identity that is expressed in a paradoxical mode – open and decentred, but, at the same time, national and conforming to state control. These analyses are linked to a further discussion of a national same-sex identity in urban China by providing major findings.

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Elaboration is also given on how these findings help fill a gap in current Western research and theory. To sum up, it is argued that this national same-sex identity, which is based on China's opening up to the contingencies of global connection, has implications for a general theory of identity formation as an ongoing political negotiation between contested contexts.

## 2 The problematics of storytelling

### The storyteller

I am always at a loss to know-how much to believe of my own stories.  
(Irving, cited in Ridler 1953, p. 267)

In this chapter, my leading role is as a storyteller. As principal storyteller of this chapter, the author seeks not only to represent and impose meanings and experiences, but also to perform identities. As such, the author recognises that she is in a relatively privileged position, and that the question of power is constantly played out in the course of storytelling.

A caveat is necessary. This chapter seeks to present *les petits recits*, rather than a 'true' revelation, of the stories about the same-sex community in Beijing. Thus, the author suggests, together with Walter Benjamin (cited in Brooks 1994, pp. 80–1), that 'the epic side of truth, wisdom, *die Weisheit* [of storytelling] is dying out' – that is to say, this chapter does not seek to tell a tale 'truthfully'. Rather, the chapter allows storytellers, including the author, to make sense of our own identities and intentions through storytelling. This is an effort that is not to reveal the truth, but to contest the truth in the practice of everyday life.

The aim in this chapter, 'The problematics of storytelling', is to provide the reader with stories obtained from interviews in fieldwork, with an eye to making the informants and interviewees as fully present as the researcher. The central question concerns how the representation and performance of stories about the same-sex community in Beijing are tightly tied to the national and global imaginings of China's opening up.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first formulates a framework, drawn from Ken Plummer's (1995) 'symbolic interactionist theory', to spell out the ways in which stories can be analysed and interpreted. This framework addresses the importance of storytelling in ethnographic relations. Special attention is also given to how storytelling confronts the question of power, and how this confrontation sheds light on an understanding of seduction in ethnographic research.<sup>1</sup> The second part turns to an in-depth analysis of the coming-out stories of the same-sex community in Beijing, stories that were obtained from interviews in fieldwork, including the ones that could not be tape-recorded. These stories are intended

to stress how Chinese same-sex identity is transformed and variously imagined around China's opening up to globalisation. The chapter concludes that not all voices of the storytellers are in harmony. As such, it is crucial to recognise the multiple and conflicting voices in storytelling as a way to address the hegemonic relationship between narrator/narrated and researcher/researched.

It is within these parameters that the following argument is put forward – that is, for many citizens in Beijing, storytelling is collectively imagined as a means of self-exploration or even self-liberation; many of them tell their stories into the national and global imaginings of opening up, sexual openness or liberation. This argument is extended to propose that, for many same-sex attracted Chinese, storytelling can be seen as a step into a political form of coming out of the hegemonic narrative of *tongxinglian* in Beijing society. Ultimately, this argument underlines how storytelling is necessarily entangled with the question of power, and that power can be challenged by the discourse of seduction.

### **Symbolic interactionist theory**

Ken Plummer's (1995, pp. 20–4) symbolic interactionist theory suggests that storytelling can be analysed and interpreted as a host of 'joint actions', characterised by political contingencies and collective imaginings in an interactive community. In particular, this theory stresses that it is important to conceptualise storytelling as a political process. Plummer (1995, p. 26) writes:

Stories are not just practical and symbolic actions: they are also part of the political process ... 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.

According to Plummer, storytelling signifies a political process or a stream of power, flowing through social acts of resistance, empowerment and disempowerment. This political process informs us of matters relating to sexuality, class, age, and access to intellectual and economic capital. All these factors come to shape an individual's capacity to tell or not to tell a story, and affect how he/she opens up or closes down spaces for storytelling. Ultimately, the question of power is central to the dynamics of storytelling.

A flow chart is put together (see Figure 2.1) as a way to picture how this symbolic interactionist theory of storytelling is a flow of political and social processes, effectively enacted and constructed through the collective power of imagination in an interactive community.<sup>2</sup> As this flow chart illustrates, stories are not only the productions of storytellers, but also of producers, consumers, coaxers, coercers, readers, and so forth. All of them are actively involved in constructing stories around memories, lives, experiences or events, despite the fact that these stories can never reflect 'reality'. Central to storytelling is the ongoing (re)production and imposition of knowledge and meaning through collective imaginings in this interactive community where stories are told and retold in different ways and contexts, in volatile power relations. As Plummer (1995, p. 22) puts it, 'The

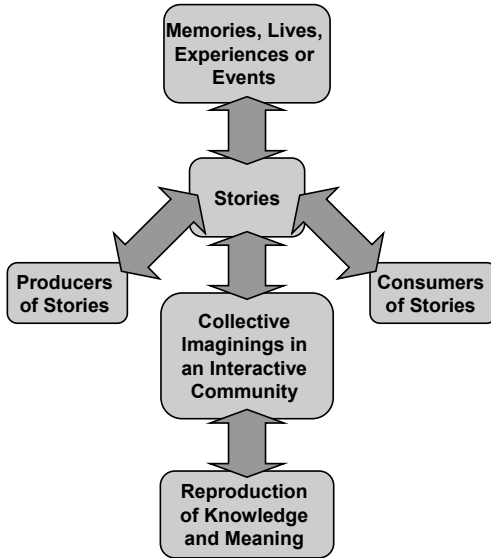


Figure 2.1 Stories as social and political processes

meanings of stories are never fixed but emerge out of a ceaselessly changing stream of interaction between producers and readers in shifting *contexts* [focus in the original text].<sup>7</sup>

This symbolic interactionist theory is intended for the analysis and interpretation of the stories about the same-sex community in Beijing. By using this theory, the importance of storytelling in ethnographic relations is highlighted in two ways. The theory helps conceptualise storytelling as a set of political processes vigorously taking place in ethnographic relations, representing endless negotiations between researcher/researched, outsider/insider and overseas Chinese/mainland Chinese. Revealingly, these processes point to the question of power. Power, in this sense, is concerned with *gay* assertion, self-actualisation, tension between public and private, state control, empowerment and disempowerment in contemporary Chinese society. On the other hand, the theory also informs us of how the formation and imposition of same-sex identities are significantly linked with the imaginary and collective powers of storytelling, heightened by China's opening up to global sexual ideas and practices. These imaginary and collective qualities of storytelling are potent agents for the formation of new Chinese (sexual) identities.

### Storytelling in contemporary China

Research into storytelling by James Farrer (2002, 2006) highlights a newly emerging social process in contemporary China – that is, the emergence of a public space for the storytelling of private matters since the era of opening up. More



specifically, stories of sexuality, love affairs and romance have become a popular genre and can commonly be seen in print and in the electronic media. One striking feature of these stories, as Farrer (2002, p. 117) remarks, is that they often self-proclaim to be 'true stories', and display 'elements of melodrama: exaggerated emotion, conflict, plot twists, and a moralising narrator'. The other feature is that these stories signify China's quest for modernity and wealth, expressed prominently through the powerful and collective imaginings of China's opening up to global capitalism. Another feature is that these stories reveal a deep concern, often with a condemnatory tone, for unhealthy pursuits in the social climate of China's opening up. Such unhealthy pursuits typically include, for instance, the worship of money, corruption, Westernisation and sexual openness.

These features are foregrounded, not to suggest *how* personal and sexual stories are narrated and have multiplied since China's opening up, but *why* this has become a recent social fact in contemporary Chinese society. It is pertinent to bring in several questions. Why have personal and sexual stories multiplied since opening up? Why has there been an apparent explosion of personal stories in some domains of the public space since opening up? Why are many seemingly willing to tell these stories? And why do they appear to have such a keen urge to tell these stories?

The clues to some of the answers to these questions can perhaps be found in talking to workers, taxi drivers, and the unemployed and retirees wandering in parks in Beijing. These are ordinary people who have modest means and a down-to-earth outlook on the rapidly changing social/sexual norms and government policies in contemporary Chinese society. They constitute useful sources to give us hints about why citizens in Beijing appear to have a strong desire to tell personal stories in the public space since opening up. Indeed, their stories articulate a changing China. Their stories are centrally linked with the rapidly changing social and political processes in contemporary Chinese society. Broadly, stories told by the ordinary Chinese point to ways in which China's opening up has contributed to 'less centralisation and government involvement in economic management, greater foreign involvement and influences in China, and increased social mobility' (Goodman 1997, p. 28). Their stories also reflect the tension between sexual conservatism and sexual openness. On this subject, most citizens in Beijing question the problematic rhetoric of sexual 'revolution' that coincides with the importation of Western-style sexual and political openness, which can be seen as a sign of moral degeneration.<sup>3</sup> They sometimes show a sense of lively defiance against established rules over the freedom of (sexual) expression in the public space. All in all, in my experience, Chinese citizens in Beijing appeared to be keen to tell stories of various kinds about contemporary Chinese society, especially when they see you as an outsider who is unattached to the Public Security Bureau (the police department) or the Chinese government.

On the other hand, Michel Foucault's (1976, 1984, 1986) *The history of sexuality* can be used as a source to offer ideas as to why the telling of personal and sexual stories has become such a popular social practice since opening up.

Foucault has charted a history of why Western societies, for three centuries, have preoccupied themselves with telling stories about sexuality incessantly and enthusiastically, while treating it as a taboo subject. These stories, according to Foucault (1976, p. 17), are characterised by ‘an incitement to discourse’ on sexuality and a proliferation of pathologised sexual identities. As Foucault explains, these stories represent an urge to speak of sexuality as a gesture to seek out the truth of the self and free the self from oppression, something that is deeply linked with repressive social practices. In Foucault’s (1976, pp. 104–5) formulation, these practices include ‘a hysterisation of women’s bodies’, ‘a pedagogisation of children’s sex’, ‘a socialisation of procreative behaviour’ and ‘a psychiatrisation of perverse pleasure’. What Foucault points out is that there is an explosion of medicalised institutional discourses on sexuality, assuming an authoritative role in rationalising sexual conduct and classifying certain sexual behaviours as perverse and pathological.

Foucault has formulated a model that is useful for understanding how some institutional practices are responsible for the explosive discourse on sexuality in Western society. This model, although based on Western experience, helps me make sense of the relationship between the newly emerging narrative on sexuality and repressive social practices in contemporary China in two directions. On the one hand, this narrative celebrates a sense of self-actualisation and freedom, albeit elusively, to tell personal and sexual stories in some domains of the public sphere. The narrative also denotes a gesture of defiance against the regulation of sexual and reproductive matters by the party-state in contemporary China. On the other hand, the explosive narrative on sexuality in China is tightly tied to the party-state’s repressive social practices. To an extent, this explosive narrative is a reaction to the party-state’s censorship over all manner of communication, including speaking, reporting and writing on subjects that are considered subversive, unhealthy or immoral. To put it simply, repression and expression coexist and contest each other. Thus, it is sensible not to interpret the outburst of sexual stories in contemporary China as a liberating narrative, essentially epitomised by China’s (sexual) openness. Rather, this seemingly liberating narrative is actually a reflection of repressive social practices in Chinese society. In a word, the question of power significantly defines the politics of telling or not telling a tale. Below, examples are given of how such power is played out.

### **A power play**

Power and control become implicated in the production of knowledge through the way researchers present their findings, when, as narrators, they position the research, write the text and select the voice(s).

(cited in Rhodes 2001, p. 8)

This section will illustrate how power and control is played out in storytelling through differences between researcher/researched, outsider/insider and foreigner/

local, particularly in terms of financial inequality, class, sexuality and Chineseness. In the stories that follow, as they are constructed and performed, they can be seen to go through stages of disempowerment, resistance and empowerment.

### ***The politics of cross-cultural collaboration***

My major roles as a fieldworker and an interviewer were challenged on my first day entering the field in Beijing, when Wan Yanhai introduced three *gay* activists to me.<sup>4</sup> I met them in a restaurant, where a private room was reserved for us. These activists were associated with the Beijing Gender Health Education Institute, a low-profile social network that aims to advance the interests of same-sex attracted Chinese in Beijing. These activists received me with civility and much suspicion. In my first meeting with them, I was questioned and interviewed. My lack of local knowledge of Beijing, and of the Beijing *gay* scene, immediately placed me as an outsider and a fledgling researcher in that field, leaving me feeling inadequate and disempowered. Almost naturally, they assumed the roles of insider and knower. All of them, in this context, seemed to be empowered by their access to these roles.

Central to the telling of this story is the politics of cross-cultural collaboration between foreign groups and Chinese *gay* activists. As a generalisation, for *gay* activists in Beijing, a sense of empowerment is often experienced through cooperation with foreign groups in which political, economic or academic supremacy lies. Having an association with foreign sexual health networks, these *gay* activists stand a good chance of gaining access to foreign funding and international representation. However, they also harbour suspicions of foreigners and outsiders. A *gay* activist, who works in the Beijing Gender Health Education Institute, is quoted to illustrate this point:

I think some of the foreign sexual health organisations come to China to obtain experience and data through collaboration with local groups. I have to say that I am sceptical of the ways in which *gay* rights in China are often associated with the human rights concerns expressed by outsiders.

(2004, pers. comm., 25 May)

Two female leaders of the same-sex community in Beijing shared this similar view:

I think some of the foreign groups are claiming too much by saying they come to China to improve lives and opportunities of *tongzhi*. Also, I think it is wrong that they make *tongxinglian* an extremely sensitive issue in Chinese politics. They know that the Chinese government sees this as an unwelcome intrusion by outsiders into local affairs, although the government is trying hard to show that Chinese society is opening up to foreign economies and technologies.

(2004, pers. comm., 28 May)

I am very concerned with the ways in which the same-sex communities in China are represented by foreigners (*laowai*). Based on what assumptions (*qianti*) do they think that they can represent us? They don't really understand (*tamen butailijie*) the domestic situation in China (*zhongguo de guoqing*). I think there is the question of representation (*daibiaoxing*). What I mean is that there are risks of cross-cultural misrepresentation of Chinese same-sex experience by foreigners or outsiders.

(2004, pers. comm., 28 May)

The stories told by these members of the Chinese same-sex communities are imbued with emotions and resistance. In the course of storytelling, they were charged with emotion. They were stories of bitter disappointment and resentment. It was perhaps with forced humility and persistence that I managed to gain access to these rather emotional and spontaneous stories. At the same time, they resisted access to their stories by an outsider like myself. Their resistance is an indication that members of the same-sex communities are suspicious of the motives of those foreign groups that tell stories about and for the Chinese in China. Despite resistance, members of the same-sex communities in China take a strategic interest in developing ties with foreign groups; this is because China does not have any political or formal *gay* organisations to narrate their stories. There are only a few *gay* groups organising activities in a low-profile manner in Beijing. These *gay* groups cannot register under a name associated with *tongxinglian*. They can only be established in the name of HIV/AIDS groups or in the guise of gender institutes. This reliance on overseas financial funding, together with a lack of government support, creates internal rivalry for funding, and subjects Chinese *gay* groups to the agenda of foreign networks. There is a fierce competition for foreign funding and international representation among Chinese *gay* networks. For example, these Chinese *gay* networks include *gay*-oriented webmasters, *tongzhi* hotline organisers, NGOs and a few voluntary informal social groups. There is also vulnerability as a sexual minority group in China. It is this competition and vulnerability that both binds and splits the relationships between local *gay* groups and foreign organisations.

Along similar story lines, there is the politics of cross-cultural collaboration between foreign groups and Chinese elites. It was almost impossible to charm Chinese elites into dropping their guard over my outsider status, especially during our first encounter. As Anne-Marie Brady's research reports (2003, p. 1), foreigners or outsiders have 'an extremely sensitive position' in the Chinese Communist Party foreign affairs system. For historical and nationalistic reasons, Chinese government authorities have always warned their citizens of undesirable foreign influence. Nevertheless, this does not mean to suggest that this foreign 'Other' is entirely received in a negative light. In reality, government warnings against foreigners have always been selective and measured. Government authorities and Chinese elites cherish opportunities to have an exchange with foreign networks. For instance, in the name of the University of Western Australia, I was granted access to meet Li Yinhe, Cui Zi'en, Pan Suiming, Beijing *Tongzhi* Hotline, Ma

Xiaonian, Cong Zhong, Fang Gang, Qiu Renzong, the editor of *Sky* (a Chinese lesbian magazine), Li Yu, three Chinese gay webmasters and others. All these people were not only elites, but also key players of the same-sex community in Beijing, in one way or another. Above all, most of them, including myself, did our part by being polite, cooperative and diplomatic. What needs to be acknowledged here is the conscious and unconscious motives of all parties, as well as the nature of self-interestedness involved in this politics of cross-cultural collaboration.

### *A cultural bastard*

My experiences with these elites were compounded by my geographical origin: Hong Kong. It is essential here to examine my subject position as a ‘Hong Kong Chinese’, a phrase that is considered by many mainland Chinese to be arrogantly expressed. One aim of this examination is to expose my outsider status, as well as the partiality of my storytelling. A parallel aim is that I have ‘a personal cultural stake’, to use Ien Ang’s (2000, p. 7) words, in finding my place under the influence of decreasing British colonisation and increasing sinicisation. The question of Chineseness is a significant issue that I needed to address when conducting fieldwork. To use Rey Chow’s (1993, p. 26) words, the Chinese elites might have had this question in mind when dealing with me: ‘How can this westernised Chinese woman from colonial Hong Kong – this cultural bastard – speak for China and Chinese intellectuals?’ Considering the schism in Chineseness between China and Hong Kong, Rey Chow’s (1993) *Writing diaspora* is an important work, wherein Chow demonstrates critical reflections on the subject in relation to her Hong Kong origin. As Chow (1993, p. 24) informs us, there are ‘social antagonisms separating mainland China and Hong Kong – such as a firmly instituted and well-used legal system, emerging direct elections, the relative freedom of speech, and so forth, all of which are present in Hong Kong but absent in [mainland] China ...’. Such antagonisms, as Chow suggests, complicate the already problematic question of Chineseness. Notice that China is almost described by Chow as a kind of ‘lack’, something that is linked with the imbalances between mainland China and Hong Kong. Chow’s analysis draws critical attention to some of the ‘imbalances’ between the two regions nowadays. And yet, it is perhaps equally notable that many aspects of mainland Chinese society have undergone radical progress, while Hong Kong society has been gradually sinicised since the handover in 1997.

After all, the complex sense of resentment against the arrogance of capitalised Hong Kong is still prevalent on the mainland, but should not be exaggerated. In my experience, I have been asked on numerous occasions if I am Chinese. I have also received contempt from a few critical interviewees, something that might be linked with the resentment of what Ien Ang (2001, p. 21) calls ‘the arrogance of advanced capitalism’ of Hong Kong. That said, my Hong Kong origin can be taken as both an advantage and a disadvantage in researching various aspects of Chineseness in China, largely depending on how a power relationship or a social hierarchy is set out.

### *A distrust of academics*

The power relationship between researcher and researched is further complicated by a distrust of academics, and hindered by the unsupportive academic environment in China. In contemporary China, the sensitive nature of *tongxinglian* arguably does not encourage Chinese researchers to carry out research into the articulation of same-sex identity. (As mentioned earlier, the link between human rights and *gay* rights makes *tongxinglian* a sensitive issue.) It is precisely the extremely sensitive nature of this subject that has produced a distrustful relationship between researcher and researched in China. It is not rare to see critical minds accuse Chinese researchers of exposing Chinese *gay* rights as a way to gain status in international academia. This distrust is also sustained by an insider belief (or a perception) that academics/researchers generally lack a genuine knowledge of the social reality of the same-sex community in China. In my conversations with individuals in *gay* bars in Beijing, some of them have made the following comments:

In China, a few researchers have been able to gain academic fame by telling stories of *tongxinglian* to the outside world. These researchers don't really know-how we live a life as *tongzhi* or *tongxinglian*. They are academics. Perhaps, I am cynical, but I think they have been exposing (*baolu*) the conditions of *gay*/human rights in China to the outside world to increase their profile (*tigao diwei*) in international academia.

(2004, pers. comm., 30 April)

Some researchers or *gay* rights activists in China utilise the sensitive subject of human rights to enhance their personal profile in Western societies. I know that some of them have received funding from international agencies. I have also heard stories about research funding being misspent or misused by members of the same-sex communities in Beijing. At the moment, nobody in China is doing any substantial research into the subject of *tongxinglian*. For the most part, some of the researchers are working on issues relating to sexual health or the prevention and intervention of HIV/AIDS. These issues are always negatively linked with *tongxinglian*.

(2004, pers. comm., 15 May)

In addition to this distrust, research into Chinese gender and sexuality is far from dynamic in mainland China, largely due to limited funding and a lack of government support. In particular, the subject of same-sex experience in contemporary China is under-researched, and is still not regarded as a respectable area for academic investigation. This is in resonance with Tarquam McKenna's (2001) comment about the recognition of *gay* teachers and students in Western academia. McKenna (2001, p. 71) writes: 'The worlds of *gay*/lesbian educators and students alike are still not considered as [sic] an arena of respectable academic inquiry.'

***An elusive bonding of Chineseness***

On the other hand, my experience with Xu Jun gave me a different insight into my roles as a fledgling Australian-based researcher and an overseas Chinese – the two roles by which he seemed to define me. Despite these roles, I was not made to feel disempowered and inadequate. With me, he chose to take on the roles of insider and knower of the *gay* scene in Beijing. His roles were assured through his involvement with Li Yinhe, Wang Xiaobo and Wan Yanhai, some of the key players of the *gay* scene in Beijing. The following fieldnotes present how and where I met Xu Jun:

I met Xu Jun at a party. It was Bruce who hosted this party at his house in the countryside of Beijing. Knowing that I was doing fieldwork into the same-sex community in Beijing, Bruce introduced Xu Jun to me. Xu Jun identified himself as *gay*. At the party, I also met other 15 people. We spoke to one another in both English and Mandarin. Almost half of the people there were *gay*. They self-identified as *gay*. It was like a party tailor-made for my research. During this evening, I was mainly talking to Xu Jun about the *gay* issues in Beijing. Xu Jun seemed to be very well-connected, knowledgeable and approachable. I was also acting as an interpreter for Xu Jun and Roy, who was particularly interested in the HIV/AIDS projects in China. There were laughter, music, food, alcohol and cigarettes. We left the party at 11.30 pm.

(Fieldnotes, 15 March 2004)

During my conversation with Xu Jun at the party, he told me the following:

I used to help Li Yinhe and Wang Xiaobo (Li's deceased husband) to obtain research data about the same-sex community in Beijing in the 1980s. I was also a colleague of Wan Yanhai. I have many connections (*guanxi*) with *tongxinglian* in China. I can put you in touch with many of them in Beijing very easily. I have been running a paying hotline in Beijing for 11 years, answering enquiries and providing counselling services related to same-sex issues of various kinds.

(2004, pers. comm., 15 March)

Xu Jun was my first field assistant. He set me up during the beginning stages of my fieldwork. With his help, I was introduced to many *gay* men, mostly middle-aged and from the lower classes of society, who had been his hotline patrons for years. I personally met five *gay* men who, according to them, had been using Xu Jun's hotline for more than four years. It is almost certain that, without Xu Jun's assurance, these *gay* men would not have come out and spoken to an outsider like myself.

Together, Xu Jun and I visited many cruising grounds on numerous occasions. We managed to forge an amiable 'friendship', which was further developed by our calculated openness and our elusive bonding of Chineseness, a subject that

has already been examined. Nevertheless, Xu Jun never entirely subjugated himself to my research agendas. Neither would he dominate. He assumed a fairly secure senior role as an adviser in our relationship. Quite often, he took charge and ordered food during our research meetings, and I would look after the costs. At times, he fended off awkward personal questions on my behalf. It was almost by tacit agreement that I went to his house, his territory, to discuss matters with him, not vice versa. He was aware that he was of interest to my research. His motivation for helping me was significant, but not without an agenda. It is speculated that he wanted me to introduce gay men from Australia to him in Beijing for an acquaintanceship or for a relationship. He also wanted to make a profit by providing opportunities for overseas gay men to meet Chinese *gay* men in Beijing. By and large, my strategy was not to challenge Xu Jun's position, and to pay him appropriate respect. In addition, 'seduction', in Baudrillard's (1987) sense, was used in the negotiation of power relationships with Xu Jun and many of my research subjects. (Baudrillard's notion of 'seduction' will be elaborated upon in the next section.)

Xu Jun and I became 'friends' in the field. He invited me to his home for dinner on several occasions. Gradually, Xu Jun allowed me to have access to his stories, which are represented below:

I am more than 50 years old now, but I have never been married in my life. I don't have a partner at the moment. I can't remember having a long-term relationship. I am *gay* (*wo shi ge tongxinglian*). Having a relationship with another man is a lot of hard work in our society. From time to time, I feel a deep sense of loss and loneliness. I can't explain why I feel that way. But it is a terrible feeling. I have been having casual sexual relationships with young men from rural areas. I got to know them through my hotline. In fact, many *tongxinglian* I have spoken to through my hotline are worse than me. They are in great pain. Some of them are suicidal. Many of them have been trapped in a loveless or sexless marriage for years ... I have been to university. I have my own property and business in Beijing. So my life is not too bad in comparison to many other *tongxinglian*. At present, I am self-employed, running a hotline to answer enquiries relating to same-sex issues. I have an adopted son who is studying Sports Science at a university in Beijing. My adopted son is good to me. He does not know that I am attracted to men. I don't think I can confide this in him. I only hope that he will look after me when I grow older.

(2004, pers. comm., 6 May)

By and large, my relationship with Chinese *gay* activists, same-sex attracted informants/interviewees and Chinese elites was structured and constrained by their preconceived attitude towards overseas Chinese, outsiders and academics. My positions and positionings as a fledgling researcher, an outsider academic and an overseas Chinese meant that it was hard, but not impossible, for me to carve out strategies to reconstruct a relationship that was conducive to this research.



‘Seduction’, in Baudrillard’s (1987) sense, proved to be a useful strategy to subvert the prevailing power relations in fieldwork. The discourse of seduction in fieldwork will be the focus of the next section.

### **The seduction of storytelling**

I have not been able to resist the seduction of an analogy.

(Freud, cited in Brooks 1994, p. 1)

As Peter Brooks (1994, p. 77) points out, storytellers are never innocent – they are always in a position to frame a narrative, and ‘the tale told may represent an attempt at seduction’. Ken Plummer (1995, p. 21) comments that storytellers such as Sigmund Freud, Oprah Winfrey and Shere Hite are highly capable of probing for stories: ‘their line of activity is to seduce stories’.

As principal storyteller of this book, I have a personal stake in seducing readers into reading the following stories of same-sex attracted Chinese in Beijing. For the same reason, I seduced my informants and interviewees into telling me their stories. The term ‘seduce’ is used to highlight that seduction permeates the politics of storytelling. The term ‘seduce’ is also used to speak of my effort to challenge the all-pervasive influence of power in narrative representation and, by extension, in social research. That is to say, it is dangerous to place too much emphasis on power as the full and ultimate principal in narrative representation or ethnographic interaction. It is helpful to recognise that a power relationship in narrative representation can be reversed and challenged by the discourse of seduction. To an extent, seduction can be employed as a ploy in storytelling or in ethnographic interaction to subvert accepted orders of power relations.

However, seduction is not a simple use of appearances to seduce. Seduction is, I argue together with Jean Baudrillard (1987, p. 43), never ‘the vulgar sense of a complicit form of desire’ – that is to say, seduction and sexuality are not necessarily coupled together. Seduction, according to Baudrillard (1990, p. 7), embodies the principle of reality that is fundamentally ambivalent and is constantly subject to ‘the play, challenges, duels, the strategy of appearances ...’, elements that are predominantly associated with femininity. It makes sense that, according to Baudrillard, seduction is deeply embroiled in the principal of reality that is often confronted with contradictions, paradoxes and challenges. But it is problematic to state that seduction is essentially interpreted as a feminine force. Why do we have to let ourselves be dictated to by a binary gendered (masculine or feminine) notion of seduction? This binary understanding of seduction should be rejected. Rather, it is productive to approach seduction as a contested but negotiated form of power. It is power that can subvert the logical and dominant relations of power, resulting in a reshuffle in role relationships. Possibly, or quite effectively, seduction can collapse the rigid boundaries between object/subject, insider/outsider and researched/researcher.

Baudrillard’s theory of seduction bespeaks some of my fieldwork experiences to the extent that seduction was a matter of social reality. Seduction, in the field, was

omnipresent, ambivalent and reversible. Seduction was used in the negotiation of the power relationships between fieldworker and informants/interviewees, relationships that were mutually or unconsciously played out by both parties. I could not seduce my informants/interviewees if they refused to be seduced, or vice versa. Perhaps I seduced them without really trying. Or was I trying? From my perspective, seduction helped break down the boundaries of these binaries: insider/outsider, *gay/non-gay*, fieldworker/informant, local/foreigner and mainland Chinese/overseas Chinese. This breakdown, as Baudrillard (1987, p. 45) puts it, makes power no longer operate in accordance with ‘a particular form of hegemonic logic’. The breakdown also makes the domains of public and private crumble, allowing narratives of personal experience to emerge.

Seduction was obviously played out when I attempted to undertake fieldwork with a self-described *lesbian* group. This group met regularly at the Half & Half *gay* bar (*yiban yiban jiuba*) at the weekend, in Sanlitun, Beijing. I devoted two months to this group of about 18 self-identified *lesbians*, led by two women who were competent, well connected, university educated, middle class and aged 31 and 41 respectively. I was under the impression that I was in their good books. Perhaps this favourable impression was due to the seductive power of my femininity. Perhaps, due to some other reasons that have already been discussed, I succeeded in seducing them into accepting me as the only *non-gay* woman in the group. On reflection, I was not fully aware of this seductive power of femininity in a Chinese *lesbian* group, especially in the beginning stages of fieldwork. Then, I gradually became a willing seducer and was ready to be seduced. There is certainly a playful spirit in seduction. Most important of all, there is a desire to empower oneself through successful seductions.

Seductions in the field gave me a degree of access to ‘insider’ narratives of what it means to be a *gay* man or a *lesbian* in Beijing, how they identify themselves and with others, and how they express their desires. My fieldnotes covered the following ‘insider’ stories narrated by two Chinese women at the Half & Half bar:

I had my first sexual experience with a married Japanese woman who used to teach me the piano. This Japanese woman was always polite and cultured. I had good feelings (*haogan*) for her. I had no idea how we began to have sex. It was her who initiated sex with me. From memory, my body was shaking (*shandou*) when I had sex with this Japanese woman for the first time. I had mixed feelings at the time: I was excited, confused, frightened and shocked. I had never been with a woman before her. After sex, I had to compose myself by smoking lots of cigarettes (*fenkuang de chouyan*) ... In the end, we couldn’t continue seeing each other as she had to go back to Japan. I really missed having intimacy with another woman.

(Fieldnotes, 6 April 2004)

You may think I am bad (*henhuai*). But, anyway ... I went for a female sex worker (*zhaoxiaojie*) once when I was on holiday in Amsterdam. I wanted to

go for the experience with a Western woman (*yangniu*). I paid US\$200.00 for this sexual adventure in Amsterdam. I don't see anything wrong for me to go to a sex worker for a sexual service. She serves me and I pay her for the service provided. Men go for a sex worker (*jiaoji*), why can't women? In terms of sexual matters and relationships, I think I am pretty open-minded (*kaifang*). I also think that we should demand more equality between men and women in China today.

(Fieldnotes, 14 April 2004)

### **Coming out: a dominant narrative**

The Western notion of 'coming out' is not only a political project of the lesbian and gay movement, but is often a cultural project of affirming the Western value of individualism, discourse of rights, talking culture, high level of anonymity in metropolitan cities, and the prioritisation of sex as the core of selfhood. The model of coming out is hinged upon notions of the individual as an independent, discrete unit segregated economically, socially, and geographically from the familial-kinship network.

(Chou 2001, p. 32)

Chou Wah-shan (2001) is quoted to illustrate that where the Western notion of 'coming out' is discussed in a non-Western context, it is almost always framed within the above-mentioned paradigms. Typically, coming out is often identified as a mainstream model of Western gay and lesbian activism that seeks to push for individual sexual rights and equality. Coming out is commonly described as a dominant narrative of the modern gay life in the West, something that is often interpreted as inspiring or life-transforming in character. Coming out is generally seen as a confrontational model of Western gay and lesbian politics of identity in the Asian same-sex communities, as it is in conflict with the familial kinship institution that is highly respected in many Asian societies.

Chou Wah-shan (2000a, 2000b, 2001) argues that coming out (*zhanchulai*) has specific cultural and political implications across the (diasporic) Chinese same-sex communities. To put it simply, for Chou, coming out in China is a challenge. Wan Yanhai (2001, p. 61) suggests that, among other things, 'the public and material manifestations of gay culture in China and the various over determinations' make coming out a thorny issue for the same-sex attracted Chinese. Both Chou and Wan maintain that coming out in the Chinese communities has no parallel equivalent in the West. Their argument is that coming out in the Chinese communities is not an individual decision. Rather, coming out is coupled with indigenous notions of *jia* (the family) and *xiao* (filial piety), values that are still central to the decision of coming out or staying in the closet in contemporary China. Research by Tom Boellstorff (2005) and Chris Berry (2001) has generally found that the family is still influential in shaping the discourse of coming out in places like China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Korea and Taiwan. That said, in contemporary China, the notion of *jia* (the family) has been increasingly influenced by China's recent

opening up, which has facilitated the importation of new ideas about marriage, reproduction, sexuality, relationship and individualism. All these ideas provide sources for people to rethink and challenge this family principle.

The above information is provided to highlight the cultural concerns that characteristically shape the storytelling of coming out in the Chinese and Asian communities at large. In particular, it is fruitful to approach coming out (*zhanchulai*) as a form of storytelling that is necessarily intersected with China's opening up to global sexual politics. Crucially, the storytelling of coming out bespeaks stories of national and global imaginings of opening up, sexual openness or liberation in contemporary China. To an extent, first, storytelling in Beijing is collectively imagined as a step towards self-exploration for some same-sex attracted Chinese; second, the telling of coming-out stories can be seen as a step towards a political form of resistance to the hegemonic narrative of *tongxinglian*.

The next section will tell stories of coming out, focusing on *where* same-sex attracted Chinese organise their social or personal life. Many of these stories are constructed, through the authorial voice, by same-sex attracted Chinese who are internet users, mostly in their early thirties, middle class, financially stable, university educated and fashionable. These people are generally aware of the notion of coming out; otherwise, coming out (*zhanchulai*) is not widely known to the same-sex community in China. Their awareness has direct consequences for how they come out and tell stories about themselves and to one another, in *gay* bars, parks, restaurants or cafes. As these stories go, they will illustrate that a few of them showed an openness to tell their stories on tape. This openness, for Plummer (1995, p. 89), is a common strategy for same-sex attracted people to 'gain access to new social worlds – an access to story tellers open to coaxing and coaching into the tales of gay and lesbian life. Here, secrecy and isolation will be broken down ...'. Strategic openness may describe the attitude of some of the same-sex attracted Chinese in Beijing, something that has arguably led to an increased visibility of *gay* venues in Beijing. Generally speaking, these *gay* venues include bars, parks, public toilets and bath houses. The following stories are selected to show where they tell their stories, where they are visible and where they come out.

### **Gay bars in Beijing**

According to a narrative by a *gay* activist (2004, pers. comm., 25 May), the emergence of *gay* bars in urban China is a recent social fact. This emergence coincides with recent research reporting that gay-oriented spaces have multiplied in urban China in the past five years (Rofel 1999a, 2007; Chou 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Wan 2001; Sang 2003). Importantly, these *gay* bars provide contingent and un-political venues for many self-identified *gay* and *lesbian* Chinese to come out in a relatively safe and comfortable environment. For example, the On/Off Bar in Beijing was a popular venue for many of my informants. My fieldnotes recorded my first visit to the On/Off Bar thus:

This was my first visit to the On/Off Bar. I went there with some of my informants on a Saturday night. We got there at about 10 o'clock. I saw many young men hanging at the door as they couldn't get a seat inside. Customers were mostly men, aged between 18 to 35 years old. Some of them looked fashionable and somewhat defiant. Many of them drank and smoked a lot. Bruce and Joseph, whom I knew, started dancing on the floor once they got in. They were embracing each other in a provocative manner. I could see them sweating as they kept on dancing. I also saw a couple of men kissing each other on the lips. There were many men dancing with men. Among them, there was one man who got on the raised platform to dance. Most men seemed to be excited to see this solo performance; they cheered. I was dancing with Roy at the time. Besides myself, there was a Chinese woman dancing with a Western woman. I could see the heavy make-up of this Chinese woman and the cleavage of her breasts, despite the dim light. The music was loud. It was mainly English songs.

(Fieldnotes, 10 March 2004)

Generally speaking, *gay* bars in Beijing allow them to imagine a community and a 'modern' identity, explore a personal relationship with a globalised gay culture, and seek out a sense of identity. Indeed, these venues constitute an essential element for the Chinese same-sex narratives. Insiders told me the following about *gay* bars in Beijing:

*Gay* bars in Beijing are patronised by many *tongzhi* who seem to know one another. If you observe carefully, you can see different people going to a *gay* bar with different purposes. Some are cruising for sex or a one-night stand. They usually come alone. Some are *money boys*. These are young things and can be quite unscrupulous. They want your money. Some are lonely hearts. They are looking for the other half. Some are looking for a sense of belonging. There are also a few Westerners and foreign tourists who are out to explore and experience the local *gay* scene. They are usually accompanied by a Chinese friend/partner. For instance, the On/Off Bar is quite a famous *gay* bar in Beijing. On/Off is probably the largest *gay* bar in Beijing. I think people go to On/Off mainly for its spacious dance floor, cross-dressing shows and gay-friendly ambience.

(2004, pers. comm., March)

I think *gay* bars in Beijing are pretty cosmopolitan. They represent spaces that allow for an exchange of Western and Chinese same-sex practices and desires. There is a lot of action going on in these spaces. Sometimes, you can see Chinese and Western gays and lesbians kiss, caress, embrace, and dance provocatively with each other. Of course, such acts and behaviours are rarely displayed to the public eye, but they are seen there. It is interesting that the boundary between the Chinese and the West is blurred in these spaces. Bodily contact is also less rigid and less bound by social and cultural convention.

(2004, pers. comm., March)

Coming out in a *gay* bar in Beijing is mostly an experience of those who have access to economic capital and those who are aged between their late twenties and late thirties. These people make use of *gay* bars as a homosocial venue to tell or listen to stories. Notably, their stories revolve around relationships, marriage or love affairs. The following accounts are some examples.

Amy was a self-identified bisexual, university educated, 31 years old and socially well connected. She was one of the big sisters of a self-described *lesbian* group with whom I conducted fieldwork. Prior to the following story, Amy had told me stories about some of the events and contradictions within the Beijing same-sex community. Here, she told a tale of her relationships:

I think Chinese society is becoming more and more *kaifang* (open). We should take an open (*kaifang*) attitude towards relationships nowadays. I have come to learn more about my own self through engaging in a number of relationships. I have had an important relationship with a woman for ten years. I have been married to a man for one year too. After my divorce, I cohabited with another man for half a year. Since 2002, I have been meeting and dating both men and women via the internet. I am now married again, but to a *gay* man. This is a kind of *mingyi hunyin*, a proforma marriage between a *gay* man and a *lesbian*. This kind of arrangement can be seen and is advertised on some of the *tongzhi* websites. My marriage is mainly to please my parents. I cannot let my aged parents know that I am attracted to women. My parents are now over 70 years old. In my marriage, I do not really have sexual intimacy with my 'husband'. But we sometimes just play around.

(Amy 2004, pers. comm., 13 April)

Stanley was the 'husband' of Amy. With the help of Amy, I was able to meet him in a bar and listen to his stories. He was 32 years old and self-identified as *gay*. He had a postgraduate degree in English Language and Literature. I asked about his view on marriage and relationships:

To my mind, it would be a tragedy if a strictly male *tongzhi* (*chun nantongzhi*) married a heterosexual woman. What is the good of this marriage? Sexual frustration? Emotional frustration? I think I have known my own self well enough not to marry a woman. As far as my marriage with Amy is concerned, I see it as a strategy to please my parents who are now over 70 years old. I think some other people in China are doing this too in order to escape from family pressure to get married. I think I would come out to my parents if they were 50 years old, but not now. Despite everything, I think our society is getting more open towards *tongxinglian*. People are now getting more tolerant of it.

(Stephen 2004, pers. comm., 19 April)

Jie Fan was forty-one years old, university-educated and married with a teenage son. She worked as a real estate agent. She understood herself to be attracted to

women. With the introduction and assistance of another self-identified *lesbian*, Jie Fan agreed to meet me in the Half & Half Bar. In this meeting, she was chain-smoking while half willingly telling her stories:

My marriage was a failure; it was largely to please my parents. Prior to my marriage, I was in love with a woman for more than ten years. However, this woman had to leave China for Singapore, as she was involved with *Falungong* [a religious group which is still considered to be subversive by Chinese government authorities]. I miss her immensely. I feel insanely lonely from time to time. On a few occasions, I seriously wanted to commit suicide. My parents do not know that I am a *lesbian*. My brother and sister know something about it. But my family members do not want to talk about it. They are too ashamed to talk about it. They are not open enough.

(Jie Fan 2004, pers. comm., 27 April)

Nevertheless, *gay* bars can be a source of homosociality as well as anxiety. Not all same-sex attracted Chinese find it safe or comfortable to come out and tell stories in *gay* bars. Some of them deliberately stay away from *gay* bars, partly because they do not want to mix with bar-goers, and partly because they are unimpressed by the environment of bars. Most importantly, these people have a deep concern about being visible in places labelled as *gay*. Consider the following stories.

I met Chu Ting in his workplace. Chu Ting was a webmaster of gay-oriented website [www.soyoo.cn](http://www.soyoo.cn). According to Chu Ting, this website aimed to give an 'objective' and 'positive' report of the everyday *gay* life to the wider community. Chu Ting was a self-identified *gay* man, 30 years old, never married and university educated. I had an audio-taped interview in which he expressed some of his views on *gay* bars in Beijing. He said that he did not frequent *gay* bars. He remarked:

Perhaps, I am not open enough. I am a bit traditional and conservative. I do not like going to *gay* bars. To my mind, these are places of debauchery (*xialiu de defang*). They are vice dens. They are not my scene. Also, I do not want to be seen in those places. Some people go there for a one-night stand and entertainment. Others go to get drunk. Of course, there are some others who go to socialise or meet one another. I would not want to meet someone in a *gay* bar.

(Chu Ting 2004, pers. comm., 21 April)

Chao Ying and I met in a restaurant. Chao Ying was 27 years old and university educated. He had a partner, but he dodged my question of how long he had been going out with his partner. He identified himself as *gay*. He was a fitness coach. It was not easy to ask him to tell his stories in this restaurant, as he did not feel free to talk. Whenever a waitress came close to our table, he stopped talking. Finally, his stories were successfully taped, as he asked the restaurant staff to stay away from us. The restaurant was fairly quiet at the time. His low opinions of local *gay* bars can be seen in the following excerpt:

I am a *tongzhi*, but I am not fond of places like *gay* bars, Dongdan Park or Sanlihe. I have never been to these seedy places. Those who go there are usually uneducated, financially unsound and of a lower class. I would be in big trouble if I was seen visiting a *gay* bar or Dongdan Park by my colleagues. In Dongdan Park, bad things always happen too. For instance, there is male homosexual prostitution. As a *gay* man myself, I find male homosexual prostitution shameful. This kind of prostitution does not make a positive impression on our society as a whole. Some men who sell their body are not even *gay*. They just want to make quick money out of their body. In my view, *tongxinglian* in contemporary Chinese society has not been accepted yet, despite the fact that Chinese society is rapidly opening up. So in order for us to gain social recognition, we have to work on this. Male homosexual prostitution will only deteriorate our image.

(Chao Ying 2004, pers. comm., 22 April)

I met Zhang Yun at a canteen of the People's University, where we had a fairly open interview. Zhang Yun was one of the self-identified *gay* men who was quite comfortable in telling his stories in public. He was single, 30 years old and high-school educated. He had worked for the Beijing Tongzhi Hotline. According to Zhang Yun, he openly proclaimed his *gayness* at the first HIV/AIDS Conference, which was held in Beijing in 2001. He has been pursued by the local and foreign press since this proclamation. Zhang Yun had this to say:

Coming out in *gay* bars is a process (*guocheng*), I think. I used to frequent *gay* bars. At one stage, I worked as the Manager of the On/Off bar. But now I have lost interest in *gay* bars. I am tired of picking up someone and being picked up in a bar. I feel physically and emotionally drained. It has taken me to sleep with more than a hundred men for the past ten years to learn a good lesson about *gay* bars. By and large, coming out to myself, to friends and to my family has been a complex process. I have come out to my family. At present, my family knows about my desire for men, but my parents still want me to get married one day. But I can't come out in my workplace where I have just newly joined.

(Zhang Yun 2004, pers. comm., 24 April)

All in all, stories of these kinds can be multiplied. They are constructed and performed to me in such a way that I am not only a fieldworker, an interviewer or 'a journalist', but also a 'friend'. I manage to gain access to these stories by collapsing the rigid boundary between researcher/researched, outsider/insider, overseas Chinese/mainland Chinese and non-*gay/gay*, by way of seduction. As emphasised earlier, seduction, in this instance, should not be reducible to the use of sexuality to seduce. Seduction is rather the self-conscious use of strategy and diplomacy to break down the rigid hierarchical power relationships that are deeply entrenched in the reality of ethnographic interaction. Despite seduction, intelligent informants and interviewees of high social status tended to exercise



caution with the stories they told for fear of being misinterpreted or misquoted. Otherwise, most of them were relatively open to telling stories on the basis of mutual trust and a lack of political repercussions. By engaging in the political process of storytelling, they are presented with an opportunity to give voice, both by themselves and through the researcher. This is a process that is arguably a step into a political form of coming out of the hegemonic narrative of *tongxinglian*, although this step may not be apparent to some of them.

As the above stories illustrate, there are divergent voices within the Beijing same-sex community. As these stories are constructed and performed, they are also used to promote certain voices that represent particular views or values. Ken Plummer (1995) speaks of how stories can be manipulated to moralise values in society. He states that ‘the sense of self and the meaning of virtue cannot exist outside of webs of narratives’ (1995, p. 144). In some of the above stories, certain same-sex attracted individuals appear to extend their moral code to others. Their language expresses dissatisfaction or disdain with certain aspects of *gay* bars in Beijing. Their accounts tend to depict the practices of casual sex or male same-sex trade as sleazy and debauched behaviour. Evidently, not all voices are in harmony within the same-sex community in Beijing. It is notable that those most familiar with the *gay* scene in Beijing tend to think that there is a general lack of solidarity within the Beijing same-sex community.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to bring in narratives to show how *gay* bars in Beijing operate generally. The business of these *gay* bars – for example, On/Off Bar, Half & Half Bar, Queer Fish Bar and Dushi Qingdao – is brisk and busy, particularly on Friday and Saturday nights. There are drinks, cigarettes, customers of various nationalities and music (mainly in English) – manifestations that are associated with China’s opening up to a global flow of cultural products, capital and people.

Xiao Xie was the manager of On/Off Bar. He was 31 years old and university educated. He identified himself as *gay*. He told me why he ran On/Off and how it was operated. To quote him:

In the beginning, I did not take this [*gay* bar] business seriously. I did not think of making any money out of *tongzhi*. I simply thought that there was a lack of venues for *gay* people. So I wanted to provide a venue for everybody to make friends. As a member of this same-sex community, I know that it is hard for us to go elsewhere to look for friends ... My family in Shenzhen and Shanghai do not know about this business. They just know I am running a bar ... There is no law saying that we cannot run a *gay* bar. But government authorities do not support this kind of business, because they think that *gay* bars undermine social and moral order. When I first began my business, I always felt that people disapproved of what I did.

(Xiao Xie 2004, pers. comm., 6 April)

Tan Han was the boss of the Half & Half Bar. According to insider narratives, he was the only ‘straight’ man running a *gay* bar in Beijing. He was married with a

son. He told me in an interview that his family did not mind him running a *gay* bar business, but some of his friends did not approve of it. He took over this business about three years ago. When asked why he operated this business, he said:

When I first began this *gay* bar business, I was mainly thinking of making money, nothing else. I thought it had enormous potential for making a profit in China. After all, there are so few *gay* bars here. But now I also want to do something for the local *gay* groups and *gay* people. I did not have any *gay* friends before doing this business. Now I have many of them. Many of the customers are my friends. They told me stories about themselves, many painful stories. They do not seem to be happy. Not single one of them seems to be happy ... I think that government authorities turn a blind eye to running *gay* bars in Beijing. Generally speaking, they will not intervene if there are no brawls or drugs happening. They might regulate the opening of new bars, but they do not mind us, because we have been here for more than ten years and we are the oldest *gay* bar in Beijing. Their general attitude seems to be to leave us alone.

(Tan Han 2004, pers. comm., 30 March)

This discussion of the business of *gay* bars in Beijing serves to illustrate a point. That is, apart from facilitating the organisation of homosocial activities and events, the business of *gay* bars in Beijing also signifies the upcoming of gay-oriented resources and establishments in urban China.<sup>5</sup> For instance, in recent years, urban China has witnessed the emergence of more *gay* establishments and resources. Apart from the *gay*-oriented venues that I have visited during fieldwork, there are now new ones. The following can be found in Beijing alone: Destination (a *gay*-oriented bar), Promen (an English-speaking *gay* professional social group), *Les+* (a Chinese-language magazine for same-sex attracted women), Chaoyang Chinese Aids Volunteer Group, and Aibai (a Chinese-language *gay*-oriented website inside China).

This upcoming of *gay* spaces is significantly linked to China's recent opening up to global capitalism, leading to economic and social restructuring, particularly in urban areas. More specifically, the upcoming converges with the national imaginings of a 'modern' China that is envisioned through its recent impressive economic performance on the global stage. As this book has been emphasising, these imaginings signal a self-conscious effort to find a sense of national pride and Chineseness, including a proud sense of Chinese same-sex identity, in this new global order.

As the stories of Xiao Xie and Tan Han imply, *gay* bars in urban China seem to have great potential to develop. However, this potential should not be overrated. Typically, the development of *gay*-oriented spaces and establishments in China typically hinges on political thought and action. Besides, this development can be over-represented as the immediate result of China's recent economic boom and its opening up to an increasingly globalised *gay* culture. Currently, there is a lack of research into the relationship between China's opening up and the

emergence of gay-friendly spaces and establishments in urban China. Thus, it is hard to rationalise this relationship due to insufficient evidence. Nonetheless, it is certainly conducive to discern how the presence of gay-oriented spaces and establishments is still seen as a challenge to the social order and moral fibre of Chinese society. In reality, to survive and expand gay-oriented business in China, individuals like Xiao Xie and Tan Han have to be doubly cautious, despite the fact that it is not illegal to operate a *gay* bar business in Beijing.

### **Dongdan Park**

The following story describes the experience of a Taiwanese *gay* man cruising Central Park in New York. It is extracted from Pai Hsien-yung's (1990) *Crystal boys*, a *gay* novel that is appreciated by many of my male informants and interviewees. Pai (1990, p. 36) writes:

On my third night in the city I went into Central Park and was dragged into the wooded area behind the bandstand by seven or eight people, I'm not sure just how many. There were a few blacks among them. Their hair was like steel wool. I could hear their heavy breathing in the dark, like a pack of hungry wolves fighting over a piece of meat. Their white teeth seemed to glow in the dark. That's how it stayed until the first light of dawn, as the sun's rays began to filter through the branches, when they grew suddenly alert and began slinking away, one after another, until the only one left was an ugly old black man kneeling on the ground and stretching out a trembling arm to grab my pantleg. As I walked out of the wooded area, I was nearly blinded by the bright morning sun.

Pai offers a sombre picture of cruising for gay sex in Central Park, where prohibition, repression and powerful sex drives are portrayed in various forms. To a degree, the sexual repression of these men challenges the much-trumpeted 'sexual liberation' in contemporary American society. This story is narrated in order to highlight that Dongdan Park has a special place in the male *gay* world in Beijing – a favourite cruising ground for some same-sex attracted Chinese men. Insider narratives tell me that Dongdan Park is not only visited by *tongzhi* for homosocial interaction and camaraderie, but also by the Beijing Public Security Bureau and regular park visitors. (The Public Security Bureau in mainland China can be interpreted as a police station.)

Members of the Beijing same-sex community tend to speak of Dongdan Park as a cruising ground. The following fieldnotes describe two of my visits to the park:

On 23 March 2004, I met Wang Jun at a metro station where he picked me up and drove me to Dongdan Park, a hangout for local *gay* men. I got to the park at 8 o'clock in the evening. It was quite dark. I observed that there were about 40 men, aged between 18 and 45 years old. Some of them were standing in the bush or next to a big rock. Others were just hanging around. Wang Jun

commented that these men were cruising. I first approached a man who was sitting alone on a bench, but he did not want to talk to me. So I went off and tried to talk to others. I approached another young man (18 years old) who was hanging around alone. I told him that I was interested in the *gay* scene in Beijing. He said that he was only waiting for a friend, and that he was not *gay*. Then, I walked towards a group of three men. Wang Jun had been watching over me at a distance. This group was curious about my southern Chinese accent when I initiated a conversation with them. They asked me where I came from and what I was doing in the park at this hour. At the same time, Wang Jun met a friend by accident. Wang Jun brought his friend over to my group. Wang Jun told everybody that he was *gay*, and that he brought me over here to better understand the *gay* life in China. Wang Jun's friend started talking about his divorce and his stories. Others started talking. I invited them to ask me questions; so they did. They asked me questions about my fieldwork and research. Suddenly, there was a young man who came over to us, and he said to me that he could talk to me. This young man struck me with his good fresh looks. He also appeared quite fashionable. He spoke to me with a mix of Mandarin and a few English words. I felt that he spoke to me as he wanted to practise English with me. For some reason, he seemed to assume that I could speak English. This good-looking young man told me that he worked in the housekeeping section of the Marco Polo Hotel in Beijing. Simultaneously, I saw a *laowai* coming along on a bicycle. I spoke to him in Mandarin and asked him to come over to join us. This *laowai* was French; his name was David. David had been living in Beijing for more than 15 years. Moments later, David left Dongdan Park with the good-looking young man. I distributed my name card and asked them to contact me. I obtained some phone numbers from them. Wang Jun drove me home. I got home at 11.30 pm.

(Fieldnotes, 23 March 2004)

On 24 March 2004, I went to Dongdan Park again to meet Lao Jin and his boy friend. When I got to the park, I saw them waiting for me at the front of the park. I got there at 10 o'clock in the morning. There were so many activities going on. I wished I had my camera with me at the time. There were ten middle-aged men and women dancing to some disco music. At the same time, about 50 people gathered and were singing like a choir. Also, there were some other people practising *Tai Qi*, having a Chinese sword dance and playing with a shuttlecock. Yet on the other side of the park, there were some men gathering around. With the help of Lao Jin, I interviewed Lin Yang and Li Ming (who self-identified as *gay*) in a quiet corner of the park. I also spoke to some other men who refused to be taped by me. I left the park at about 12 o'clock.

(Fieldnotes, 24 March 2004)

Informants and interviewees who knew that I went to Dongdan Park often warned me to beware of robberies and fighting there. There are stories of men being

robbed, extorted or beaten up. Stories of male same-sex trade and unprotected sex in the toilets of Dongdan Park are also heard.

The following insider narratives are presented to indicate how some members of the Beijing same-sex community think of Dongdan Park. A female interviewee said:

I have been to Dongdan Park. I find it very rough (*henluan*) there. I pity those who go there. You see lots of *gay* men hanging around in the park, but it is rare to see *lesbians*. I have been told that *gay* men look for ‘quickies’ there. I find it an unsafe and unhygienic place to have sex. But if it was easy for us [*gay* men and *lesbians*] to look for a partner, nobody would like to go there. Our society is not open enough. I think, without much choice, some men simply have to go there to let off their sexual frustration. I have some *gay* male friends who go there occasionally.

(Amy 2004, pers. comm., 13 April)

Another female interviewee commented:

Of course, I have heard of Dongdan Park. But I do not go there. Li Yinhe and Wang Xiaobo’s *Tamen de Shijie* (*Their world*, a Chinese book about same-sex experience) has mentioned Dongdan Park many times. It seems to me that Dongdan Park is a hot spot for male homosocial interaction. But at the same time, I have heard of dreadful things about Dongdan Park. Robberies, fighting and casual sex are not unheard of. It is very sad that bad things are happening in Dongdan Park. These things give a bad name to the *tongxinglian* circle (*quan*) in Beijing.

(2004, pers. comm., May)

Whenever I could, I visited Dongdan Park in order to have access to some potential informants. Quite a few times, I had successfully struck up a conversation about *tongxinglian* with men who appeared to be hanging around for something or somebody in Dongdan Park. Let us hear the following stories, told by two Chinese men:

I sometimes come here [Dongdan Park] to look for a friend (*zhao pengyou*), but I do not like what I am doing. Of course, I would prefer to meet someone in my normal social life, but that is almost impossible. Dongdan Park is not really a good place. You just have the impression that people you meet here always lie to you. You won’t believe what they are telling you.

(2004, pers. comm., May)

I am 20 years old. I come from Guangzhou. I don’t want to return to Guangzhou because there is too much restriction from my family. My parents will stop me from going out to look for (male) friends. I am interested in mature men who are under 60 years old. My *gay* friends think that there is

something wrong with me because I prefer to have a relationship with much older men ... I once met a *laowai*. He was much older than I was. He could speak some basic Chinese, but on the whole we couldn't really communicate to each other. He wanted to have sex with me. I refused him not because I was not interested in him. The important thing was that I was worried that I might contract HIV/AIDS from him.

(2004, pers. comm., March)

Coming out in Dongdan Park reflects a slightly different reality from coming out in a *gay* bar in Beijing. The reality is that Dongdan Park is simply not an accepted *gay* space. In both the homosexual and heterosexual communities in Beijing, Dongdan Park is generally perceived as a place that is frequented by same-sex attracted men of low social status. In the same-sex community in Beijing, these men are assumed to be *money boys* (rent boys), cross-dressing performers or migrant workers who usually come from an underprivileged village background and are impoverished, uneducated or unemployed. They are ascribed low *suzhi* (quality) in the social order of contemporary Chinese society. Because of their association with low *suzhi*, they experience a degree of exclusion within the Beijing same-sex community, a community that has already been excluded by the mainstream heterosexual community. For these men, cruising Dongdan Park is a homosocial activity on Friday nights and at weekends, an activity that facilitates the development of their homosocial networks.

My conversations with a wide range of informants and interviewees indicate that Dongdan Park is actually a place where people of different backgrounds mix – that is, Dongdan Park as a *gay* space in Beijing is not restricted to underprivileged members of the same-sex community. In fact, people who frequent Dongdan Park will tell you that there is less cruising for *gay* sex than generally imagined by both the homosexual and heterosexual communities. The fact is that not many men would nowadays risk conducting sexual activity in the toilets of Dongdan Park. They would rather meet up in the park and then go to a nearby hotel. More importantly, there are now more channels for individuals to explore and express their same-sex identity and desire than there were decades ago. For instance, the emergence of male homosexual prostitution is a channel, albeit socially stigmatised, that meets the need of those men unable to integrate their sexuality with their life. On my first visit to Dongdan Park, I had a good look at its surroundings and I saw an advertisement for male same-sex trade painted on a rock. This advertisement contained a mobile phone number and a charge of 300 to 500 *yuan* for a sexual transaction.

### **Money boys**

In traditional Chinese culture, the boy entertainers who engage in a homosocial/homoerotic relationship were known as *xianggong* (or gentlemen). As Wu Cuncun and Mark Stevenson (2006, p. 46) inform us, the term *xianggong* began circulating widely from the mid-Qing until the early years of the twentieth century. According to them,

the term denoted quite specifically the boy-actors who cross-dressed for young female (*dan*) roles on the public stages of Beijing and who were available as catamites. Without exception, *xianggong* came either from utterly destitute families (in which case they had been sold, usually on contract), or they were born into the profession through descent within an acting family.

(Wu and Stevenson 2006, p. 46)

Chen Kaige's film *Farewell My Concubine* is a prime example illustrating an aspect of this homosocial/homoerotic tradition.

Indeed, it was almost like a lifestyle for cultural elites to develop a homosocial/homoerotic relationship with boy entertainers from Peking Opera troupes. This lifestyle was in fashion, for instance, during the period between the late Ming dynasty (c.1550–1644) and the fall of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) (Wu 2004; Wu and Stevenson 2006, p. 45). From the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, this Chinese homosocial/homoerotic 'sensibility' (*fengqi*), to borrow the term from Wu Cuncun (2004), shaped not only the Peking operatic style, but also the development of male homosexual prostitution associated with the world of Peking Opera (Wu and Stevenson 2006, pp. 45–6).

Along with the rapidly changing social and economic landscape in contemporary China, there has been change in the history of male homosexual prostitution in China. It is now detached from the Peking Opera and is instead developing as part of the emerging gay-oriented spaces and establishments. The widening social inequalities as a result of China's opening up to global flows are a key factor facilitating this development and encouraging young men to enter the industry of male homosexual prostitution.

The subject of *nantongxing maiyin* (male homosexual prostitution) in China is increasingly familiar to the wider community via the Chinese media. The case of Li Ning is compelling evidence of the growing visibility of male homosexual prostitution in the media. Elaine Jeffreys (2007, p. 151) has documented that the Chinese media have given extensive coverage to the case of Li Ning, who 'made legal history in the People's Republic of China (PRC) on 17 October 2004 when he was sentenced to eight years jail and fined 60,000 yuan for organising male–male prostitution services in a recreational business enterprise'. Notably, the case of Li Ning was regarded as 'one of China's ten biggest legal cases in 2004' (Jeffreys 2007, p. 153).

Stories of men being convicted of involvement in male same-sex trade are gaining attention in the electronic media.<sup>6</sup> The website [http://www.floatinglotus.com/news/cnews.html#\\_Chinaprost](http://www.floatinglotus.com/news/cnews.html#_Chinaprost) (retrieved 18 January 2005) contains some stories relating to male same-sex trade in China. To give some examples, Liu Xiaozhi, 42, was convicted of supplying male sex workers to a bar in Guangzhou in July 2003. Zhou Deming received a five-year jail term for hiring an apartment where he also supplied male sex workers in September 2003. A bar owner in Jiangsu was taken to court for employing male sex workers for male same-sex attracted customers. Wang Zhiming, another operator in the male same-sex trade,

was sentenced to imprisonment for three years and fined 3000 *yuan* by a Shanghai court in July 2003.

Generally speaking, male homosexual prostitution is gaining media attention and is depicted as a growing social problem. It has aroused great social concern for an important reason: men who have sex with other men carry a high risk of HIV/AIDS infection – that is, male homosexual prostitution, together with male same-sex practice, has the potential for male sex providers and their clients to spread HIV/AIDS.

Furthermore, the growing level of male homosexual prostitution is causing anxiety particularly in male same-sex communities. Lisa Rofel's (2007, p. 105) research has indicated that 'many urban-born gay men have anxieties, paradoxically, about exploitation by rural migrants and associate *money boys* with rurality [and also with the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmissible infections]'. This situation points to an anxiety over the differentiation between healthy and unhealthy expressions of same-sex practice, desire and identity in Chinese same-sex communities.

There are different forms of male homosexual prostitution across societies. In contemporary Chinese society, the major form is known as *nantongxing maiyin* (male homosexual prostitution), involving a *money boy* who provides sexual services to men sometimes through a procurer. As mentioned in previous chapters, the term *money boy* is used in China to describe those men, whether *gay* or not, who offer paid sex for men. *Money boys* in China are male same-sex sex workers. Travis S. K. Kong (2005), by way of Van de Poel, reports that male sex workers can be broadly classified into four groups in accordance with their business mode. Kong (2005, p. 5) writes:

The first group is the 'rough trade', or boys who use 'sex workers' as a means of covering up to achieve other ends such as blackmail, robbery, and gay bashing. The second type consists of 'street hustlers', or boys who are usually homeless and/or drug addicts and who exchange sex for money for their day-to-day survival. The third type is made up of 'part time' sex workers who enter into sex work by accident and treat it as a freelance job or weekend pastime. The fourth type consists of 'professional' sex workers who have committed themselves to sex work and treat it as a full-time and long-term career.

As a reference, this system of classification can be used for female sex workers too. *Money boys* can be interpreted as a new form of sexual identity made possible through the emergence of gay-oriented spaces and establishments, something that is fuelled by China's opening up to global capitalism. They are constructed as young men (in their early twenties) who are of low social status and rural origin. They seem to be aware that their body is an instrument for upward social and economic mobility. For some of them, their body is used for homoerotic exploration and experimentation. Their sense of identity revolves around the kind of male homosexual prostitution they perform. Thus, *money boys* can be seen as, following Travis Kong (2005, p. iii), 'possessing a strategic identity that is plural,



unstable and regulatory; and always caught into the complex web of domination and submission'. My interview with a manager of male same-sex trade confirms most of these constructions.

All these young men [*money boys*] kind of choose to work as *money boys* for different reasons. They prefer to make easy money out of their body. They are impoverished. They also want to prove that they are desirable. At the moment, I have 12 *money boys*, aged between 18 and 22, working for me. Most of them work in this trade for no more than three years. And they tend to travel all over China to make money. They earn from 100 to 300 *yuan* for each sexual transaction, which normally lasts for 45 minutes to an hour. As a manager myself, I obtain a 30–40 per cent share of profit. Generally, the amount of daily business of a *money boy* varies. He could sometimes have no customers at all. The other times, he could have one to three customers. Occasionally, he gets some 'special' customers who demand sadomasochism to be practised. For this, I would have to send two of them to go together in order to look out for each other. My pragmatic concern is that a homicide might happen in certain sadomasochistic practices. The ones who go for sadomasochistic customers should be in good health, with no lesions on their body. Normally, they need one to three months to recuperate after receiving S/M customers. Customers pay about 2000 *yuan* for sadomasochistic services.

(2004, pers. comm., 13 May)

There are also concerns when running male same-sex trade in China. This manager is quoted again to provide some insider information:

Male same-sex trade in China involves different levels of risk: risk of police arrest; risk of malicious retaliation by disgruntled and infuriated *money boys* and customers; or risk of reports by inquisitive neighbours. In view of these risks, I am mainly dealing with familiar customers. But, then this is a tricky one too. I have to be extremely careful when finding customers. Each customer is given a code to identify himself. I solicit customers mainly via the internet. So I have little knowledge of their social background.

(2004, pers. comm., 13 May)

At the same time, it is pertinent to ask this question: how do *money boys* understand the 'choice' of selling sex to other men for money? My interview with Lin Yang below is an exploratory attempt to make sense of this question:

I come from Dalian, which is 20 hours by train from Beijing. I am 21 years old. I've worked in *gay bars* as a cross-dressing performer in Dalian. In fact, I've worked in many big Chinese cities as a cross-dressing performer. Perhaps, due to rapid development of China's economy, the business of cross-dressing performance seems to be growing in urban areas. You can see that

many *gay* men in the cities love watching us (cross-dressing performers) sing and dance provocatively on stage, but they are at the same time suspicious of us. What can you do with this suspicion? I don't know. This is a love-hate (*yaoai yaohen*) relationship. Occasionally, a few *gay* men will offer to pay us for having sex with them. I usually choose the men I want to have sex with. I don't think I was a *money boy* because I was not out looking for customers. People come to me for sex. I wouldn't mind taking money from men after having satisfied their sexual needs. Of course, I have to charge them for having sex with me. I need to make a living (*woyao ganhuo de*). For instance, I met a *laowai* in a *gay* bar yesterday. He approached me. He could speak some basic Chinese, but we couldn't really communicate with each other. He was quite fat (*hen pang*). I took him to a sauna club where he played (*wanwan*) with me and we had sex in a private room of the club. He gave me \$300.00 *yuan*. I was a bit scared yesterday because this was my first time to have sex with a *laowai*. I was also afraid of contracting HIV/AIDS from him ... He was *yao* (1) and I was *ning* (0). [*Yao* (one) and *ning* (zero) are numbers in Chinese. *Yao* is the penetrator. *Ning* is the penetrated.] I didn't use a condom. I should be a lot more careful next time.

(Lin 2004, pers. comm., 25 March)

The Chinese *gay* men that I have spoken to usually made the following comments about the non-Chinese men who patronise *money boys*:

These (foreign) men are rich. They can afford to buy sex in China. They come from different places and countries. They use *money boys* for sex, either knowingly or unknowingly. They, together with *money boys*, may spread HIV/AIDS to you.

(2004, pers. comm., March to May)

My research into the constitution of Chinese same-sex identity has indicated that China's opening up has led to an influx of non-Chinese *gay* men and practices into China (Ho 2005, 2007, 2008). These non-Chinese men, who are generally regarded as white *gay* men, have contributed to the growth of male homosexual prostitution in urban China. These comments feed into racialised discourses of sex and power. These discourses are intertwined with the present analysis of China's opening up to global same-sexness, which is shaped by the complex interplay between Western notions of homosexuality and unequal global flows of people, information and capital. More analysis should probe into a number of questions. For example: (1) To what extent do foreign clients of *money boys* impact on the development of male homosexual prostitution in China? (2) Who patronises *money boys* in China? (3) What motivates men to sell and buy sex in China? These lines of analysis are at present far from clear.

In short, the rising visibility of male homosexual prostitution in China has provoked unprecedented public debate in the media and among policy-makers recently. Male homosexual prostitution is portrayed as a growing social concern,

and a threat to sexual and national health, yet its overall significance is under-researched and poorly understood. Thus, stories told here should be not taken as a reflection of social reality, but as an exploratory attempt to make sense of a ‘*money boy*’ identity and certain social and moral implications of male homosexual prostitution (*nantongxing maixin*) in contemporary China.

Male homosexual prostitution is re-emerging as a recent social reality, about which little research has been undertaken. The author suggests conducting in-depth research into three lines of inquiry: (1) how the purchase of intimacy is accompanied by complicity and passive resistance; (2) how national, cross-border and global migration has facilitated the rise of male homosexual prostitution in urban China; and (3) how rising population mobility in China has intensified the recent growth of male homosexual prostitution in urban areas. Engaging discussion around ‘intimacy’, ‘migration’ and ‘mobility’ will shore up the theoretical conception of prostitution in China.

### **Cross-dressing performers**

Since China’s opening up, performance arts (such as cross-dressing shows, the Peking Opera and theatrical performances) have increasingly been employed by the party-state as a national project. Performance arts converge with the party-state’s aspiration to construct a ‘socialist spiritual civilisation’, with the aim of enhancing the *suzhi* (quality) of the entire nation.<sup>7</sup> The remark by former President Jiang Zemin is an illustration of this national aspiration. In an opening address at a symposium commemorating the late Peking Opera performers Mei Lanfang (1894–1961) and Zhou Xinfang (1895–1975) in 1994, Jiang Zemin said:<sup>8</sup>

As our country’s traditional theatre communities and literary and artistic groups are celebrating the birthday centennials of Mei Lanfang and Zhou Xinfang ... the purpose of the symposium is to address the grand vision of reviving the Peking Opera, the traditional theatre, and the national arts.

This official recognition of performance arts is a strategy to integrate China into social and economic globalisation through culture, ideology and education. However, this does not mean to suggest a simplistic interpretation of performance arts in contemporary China as a national project, aiming to cultivate the entire population and promote artistic appreciation. The point here is to link this official recognition to underline two special features of cross-dressing performances within the same-sex community in Beijing. First, cross-dressing performances in the same-sex community in Beijing are actually independent of state influence. Second, they are a form of homosocial and homoerotic activity that is important to the imagination of personal and collective identity within the same-sex community.

A popular form of homosocial and homoerotic activity in the same-sex community of Beijing is called *fanchuan yanchu* (cross-dressing performance). This is often referred to as a kind of male-to-female cross-dressing performance.

On/Off Bar, Queer Fish Bar and Dushi Qingdao run regular cross-dressing performances, which are mostly patronised by men and a small number of women. Half & Half Bar is the only bar that does not have this kind of performance, probably because of its small area. Cross-dressing performances are typified by men who self-represent as male entertainers, and are dressed up with flowery female costumes and make-up. They put on a female voice, and dance provocatively and seductively on stage, providing a visual stimulation of the performing body and male same-sex flirtation.

Wang Yan, who had been working as a cross-dressing performer for five years, had this to say:

It seems to me that many 'straight' people enjoy watching men impersonating women. But for *gay* men, we prefer to look for an outstanding singer or dancer in cross-dressing performances. Many of us (performers) perform cross-dressing shows in order to make a living. For some performers, they cross-dress to look like 'real' women in order to solicit those customers who are attracted to the idea of cross-dressing. Many customers treat us like women. Some of us accept paid sex at the request of customers. Of course, you can have sex with your customers unless you are really desperate for money. I earn between 200 and 400 *yuan* from each performance. It usually takes me half an hour to put on the make-up and the whole set of performing gear.

(2004, pers. comm., 6 June)

What are these cross-dressing performances like? The following fieldnotes recorded some of my experiences with these performances:

It was 10.00 pm on 10 April 2004. I went to watch a cross-dressing show with a group of self-described *lesbians*. We took a taxi to get to the Guo Mao Centre, where we took a lift to go upstairs. Once I got off the lift, I could hear some music. We then entered a bar which was called *Zi Ye*. The music was extremely loud to the extent that it hurt my ears. *Zi Ye* was absolutely packed with men, aged between 25 and 45. Presumably, they were mostly *gay*. Through chatting with my *lesbian* 'friends', they told me that most non-*gay* people in Beijing would not go to a *gay* bar. I saw men dressing up as women, smiling, flirting, dancing and singing in a seductive and provocative manner. All of them performed on a raised platform. A few audiences put money into the artificial breasts of a couple of attractive cross-dressing performers. One man from the audience chucked 100.00 *yuan* into the hands of a performer who played the role of a clown. Upon receiving 100.00 *yuan* as an appreciation of his clowning performance, this clown virtually kowtowed to this man, profusely. I very much hoped to talk to some of the performers this evening, but I was not quick enough to catch them. They went backstage soon once they finished their performance. We left at 12.30 am.

(Fieldnotes, 10 April 2004)

On 11 April 2004, I went to watch another cross-dressing show. After having dinner with my 'friends' at the *Kongyiji* Restaurant in *Dong Qu*, we decided to go to *Dushi Qingdao* (a *gay* bar) to watch a cross-dressing show. I happened to meet some other 'friends' at *Dushi Qingdao* which was packed with men. I saw a *laowai* with a Chinese man. I brought my camera in order to take some photos. I confirmed with my friends if I could take photos. They said I could. So I did, although I felt inhibited. When my camera flashed for the first time, a man sitting five tables away gestured to me that I should not take photos. One of my friends introduced the manager of *Dushi Qingdao* to me when the whole performance finished. The manager told me that I should have not taken any photos, but he was kind enough not to take my film. I was apologetic. I told him about my research interest. The manager and I exchanged name cards. We left *Dushi Qingdao* at midnight.

(Fieldnotes, 11 April 2004)

Cross-dressing performances are not entirely approved of by some members of the same-sex community in Beijing, despite the fact that ancient Chinese society appreciated cross-dressing in connection with the Peking Opera. One reason for their disapproval is that cross-dressing performances are associated with male same-sex trade in Beijing. The other reason is that cross-gender expressions carry a social stigma in contemporary Chinese society. Parallel research by Arlene Istar Lev (2004, p. 108) informs us that 'the gay community [in the West] has denied cross-gender behavior in trying to gain social respect'. As Lev (2004, p. 109) points out, some individuals uncritically think that those who express gender unconformingly will 'easily discard genders at will, freely engage in sex-change surgeries, and the institution of marriage will lose its sacred and economic value'. A further reason, as William H. DuBay (1987, p. 13) suggests, is that cross-gender behaviour is seen to transgress the boundaries of three major social constructions: personal identity, sexuality and gender. Martin F. Manalansan IV's (1996) research into the Filipino same-sex community explains partly why cross-dressing generally fails to gain support from some gay people. As Manalansan IV (1996, p. 53) reports, cross-dressing is seen by some (Filipino) gay people as 'low-class'. As Manalansan IV (1996, p. 53) adds, some of his participants say that Filipino drag queens have 'illusions' and are 'internally homophobic or self-hating'.

In the field, I received no such strong comments about cross-dressing performances. It is true that coming out as a cross-dressing performer in Beijing is seen as a challenge to the accepted behaviour of being a *gay* man. Yet, cross-dressing performances are not harshly judged. Differences in opinion seem to be played down with the compelling need to take an 'open' attitude towards alternative practices or lifestyles. Furthermore, historically, there have been close links between cross-dressing performances and the Peking Opera, something that has been largely accepted as a form of art in Chinese society. The vignettes that follow illustrate this point.

I visited Dongdan Park where I spoke to a man. He expressed how he felt when he first watched a cross-dressing show in a *gay* bar. To quote him:

When I first watched a cross-dressing show, I got goose bumps. I could not see why a man would dress up as a woman, singing and dancing on stage. But now I realise that I was too young to appreciate the diversity of our same-sex culture back then. We should be more open-minded. Now, I would not rubbish cross-dressing shows like I did before. I myself have done a cross-dressing show in a bar in Sanlitun.

(2004, pers. comm., 24 April)

I travelled to Tianjin to meet Martin. Martin was 34 years old, identified as *gay* and had a steady male partner. He was a medical doctor by profession. He ran a gay-oriented website and hotline in Tianjin. When asked about his views on cross-dressing shows, he stated:

I am not against cross-dressing shows. We should take an open attitude towards these things. They represent a kind of local *gay* culture, an ideology and a performance. They are also a profession and a form of entertainment. I think *tongzhi* in China are getting more open to these shows, which are quite popular in the West. There is nothing wrong with these shows as long as they are running under the permission of Chinese government authorities. Also, it may be a self-fulfilling experience for some *gay* men to do an impersonation of women.

(2004, pers. comm., 6 June)

A *gay* interviewee commented:

I do not mind cross-dressing shows. They are a kind of entertainment. Also, these shows are very normal things in the Peking Opera. For instance, a master of the Peking Opera, whose name is Mei Lanfang, is very well respected in his field. He performed as a woman in the Peking Opera so successfully for many years. These cross-gender performances are a form of art, I think. It is important for us to be open to these kinds of artistic performances and new ideas in our society.

(2004, pers. comm., 23 April)

I had a meeting with a self-identified *gay* man who was also a cross-dressing performer. He was 31 years old and university educated. In this meeting, he showed me photos in which he dressed like a woman. His comments on cross-dressing performances were:

Cross-dressing shows are excellent social activities for the same-sex community in Beijing. They help generate a very relaxing atmosphere in which there are beautiful and glamorous performers, singers and dancers.

(Zhe Bing 2004, pers. comm., 13 April)

Arguably, cross-dressing performances are increasingly regarded as a form of homosocial activity within the same-sex community in Beijing. They constitute

an element of Chinese same-sex narratives. The above narratives indicate that some same-sex attracted Chinese men are 'open' to cross-gender expressions, an openness that is articulated and imagined around the rhetoric of China's opening up to globalisation. These narratives also inform us that cross-dressing performers in the same-sex community in Beijing assume a role in pushing the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour of *gay* males. At the same time, they also represent a cultural engagement with traditional theatrical performances in China, where female roles were played by males.

### **The placement of power**

One important aim in this chapter has been to demonstrate how power and control is actively played out in storytelling through differences between the researcher and the researched. And yet this power play can be challenged by the discourse of seduction. A parallel aim has been to emphasise how storytelling, for many same-sex attracted Chinese in Beijing, is seen as a step into a political form of coming out or a step towards self-actualisation.

This chapter has provided the reader with certain coming out stories obtained from interviews in fieldwork, with a focus on how same-sex identity in Beijing is transformed and imagined around China's opening up to globalisation. The chapter has also illustrated how these coming out stories are necessarily implicated in delicate issues of class, gender and sexuality, Chineseness, power, seduction and access to economic capital. Most significantly, these stories bespeak divergent voices, values and positions within the same-sex community in Beijing. While divergent voices manage to coexist, certain voices seem to triumph. This divergence constitutes a major challenge in making sense of the politics of telling or not telling a tale. The other challenge lies in the impossibility of representing 'real' events or characters, all of which are constantly subject to performance, inconsistency and construction. Another challenge is concerned with identifying sites where Chinese same-sex narratives occur. For this, the author has exercised caution to illustrate how location and profession are important categories in constructing stories around same-sex identity, categories that are fundamentally linked with various forms of self-empowerment, self-actualisation, resistance and disempowerment.

### 3 Fieldwork

#### Filtering the field

##### **Engaging the gaze in the *gay* community**

I'm an eye. A mechanical eye. I, the machine, show you a world the way only I can see it.

(Vertov, cited in Berger 1972, p. 17)<sup>1</sup>

As a fieldworker researching the articulation of same-sex identity in Beijing, I entered the field with an anthropological gaze and with assumptions, or possibly misconceptions, about the Other. Admittedly, I was gazing, with voyeuristic pleasure, at the same-sex community in Beijing that had typically been cast as a marginalised group. This community was, to some extent, aware of my anthropological gaze. At times, I too was being observed. This was the 'gazer being gazed at', where the role/power relationship between the two parties was reversed. Mutual gaze was definitely crucial to the everyday social experience of my fieldwork, as this chapter will explain.

The objective in this chapter is to problematise how my anthropological gaze, together with the reflected and reflective gaze of the same-sex community in Beijing, shapes my narratives and those of the informants and interviewees that I have spoken to. In doing so, the chapter demonstrates how these narratives result from various assumptions, imaginaries and 'friendships' that are endlessly (re)negotiated around the ever-shifting power relationships between researcher and researched.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter is the product of a fieldwork project in Beijing, along with post-fieldwork telephone and email correspondence with research contacts over four years. It should be stressed that this fieldwork was not an anthropological study of the articulation of same-sex identity in Beijing. I neither operated nor claimed to be an anthropologist in the field. Rather, this fieldwork was merely employed as one of the research methods in this book to sharpen knowledge of the present inquiry, by way of observing and engaging in the Beijing same-sex community.

This chapter argues that it is not always possible for the fieldworker to discern what is altering the power dynamics in fieldwork, as the gaze involves a constant struggle over meanings that are significantly intersected with the problems of representation, legitimation and self-reflectivity – that is, the politics of fieldwork



is constantly altered with the gaze that may be objectified, misrepresented, sexualised, reversed or regulated. By extending this argument, the gaze is approached as a multiplicity of viewing positions that articulate the distance between interviewer/interviewee, insider/outsider and mainland Chinese/overseas Chinese, in a fieldwork setting, an uneasy site that is inevitably infused with claims and conflicts.

There are two main sections in this chapter. The first sets out to address some of the problems of representation that many fieldworkers must tackle. Central to these problems are the following considerations. To what extent can the fieldworker represent the Other? Who is the Other? Or who can speak for the Other? The second section examines the legitimisation of research data. This examination is linked to the fieldworker's self-reflexivity by asking to what personal, ethnographic and political ends the fieldworker should write in a self-reflexive manner. The chapter concludes that this fieldwork has revealed how the gaze can operate as a powerful metaphor to engage the ever-shifting power relationships, which inevitably pose challenges in discerning what is shaping the politics of fieldwork.

### **The problem of representation**

This section is a study of some of the problems of representation in fieldwork. It concentrates on the fieldworker's privileged position to ask questions and make claims to knowledge about the Other. On this subject, Arjun Appadurai (1991, p. 191) draws attention to 'the dilemmas of perspective and representation that all ethnographers must confront' in the world of the twenty-first century. These dilemmas bespeak how the fieldworker faces the difficulty of seeking to represent the Other in a critical and ethical manner, and yet the act of representing in itself is an act of power over the Other. By the same token, as Richardson (cited in Rhodes 2001, p. 3) notes, 'no matter how we [fieldworkers] stage the text, we – the authors – are doing the staging. As we speak about the people we study, we also speak for them. As we inscribe their lives, we bestow meaning and promulgate values.' Some studies, following Michel Foucault, indicate that representation may be viewed as the researcher's will to power (Kong 2000; Kong, Mahoney and Plummer 2001; Rhodes 2001). As such, representation is a form of self-representation to the extent that the voices of the researched are 'always already directly connected to the situated interviewing self of an author/researcher and his or her project' (Kong, Mahoney and Plummer 2001, p. 245). To put it simply, representation is seen as the performance of a particular point of view. Carl Rhodes (2001) cautions, by way of Clifford Geertz, that representation and manipulation of the Other are necessarily coupled together, as the researcher or the fieldworker is always in a position to make use of different strategies to gain access to research material. Rhodes (2001, p. 5) writes: 'Representing others cannot easily be separated from manipulating them (even if this manipulation is not pre-meditated).'

Another problem, which arises from the anthropological privilege, is linked with the ways in which the anthropological gaze may reflect, reproduce and (mis)represent the 'reality' of the culture studied. One contestation is that there

is no way of obtaining an 'objective' reality. Jean Baudrillard's (1983) notion of 'simulation' strongly advocates this position.<sup>3</sup> For Baudrillard, simulation should not be merely reduced to artificiality; rather, it is an imitation of the real that represents claims to knowledge and the truth. In some ways, as Baudrillard argues, these claims are often attached to more symbolic value than the real, marking the absence of reality. From this perspective, what is considered 'real' or 'authentic' is no longer credible. It is the process of reproducing knowledge and the truth that is important for making sense of the formation of cultural identities and patterns. Baudrillard's simulation is interpreted by some as 'the crisis of representation', something that is associated with the position that 'language is the process making rather than reflecting meaning and therefore not a straightforward way of representing others' (Rhodes 2001, p. 8). The centrality of Baudrillard's 'simulation' raises the compelling question of what constitutes an accurate representation of social 'reality' in fieldwork. Baudrillard underlines the fieldworker's endless efforts to represent local realities of everyday life in the field. The fieldworker is in a position to make representational claims about the characteristics of a selected culture through the acquisition of 'valid' source information. By making this claim, the fieldworker is not only obliged to reconcile with the tension between representing reality and its representation, but also to exercise caution over how local realities should be represented in accordance with the prevailing power relationship between fieldworker and informant.

Moreover, a 'new' problem of representation emerges with what is now called 'deterritorialisation'. Deterritorialisation refers to the apparent growing criss-crossing of geographic boundaries via transnational flows of people, capital, information and cultural products in the world of the twenty-first century (Appadurai 1991, pp. 191–210). As a newly emerging concept, 'deterritorialisation' directs us to rethink the representation of cultures and identities, and the notions of 'authenticity' and 'tradition', in this globalising social order. The concept can also help us to better comprehend how the impact of deterritorialisation alters social organisations, recreates markets, reinforces conflicts, 'affects the loyalties of groups' and 'combines experiences of various media with various forms of experience' (Appadurai 1991, pp. 192, 209). Given this conception of deterritorialisation, it can be argued that deterritorialisation has become one of the central forces in field research that affects processes and products of representation. In particular, contemporary fieldwork constitutes a fertile ground 'in which money, commodities, and persons unendingly chase each other around the world, that the group imaginations of the modern world find their fractured and fragmented counterpart' (Appadurai 1991, p. 194). That is to say, fieldwork is not only profoundly interactive, but also increasingly deterritorialised and fragmented. To an extent, cultural meanings are increasingly modified and constructed through interaction, which is made possible through the collapsing and overlapping of local, national and transnational boundaries by information technologies and the mass media. Thus, categories of cultural knowledge, identities and commodities are no longer neatly territorialised, spatially bounded or culturally homogenous. Some of these categories, which may originate as transnational, are progressively

localised or even deterritorialised by the power of imagination that has become an organised field of social practices. This imaginary power is not a mere fantasy or an escape. But it is in itself a social fact that is central to the representation of all forms of agency and subjectivity in this increasingly deterritorialised world.

Clearly, there are issues of representation that all fieldworkers have to confront. Translating these issues into productive strategies for fieldwork requires a critical understanding of how the nature of locality is imagined around the negotiation between representation and reality in a globalised, deterritorialised context. What is to follow will suggest that one of the main difficulties with representation in fieldwork is the fieldworker's self-representation, a domain that forces a recognition of the differences, despite some similarities, between fieldworker and informant.

### ***The problem of self-representation***

The problem of the fieldworker's self-representation in the field is central to this section. Arguably, the fieldworker's self-representation forces a recognition of the distance implicated in ethnographic relations. In fieldwork, I was alternately a semi-outsider, a non-*gay* female, a researcher from Australia, a citizen of Hong Kong, a visiting scholar of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, and a non-Beijing resident in the field. These identities were endlessly and strategically positioned and re-positioned in different periods and contexts, with different informants that I came across, forcing me to consider the contingencies of identity formation in an ethnographic setting. Importantly, this strategic positioning and repositioning of identities captures the distance between me and those being studied – in terms of sexuality, education, class, access to economic resources, language and Chineseness – all of which were subject to the scrutiny of our mutual gaze. It is this mutual gaze that helps us better understand how same-sex attracted Chinese present themselves as *gays*, *lesbians*, *tongzhi*, *tongxinglian*, good citizens or part of their family, and how they generally organise their life. These are the tensions that must be negotiated pragmatically.

Self-representation in the field has to be strategic. My strategic considerations led me to ask these standard but obligatory questions. How should I represent myself? How should I represent my sexuality? Or how should I introduce my research? Answers to these questions assume a perspective. It is a perspective that is influenced by my assumptions, or possibly misconceptions, of the Other. It is with this recognition that I typically introduced myself to informants:

I am a PhD student in Asian Studies, with a focus on contemporary China. I am currently studying at the University of Western Australia, in Perth. I am now in the first year of my PhD. I am here in Beijing doing fieldwork in order to gain some lived experience about the same-sex life in urban China. In Beijing, my supervisor is Li Yinhe. I am a visiting scholar of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

The aim of this introduction was to represent myself as a professional and sympathetic researcher who would like to contribute a part, however small, towards minimising social misunderstanding of *tongxinglian* in Beijing by way of research. Most of my informants did not ask much about my research. If questions on my research were asked, their tone of voice sometimes conveyed scepticism or cynicism. But I was often confronted with the following questions in the process of representing myself to informants: Are you *gay*? Where do you come from originally? How old are you? Do you have a partner? Are you married? What brings you to Beijing? How long are you going to stay in Beijing? Where is Perth? What is Perth like? How long is the flight from Perth to Beijing? Why did you choose to study this particular subject? Or have you not got better things to do than study *tongxinglian*?

These questions should not be reduced as a gesture to pry into the fieldworker's private life, or an interest in foreignness. On reflection, these were the questions about the differences between us over these problematic dichotomies: insider/outsider, mainland Chinese/overseas Chinese and *gay*/non-*gay*. There were times I preferred to hide or disguise some of my identities for fear of being misunderstood or misinterpreted. My main strategy to downplay our distance was to pay attention to my dress code, a general indication of an individual's social and economic status, and, to some extent, personal values. I consciously did not wear any clothing that would be perceived as expensive, too colourful or too revealing. But some of my informants seemed to be able to see through my intention. Informants are definitely not, as Dorinne Kondo (cited in Hoon 2006, p. 23) puts it, 'inert objects available for the free play of the ethnographer's desire, [as] they themselves were, in the act of being, actively interpreting and trying to make meaning of the ethnographer'.

In this section, the chapter has explored how representations of same-sex identity, culture and community in China are now increasingly confronted with the power of cross-cultural (mis)representation by fieldworkers like myself, who do not live *within* mainland China, but who construct stories about *tongxinglian*. Thus, it is crucial to promote recognition of the problem of cross-cultural representation. Fieldworkers may enter the field to heighten the distance between fieldworker and informant, or to confirm our constructions of the Other. In coming to terms with this fact, it is imperative to utilise fieldwork as a means to question 'the author's position as a knower and teller and therefore destabilise the authority of authorship' and 'foreground [our] own constructedness' (Rhodes 2001, p. 4).

### ***Interviewing: a problematic form of representation***

This section will indicate that interviewing is a problematic form of representation. It will focus on how same-sex attracted Chinese become the Other within the ethnographic context of being the 'interviewee'. This focus does not mean that these individuals will be interviewed and represented as a homogenous group, and cast into some role of 'the Other'. Rather, by focusing on how these individuals are typically represented as the Other through interviewing, the task here is

to capture the shifting and sometimes reversible power relationship between interviewer and interviewee. To this end, the task rejects the traditional approach that the interviewer essentially speaks for the Other who will automatically be cast into an object of research. By the same token, the task rejects the argument that the relationship between the gazer and the gazed in an interview is irreversible. In addition, it is crucial to collapse the old dichotomies between interviewer/interviewee, researcher/researched and observer/observed, in order to gain a sense of how asymmetric power relations are subtly embedded in interviewing and negotiated through unequal social status. This position takes into account that an interview 'is not a neutral tool, for at least two people create the reality situation' (Denzin and Lincoln 2003, p. 48) – that is, the parties involved can both be subject and object of interviewing. The interviewer speaks for and about the interviewee. The interviewee also speaks through the interviewer, who occasionally uses the interviewee's voice for self-representation. It is through this interactive or even competing process that narratives are co-created and contested.

The problem of interviewing is acknowledged in parallel research into other same-sex communities (McLelland 2000b; Kong, Mahoney and Plummer 2001; Chalmers 2002). For instance, some researchers draw critical attention to the necessity to scrutinise the authorial voice of the interviewer in representing the homosexual voice. Consider this comment (Kong, Mahoney and Plummer 2001, p. 245):

Whether or not the interviewer's voice is manifest, it always deploys a unique self in the interview and claims to have some pervasive authorial functions over other subject matters that are being interpreted. Even having the research subjects as authors does not completely solve the problem, for we are left asking under what institutional constraints they can come to be authors and under what historical limitations they can speak and write.

The question of the authorial position of the interviewer is a hard one. This question is perhaps becoming more problematic with the emergence of recent critiques by queer theorists. For example, Kath Weston (cited in Kong, Mahoney and Plummer 2001, p. 246) argues that many of the homosexual interviews 'appear too modern, too urban, too here and now, too wealthy, and too white'. What Weston implies is that it is necessary to decentre the representational power of the interviewer who often comes from a Western middle-class perspective. Kong, Mahoney and Plummer (2001) and Appadurai (1991), among others, argue that interviewing can be made less problematic by incorporating more localised and specialised ethnographic knowledge, as a way to make sense of the nature of locality as a lived experience. This argument assumes that the interviewer has knowledge of local language and culture, and that he/she is living within a local culture and is actively negotiating with local subjects. It is pivotal to interrogate how local interests and intentions can best be represented by applying more ethnographic knowledge and experience of a local culture studied. Simultaneously, interviewing is, to borrow Paul Rabinow's (1977, p. 155) words, 'a process of intersubjective

construction of liminal modes of communication'. Interviewing actively involves all the subjects, both interviewers and interviewees, in negotiating a narrative, which is often constructed upon cross-cultural assumptions, many of which may not be shared.

The interviews in my fieldwork were, in the main, semi-structured and open-ended. One goal of the interviews was to obtain a wide range of qualitative data from a focused group to formulate opinions about the articulation of same-sex identity in Beijing. A parallel goal was to evaluate how Chineseness, with a specific focus on a fresh form of Chinese same-sex identity, is constructed around national and global imaginings of China's opening up.

Interviewing can be read as 'a negotiated text' (Fontana and Frey 2003, pp. 61–106). In some of my interviews, I struggled to read and negotiate meanings and intentions. There were times I was simply unable to ask questions for fear of giving offence by accident, or because I sensed a degree of distrust. Perhaps, it was also because of my pride or my insufficient knowledge of the field; I sometimes could not bring myself to address certain questions that would be seen as inappropriate or unintelligent. For instance, when interviewing a sociologist, I avoided asking her how I should make sense of the Chinese term *tongxinglian*. I merely assumed that she would find this a naive question, which would only reflect inadequacy on my part. As I recall, there were some questions I did not feel free to ask her. I sensed that she was hedging over critical questions about her research plans and opinions of the *gay* scene in Beijing. She apparently exercised caution not to make any impertinent remark about those who were involved in the same-sex communities in China. Diplomacy seemed to be her overriding consideration.

On a different occasion, when interviewing a *gay* activist, I dared not ask if he would identify himself as being attracted to the same sex. I naturally assumed that he would be reluctant to answer this question, because in the first place he was lukewarm, because I had been told that he was married, and because he was a *gay* activist, representing knowledge and power in my field of research. My perceived role being an outsider added to my lack of audacity to approach him. An entry in my fieldnotes recorded how this meeting went:

I had a taped interview with a *gay* activist. He humbled me in his own way before the interview. He and I agreed to meet for an interview in his office. But, for some reason, he did not reply to my email requesting for his office address written in Chinese, which I eventually obtained with ingenuity. Upon arrival at his office on the day we were supposed to meet, I was told that he was not in, and would return soon. I waited for him, for about 45 minutes. Then when he arrived, he gave me an unsmiling glance and did not speak to me. He took his time to settle down. I merely sat there, without speaking and feeling unwelcome about my reception. My only strategy was to keep my countenance ... . My interview with this *gay* activist was a memorable one. I still remember seeing traces of pride, distrust, irritation, resistance and contempt in his face during the beginning of the interview. Yet he eased up and became reasonably friendly towards the end. His changing states of mind

represent a negotiation of our relationship between *gay/non-gay*, insider/outsider, *gay* activist/researcher of Chinese gayness, mainland Chinese/overseas Chinese, a relationship that has largely been structured. He was apologetic towards the end of the meeting. He gave me a lift to the nearest underground station.

(Fieldnotes, 25 May 2004)

My interview with this *gay* activist indicated that, as reported in W. R. Borg's study (cited in Bell 1993, p. 95), many factors influence the process and product of interviewing, including the following: 'Eagerness of the respondent to please the interviewer [or] a vague antagonism that sometimes arises between interviewer and respondent ...'. There was no easy answer as to why there was tension between this *gay* activist and myself, despite the fact that both of us have been able to maintain post-fieldwork contact for four and a half years now. Possibly, this *gay* activist was, understandably, concerned about any repercussions from his family or the community that might arise from comments he made to me. Arguably, the subjective experience in interviewing can be shaped by the researcher's human qualities – the ways in which he/she is 'seen as likeable, friendly, dependable, and honest' (Shaffir 1998, p. 48).

There were other times the power relationship between interviewer and interviewee was renegotiated and reversed in some of my interviews. A conversation in an interview would simply take an unexpected turn. I would be obliged to answer some personal questions (mostly related to sexuality and relationship) posed particularly by my interviewees.<sup>4</sup> Evelyn Blackwood (1995, p. 95) is quite right in reminding us that it is insufficient to address the 'disadvantaged' role of the Other in field research; rather, it is equally important to consider 'the position of the anthropologist in this 'confrontation with the Other''. It is a position in which the interviewer has to endlessly (re)negotiate with the different intentions and practices of interviewees, in different contexts and times.

From my perspective, my interviews entailed a great deal of negotiation and labour. Much of my interview time was spent laboriously finding a suitable interview environment, waiting for interviewees to turn up, making sense of their political motives, taking notes, monitoring my tape-recorder, listening attentively, observing reactions or tolerating passive smoking. Some of the time was spent being interrupted by unexpected visitors or working out strategies to probe into people's private lives when they were obviously trying to conceal them. All these features – mundane, repetitive and laborious – characterised not only the tasks I undertook as a fieldworker, but also the role I assumed as an outsider situated in these particular social contexts.

Above all, unequal power relationships are particularly influential on the directions and evasions that take place in interviewing. There are key factors influencing the power relationships in my interviews. As an interviewer probing into *gay* life in Beijing, I did not naturally assume power over my interviewees, for various reasons. First, I was perceived as a fledgling researcher by high-profile figures on the *gay* scene in Beijing. Thus, this posed a challenge for me

to negotiate an interview on 'equal' terms with some of them. Where the product and process of interviewing is concerned, the interviewer's social status is necessarily a factor: 'student interviewers produce larger response effects than do nonstudents, higher-status interviewers produce large response effects than do lower-status interviewers ...' (Fontana and Frey 2003, p. 70). Second, I was a female in a society where young women were still expected to be dutifully respectful to seniors, and mindful of their words and deeds. My gender and age were definitely factors, a fact that resonates in some other research (Fontana and Frey 2003, pp. 64–8). Third, I positioned as a non-*gay* female and was thereby seen as an outsider by same-sex attracted people in Beijing, in which they were mostly *gay* men; in this sense, neither did my interviews with same-sex attracted Chinese women allow me to claim to be part of them. Fourth, I was seen as an outsider who did not easily understand their native language or way of life. This outsider status gave them the opportunity to assert their power, make a fool of me or mistrust me.

Finally, this fieldwork was subject to the agenda of those I was interviewing. Many interviewees apparently welcomed the opportunity to provide me with the information, but on their own terms. Clearly, there is a status imbalance between most of my participants and myself, producing tension and contradiction in our relationship. Paradoxically, I was also regarded by many of them as a privileged researcher coming from affluent Hong Kong or Australia, and with access to considerable economic and intellectual resources, which may have been viewed as an opportunity for them to be associated with me for their own ends.

The shift of power between interviewer/interviewee and fieldworker/informant is constant. Lyn Parker (2003, p. 10) articulates it thus:

Almost by definition the researcher enjoys the power of the right to ask questions, to enter homes and observe ceremonies. The subjects of research do fight back: they feign ignorance, absent themselves, procrastinate, poke fun at the researcher, and manipulate language and the social intricacies.

Parker is cited to underscore that the notion of power in fieldwork cannot be reduced to a single possibility: oppression. Quite the contrary, there is no absolute privileged position to characterise the relationship between researcher and researched. To put it simply, the form of power relationship between researcher and researched in fieldwork is reversible.

### ***Representing informants***

I spoke to approximately 500 people on the subject of *tongxinglian* during fieldwork in Beijing, along with post-fieldwork phone and email contact for four and an half years. For all these years, I have been maintaining close contact with a number of self-identified *gay* and *lesbian* informants that cannot be named. All these people constituted my informants. The information provided by my informants was necessarily selected and edited to illustrate dominant trends and



themes that correlate to the research agenda of this fieldwork. Broadly, these informants came from both urban and rural areas. They were stratified by their diverse social backgrounds. For example, there were cross-dressing performers, *money boys*, the unemployed, office workers, manual labourers, supervisors, taxi drivers, accountants, insurance agents, university professors, university students, film directors, medical doctors, sexologists and mental/sexual health professionals. Their age ranged from the early twenties to the early seventies, but many of them were in the age range of early thirties to early forties. A few had travelled outside China, either as tourists or students.

Our conversations ranged from 15 minutes to a few hours. Short conversations were mostly conducted in Dongdan Park, where I managed to initiate conversations with park visitors on the subject of *tongxinglian*.<sup>5</sup> Our conversations covered the following general questions:

- How long have you been coming to Dongdan Park?
- How often do you come here?
- Did you know that Dongdan Park is a spot for Chinese *gay* men to hang around?
- Did you know that Dongdan Park is a spot where male same-sex trade operates?
- What does the word *tongxinglian* bring to mind?
- What do you think of *gay* people in China?
- How would you feel if your children are attracted to the same-sex?

Generally speaking, park visitors demonstrated slightly different attitudes towards the subject of *tongxinglian* in China. Some expressed their suspicion and ignorance of, rather than hostility towards, the subject. Others view same-sex attracted people as ‘abnormal’ or ‘perverse’. A medicalised understanding of *tongxinglian* was, and is, still prevalent in contemporary China. Nevertheless, one characteristic that marked most of the conversations was the belief that contemporary Chinese society is becoming more and more open towards *tongxinglian*. This attitude of opening up is also demonstrated by some of the social elites in China. In my conversations with social elites in Beijing, they stated that the general public’s prejudice against *tongxinglian* in China should not be exaggerated, despite the fact that same-sex attracted people themselves might think otherwise. According to these elites, the younger generations in China, especially the educated ones, are merely suspicious of *tongxinglian* due to ignorance and insufficient education about same-sex relations, but they are becoming more ‘open’ towards it.

### ***Representing interviewees***

Out of these 500 informants, 41 of them were my interviewees.<sup>6</sup> Table 3.1 presents an abridged version of the profiles of these 41 interviewees. In Table 3.1, none of the interviewees who call themselves *gay* or *lesbian* is named, except Cui Zi’en and Zhou Dan.<sup>7</sup> (For a detailed description of the interviewees, see Appendix B.)

Table 3.1 Profile of Interviewees (an Abridged Version)

Amy	F	31	Currently in a proforma marriage ( <i>mingyi hunyin</i> ), a university graduate, a key figure in a Beijing <i>lesbian</i> group, self-identifies as <i>bufen</i> (bisexual)
Amy's husband (Stanley)	M	32	Currently in a proforma marriage with Amy, graduated with an MA in English, occasionally goes to cruising grounds for casual sex, <i>gay</i>
Cathy	F	21	Unmarried, a university student, completed a survey into some of the <i>tongzhi</i> hotlines in China
Cong Zhong	M	43	A psychiatrist, has collaborated with Beijing <i>Tongzhi</i> Hotline and Zhang Beichuan
Cui Zi'en	M	38	Unmarried, graduated with an MA in Chinese Literature, a director, a film scholar, a screenwriter, a novelist, one of the most outspoken <i>gay</i> activists based in Beijing
Chao Ying	M	27	Unmarried, a university graduate, a gymnasium and yoga coach, has a boy friend, <i>gay</i>
Chu Ting	M	31	Unmarried, a university graduate, operator of this gay-oriented website <a href="http://www.gaybyte.com">http://www.gaybyte.com</a> , published a Chinese book on <i>tongxinglian</i> , <i>gay</i>
David	M	31	Unmarried, graduated with an MA, works in the information technology industry, <i>gay</i>
Di Xiao Lan	F	43	A clinical psychiatrist and a researcher of sexual psychology
Fan Ling	M	42	Unmarried, an insurance agent, interested in having casual sex with men, <i>gay</i>
Fang Gang	M	36	Married, a prolific writer on gender and sexuality in China, published a Chinese book entitled <i>Tongxinglian Zai Zhongguo (Same-Sex Eroticism in China)</i>
Guo Jun	M	38	Married, heads the Beijing Gender Health and Education Institute, a key figure in the development of <i>tongzhi</i> hotlines, published a Chinese book on <i>tongxinglian</i> in 2005
Han Yan	M	37	A university graduate, works with Wan Yanhai at the Beijing Aizhixing Institute
Jiang Yu	M	26	Married with children for ten years, got married through match-making in Anhui, lower-middle-school educated, an advertising agent, <i>gay</i>
Jie Fan	F	43	Married with a son for ten years, a university graduate in Property Management, has suicidal thoughts, <i>lesbian</i>
Lao Jin	M	61	Divorced with two children, lower-middle school educated, cruises in Dongdan Park for sex, has a boy friend who is 25 years of age, <i>gay</i>
Li Han	M	34	Rejects any identity labels, works for the Beijing Gender Health Education Institute
Li Ming	M	22	Unmarried, a university graduate, works in the computer industry, <i>gay</i>
Li Yinhe	F	45	Widowed, started her pioneer research into <i>tongxinglian</i> in the 1980s, a researcher on Chinese gender and sexuality at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing

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Li Yu	F	31	A university graduate, a film director, produced the first Chinese lesbian film <i>Jinnian Xiatian</i> (or <i>Fish and Elephant</i> in English)
Lin Yang	M	21	Unmarried, lower-middle school educated, a <i>money boy</i> , a cross-dressing performer, <i>gay</i>
Liu Ning	F	40	A doctorate graduate, a clinical supervisor, provides counselling at Qinghua University
Ma Xiaonian	M	60	Obtained his degree in medicine in England, a clinical doctor and a sexologist
Martin	M	34	Unmarried, a medical doctor based in Tianjin, has a live-in boy friend, runs a <i>tongzhi</i> hotline and a gay-oriented website, <i>gay</i>
Qiu Renzong	M	70	Married, a professor of bioethics, a contributor and advisor of <i>Pengyou</i> (a magazine which is circulated in <i>gay</i> bars in Beijing)
Ou Yang	F	40	Unmarried, a university graduate, a script-writer, <i>lesbian</i>
Pan Suiming	M	45	Married, Professor and Director of the Institute for Research on Sexuality and Gender at the People's University
Shi Tan	M	36	Unmarried, a university graduate in arts, has a live-in girl friend, sees herself as an 'out' <i>lesbian</i> in China
Tan Han	M	32	Married with a child, high-school educated, the boss of Half and Half Bar
Wang Jun	M	45	Married with a son for 17 years, high-school educated, practises sadomasochism, <i>gay</i>
Wang Jun's wife	F	42	Married, high-school educated, works as a supervisor in a private enterprise
Wang Yan	M	23	Unmarried, lower-middle school educated, a cross-dressing performer, <i>gay</i>
Xiao Xie	M	31	Unmarried, graduated in Economic Management, the boss of On/Off <i>gay</i> bar, <i>gay</i>
Xiao Xiong	F	31	Unmarried, a university graduate, has a girl friend, seldom mixes with other same-sex attracted women, <i>lesbian</i>
Xiao Ban	M	31	Unmarried, graduated with an MA in the Chinese Language, currently doing a PhD, works in the digital media, a volunteer for <a href="http://www.gaychinese.cn">http://www.gaychinese.cn</a> , <i>gay</i>
Xiao Zhong	F	30	Unmarried, graduated in English and Photography, rejects any sexual identity labels
Xiao Zhou	F	31	Unmarried, studied in Singapore, a university graduate, <i>lesbian</i>
Xu Jun	M	48	Unmarried, graduated in Chinese Literature, has an adopted son, runs a paying hotline targeted <i>tongzhi</i> , has helped Li Yinhe to obtain research data on <i>tongxinglian</i> , <i>gay</i>
Zhang Yun	M	30	Unmarried, middle-school educated, used to run On/Off Bar, <i>gay</i>
Zhe Bing	M	31	Unmarried, middle-school educated, used to be a cross-dresser, <i>gay</i>
Zhu Chuanyan	F	21	Unmarried, completed an MA book in Chinese entitled <i>Internet's Effect on Homosexual Identity</i> in 2004

The interviewees were invited to participate in this fieldwork research via interview, largely because their experience and expertise could be used to inform the research. In the main, they comprised same-sex attracted men and women, bisexuals, *money boys*, cross-dressing performers, *tongzhi* website operators, *tongzhi* hotline managers, researchers into Chinese gender and sexuality, directors of Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* films, and medical professionals involved in HIV/AIDS programmes in China.

Table 3.2 presents the sexual identities of these interviewees. However, the table should be seen as a contingent continuum, involving the fluidity and complexity of the sample group's sexual identities.

As can be seen in Table 3.2, there were more interviewees who identified as *gay* (18) than as *lesbian* (5). The disparity between the two was largely because a lot more *gays* than *lesbians* were inclined to come out for many different reasons.<sup>8</sup> One female interviewee questioned the label of lesbianism, despite the fact that she had a female partner at the time of interviewing. Fourteen interviewees were heterosexual. One man refused to be categorised. In fact, quite a few of my interviewees refused to be labelled as *gay*, *lesbian*, *tongzhi* or *tongxinglian*, terms that, according to them, are stigmatised and pathologised in Chinese society. Thus, when it comes to self-identification, these few individuals simply stated that they were attracted to the same sex.

In total, 41 interviews were conducted. By and large, these interviews were audio-taped, semi-structured and open-ended.<sup>9</sup> They all took place in somewhat informal environments, including university campuses, Starbucks cafes, restaurants, my temporary office in Beijing, interviewees' homes and offices, Half & Half Bar, Dongdan Park or hotel coffee shops. On average, each interview lasted for an hour; some of the interviews lasted for two and an half hours. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin, with the exception of one interview with a 61-year-old self-identified *gay* man, who spoke Mandarin with a heavy accent and needed paraphrasing by another local *gay* man. I did not always understand everything spoken in Mandarin during interviews. But I had no trouble at all understanding the interview scripts (which were then transcribed into texts by field assistants).

Some of the interviewees showed unease when being audio-taped, but they did not demonstrate open hostility, only mild resistance. The fact that they agreed

Table 3.2 Sexual Identity

<i>Sexual identity</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Subtotal</i>
Gay	18		18
Lesbian		5	5
Bisexual		1	1
Questioning		1	1
Heterosexual	7	7	14
Other (does not identify)	1	1	2
Subtotal	26	15	Total (26+15=41)

to the interview indicated something about their ‘openness’ to this research into *tongxinglian* in Beijing. They often opened up stories relating to extortion of *tongzhi*, estrangement from the family, one-night stands, deception on the internet, sexual discrimination or male same-sex trade. Most of them held that it was still very hard being *gay* in mainland China. Privacy and safety were – still are – the key concerns for most of them. This is an important reason why many of them use either English names or false names when socialising, even in venues that are marked *gay*. I actually heard an interviewee of mine, who was a self-identified *money boy*, using two different Chinese names when talking to me and to others in a restaurant. Two self-identified same-sex attracted women, who became close to me, revealed that they used a false Chinese name in local *gay* venues.

For now, let us examine the ways the above informants and interviewees have been represented. They have been primarily represented by an authorial voice, together with an anthropological gaze. This is a voice that speaks in the form of a first-person narration that marks a desire not to be silenced, but to be explicitly recognised. This is also a gaze that legitimises itself to be the *real* eyewitness of events and people. The whole point here is to assert that, as Carl Rhodes (2001, p. 105) puts it, ‘this is where I was, this is what I did, and this is why I did it’, legitimising the authorial position of the researcher through representing *real* facts. Yet, how can we legitimise this authorial voice and this anthropological gaze? That is the central question of the next section.

### ***The problem of legitimation***

Legitimation is the process by which the governing obtains the acceptance of the governed ... . Many Marxists see IDEOLOGY as the characteristic legitimation process of capitalist government: ideology ‘legitimizes’ existing power relations by making them seem natural and right ... The post-modern era, according to Lyotard, has come about because we have suffered under regimes of knowledge that have claimed to explain and represent (and thus ‘legitimate’) more than they can.

(Childers and Hentzi 1995, pp. 166–7)

The above is cited to draw attention to the practice of legitimation in the domain of social research. Essentially, this practice of legitimation is concerned with how an act or an ideology has come to influence through authority and power, and the exercise of control by those in a privileged position over people in a subordinate position. The usefulness of legitimation as a critical research practice points to at least two searching questions. Do the researched subjects really consent to those who have power? Or are they coerced to surrender to power?

To arrive at a better understanding of how legitimation lies at the heart of the construction and contestation of ethnographic knowledge, it is vital to recognise two facts that are increasingly relevant to field research. The first is to recognise that ‘legitimation’ is not free from the problem of the validity of constructing research data, both qualitative and quantitative. In particular, this concerns how

research data about a culture or an institution are 'authentically' represented in accordance with the context, people and period investigated. In fact, some researchers argue that it may be a realistic goal to aim for authenticity, rather than objectivity or verifiability, in ethnographic research. This line of argument follows that 'authenticity has to do with situating a specific ethnographer in a real place, among a real group of people' (Poewe 1999, p. 201). Besides, it is perhaps equally crucial to recognise that any attempt to achieve this 'authenticity' will lead to the trap of essentialism, which assumes that social realities can 'truly' be reflected through 'objective' modes of research. This is a response, as Travis S. K. Kong (2000, p. 363) suggests, to the call for 'the post-modern sensibility' by treating authenticity not as authority, 'but as a text's desire to assert its own power over the reader'. In other words, this post-modern sensibility acknowledges that the role of the researcher can often be legitimised by the privileged position he/she occupies.

Indeed, recent research into the emerging forms of same-sex experience in ethnographic research revolves around the problems of legitimation and authenticity (Kong 2000; McLelland 2000b; Kong, Mahoney and Plummer 2001; Rhodes 2001; Chalmers 2002). As suggested in a study by Travis S. K. Kong, Dan Mahoney and Ken Plummer (2001, p. 247):

Gays and lesbians may tell lies or just set out to please the interviewer to gain positive evaluations. Even if they are assumed to give authentic answers, problems still exist. As a large part of gay and lesbian interviews are usually retrospective accounts, interviewees are required to reconstruct their pasts actively in order to make sense of their present selves. Problems of memory and accounting enter here.

This study is discussed to underline the problems inherent in the ethnographic practice of legitimation relating to the same-sex community. In a way, neither the fieldworker nor the researched can legitimise their narratives as an 'authentic' reflection of the same-sex world, something that is necessarily shaped by the discourses of memory and invention. These discourses are then further convoluted by the fieldworker's agenda and ideology, creating more ambiguities and conflicts in the process of inventing and reproducing reality. At the same time, making sense of the legitimation of these same-sex narratives requires considering some of these standard questions. For instance, in what ways do both interviewer and interviewee construct the 'truth' about the same-sex community? Why is it problematic to recount past stories of gays and lesbians? To what extent can interviews about gays and lesbians tell us about their worlds? In what ways are interviews a legitimate form of ethnographic knowledge of the homosexual? Or how do we know that these interviews represent the worlds of those interviewed? These questions are of course not unique to research into same-sex attracted individuals, but they underline the very fact that there are limitations to the legitimation of data in any social research.

These questions are brought in to speak of the anxieties over legitimation (which intersects with key notions of authenticity, validity and objectivity) as an

apparent condition in modern ethnographic research. These anxieties are many. They are mine too. They make researchers highly sensitive to what they should aim to avoid – for example, misrepresentation, the reflection of ‘reality’, and manipulation. There is certainly the anxiety over the issue of misrepresentation in ethnographic research. Researchers are cautious not to cast the researched into the typical role of the Other that is worthy of support and sympathy. To this end, they turn to a de-essentialised approach by self-consciously ensuring the presence of the researched in a text or avoiding the language of the exotic. This form of anxiety over legitimisation as a critical research practice has decisively undermined the power of cross-cultural (mis)representation.

Then, the other problem that haunts fieldworkers is the impossibility of representing social realities of a local culture as a lived everyday experience through ethnographic research. As signalled in the previous section, a body of researchers reject the possibility that social realities can be reflected in ethnographic research (McLelland 2000b; Kong, Mahoney and Plummer 2001; Rhodes 2001; Chalmers 2002). According to them, both researcher and researched are responsible for constructing reality, which is itself already constructed by the interplay of knowledge, thought and lived experiences. They propose the acquisition of localised and specialised knowledge as an alternative way to represent social realities as a set of full-bodied experiences, organised around the practice of everyday routines.

There is also anxiety over the question of manipulation in the field. This is an anxiety linked with how researchers gain legitimate use of power by their privileged positions, which legitimise their use of power. Researchers with this particular concern attempt to minimise the distance between the subject (researcher) and the object of the study (researched). In doing so, they exercise constant self-reflexivity in coming to terms with the deep inequity in the social order within societies and across societies. This is a strenuous exercise mainly because, as emphasised before, unequal power relationships and manipulation are necessarily embedded in an ethnographic context.

Now, then, how do I legitimise my authorial voice and anthropological gaze? What has been achieved so far is to suggest how the anxieties over cross-cultural misrepresentation, the uneasy negotiation between representation and reality, and manipulation have come to represent and legitimise the nature of my fieldwork. This task is thus an effort to highlight the practice of legitimisation as a problematic form of narrative co-created by both researcher and researched, both of whom are responsible for negotiating the problems of inequity, exploitation and agenda-setting that are implicated in the act of legitimisation itself. In addition, this is an endeavour to underline the power of legitimisation in ethnographic research. More precisely, this is to address the fundamental question of who has the power to legitimise values and intentions in the course of narration. It is not only the author, but also the researched, who come together to negotiate and legitimise positions in a research project. It is essential to rethink the notion of the ‘author’ as multiple, rather than singular, voices in legitimising courses of action that are based on specific social norms and values. It is thus erroneous to speak of the authorial

voice as the sole narration and legitimation of personal experience. Rather, to quote Foucault (cited in Rhodes 2001, p. 104), the ‘author’ in ethnographic research does ‘not refer purely and simply to a real individual, since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subjects’.

### *Flexing self-reflexivity*

This section will examine the ways in which the fieldworker may flex self-reflexivity. The term ‘reflexivity’ in ethnographic research, as noted by Don Kulick (Kulick and Willson 1995, p. 2), ‘can mean many things, but at its most basic, it makes a problem out of what was once unproblematic: the figure of the fieldworker’. That is, the activity of self-reflexivity is to problematise the multiple selves of the fieldworker by questioning his/her research paradigms in the course of representing the Other.

It is generally argued that the exercise of self-reflexivity offers a much greater sensitivity to the entire ethnographic process. Yet, some forms of self-reflexivity turn out to be more insightful than others. The question of self-reflexivity may arguably generate a great deal of controversy surrounding ethnographic knowledge, mainly because self-reflexivity itself, if examined analytically, can help us veer from self-absorption to political critique. With this argument in mind, the questions raised in this section are: to what end should the fieldworker write in a self-reflexive manner? Towards what ethnographic and political goals should the fieldworker strive?

As is evident, my fieldwork project has an intellectual purpose. On reflection, my fieldwork has definitely helped sharpen the argumentation of this research. In particular, it has enabled me to unravel an intellectual conundrum that I have been mulling over – that is, what is the nature of *tongxinglian*, as a lived local experience, shaped increasingly by a deterritorialised, globalised gay culture? My answer to this conundrum lies in how same-sex identity in Beijing is articulated around the national imaginings of China’s opening up to globalism. By engaging and living in the field, I witnessed, to a degree, how Chinese same-sex identity was shaped by international flows of cultural products, images, people, and information, amid the density of bars and cruising grounds that are marked *gay* in Beijing.

My fieldwork was an intense and personal project. Through it, I gained new insights into the articulation of same-sex identity in Beijing, and enhanced self-knowledge. In a sense, my fieldwork was a study as much about me as about them. It is worth noting Evelyn Blackwood’s (1995, p. 70) remark in that ‘contact with another culture produces a new vision, a shift in perspective, and a need to make sense of one’s place in the world that creates new distances and categories in the collision of race, class, ethnic, and gay identities’. At the same time, my fieldwork intensified the dislocation and alienation that I experienced because of the need for endless negotiation over meanings such as mainland Chinese/overseas Chinese, insider/outsider and *gay/non-gay*. Paradoxically, this negotiation was at times minimised by a vague notion of Chineseness. When speaking of my



‘Chineseness’ in the field, I would cite Ien Ang’s (2001, p. 24) assertion: ‘There is considerable, almost malicious pleasure in the flaunting of [my] own “difference” for critical intellectual purposes.’

### *The politics of fieldwork*

Beijing<sup>10</sup> was chosen as a fieldwork site, partly because I managed to obtain a few research contacts there, and partly because I succeeded in liaising with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, which offered me a research fellowship as a Visiting Scholar, under the supervision of Li Yinhe.<sup>11</sup> The Academy provided me with a modest office at a cost. In addition to these logistic considerations, Beijing was chosen to provide evidence of a globalised capital city that has ever-increasing contact with the West. Beijing was also chosen, partly because it is sensitive to global sexual trends and partly because its citizens have reasonable access to information and knowledge, thereby enabling them to respond to evolving notions and practices of sexuality. Furthermore, Beijing was meant to capture the ever-increasing social imbalances that have been occurring particularly since China’s opening up in the late 1970s. Most fundamentally, Beijing was selected as a fieldwork site to underline a paradoxical social fact: on the one hand, emerging Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities counter the party-state’s ‘authentic’ Chineseness, and yet, on the other, same-sex identified individuals often embrace national rhetoric and conform to state control. Arguably, such a paradox is manifested more prominently in Beijing than in other Chinese urban cities, necessarily due to its proximity to the central government.

The fieldwork was a case study of a small sample of informants, but covered a wide variety of data obtained through semi-structured, open-ended interviews and direct observations. Significantly, to use the words of Arjun Appadurai (1991, p. 203), my fieldwork into the same-sex community in Beijing represented ‘a field of practices operating within a larger world of institutional policies and power’. That is to say, my fieldwork was organised in a climate wherein an increasingly globalised gay culture seeks to extend its dominion. This fieldwork, to paraphrase Vered Amit (2000, pp. 1–5), was also my commitment to a vigorous cultural immersion that demanded all my emotional, physical, intellectual and political resources. Understandably, immersion came with costs, involving a dislocation of identity, moments of alienation and discomfort, physical displacement and an experience of initiation.

Fieldwork was not always a ‘humanistic’ activity. It was a political activity. In the field, I saw myself as a pragmatic, target-oriented and opportunistic outsider. I was constantly in a frame of mind that I should be empathetic and sensitive to my respondents, for the purpose of maintaining a ‘friendship’ with them. Kleinman and Copp’s (1993, p. 2) *Emotions and fieldwork* highlights this point by demonstrating how fieldworkers often allow themselves ‘to have particular feelings, such as closeness with participants, and try to deny or get rid of emotions [which they] deem inappropriate’. Admittedly, ‘friendship’ can be seen as ‘a

way to find some solace for the loneliness we [fieldworkers] feel and replace relationships we had at home' (Blackwood 1995, p. 53).

To some extent, my fieldwork was an awkward and emotional experience, and I would leave it at that. I must say that some of the interviews were quite confronting. For example, an entry in my fieldnotes recorded the following interview:

On 28 March 2004, I had an interview with Wang Jun (a self-identified *gay* man) and his wife at 3 o'clock. The interview was conducted in their house, which was about 40 m<sup>2</sup>. When I entered the house, I saw his wife lying in bed and talking to someone on the phone. This was the second time I met his wife. She hung up immediately when she saw me. She offered me some tea, a mandarin and a cigarette. Wang and his wife asked questions not only about my research, but also about my family and my personal life. I encouraged them to ask me questions. I first started interviewing Wang Jun. While I was interviewing Wang Jun, his wife was smoking and lying on the bed, doing nothing. I did not feel that she was consciously listening to us. She was simply relaxed. Wang Jun was not articulate, but he was very cooperative. I could feel that he was attempting to answer all the questions that I might have. I then interviewed his wife. Wang Jun was cruising on the internet while the interview was being conducted; he was not paying attention to what I asked his wife either. In the beginning of the interview, she appeared to be somewhat emotional. Her eyes were teary. I avoided looking into her eyes as I did not want to encourage her to cry. But I was prepared for her tears. She expressed that she had never talked to anybody about her husband's attraction to men. She encouraged me to ask her any questions. So I did. I asked her questions about their sex life. She then asked me if I was interested in women. I gave her the most honest answers I could. I stayed on for another one hour after I finished the taped interviews with them as I felt rude to leave them after having extracted some of their secrets. I knew I would be late for my next appointment at the Half & Half Bar, but I felt the need to stay with them. And they did not seem to want me to leave. In the end, I made a move at 6 o'clock. Wang drove me to a metro station where I carried on from there.

(Fieldnotes, 20 March 2004)

On the whole, my fieldwork experience reminded me of the presence of 'a continual shifting between the personal and the professional' in the field (McGrath 1998, p. 62). This experience also made me seriously consider to what extent fieldwork should be personalised. For some fieldworkers, fieldwork is understood as a professional project, 'gathering information in situ: on site, non-experimentally, from and about human informants' (Bestor, Steinhoff and Bestor 2003, p. 3). These fieldworkers maintain that 'self-negation [is] the methodological prerequisite to quality fieldwork' (e.g. see Ashkenazi and Markowitz 1999, pp. 1–21). They believe that they should depersonalise any intimate encounter between fieldworker and informant. This approach of self-negation basically follows from Bronisław Malinowski (Ashkenazi and Markowitz 1999, p. 3). Malinowski's

(1922) *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* represents an influential voice in support of the denial of personal attachment in fieldwork.

Nevertheless, fieldwork, for other fieldworkers, can be interpreted as an experiential and personal project to pursue ‘an intimate familiarity with the world of the other, through getting close to the dilemmas, frustrations, routines, and risks that are a part of everyday life’ (Grills 1998, p. 4). There are fieldworkers who even suggest making use of the subjective experience of sexuality to challenge the distance between ‘us’ and ‘them’ embodied in fieldwork (Blackwood 1995; Kulick and Willson 1995; Lewin and Leap 1996; Markowitz 1999). By and large, they argue against the silence of sexuality in the field that is in itself sexually constructed (Kulick and Willson 1995). As they declare, the reluctance of fieldworkers to reveal sexual experience in the field ‘only highlights the limited views of sexuality that the profession has been unable to discuss’ (Lewin and Leap 1996, p. 3). Don Kulick (cited in Ashkenazi and Markowitz 1999, p. 13), among others, believes that ‘sexual experiences in the field hold a promise for epistemological productivity’.

In my case, it was essential to enter the field with a degree of openness to address the personal and sexual matters of informants, as well as my own. It would have been a contradictory or even self-defeating task for me to silence sexuality while choosing to explore it. It made sense to me that ‘openness’ was an important strategy, allowing me to venture into the silenced realm of homoerotic and homosocial experience in Beijing. That said, I did strive for ‘professionalism’ with those with whom I came into contact. I did not use the field for sexual experimentation, but I did find it a stimulating fieldwork experience to forge a ‘friendship’ with some of my contacts, who opened my eyes to a different dimension to human relationships. We all were making use of our ‘friendships’ to help ease our sense of loneliness, despite the fact that I experienced not merely loneliness, but also disorientation, dislocation and alienation in the field. Admittedly, there were differences in sexuality, class, education and financial status between me and them. These differences will always remain problematic. Typically, like some fieldworkers, I self-consciously managed my identities and kept a distance from my informants in order not to amplify these differences. My main concern was with the brutal fact of exploitation and manipulation implicated in fieldwork. This very fact can never easily be explained, and is always subject to constructions and contestations, across different practices, positions and circumstances, with different individuals. Taken collectively, as Don Kulick (Kulick and Willson 1995, p. 8) suggests, intimacy in the field is “‘a domain of exploration, pleasure and agency” and ... “a domain of restriction, repression and danger””. Above all, I feel obliged to add some vague moral force to this subject matter.

### ***Entering the field***

On Sunday 7 March 2004, I arrived at Beijing International Airport, where I was met by David Kelly and Wan Yanhai.<sup>12</sup> After having settled the issue of accommodation, Wan took me to a restaurant for dinner. I thought we would just

have dinner. But when I arrived at the restaurant, I realised that Wan intended to introduce three men to me, who I later found out were *gay* activists. I cannot recall if Wan had told me about this introduction; my partial comprehension of his Mandarin could have hindered my understanding of his intention. A private room in the restaurant was reserved for the five of us.<sup>13</sup> In the restaurant, Wan gave me some literature about HIV/AIDS projects that he had been working on. Then, five minutes later, Wan left the four of us to chat over dinner and came back an hour later. He said that he needed to go to a meeting with a foreigner. In our chat, these three men asked me quite a few questions. Below is an abstract of the fieldnotes about this meeting:

I met four Chinese men on my first day. They were lukewarm and somewhat suspicious of me. They asked me questions that made me feel uneasy and inadequate. Are you Chinese? Do you consider yourself Chinese? Is this your first time to meet Chinese *gay* men in mainland China? Is this your first time to come to Beijing? What presents have you brought from Australia to Beijing? How much did you spend on these presents? What do you want to achieve in your fieldwork? One of them said to me, with a few English words, that I needed to be more proactive by asking more questions rather than being so quiet. I wish I knew the 'proper' ways of behaving or speaking with them. I lacked energy to deal with them after a flight from Perth to Beijing. I felt tired and poorly. I had difficulty in understanding what they said, especially when they talked fast among themselves. I took a taxi to go 'home'.

(Fieldnotes, 15 March 2004)

These four men shared a common goal in seeking to contribute a part to the same-sex community in China. In particular, Wan Yanhai is seen as one the important figures in the development of *tongzhi* hotlines and HIV/AIDS sexual health programmes in China. One of these men headed the Beijing Tongzhi Hotline, a nationwide helpline that provides telephone counselling and answers enquiries for those who seek information about gay-oriented issues. They stressed that it would be an enormous challenge for me to obtain research access to *tongzhi* in Beijing because of the issues of secrecy and sensitivity concerning same-sex practice in China. Wan suggested that I offer 50.00 *yuan* to every informant, presumably Chinese *gays* or *lesbians*, to assist in my fieldwork.<sup>14</sup> On the whole, this was a useful meeting. I was under the impression that they were somewhat disappointed with my lack of ethnographic experience and, by extension, my possible inability to provide them with useful international contacts or help them obtain foreign funding. Their questions indicated that they saw me as an outsider.

This first fieldwork encounter was more than just an expression of the fieldworker's displacement. It should not be reduced to a gesture to establish *guanxi* (a relationship) between fieldworker and informant, despite the fact that having *guanxi* in Chinese society plays an extremely important role in gaining access to resources, which in return affects the quality and quantity of research data. Rather, this encounter can help us recognise a few facts. First, these men

were quite aware of the possibility or danger of cross-cultural misrepresentations of *tongxinglian*, making them ultra-sensitive to and highly suspicious of outsiders and foreigners. Second, there were differences and similarities between us, which were articulated in terms of cross-cultural knowledge, language, trust, sexuality, social status, age and Chineseness. Third, I was operating as a fledgling researcher in relation to these men, who were experienced in dealing with foreign individuals and networks. This particular encounter challenged the dominant perception that fieldworkers, who were all too often researchers of underprivileged individuals or groups, commonly assume a privileged position over the people studied, despite their effort to hide this inequality.

## Research methods

In the main, a snowballing technique was employed to rely on informants and interviewees for an introduction to more research contacts. This technique constituted a central approach to learning and unlearning the articulation of same-sex identity in Beijing. In addition to this snowballing technique, random sampling was used to locate informants and obtain potential research contacts. I went to bars and parks where same-sex attracted people go, in order to observe and obtain first-hand experience about the *gay* scene in Beijing. The following list shows the meeting places mostly for same-sex attracted men in Beijing that I visited – places that are generally known to younger generations; I visited most of them on a number of occasions during fieldwork:<sup>15</sup>

- Dongdan Park
- On/Off Bar
- Half & Half Bar
- Dushi Qingdao (a bar)
- Queer Fish Bar
- San Li He (a park)
- Du Cheng Park
- Xizishui Chalou (a tea house).

Vox populi was used to locate informants and evaluate how citizens in Beijing responded to the subject of *tongxinglian* generally, although some of their reactions could be expected. In doing this, I had an open-ended discussion with a crowd about *tongxinglian* in Dongdan Park, generally known by the same-sex communities in Beijing as a rough spot. It is a spot where male same-sex trade or ‘quickies’ take place in various forms, and where robberies and fighting are not unknown.

At its peak, the crowd reached 70 people. Every effort was made to engage this crowd. At times, some of my questions were repeated. Cigarettes were given to those who were listening to the discussion, or simply hanging around. These people were led to ask questions about my research, which they did. I provoked them to debate their views on same-sex issues in China. During one debate, there

was a small row among a few men over the legal status of same-sex couples in China. On the whole, the crowd showed keen curiosity in trying to understand why research into the same-sex community in China was chosen. This discussion went on for more than an hour until it was ended by two police officers because I did not realise I was violating Chinese law – a permit was required before holding any public discussion in China. These officers kept me for about ten minutes for questioning. In the end, the plain-clothes police officer released me. This incident is one of the examples that reflects my lack of knowledge of Chinese law.

Field assistants were recruited through advertising on the Bulletin Board of Beijing University. Within two days, more than 20 responses to this advertisement were received. A number of Beijing University students were employed to help transcribe my 41 audio-taped interviews. This transcribing task was completed before my return to Perth, mainly because it was essential to make use of the cheap and easily available helping hands in China. Advertising for research contacts with the Beijing same-sex community was placed in the *Oriental Post* in Perth, Western Australia, for two weeks, but without any response. However, no advertising could be placed in Beijing, as this type of advertising was deemed socially inappropriate.

On one occasion, recruitment for field assistants was initiated by a self-identified *gay* man and a *money boy*, Xiao Zhang. Xiao Zhang obtained my phone number from another *gay* man that he met in Dongdan Park. On our first meeting, Xiao Zhang expressed his wish to be my field assistant. My relationship with Xiao Zhang was largely based on monetary or material terms. He expected me to look after his lunch and his expenses in a *gay* bar. He asked me to lend him money to pay for his dinner at a party. He also persuaded me to buy a *xiaolingtong* and sell it to him at a low price, or give it to him when I left Beijing.<sup>16</sup>

### ***A pragmatic ethical approach***

The interviews for this fieldwork were conducted on the basis of a 'pragmatic ethical approach'. In a way, the interviewee's privacy was given a top priority. I was keenly aware of some of the possible 'hazards' that might be posed to interviewees if their sexual preference was revealed. These 'hazards' included a fear of being disowned by their family or losing their job. Other possible 'hazards' might come in the form of embarrassment or discomfort, something that is related to a discussion of their same-sex attraction. On this point, Fran Markowitz (1999, p. 161) rightly points out that '[the subject of] sexuality frequently explodes onto the forefront of human interactions'. After all, a discussion of sexuality often brings about intense human emotions and feelings. To an extent, to quote Markowitz (1999, p. 161) again, 'sometimes the avowal of sexual attraction causes one or the other person involved shame, disgust, even self-blame, whereas at other times, even when least expected, it may pique positive feelings and lead to the formation of an intimate relationship'.

Pragmatic procedures of interviewing were followed to obtain verbal consent before each interview was undertaken and audio-taped. Caution was exercised

to explain to interviewees the aims of the fieldwork, their rights as interviewees, and the possible outcomes of the interview, especially when detecting that interviewees were slightly suspicious of the interview. It was made clear to interviewees that they could withdraw from the interview at any time, without prejudice. No explanation would be required for the withdrawal. Assurance was given to interviewees that this research would be published only on the condition that they would not be identifiable. Finally, interviewees were made to understand that the interview did not constitute a formal contract between interviewer and interviewee; it was thus not necessary to have a witness.

Nevertheless, on many occasions, my request for permission to conduct an audio-taped interview met with a flat refusal. In view of this fact, it was necessary to be pragmatic with the issue of obtaining consent of any kind. Obtaining written consent was almost impossible, as this legal contractual agreement was still not too familiar to Beijing society. The insistence on written consent would only accentuate my outsider status, leading to suspicion and distrust in interviewees or, even worse, failure to obtain permission for interviews.

On the whole, interviews were premised on the assumption that each interviewee was an autonomous person, who was rational enough to make a decision to take part in an interview, and who was able to question procedures or instructions. This assumption is drawn from Immanuel Kant's (1785) *Fundamental principles of the metaphysics of ethic*, wherein Kant urges us to treat human subjects as ends in themselves, not solely as means to ends, suggesting that we should regard individuals as autonomous and rational entities.

### **More reflections**

In retrospect, I was dispatched to the field with an abundance of directives to attend to fieldwork issues of inequality, subjectivity, sexuality, representation, legitimation, self-reflexivity, and so forth. I entered the field with a determination that I would learn to swim once I was thrown into the water. Most importantly, I entered the field with a fairly rigid anthropological gaze upon the Other, but came out with a relatively sceptical mind, one that had been opened to wider possibilities of gender and sexuality.

It was a great adventure for me, as a semi-outsider, a non-gay female, a researcher from Australia, a Hong Kong citizen, a visiting scholar of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing and a non-Beijing resident, to seek to make sense of the same-sex experience in Beijing. These identities, although explanatory of certain aims of this research, could possibly lead the same-sex attracted Chinese to see me as a researcher entering the field to seek academic prestige or an opportunity for voyeurism, viewing *tongxinglian* from the perspective of an outsider.

I left Beijing thinking that my mission had been completed, with mixed feelings of satisfaction and loss. Undeniably, I also thought of the absences and inconsistencies in the data collected, and my partial understanding of my informants and interviewees.

The aim in this chapter has been to indicate how my anthropological gaze, together with the reflected and reflective gaze of the same-sex community in Beijing, constructs narratives on Chinese same-sex identity. The gaze, as a metaphor of changing viewing positions, has shown itself to be a constant struggle over meanings that are entwined with the ethnographic problems of representation, legitimation and self-reflexivity. These are some of the major problems that complicate the ways in which manifold power relations operate in ethnographic interaction.



## 4 Speaking of same-sex subjects in urban China

What do we mean when we say 'gay' in a world where hybridity and syncretism provide the grist for cultural production, distribution and consumption?

(Manalansan IV, cited in Boellstorff and Leap 2004, p. 1)

Just as the word *lesbian* has been stretched many times in Europe and America in recent debates to include diverse communities of women-loving women, there is little to stop contemporary women in a non-Western culture from desiring that label and calling themselves *lesbian*.

(Sang 2003, p. 31)

The above quotations are cited to underline a point: there is intensifying appropriation around the terms 'gay' and 'lesbian' in the context of ever-increasing global flows of people, technology and capital. This phenomenon has been commonly described by some researchers as indicating the proliferation of 'global gayness'. As an academic rhetoric, 'global gayness' has gained a measure of popularity among some English-language researchers (Altman 1996, 1997, 2001a; Warner 1996; Cruz-Malave and Manalansan IV 2002). In general terms, the rhetoric of global gayness is wedded to a representation of (homo)sexuality in modern Western societies. This rhetoric has a triumphal and promising tone, giving voice to an affirmative politics of identity, community building, individual empowerment, and a challenge to heteronormativity in the West.

Nevertheless, as emphasised in Chapter 1, this rhetoric is simultaneously criticised by a school of researchers for representing a universal and ahistorical Western gay or lesbian identity (Plummer 1995; Seidman 1997; Rofel 1999a; Martin 2003; Boellstorff and Leap 2004; Jackson 2004). These researchers report that this identity representation is highly problematic as it is unevenly circulated in many urban gay scenes, in both Western and non-Western societies. They argue for the importance of understanding both the global homogenising and local heterogenising forces that simultaneously construct gender and sexual identities.

In contemporary China, the rhetoric of 'global gayness' is being vigorously appropriated by a group of same-sex attracted Chinese for both sexual and social identification, giving it a new set of expressions. Recent studies have reported on the rising visibility of self-identified *gay* and, to a lesser extent, *lesbian* individuals

in urban China (Berry 1996a; Rofel 1999a; Wan 2001).<sup>1</sup> For example, Lisa Rofel's (1999a, p. 451) ethnographic research reveals that 'in the past five years in China, for example, cosmopolitan cities have witnessed a veritable explosion of people who call themselves gay'. Yet, what does it actually mean when the Chinese call themselves *gay* or *lesbian*? What has facilitated the recent emergence of self-described Chinese *gays* and *lesbians* in urban China? And how is the Chinese same-sex community part of the sameness and difference of this 'global gayness'? These are the central questions for this chapter.

Given these questions in view, this chapter argues that same-sex articulations in urban China are marked by increasing social stratification and tension. To an extent, since China's opening up to diverse forms of unequal global connection, Western same-sex identity terms, together with Western ideas and practices of gayness, have rapidly proliferated in urban China. Most significantly, this proliferation captures a paradoxical phenomenon in contemporary China – that is, same-sex articulations bespeak widening social hierarchies within the Chinese same-sex community, while simultaneously symbolising heightened attention to ways of speaking identity in terms of individual rights, freedoms and desires. This position is extended to elucidate that the sense of self-consciously modern Chinese same-sex identity is often subtly enunciated to rationalise social hierarchies within the Chinese same-sex community.

This chapter therefore seeks to provide an explanatory framework for this argument in three main parts. The first part opens by looking at the rising visibility of *gay* spaces in urban China. This development is linked to demonstrate how same-sex articulations in urban China enunciate diverse forms of 'modern' and 'proper' representations of same-sex identity, something that is based on a complex social hierarchy. The second part approaches the analysis of same-sex articulations in urban China as a representation of the newly emerging social categories. It highlights how Chinese same-sex articulations signal an intensification of social stratification within Chinese same-sex groups and networks.

The final part is followed by a study of the discourse of *suzhi*. There is no single English word that can fully capture the cultural specificities of *suzhi*. As Andrew Kipnis (2006, p. 296) informs us, 'it [*suzhi*] has been translated into 32 different English terms'. Generally speaking, *suzhi*, which may be translated as 'quality', has become a popular rhetoric in China especially since the late 1970s (Anagnost 2004; Kipnis 2006). Here, in the final section, it is demonstrated that *suzhi*, as it relates to same-sex articulations, is a practice to normalise social hierarchies. It is a practice that is perpetrated by certain urban, middle-class same-sex attracted Chinese to give voice to themselves, while at the same time precluding dialogue with others.

In closing, this chapter asserts that it is erroneous to presuppose a singular, normative model that embraces a totality of sexual and gender identities in any given same-sex culture. The chapter concludes that there is no fixed term to speak of an 'authentic' Chinese same-sex identity at the level of popular discourse, in or outside China.

A note on the term 'articulation': Stuart Hall's (1985) conception of 'articulation' is primarily utilised for the present analysis in this chapter. Hall's conception provides

a framework to approach problems of articulation as a theory of social formations. This is a theory that is infused with claims to various forms of knowledge, power control and resistance. In particular, this theory is concerned with how linguistic hegemony comes to construct identities and ideologies across local, national and international boundaries. Hall's conception also opens inquiry into problems of articulation in ways that are fluid, contingent and multi-dimensional. As Hall indicates, the politics of articulation always opposes the fixing of meaning and requires constant reviewing and contesting. Hall (1985, p. 92) writes:

We have to think about the articulation between different contradictions; about the different specificities and temporal durations through which they operate, about the difference modalities through which they function ... The emphasis always falls on the continuous slippage away from any conceivable conjuncture.

By incorporating Hall's conception, this chapter endeavours to make sense of the politics of same-sex articulations in urban China. In a way, in urban China and elsewhere, there are always efforts to fix a particular way of speaking of same-sex subjects through a hierarchical social structure. At the same time, there are politically inclined and academic voices to represent the diverse and shifting articulations of same-sex identities, desires, practices and sexual rights, not only within China, but also the diasporic Chinese communities around the globe. Most fundamentally, the politics of same-sex articulations in urban China is born out of everyday encounters with sameness and difference, intertwined with local, national and international exchanges of sexual politics and cultural discourses. Such complex encounters have given rise to a diversity of speech communities, signifying various, but locally and historically specific, enunciators of social structures and stratification.

As a caveat, this chapter is not a linguistic study of same-sex articulations in urban China. Rather, it is a socio-cultural analysis of the reciprocal relationship between language and identity, with a specific focus on gender and sexuality. By focusing on the socio-cultural dimensions, the present study deliberately sidesteps such issues as the formation of Chinese same-sex identity terms and linguistic variations on an urban/rural divide. Its primary aim is thus to go beyond a general concept of language as an act of self-identification, towards a model that seeks to enunciate how language is performed as an instrument of dominion. In this chapter, language is an instrument that is deeply implicated in the construction of 'Chineseness', along with the exclusion of the Other. What follows is an attempt to illustrate how Chinese same-sex identity terms are articulated within the broad social context of China's opening up.

### **Same-sex articulations in urban China**

In contemporary Chinese society, 'gay' and 'lesbian' may not be particularly attractive words, but there is no conscious effort to preclude people from desiring

or reinventing these words for their own use. Many who go to entertainment venues (such as bars, discos or parks) in Beijing that are marked *gay* are quite aware of the existence of these words. Some of these people would even use 'gay' and 'lesbian' for *gay* assertion. Arguably, no political or academic discourse around *tongxinglian* in China and Chinese diasporic communities is complete without these English terms. Nevertheless, 'gay' and 'lesbian' in China are used not to represent mainstream Western gay and lesbian activism or empowerment, but to indicate a measure of social status and a marker of modernity.

In urban China, the manner of occupying a *gay* or *lesbian* subject-position usually involves using a mix of Mandarin and a word of English. Consider the examples in Table 4.1.

*Lala* is a modern term that possibly originates from a character in a Taiwanese novel, as informed by Cui Zi'en in an interview (2004, pers. comm., 15 March).<sup>2</sup> *Les* is another modern term. According to some of my self-described *lesbian* interviewees, *les* is borrowed from the English word *lesbian* and is re-adapted for use in an abridged form. Both *lala* and *les* have increasingly been used by the same-sex attracted women in urban China for self-identification over the past few decades. The two terms are widely used by women who are in their twenties and thirties, suggesting that there are generational patterns in their usage.

In the field, many of my interviewees and informants used the terms *gay*, *lesbian*, *lala* and *les* for self-identification. They used these terms within the same-sex communities and in entertainment venues (such as bars, discos and parks) that were perceived as gay-friendly. Interestingly, these terms were not understood in the Chinese same-sex communities to carry a strong social stigma. On the contrary, they were vaguely understood as having foreign or Western characteristics. They were used to represent at least two bodies of discourse: (1) Western ideas and practices of homosexuality, and (2) elusive forms of modern Chinese same-sex identity.

Significantly, the use of *gay*, *lesbian*, *lala* and *les* by same-sex attracted Chinese in China cannot be surmised merely in terms of a direct imitation of the West. Rather, it mirrors an expressive desire for modernity, along with a desire for rights and freedom. This desire has been further augmented by China's recent opening up, as this book has been demonstrating. More importantly, this desire may also be interpreted as a strategy for self-described *gays* and *lesbians* in China to challenge local sexual institutions and regulations.

There are other modes of articulating modern same-sex identity in China. For example, they are *tongxinglian*, *tongxing'ai* and *tongzhi*. They are all gender-neutral

Table 4.1 Same-sex articulations in urban China

<i>An assertion of gayness in Chinese</i>	<i>English translation</i>
<i>wo shi ge lala</i>	I am a lesbian.
<i>wo shi ge les</i>	I am a lesbian.
<i>wo shi ge lesbian</i>	I am a lesbian.
<i>wo shi ge gay</i>	I am a gay man.

terms used by both the homosexual and heterosexual communities to refer to same-sex attracted Chinese men or women. Typically, *tongxinglian* is represented in the Chinese media as an ‘abnormality’ or a ‘perversion’. A medicalised representation of *tongxinglian* was, and is still, prevalent in contemporary China. It is also significant to note that *tongxinglian*, *tongxing'ai* and *tongzhi* signify earlier ‘local’ representations of modern same-sex identity, which are significantly confronted with the complex processes of cross-cultural (re)appropriation and translation (Liu 1995; Chou 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Sang 2003). These are processes that are infused with various forms of hierarchy, discrimination and domination that permeate the social realm. Nowadays, these ‘local’ categories of same-sex identity continue to be used, usually by same-sex attracted Chinese who deliberately detach themselves from or are indifferent to any same-sex networks.

An unpublished source reports that *tongxinglian* was introduced to Chinese via Japanese in the 1920s by Zhou Zuoren, a well-known Chinese writer and translator at the time (Huang 2006, p. 26). The detailed historical background under which *tongxinglian* was introduced to China can be traced in Sang’s (2003, pp. 99–106) research. Nowadays, *tongxinglian* is widely used by both ‘gays’ and ‘straights’ in contemporary China. The term *tongxinglian* is commonly understood by the general public to refer to those who are attracted to the same sex. However, the term is not generally favoured by same-sex attracted Chinese because it carries a strong social stigma and denotes a pathological condition.

As discussed above, *tongxinglian* can be used to refer to both Chinese *gays* and *lesbians*. Occasionally, *nan tongxinglian* (male same-sex love) is spoken of to differentiate itself from *nü tongxinglian* (female same-sex love). However, notice that *tongxinglian* is more commonly used to refer to *gays* mainly because *lesbians* are still less visible in contemporary China. What is also noteworthy is that many self-described *gays* and *lesbians* (such as my informants) prefer to use *gay* and *lesbian* rather than *tongxinglian* for self-identification. Their rationale is that *tongxinglian* carries a social stigma that leads to marginalisation, whereas the use of *gay* and *lesbian* for self-identification symbolises a degree of sexual freedom.

*Tongxing'ai* (same-sex love) signifies another way of articulating modern Chinese same-sex identity. It is reported that *tongxing'ai*, along with *tongxinglian*, has its origin in Japanese (Sang 2003, p. 102). It is noteworthy that *tongxing'ai* is less commonly used than *tongxinglian* for self-identification in contemporary China, for reasons that are not entirely clear. And yet, *tongxing'ai* is only brought to greater attention, at a later period, by Zhang Beichuan’s (1994) *Same-sex love*, a Chinese monograph on same-sex life in mainland China. In fieldwork, none of my self-described *gay* and *lesbian* interviewees and informants used *tongxing'ai* for self-identification.

*Tongzhi* is also a form of modern Chinese same-sex identity. The term *tongzhi* is often translated as ‘comrade’. *Tongzhi* was ‘a Chinese translation from a Soviet communist term, “comrade”, which refers to the revolutionaries who shared a comradeship’ (Chou 2000b, p. 1). *Tongzhi* has become a form of address in everyday social and communist discourse in China, especially after 1949. Chou Wah-shan’s (2000b) *Tongzhi* has brought the term *tongzhi* to a higher profile

in terms of same-sex movements in China and across the Chinese diasporas. To a degree, *tongzhi* represents a self-proclaimed 'authentic' Chinese same-sex identity, an identity that 'need not reproduce the Anglo-American experiences and strategies of lesbigay liberation' (Chou 2000b, p. 1). According to Chou (2000b, pp. 1–2), *tongzhi* was allegedly first appropriated in Hong Kong in the 1990s to claim an 'authentic' and 'indigenous' Chinese same-sex identity. During fieldwork, the individuals who used *tongzhi* for self-identification appeared to be of the older generations.

The subject of sexual identity is pervasive in discussions among same-sex attracted Chinese in urban China. Broadly, sexual identity in China is constructed on a fixed binary of male/female, despite inconsistency in how each individual makes sense of issues relating to 'identity', 'desire' and 'practice'. For instance, in addition to *lesbian*, *lala* and *les*, same-sex attracted Chinese women also self-identify as *T*, *P* and *bufen* (Kam 2006 pp. 87–103). Where *T*, *P* and *bufen* come from requires more research attention, but what these terms imply is that they enunciate a quest for self-assertion through a Western model of homosexuality. This quest forms an important component of modern same-sex experience in China.

When a self-described *lesbian* says '*wo shi ge T*', she is representing herself as a tomboy or a masculine lesbian. By the same token, when a self-described *lesbian* says '*wo shi ge P*', she is identifying herself as a feminine *lesbian*. As my interviewees suggested, *P* was related to the notion of purity. *Bufen* can be translated as undifferentiated. *Bufen* refers to an individual who is attracted to both men and women. As a matter of fact, the question of gendered role is vital for forming an initial friendship or relationship for many self-described *lesbians* in China. As such, these questions were often asked among many of my female interviewees and informants: 'Are you a *P*? Are you a *bufen*? Are you a *T*?' The point of asking these questions was to find out an individual's gendered role in a lesbian relationship.

Notice that *T*, *P* and *bufen* are used to represent an individual's gendered role, which is partly understood on the basis of a duality of masculinity and femininity. Notice also that this *T/P* divide is based on some of these elements: 'sexual behaviour (degrees of being active or passive: being touched/penetrated, degree of undressing with a partner); appearance and body posture; personality, and being financial provider or provided for' (Engelbreten 2005, p. 5).

By comparison, the terms *T* and *Po* have been increasingly used by same-sex attracted women in Taiwan in recent decades (Chao 2000, pp. 377–90, and 2001, pp. 185–209; Damm 2005, pp. 67–81). *T* and *Po* refer to the two lesbian gendered roles in Taiwan and are now utilised by the mass media to represent female same-sexness. *T* refers to the masculine role of a lesbian relationship. *Po* (which literally means wife) is the feminine role of a lesbian relationship. *Po* originates from the English word tomboy. This comparison between same-sex articulations in China and Taiwan is intentional. It seeks to enhance understanding of how interplay between local and global in each region comes to produce a locally unique discourse of same-sexness.

The terms *dun bui* in Cantonese and *duan bei* in Mandarin (or 'brokeback'

in English) have apparently become modern phrases to describe male same-sex ties since the film *Brokeback Mountain* won an Oscar and its director Ang Lee became *huaren zhi guang* (a luminary for the Chinese). Despite its international acclaim, *Brokeback Mountain* could not be screened in mainland China, primarily due to its lack of support from the party-state. A primary official concern was its gay content. Furthermore, the Chinese government has a quota on foreign film. (It has an import quota of 20 foreign films a year.)<sup>3</sup> The exclusion of *Brokeback Mountain* from the quota was expected at the time.

It was widely reported that *Brokeback Mountain* was well received by most gay-friendly film critics. Yet, a few critics challenged the representation of *Brokeback Mountain* as a 'gay' film. One major criticism was that neither its two lead actors, nor its film director, nor its screenwriters were gay. Despite criticisms, *Brokeback Mountain* has facilitated the promotion of gay films not only in US cinema, but also in Chinese cinema. In fact, recent research has reported on the appearance of Chinese queer cinema that explores the local experience of *tongxinglian* in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and across the diasporic Chinese communities (Berry and Martin 2003; Berry, Martin and Yue 2003; Berry 2004; Zhang 2004; Lim 2006).

Since the award, '*dun bui*' has been used loosely in popular discourse, especially in southern China, to refer to any intimate male bonding. Often, *dun bui* and *duan bei* are used in a jocular fashion – for example, *nimen lia zhen duanbei* (You two are so gay). It should be emphasised that although the subject of same-sex experience is rendered jocularly in social discussion, it is never severely denigrated in Chinese society. Neither is there enormous animosity towards *tongxinglian* among the Chinese. When asked about their views on *tongxinglian*, most ordinary citizens in Beijing I spoke to commented that *tongxinglian* was an illness that should be treated.

'Queer' has emerged as a modern form of same-sex articulation in China today. However, the term 'queer' (*kuer* in Mandarin) is not commonly known by the same-sex attracted Chinese. Neither is the term known by most of those who self-consciously call themselves *gay* or *lesbian* in urban China. During my fieldwork, I have not heard any one of my interviewees use the term 'queer' for self-identification. In China, the term 'queer' is mainly used in academic discourse to speak of mainstream gay and lesbian activism in advocating individual sexual rights and equality in Western society. In this book, the term 'queer' is deliberately avoided, partly because it remains at the level of academic discourse and partly because it is not integrated into the everyday life of most same-sex attracted Chinese. Nonetheless, queer theory offers a useful critique particularly to fixed and 'authentic' gender and sexual identities. For more discussion on the rationale for using and defining the term 'queer', see writings by Mark McLelland (2003, pp. 53, 66, and 2005, p. 1), and James Welker and Lucetta Kam (2006).

On the other hand, *money boy* (or *MB*) represents a newly emerging modern term in mainland China. *Money boy* is used to describe a rent boy who has sex with any men for money or material gain. Where *money boy* originates is not entirely clear, but what is noteworthy is that the term is always discussed in

connection with male homosexual prostitution, something that is seen as a social harm in contemporary China. In recent years, male homosexual prostitution has attracted much media attention, largely because it causes great moral concern in the Chinese (same-sex) community, and particularly among Chinese *gay* men. (The subject of *money boy* will be addressed in the final section of this chapter.)

Tellingly, the above same-sex terms should be used and understood within a specific historical context. Many of these terms have been reproduced, first, through the long-term impact of Western colonialism and, more recently, through unequal global intersections of people, capital and information. Nowadays, traditional narratives of same-sexness have little resonance or interest for those who call themselves *lala*, *les*, *gay* or *lesbian* in urban China.

Indeed, same-sex articulations in urban China involve a degree of appropriation from and resistance to an English source. How Chinese men and women speak of same-sex subjects represents a Western source and a yearning for modernity. This is a manifestation of the complex interplay between local/Western and modern/traditional articulations of gender and sexual identities in the routines of everyday life. The trend is that there is increasing (re)appropriation of ostensibly Western and modern same-sex identities in Chinese society. As some evidence has shown, the development of ‘global’ gayness seems set to thrive in urban China. This development can be variously viewed as a transition from socialism to a capitalist social order, an entry into a stage of late modernity and pertinent to the discussion in the next section, an articulation of widening social hierarchies through the discourse of *suzhi* in contemporary China at large.

### **Same-sex articulations, social hierarchies and *suzhi***

In the final part of this chapter, the complex formation of same-sex articulations in urban China will be encapsulated. This formation is significantly tied to the recent emergence of new social actors who call themselves *gay* or *lesbian*, and vocalise social hierarchies through the word *suzhi*.

The definition of *suzhi* is highly contested. The key to making sense of *suzhi* is to discern how the power of *suzhi* can be variously produced and reproduced. It is thus important to recognise that, as Andrew Kipnis (2006, p. 295) enunciates, *suzhi* is a hegemonic discourse that ‘justifies social and political hierarchies of all sorts, with those of “high” quality gaining more income, power and status than the “low”’ in contemporary China. Similarly, as Yan Hairong (2003, p. 494) aptly points out, *suzhi* is a significant term used to evaluate the ‘qualities of civility, self-discipline and modernity’. Perhaps equally significant, *suzhi* is a project of the party-state. In contemporary China, the politics of *suzhi* is geared towards the needs for state governance, economic development, and personal and national improvement. On a political front, *suzhi* is materialised to produce desired subjects that are capable of contributing to China’s socio-economic growth in the era of global competition. To quote from Yan Hairong (2003, p. 494) again, *suzhi* has rearticulated ‘a neoliberal governmentality’ – a new, subtle form of state power over human subjects in contemporary Chinese society.



*Suzhi* may not be regarded as a gay-specific word, but *suzhi* has special meaning for same-sex attracted Chinese living in mainland China. *Suzhi* works as a hegemonic rhetoric that divides individuals into different social categories within the Chinese same-sex community. More specifically, the power of *suzhi* can exercise and ensure exclusion of marginalised individuals (same-sex attracted Chinese) by and within a marginalised community (the same-sex community in China). This exclusion points to an anxiety about how the community can improve the nature of its low-quality (*di suzhi*) members, who are often assumed to come from rural China. At the same time, *suzhi* encompasses a set of strategies for social mobility for members of both the urban and rural same-sex communities, although they represent vastly different social positions in China's new socialist-capitalist economy. This quest for social mobility is symbolic of the entire same-sex community's stronger desire for a 'modern' identity than ever before. This quest also coincides with a keen interest in enhancing self-awareness among the Chinese same-sex population. All these strategies are grounded in China's determination to promote market-oriented economic growth. Ultimately, these strategies reflect some of the concerns and contradictions at the heart of the same-sex community in contemporary China.

The above discussion of *suzhi* is informed by the scholarship of Andrew Kipnis (2006), Ann Anagnost (2004), Yan Hairong (2003) and Lisa Rofel (1999a). Their scholarship has inspired me to develop the idea of how *suzhi* vocalises social stratification in the Chinese community on an urban and rural divide. In particular, Rofel's research highlights the intensifying exclusion of rural *gay* men from the same-sex community through the discourse of *suzhi*. Rofel (1999a, p. 466) writes:

The issue of *suzhi* [quality] is pervasive in discussions among gay men and society at large ... . It arises in discussions about population control and desired kinds of children, about capitalism and the kind of Chinese subject who is capable of making wealth, as a way to constitute proper bourgeois subjects and to mark the divisions between urban and rural.

Rofel's research represents one of the few studies that does not reproduce the urban/rural divide, but deploys *suzhi* as a compelling metaphor to capture the growing dissension between urban and rural same-sex attracted Chinese in Beijing. Building on Rofel's research, this chapter intends to offer preliminary observations on how the power of *suzhi* augments such an urban/rural divide. In doing so, my fieldwork data will be employed to capture how *suzhi* is pervasively circulated in urban China as a broad social critique of Chinese identity, including Chinese same-sex identity. This circulation is then linked to emphasise how *suzhi* is almost always targeted at *money boys* who originate from the countryside.

As a fieldworker in Beijing, I observed that the Chinese same-sex 'community' was increasingly stratified by the conditions of continued opening up, globalisation and migration in contemporary China. Let it be very clear that this 'community' is not a given or a bounded place. It is a highly problematic space. It is a dynamic

social space where communal, national and transnational same-sex representations compete and converge; where urbanity and rurality connect and disconnect, to inform the social reality of same-sex experience in Beijing. Within this space, urban-born locals, rural migrants and overseas visitors mix together and bring in their own same-sex cultural products and characteristics. Arguably, all this mixing is increasingly negotiated and constituted on the notion of *suzhi* as contemporary China continues to be guided by the dominant paradigm of opening up. Of course, not all urban *gay* scenes in China articulate *suzhi* in the same manner as Beijing. Neither is all this mixing characterised by exclusion through the discourse of *suzhi*, but a majority of it is necessarily enacted by some form of power and control. Crucially, all this inter-communal contact and negotiation serves to inform us of certain narratives on exclusion, vocalised through *suzhi* within the same-sex community in Beijing.

Exclusion within the same-sex community in Beijing, and elsewhere, is often subtle. The subtlety may be conveyed through the simple act of urban *gay* and *lesbian* Chinese speaking of the anxiety over or displeasure with their rural counterparts. For instance, there are certain ways of speaking into an exclusion and devaluation of the rural population within the same-sex community. Consider the following narrative by a 30-year-old IT programmer in Beijing:

I think, in some way, the *suzhi* of the Chinese (same-sex) community is lowered by rural people. The low *suzhi* of the rural population makes it extremely hard for us to promote the legitimacy of *gay* rights in China. Besides, I am quite disappointed that the Chinese *tongxinglian* circle (*quan*) is increasingly in a state of disorder (*luan*). *Money boys* (*MBs*) are responsible for this disorder because they bring social problems of various kinds to the Chinese community. Nowadays in China, these problems are becoming more and more serious. These problems, for example, include *nantongxing maiyjin* (male homosexual prostitution), promiscuity, deception, harassment and robbery. All these things they are doing are of low *suzhi* (Xiao Zhou 2004, pers. comm., 14 April).<sup>4</sup>

This narrative is constructed as an example to indicate how *money boys* are often perceived as a social harm in the Chinese (same-sex) community. To give another example, Elaine Jeffreys' (2007, p. 167) research similarly demonstrates how *money boys*, as they relate to male homosexual prostitution (*nantongxing maiyjin*), are typically represented as an undesirable social category in Chinese society:

... many gay men view *money boys* as criminal lowlifes who bring the homosexual community into disrepute, and whose activities need to be curbed via the implementation of stricter government controls. Most notably, Chinese academics, policing scholars, and self-identified members of China's homosexual community similarly contend that male homosexual prostitution needs to be made subject to government constraints in order to curb the PRC's rapidly increasing rate of HIV/AIDS infection.

The above two examples are cited to underline the relationship between the exclusion of the rural and the hegemonic discourse of *suzhi*. The construction of a rural identity, (mis)represented mainly by *money boys*, in urban China is far from a voluntary choice, as it almost presupposes and requires exclusions by both the mainstream homosexual and heterosexual communities in China. These exclusions, as Judith Butler (1990, p. 3) remarks, always ‘proceed with certain legitimating and exclusionary aims, and these political operations are effectively concealed and naturalised by a political analysis that takes juridical structures as their foundation’. For Butler, two key issues seem to stand out. First, it is the exercise of exclusionary practices through dominant heteronormative and naturalising discourses that ensure the reproduction of marginalised identities. Second, while exclusions are not always carried out overtly, they may appear in many subtle ways in order to enforce and conceal their agenda. Such is the exclusionary power of *suzhi*, too.

Indeed, *suzhi* works subtly as a self-regulative regime in which Chinese citizens appear to be well aware of their own level of *suzhi*. The Chinese not only recognise, but also internalise *suzhi* as a legitimising principle to mark a hierarchy of human bodies and values, despite a general lack of consensus on what is high *suzhi* and what is low *suzhi*. A 28-year-old gay-oriented webmaster is quoted below to illustrate how *suzhi* may be used to justify social hierarchies in Chinese society:

*Suzhi* is a very broad concept. When people speak of *suzhi*, they make an evaluation of you. That is to say, they try to evaluate your educational level (*wenhua chengdu*), your relationship (*guanxi*) with other people, your survival skills (*shengcun nengli*) and your ability to make money (*zhuanqian nengli*). For instance, in Beijing, some same-sex groups do make an evaluation of other same-sex groups in terms of *suzhi*. They do this by looking into how many members of a group have a PhD degree or master’s degree. The more degrees they have, the higher *suzhi* they can claim.

(Xiao Jiang 2004, pers. comm., 25 May)

The above discussion of *suzhi* may well be used to bespeak a desire to mark a hierarchy of human bodies within same-sex groups in China. It is a desire to fix, delimit and delineate bodies along an axis of urban and rural. That is to say, the discourse of *suzhi* also operates at the corporeal level. Bodies are categorised into different levels of *suzhi* on the basis of educational level, financial status, relationship networks and survival skills in the Chinese scheme of things. On this point, Anne Anagnost (2004, p. 193) sums it up well: ‘It [*suzhi*] works ideologically as a regime of representation through which subjects recognise their positions within the larger social order.’

Clearly, not all human bodies are equally shaped by the discourse of *suzhi*. Neither do all urban-born *gays* or *lesbians* agree with this categorising principle. The following remark made by Zhou Dan is thus a helpful reminder:<sup>5</sup>

Different Chinese use *suzhi* differently. Different regions and different same-sex groups in China will have a slightly different understanding of *suzhi*. But the language of *suzhi* is a response to some of the needs of our same-sex community. For a long time, *tongzhi* in China have been struggling to create a healthy image in the public eye. This is due to the fact that *tongxinglian* in China has been demonised for so long. I think *suzhi* is such a tool to realise this goal. Besides, I do not find it useful to categorise people in terms of *suzhi*. Unfortunately, some people think that they are superior to others. These people are pretty narrow-minded.

(Zhou Dan 2006, pers. comm., 14 September)

Zhou Dan is cited to stress that *suzhi* should not be interpreted as an overpowering rhetoric or practice. Rather, *suzhi* may be approached as a hegemonic discourse that is articulated around the desire of certain urban *gay* and *lesbian* moderns to construct a 'superior' form of body that is internalised as 'high quality', as a way of ensuring social stratification on an urban/rural divide. A person of high quality is basically assumed to be cultured and civilised, attributes that are internalised as essential for personal and national development. To some extent, *suzhi* is internalised to perpetuate the invisible exclusion of rural same-sex attracted Chinese from the mainstream same-sex groups.

This invisible, and yet extensive, power of *suzhi* is simultaneously attached to a discourse on morality. Of all anxieties about the low quality of the rural masses, male homosexual prostitution (*nantongxing maiyin*) may be said to cause the greatest moral concern within the Chinese same-sex community. As a generalisation, male homosexual prostitution is often associated with rural men and is seen as morally dubious in Chinese society, and some other societies. However, this moral concern is specific to China's commitment to the attainment of cultural capital, with emphasis on the development of the people's *suzhi* – for example, cultural quality (*wenhua suzhi*), psychological quality (*xinli suzhi*), quality of consciousness (*sixiang suzhi*) and quality of morality (*daode suzhi*). This emphasis on *suzhi* development also coexists with the party-state's campaigns to create a 'socialist spiritual civilisation' that serves to reflect a new social order, guided by the policies of reform and opening up. Crucially, the creation of this socialist spiritual civilisation is to raise the people's political consciousness and foster public morality and self-discipline on the basis of 'communist' ideology (Landsberger 1996; Lynch 1999).

A focus on the quality of morality (*daode suzhi*) in contemporary China has great implications, particularly for *money boys*. The fact that *money boys* engage in male same-sex trade already marks them as morally wrong – also a reference to low *suzhi*. This language of low *suzhi* is constructed on certain perceptions of *money boys*. Broadly speaking, *money boys* are considered to have no morals and will do anything for money. They are assumed to come from rural areas, which are associated with stereotypes of backwardness, poverty and improper behaviour. Owing to their engagement in male same-sex trade, they are labelled as the main culprits for shaming the entire same-sex community and posing a severe risk to

the sexual health of urban-born *gay* men. Notice that these perceptions circulate pervasively in the community, alongside a moral anxiety about the differentiation between urban propriety and rural incivility, and between proper and improper expressions of same-sex identity and practice. This focus on morality raises the question of the ‘proper’ expression of identity and sexual desire, which is made explicit not by the rural population, but by some modern urbanites who call themselves *gay* or *lesbian*. In this sense, the discourse of *suzhi*, as articulated by urbanites, excludes the rural *gays* and *lesbians* from the mainstream Chinese same-sex community.

Certainly, not everyone harbours these perceptions about *money boys* or male same-sex trade, but the reality is that the language of low *suzhi* is applied almost exclusively to *money boys* and is central to the construction of a ‘rural’ identity. This means that *money boys* are automatically ascribed a rural identity, and that they are perceived as, to borrow the words of Solinger (cited in Yan 2003, p. 505), ‘uncouth, even nearly imbecile, an embarrassment to polite Chinese society’.

### ***Suzhi and strategies***

Not all *money boys* accept the imposition of low *suzhi*. Neither are all same-sex attracted Chinese equally implicated in the discourse of low *suzhi*. It is fair to say that most same-sex attracted Chinese resort to various strategies to counter the hegemonic ideas and practices of *suzhi*, depending on such factors as class, economic power, education, age, marital status and accessibility to local and international same-sex cultural products. As for *money boys*, it may be argued that they resist the imposition of low *suzhi* in their own ways. How *money boys* resist the power of low *suzhi* is a compelling question, as it is of great research interest to probe into how ‘weapons of the weak’ are performed through the act of active or passive resistance (Scott 1985).

Meantime, let us give voice to two of my interviewees who are engaged in male same-sex trade. My interviewees and I are here to construct a story of how *money boys* resist the discourse of low *suzhi*, although this form of resistance is not always apparent to them.

Xiao Zhou is a 21-year-old self-described *money boy*. Some self-described *gay* men in a local bar introduced Xiao Zhou to me. Xiao Zhou remarked:

I grew up in a small village in Anhui. It is a poor village. I have come to Beijing to look for opportunities (*zhao jihui*), but I am not educated (*meiyou wenhua*). I find it hard to find work in big cities like Beijing. I have to make a living (*ganhuo*). What can I do? I am someone of low *suzhi*. I have worked as a waiter, a hawker and a cleaner. The money was so little and the work was very demanding. I am not *gay*, but I am still young and I know-how to talk (*huijianghua*) to people. This is only a job. I get good money (several hundred  *yuan*) out of one single transaction, if I am lucky.

(Xiao Zhou 2004, pers. comm., 24 April)

Wang Jun is a 48-year-old brothel manager. He ran male same-sex trade in Tianjin and had 12 *money boys* working for him at the time when I interviewed him. Consider Wang Jun's response:

These people [*money boys*] are usually quite young. They come from poor rural areas. They are of low *suzhi*. They do not have many survival skills (*shengcun nengli*). Youth is their asset. I think everybody sells something about himself. Why can't we sell our body (*maishen*)? These people sell their body because they have to survive. At the end of the day, we have to make a living. You see, some of them who work for me are not even *tongxinglian*, but they only use their sexuality as an instrument for economic improvement. What is wrong with that?

(Wang Jun 2004, pers. comm., 25 May)

The fact that *money boys* are prepared to be commodified and objectified is an act of passive resistance to the hegemony of low *suzhi*. This may be interpreted as, to use the words of Yan Hairong (2003, p. 499), a 'poverty-relief strategy'. This is a calculated act on their part to rid themselves of poverty, as they find themselves in deep crisis with the newly unequal economic restructuring in contemporary China. However, this does not mean that the *suzhi* attributed to *money boys* should be measured solely in monetary terms. *Money boys* also wish to rid themselves of cultural poverty and *suzhi* poverty, a gesture that is symbolic of their struggle for self-recognition and self-development. This is also a process of 'reterritorialising' the rural into the urban setting of a market-based economy where *money boys* can attempt to represent themselves as part of the productive workforce and eventually climb the social ladder (Yan 2003, p. 499). The implication of this process is that they come to recognise their own position in the hierarchy of *suzhi* – their lack of *suzhi* or their need to develop *suzhi*.

My fieldwork indicated that some self-identified Chinese *gays* and *lesbians* were in a struggle to seek out ways for self-improvement, with the aim of raising their *suzhi*. For example, look at the words of this 38-year-old television scriptwriter:

I think the raising of quality (*tigao suzhi*) in our community is an urgent thing. In fact, I find it more important to improve people's *suzhi* than push for the legislation of *gay* rights in China. This is because most of us in China have a poor sense of identity, while many others, especially the people in the countryside, are of low *suzhi*. We should improve the quality of our mental health (*xinli suzhi*) by learning the right ways to come to terms with our sexual attraction and identity.

(Ou Yang 2004, pers. comm., 23 May)

This is evidence that a self-described *lesbian* expressed a need for self-improvement by focusing on improving the quality of her mental health (*xinli suzhi*), while learning to adopt a 'healthy' attitude towards same-sex practice and relationship. In my conversations with many Chinese *lesbians*, they demonstrated

a keen interest in the enhancement of *suzhi*, which was often understood in terms of the quality of mental health (*xinli suzhi*) and personal qualities (*geren suzhi*). Notably, how Chinese *lesbians* speak of *suzhi* is slightly different from their male counterparts. To an extent, *suzhi* is often verbalised around the urban/rural divide in the Chinese male same-sex community where *suzhi* is considerably targeted against *money boys* on the basis of geographic and class differences. By and large, it is these complex cultural nuances of *suzhi* – intensified by urban modernity and rural vulgarity – that incite the rural masses to strive for self-enhancement, facilitating the emergence of new social identities, including new sexual identities. *Money boys* are among those social identities who struggle hard to transform from a rural identity to an urbanite and join the modern world. However, their struggle against a low-*suzhi* rural identity is not without paradoxes.

This is one paradox: the more *money boys* desire to abandon their rural identity, the more they fail to do so. As I observed and engaged in the field, many *money boys* who are determined to escape the poverty, suffering and oppression of rurality, claim a personal space and acquire economic advancement and upward social mobility through migration to urban areas. Nevertheless, stereotypes of their rurality seem to be all the more heightened and reinforced by their expression of high quality through consumption, fashion and lifestyles in the city. *Money boys* continue to represent rurality and low *suzhi* in the eyes of urban same-sex attracted Chinese. These stereotypes are internalised by *money boys* themselves too. Quite a few of them think that they are of low *suzhi*, partly because they are automatically associated with backwardness and poverty, and partly because they are perceived as a problem to the community. Lisa Rofel (1999a, p. 466) offers a thoughtful response to this perception:

Everyone assumes that *money boys* come from the countryside and that they pollute city life with their transgressions of the social divisions between masculine wealth and masculine love, between urban propriety and rural excess, and between proper and improper expressions of gay identity.

Another paradox lies in the fact that the bodies of *money boys* are both an object and a subject. Their bodies represent an intersection of urban and rural bodies, symbolising the transgression of urban/rural, low-*suzhi*/high-*suzhi*, moral and immoral expressions of same-sex practice and desire. People who are familiar with the urban *gay* scenes in China know that the bodies of *money boys* are the object of desire of the upper-middle classes and urbanites. Paradoxically, some urban-born *gay* men are quite suspicious of *money boys*. In particular, these urbanites are anxious about ‘exploitation by rural migrants and associate *money boys* with rurality (and also effeminacy, since in their view acts of prostitution effeminise men)’ (Rofel 1999a, p. 467).

There is apparently a politics of seduction between *money boys* and those who consume their bodies. This politics is manifested in such a way that *money boys* use their sexual capital to gain economic resources and social mobility, thereby allowing them to somewhat subvert the urban/rural divide. In a way, the bodies of

*money boys* are often penetrated and at times exploited on the basis of monetary and material transactions. Most significantly, how the bodies of *money boys* are consumed represents not only the exploitation of these male sex workers, but also the effects of increasing social imbalances in contemporary China. In this respect, Li Yinhe (2006, p. 86) and Wu Cuncun (2004, p. 162, and 2006) report that the male homosexual acts of penetration and being penetrated often invoke notions of status and social stratification.

And yet, who consumes the body of *money boys*? A 50-year-old self-identified gay man in Beijing made this remark:

The people who use the service of *money boys* usually fall into three categories: the rich (*youqiande*), the very old (*henlaode*) and the ugly (*choude*). These people include *laobeijing* (Beijingers), *waidiren* (Chinese from other parts of mainland China), people from Hong Kong and Taiwan, and *laowai* (usually referring to white people).

(Lao Xu 2007, pers. comm., 15 Aug)

This remark is merely intended to offer an inkling of who possibly consumes the body of *money boys* in Beijing. Importantly, this ethnographic remark should not be interpreted as an objective standard for evaluating the consumption of *money boys* in Beijing. This remark symbolises an exploratory attempt to piece together how some individuals may react and respond to this subject matter. On this subject, it is helpful to consider Elaine Jeffreys' (2007, p. 164) report: 'To date, the available literature does not address the question of who precisely demands the services of male sex sellers in present-day China, other than gesturing towards an unspecified group of usually married men.' In short, the question of who consumes the body of *money boys* is still under-investigated and requires dynamic research attention.

## Conclusion

The central argument of this chapter has been that the emergence of same-sex identity terms in urban China signals widening social divisions among same-sex attracted individuals and groups. Same-sex articulations, in this book, are not merely a discourse of naming, labelling or even resistance to the hegemony of global gayness. They are also a representation of power relations. Ultimately, they capture not a unitary homosexual voice, but rather a diversity of silences and voices.

The approach to this argument has stemmed from the need to make sense of two pertinent questions. The first is concerned with how the growing dominance of Western same-sex identity terms has come to represent the newly emerging social identities in urban China. The second question addresses the need to sharpen knowledge of how a heightened sensitivity towards social hierarchies finds expression in the discourse of *suzhi* in contemporary China. Most interestingly of all, *suzhi* is favoured by a group of urban-born, middle-class same-sex attracted Chinese as a form of hegemonic language to exercise and ensure exclusions of



their rural counterparts. *Suzhi* is also deployed strategically by both members of urban and rural areas to gain access to personal and economic advancement.

Throughout this chapter, research energies have been invested in how same-sex articulations in urban China are not merely constructed across local, national and transnational discourses, but are also negotiated through the social reality specific to China's commitment to reform and opening up. With regard to the culture of same-sex articulations in urban China, it is rife with social conflicts and contradictions – a condition that is representative of the diverse and divisive nature of the same-sex community in urban China. It is anticipated that the class relations across same-sex groups will become more complicated as China continues to open up. It is absolutely essential to conduct further ethnographic research into two lines of inquiry: (1) how exclusion of the rural population plays out within the same-sex community in urban China, and (2) how *suzhi* is understood and practised in the female same-sex community in China.

## 5 The *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace

### Self-censorship, commercialisation and misrepresentation

Much of the analysis so far has been to problematise local/global, modernity, the politics of storytelling and fieldwork, same-sex articulations and the researcher's agency in setting the research agenda.<sup>1</sup> A central element of analysis has been how the articulation of seemingly modern and authentic Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities bespeaks a peculiar paradox: an expression of a new sense of national identity, coupled with a growing disenchantment with traditional culture. This articulation is imagined around the social realities of opening up, which are further negotiated around a re-articulation of 'local' and 'global' cultural politics, under contingent circumstances that are constantly being contested.

This chapter will add to this analysis by shifting the focus to investigate a *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace. Primarily, 'Chinese cyberspace' refers to Chinese internet users, Chinese-language websites, Chinese website operators and online censors who are based in mainland China. The Chinese here are constructed as, to use Karsten Giese's (2004, p. 28) words, "'indigenous" PRC identities, not Greater China, not overseas Chinese nor globalised identities ...'. They are also identified as '*gay* netizens in China'.

The chapter has two main goals. It explores how the internet is used as a system of state control and a sphere of theoretical freedom. It also delves into how some of the Chinese *gay*-oriented websites are increasingly self-censored and commercialised in Chinese cyberspace. That is why, in the title of this chapter, the author implies that while the *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace is self-censored and commercialised, same-sex identity is arguably misrepresented.

The argument in this chapter is two-fold: (1) the growing commercialisation of the *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace marks a paradoxical development of the Chinese internet, where state control, a degree of freedom of expression and self-censorship coexist; (2) the complexity and dynamism of Chinese cyberspace ensures misrepresentation of same-sex identity, but can also produce as much homogeneity as diversity. This argument seeks to engage with the ever-changing processes of state surveillance, commercialisation and identity reinvention taking place in Chinese cyberspace. It also serves to highlight how these processes are increasingly localised and tied up with contradictions of homogeneity and diversity, freedom and control. Ultimately, these contradictions serve to demonstrate the ways in which *gay* netizens in China discover themselves and

embrace the international same-sex communities through an imagined and real sphere in Chinese cyberspace. Given this, the following structure is proposed for this chapter.

### **The structure of this chapter**

This chapter sets out to examine the representation of some of the gay-oriented websites that are mainly created for, and visited by, Chinese-speaking same-sex attracted individuals in mainland China. The first part of this chapter clarifies a few key terms and explains why cyber anthropology is adopted as a research methodology to examine the *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace. It then presents the collective dynamics of the *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace by focusing on the complex interchange between the local and the global in an online setting. In the second part, the chapter analyses the local nature of the *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace. It demonstrates that this Chinese *gay* space is increasingly (self)-censored and allows for a theoretical expression of individual identities. This exploration is linked to study the emergence of Comrade Literature and a commercial culture in the Chinese *gay* space. This study is intended to illuminate how this emergence comes to affect the authorial autonomy of Chinese gay-oriented websites and how it facilitates misrepresentation of same-sex identity. In closing, the chapter proposes a rethinking of some of the political issues in the *gay* space of Chinese cyberspace. In particular, it seeks to problematise how the impact of increasing online self-censorship and commercialism is reinforcing misrepresentation of gay-oriented websites, along with same-sex identity.

### **Terminology**

This section will be dedicated to a study of two terms: ‘cyberspace’ and ‘representation’. The term ‘cyberspace’ is chiefly drawn from William Gibson (cited in Cavallaro 2000, p. *viv*), who writes that cyberspace is:

[a] consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts ... A graphic representation of data abstracted from banks of every computer in the human system.

Gibson’s conception of cyberspace is useful for this chapter as it reminds me of how imagination and fantasy are deeply embedded in many of our everyday experiences. Gibson’s conception also helps me recognise how the power of imagination continuously transforms individual identities or desires into collective representations. Crucially, this imaginary power is, as Dani Cavallaro (2000: x) observes, ‘a product of contingent trends and is accordingly open to ongoing redefinition’.

Drawing from Gibson and Cavallaro, and others, the present study develops the term ‘cyberspace’ to conceptualise an imagined space where interaction

and representation take place. The study also interprets 'cyberspace' as a form of reality that has implications for offline social experiences. In stating this, the study recognises a close link between online and offline experiences to the extent that certain online features (such as email and chat rooms) can be used to alter the economies of social organisation in significant ways. In addition, it should be stressed that the use of 'cyberspace' as both an imagined and real space signifies my exploratory attempt to make sense of the relationship between identity and electronic technology. This attempt is thus ultimately to offer new perspectives on the construction of online Chinese same-sex identity and contribute to cyber anthropology on this subject matter.

Furthermore, it is essential to explain the term 'representation' in this chapter. On the one hand, 'representation' is used with an acute awareness that a few problems are particularly relevant to the representation of the Other in cyber anthropology, something that has been carefully examined in Chapter 3, 'Fieldwork: filtering the field'. In this chapter, the author offers to situate these problems within the context of an online setting. The first problem is that cyber anthropology, as well as many other studies, all confront the dilemma of seeking to represent the Other in a critical and ethical manner, and yet the act of representing in itself is an act of power over the Other. Another problem, which arises from the anthropological privilege, is linked with the ways in which the anthropological gaze may misrepresent online identities, something that is a highly problematic category. For one thing, online identities are never clearly defined and have great potential to cross local, national and international boundaries. Furthermore, a 'new' problem of online representation emerges with what is now called deterritorialisation. Increasingly, deterritorialisation has become one of the central forces in cyber anthropology that affects processes and products of representation. In a way, cultural meanings are all the more constructed through interaction, which is made possible through the collapsing and overlapping of local, national and transnational boundaries, especially by the electronic media.

On the other hand, 'representation' is used to emphasise how Chinese gayness in the online and offline communities may be represented as non-confronting. As Chou Wah-shan (2000, p. 8) argues, this non-confronting self-representation of Chinese gayness attaches 'primacy to the familial-kinship system over individual rights, and harmonious social relationships over confrontational politics'. Chou is cited to underline that same-sex attracted Chinese tend to reconcile their sexual identity with the cultural and familial structure of the community where social harmony is actively promoted. The use of this non-confronting approach also means that Chinese gay-oriented webmasters have to scrutinise their content in order not to offend the censor. By the same token, Chinese *gay* netizens must abide by the censorship laws in China where (self)-censorship is not always made explicit, but is often internalised by people through indoctrination.

At the same time, this non-confrontational approach is accompanied by passive resistance and is a by-product of (self)-censorship in Chinese cyberspace. An example of passive resistance is the frequent use of coded language in Chinese gay-oriented chat rooms to escape censorship. As Remy Cristini (2005, p. 35)

suggests, the emergence of this coded language is a reaction to government prohibition of the use of sexually explicit language in Chinese chat rooms. Along similar lines, Karsten Giese's (2004) research reports that netizens in China constantly use their ingenuity to find news ways of escaping online surveillance. One common way to do this in China is to use a coded language, through a play of numbers, symbols, dialects, foreign terms, sounds, and so forth. This play of language in Chinese cyberspace has created what Fu-chang Hsu (2002, pp. 3–4) calls 'a net speak subculture', subverting traditional language use.

In a nutshell, the representation of same-sex identity on Chinese gay-oriented websites is largely contingent upon, among other factors, state surveillance in cyberspace. Despite surveillance, Chinese *gay* netizens make use of the online environment to form imagined communities as a symbolic act of representing their gayness. However, these communities merely represent a form of self-help group rather than institutional organisations. The kind of confrontation with powerful institutions that represents Western gay and lesbian politics does not come into their equation. The Pride Parade is a prime example, pushing gay and lesbian visibility, moving beyond the non-confronting practice of staying 'in the closet'.

As signalled above, 'cyberspace' and 'representation' are compelling concepts that require problematisation. This problematisation, in turn, is significantly informed by the following research methodology.

## **Methodology**

'Cyber anthropology' is used as a research methodology in this chapter. The rationale for using it is two-fold. Primarily, online material can offer untapped textual resources concerned with the construction of emerging gender and sexual identities. Recent research has reported, albeit quite generally, that 'for young GLBT [gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual/transgendered] people the Internet is the most important source of information pertaining to GLBT issues' (Jardin 2006, p. 9). Furthermore, 'cyber anthropology' is used as a research practice to reflect on the relationship between electronic technology and identity. For this purpose, the present analysis takes issue with how self-consciously modern Chinese same-sex identity is transformed and articulated around the internet.

Importantly, this methodology of cyber anthropology involves the practices of self-reflexivity and online participant observation. Perhaps equally important, the methodology also requires the application of ethical principles to study human subjects on targeted websites. There are still unresolved ethical issues concerning rights and under what circumstances researchers can use online postings. In view of this, ethics approval was obtained from the relevant academic institute before data were appropriated from websites.

This methodology also involves positioning myself as an observer and a netizen within the *gay* space of Chinese cyberspace, while seeking to carry out a textual analysis of narratives on websites. Through this positioning, the author aims to gain a sense of how social experiences of *gay* netizens in China are expressed in their own terms, despite the fact that these terms are necessarily mediated by

the complex process of translation. This positioning is strategic. It allows me to randomly select cultural material from targeted websites, which can be publicly accessed for data collection and interpretation, and are regularly visited by *gay* netizens in China. This selected material is meant to represent popular features that characterise a newly emerging social space for the online Chinese same-sex community. It is a space that has been rapidly extending its territory, especially since China's opening up to global power relations. Generally speaking, the emergence of a gay space in cyberspace has provoked criticism and resistance, both in public and academic discussion.

### **The gay space in cyberspace**

Recent studies have argued that community building of same-sex attracted people has been transformed by and around electronic media (Castells 2001; Alexander 2002a; 2002b; Heinz *et al.* 2002). As shown in Van Noort's study (cited in Heinz *et al.* 2002, p. 108), the same-sex communities have moved from physical locations to cyberspace, which is thought to be 'incredibly welcoming, supportive, vibrant, and amusing', offering them a space to imagine a shared community and look for friendships and relationships. Jennifer Egan (cited in Alexander 2002b, p. 78) notes that an increasing number of young, same-sex attracted people are making use of cyberspace to 'make contact with others, to find role models for their fledgling lives as gay people, and even to establish romantic and sexual relationships'. Egan (cited in Alexander 2002b, p. 78) argues that same-sex attracted people now tend to come out at a younger age, 'perhaps due to the availability of information and interactivity, offered by the Internet'. Dennis Altman (2001a, p. 94) writes that the internet in Japan 'has become a central aid to homosexual cruising', facilitating sexual interaction among gay men and a building of the same-sex community. John Gilgun (cited in Alexander 2002b, p. 78), an award-winning gay author, believes and advocates that the internet has considerably transformed the lives of many gay men and lesbians.

The discussion of this line of argument is to underline a point – that is, cyberspace may be conveniently construed as a site for producing a shared community or even a common consciousness, existing across time and space. Cyberspace may also easily be imagined as a 'global' space that helps negotiate the process of coming out. This line of thought is problematic. It seems to overstate the function of cyberspace in transforming lives and lifestyles on a 'universal' scale, despite its unpremeditated intention. By overstating its function, it creates the image that 'universal' thoughts and values can automatically be promoted within cyberspace. This overstatement is not entirely useful for making sense of the complex and multiple processes of cross-cultural appropriation taking place in cyberspace. Following Chris Berry and Fran Martin (2003, p. 89), it is worth considering how these processes articulate 'the specific, material process through which cultural products and practices travel the globe and are altered and assimilated "elsewhere" in specific local contexts, often through indigenisation with less recognisably "global" forms'. In other words, it is important to think through how globalising

processes transform local identities, and how such processes are absorbed and localised within specific spatial and material conditions.

This consideration is based on readings about cultural globalisation by Chris Berry and Fran Martin (2003), Lisa Rofel (1999a) and Arjun Appadurai (1996). These researchers are united in arguing for ‘the possibility of a heterogenising view of cultural globalisation’ (Berry and Martin 2003, p. 88). Their position is that cultural globalisation survives on cross-cultural differences in power and knowledge. In particular, Appadurai has convinced me that the globalising or homogenising approach to cultural identities and categories is inadequate in capturing the politics of localising and globalising processes that characterise plurality, diversity, difference and imbalance. Appadurai’s (1996, p. 17) comment is thus a helpful reminder:

... globalisation is itself a deeply historical, uneven, and even localising process. Globalisation does not necessarily or even frequently imply homogenisation or Americanisation, and to the extent that different societies appropriate the materials of modernity differently, there is still ample room for the deep study of specific geographies, histories, and languages.

This line of argument is convincing to the extent that the interactions between the local and the global are deeply inequitable, diverse or even increasingly localised. This line of argument is underlined, to use the words of Lisa Rofel (1999a, p. 457), in order to ‘open inquiry into contingent processes and performative evocations that do not presume equivalence but ask after confrontations charged with claims of power’. Significantly, this argumentation refuses to posit ‘local’ and ‘global’ as two totally opposing categories. It advances the notion that we should interrogate how each constructs and problematises the other.

What follows builds on this line of argument. A shift is proposed, from an emphasis on cultural homogenisation to a position that considers how homogenisation and heterogenisation can both construct a gay space in cyberspace. This is intended to engage in a broad data sample to focus on two internet realms: the intensifying localisation and commercialisation of gay-oriented websites in Chinese cyberspace. The two realms serve to reflect my main concern in this chapter – that is, the problematic space of cyberspace, which is subject to the complex interplay of the local and the global, and can create as much homogeneity as diversity. This point will be explained in the next section.

### **The *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace**

Ongoing studies have indicated that the emergence of a *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace has become a reality since the 1990s (Chou 2000b; Tong 2004; Zhu 2004; Cristini 2005; Jiang 2005; Martin 2008). This upcoming Chinese *gay* space, as Fran Martin (2008) rightly points out, may be used as a strategic sphere ‘to challenge the hegemonies of local regimes of sexual and gender regulation’ and ‘can provide imaginative resources for urgent and intensely local struggles’.

Similarly, Chou Wah-shan's (2000b) research reports that the internet in China is becoming an important tool for *tongzhi* to engage in a constructive dialogue and build an unprecedented space for the diasporic Chinese same-sex communities around the globe. Chou (2000b, p. 134) writes: 'the gradual popularisation of the Internet in China has helped to generate a small but a rapidly growing *tongzhi* community which will prove to be a pioneering force in building indigenous *tongzhi* discourses in China'.

Consider what this self-identified *gay* man said in an interview: 'It would never have been possible for me to find our kind of people (*women zhezhongren*) if there were no internet' (2004, pers. comm., 25 May). During my interviews with webmasters of the gay-oriented websites [www.gaybyte.com](http://www.gaybyte.com), [www.gaychinese.cn](http://www.gaychinese.cn) and [www.tianjincool.com](http://www.tianjincool.com), they emphasised that the internet has brought together many *tongzhi* in China, where there is still little genuine acceptance of same-sex relationships as a healthy sexual life (2004, pers. comm., 22 May). In my conversations with those who called themselves *gay* or *lesbian*, they all believed that the internet was a significantly new channel where they could look for friends (*zhao pengyou*) and support (*zhichi*) (2004, pers. comm., March to May). Zhu Chuanyan (2004, pers. comm., 25 March), who compiled the *Internet's effect on homosexual's identity*, told me that many *gay* netizens in China are making use of the online environment to look for a sense of community, not only in China, but also across the diasporic Chinese same-sex communities. Hui Jiang (2005, p. 1), a webmaster of [www.gaychinese.cn](http://www.gaychinese.cn), remarks that the internet has become 'an inseparable part of the gay agenda and community building' for same-sex groups in China.

Nevertheless, the *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace, and elsewhere, can be viewed as a sphere for the (re)production of both cultural homogenisation and heterogenisation. On the one hand, there is a degree of cultural homogenisation in the *gay* space of Chinese cyberspace. A glance at certain well-established Chinese gay-oriented websites (for example, [www.gaychinese.cn](http://www.gaychinese.cn)) shows that it is common to see foreign news coverage revolve around such similar topics as the Pride Parade, gay rights, same-sex marriage, the decriminalisation of homosexuality or the coming-out process.<sup>2</sup> Besides, gay-oriented websites in China tend to use homogenous ideas or symbols as gay identity markers. Quite prominently, diasporic or popular Western gay and lesbian icons are commonly used as symbols for group identification. These websites also mark themselves as *gay* by revolving around typical gay-oriented subjects; many of them are arguably based on foreign/Western sources. This cultural homogenisation leads me to question how the globalisation of electronic media helps (re)produce certain universal myths, stereotypes and misrepresentations about the 'Western' gay scene as a gay haven. One major criticism of this homogenisation is that the universally homogenising view of cultural globalisation ensures an elimination of cultural difference and a reduction of (same-sex) identities around the globe (Appadurai 1996; Rofel 2001; Berry, Martin and Yue 2003).

On the other hand, there is also cultural heterogenisation in the *gay* space of Chinese cyberspace. Cyberspace represents a field that enables *gay* netizens in



China to imagine alliances with diverse same-sex identities and communities around local, national and international borders. For example, in my conversations with people in bars marked 'gay' in Beijing, these people often demonstrated a sense of affinity for the global and diasporic Chinese same-sex communities (2004, pers. comm., March to May). Some of them mentioned having (sexual) relationships and friendships with *laowai* (usually referring to Westerners) or *huaqiao* (overseas Chinese). A few of them mentioned that they had visited gay bars while they were on a trip overseas. A self-identified *lesbian* said that she paid to have sex with a female sex worker in Amsterdam. A self-identified *money boy* (rent boy) told me in an interview that he had sex with an overweight *laowai* without a condom for 350.00 *yuan*.

Notably, all this affinity is subject to displacement. In a way, *gay* netizens in China make use of cyberspace to appropriate notions of identity or activism from foreign sources. And yet this appropriation is strategic, not a simple reproduction of other identities or cultures. This point is made by drawing from a recent study that focuses on how online interactions between local and global identities give rise to a melange of cultural categories, rather than a simple mimicry of patterns (Berry and Martin 2003, p. 89). This study follows closely the post-colonial project to decentre the West by rejecting Western-centric claims to knowledge and power. Significantly, this study does not mean to privilege the local over the global. Rather, as Ann Cvetkovich and Douglas Kellner (cited in Berry, Martin and Yue 2003, p. 5) point out, such a study urges us to 'think through the relationship between the global and the local by observing how global forces influence and even structure ever more local situations and ever more strikingly'.

### **Locality of gay-oriented websites in China**

Hui Jiang (2006, pers. comm., 11 May), a webmaster of [www.gaychinese.cn](http://www.gaychinese.cn), told me on the phone that the earliest gay-oriented websites in China emerged around 1998. These websites were: [www.gtz.org](http://www.gtz.org), [www.china.reddust.net](http://www.china.reddust.net) and [www.boysky.com](http://www.boysky.com). According to figures presented by Tong Ge (2004, p. 190), up to the end of May 2004, there were approximately 360 *tongzhi* websites operating in China.

A quick survey of some of the Chinese gay-oriented websites shows that they are generally quite similar in layout and content. Generally, Chinese gay-oriented websites have an extremely compact layout. It is a layout that is loaded with links to, for instance, Comrade Literature, chat rooms, the bulletin board system, a question-and-answer corner for *tongzhi*, making friends, legal aid and news. In particular, many of these links cover local and international news and information, with a focus on same-sex issues. Typically, there are also numerous blinking texts, colourful images and advertisements that immediately catch the eye.

There are distinctive features that characterise gay-oriented websites in China. Three of them are highlighted here. First, most of the *gay* and *lesbian* websites in China are short-lived. This short duration is partly attributable to the ambiguity in the legislation of internet regulations. Chinese authorities tend to continually

revise internet regulations. Apart from having to go through 'the world's largest and oldest bureaucracy' – as Johan Lagerkvist (2005, p. 190) calls it, commenting on China's implementation of electronic technology – website operators in China also have to re-register upon the announcement of revised internet regulations. Michelle W. Lau's (2005) report indicates that government authorities in China issue extensive regulations to govern internet usage. Lau (2005, p. 3) writes: 'these [internet] regulations often overlap, are regularly updated, and are created and carried out by multiple government agencies, the legal infrastructure regarding internet usage in China is extraordinarily complex'. In sum, according to the gay-oriented webmasters I interviewed, the opening and running of Chinese gay-oriented websites could be affected by four main factors: (1) an ambiguous online legal status; (2) a lack of financial resources; (3) online pornography; and (4) computer hacking by other Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* websites (2004, pers. comm., March to May). As Hui Jiang (2006, pers. comm., 10 November), a webmaster of [www.gaychinese.cn](http://www.gaychinese.cn), informed me, computer hacking could be attributed to two main reasons: competition for representation within the same region, and personal conflicts among gay-oriented website operators. To complicate matters, government bodies sometimes handle the applications of certain *gay* and *lesbian* websites with deliberate delay or even avoidance (Tong 2004, p. 201).

Second, there is an imbalance between *gay* and *lesbian* websites in China. Of the 300–400 websites, fewer than 20 serve the lesbian community, although some *gay* and *lesbian* websites have started to merge, with the aim of attracting a larger audience. One striking difference between *gay* and *lesbian* websites in China is that gay-oriented websites demonstrate more technical expertise than their lesbian counterparts, with more instant text-messaging devices such as ICQ/QQ, MSN, IRC and audio-visual chat rooms. The other difference lies in the fact that gay-oriented websites are generally more commercialised and sexualised. They constantly call for advertisements, memberships, sponsorships and donations, while exhibiting sexually suggestive images. These differences are largely due to the fact that gay-oriented websites have established themselves at an earlier stage, allowing them to accumulate more technological expertise and internet experience.

Third, most of the *gay* and *lesbian* websites in China are set up as blogs. They are run by individuals, a small group or a few volunteers, in accordance with their wishes. As Tong Ge (2004, p. 197) comments, the content (such as text, images, videos or links) of many '*tongzhi* websites' is generated on the basis of the founders' goals and interests. This fact gives rise to a lack of objective standards in providing services to the same-sex community in China. For example, some self-regarded *gay* webmasters I interviewed provided the following information (2004, pers. comm., March to May): (1) a handful of websites carry out gay activism by seeking cooperation with international groups in order to protect gay rights and demand legislation on sexual equality; (2) some websites single out education as a vital tool in bridging the gap between the same-sex community and the wider community via electronic means; (3) other websites provide services to same-sex attracted people with the purpose of looking after their general

well-being; these services include, for example, social activities, seminars, sexual health workshops, *tongzhi* hotlines or counselling, organised for members of the community by *gay* or gay-friendly volunteers.

### ***Localised gay spaces***

Gay-oriented websites in Chinese cyberspace are arguably deeply localised. It should be stressed that the websites studied are Chinese language-based. The language of online discussions is predominantly Chinese, but simple English and 'Chinglish' phrases – for example, *P, T, les, lala, gay* or *lesbian* – are occasionally used, especially for self-identification (Tong 2004, p. 191).<sup>3</sup> These particular ways of speaking are embroiled with local meanings and interpretations that reveal values and concerns specific to Chinese (same-sex) communities across the globe. This special feature of the Chinese internet is explored in the research by Guobin Yang (2002, 2003, p. 470), who argues that there is the presence of 'an online Chinese cultural sphere'. This sphere is characterised by:

the interactions of three symbolic universes, the first consisting of mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, the second of other ethnic Chinese communities around the world, and the third of individuals (such as teachers and journalists) who try to understand China intellectually and bring their understanding to their own communities. Far from presuming that all the population in the three universes is connected to the Internet or is at all interested in things Chinese, I view the three universes as the potential tool from which the emerging online Chinese cultural sphere draws its publics.

(Yang 2003, p. 470)

Building on Yang's research (2002, 2003), this chapter takes the position that gay-oriented websites in China are not only localised, but also increasingly transnational. For one thing, most of the web content is in Chinese and is predominantly concerned with the well-being of diverse Chinese (same-sex) communities. Furthermore, another striking feature of these websites is that *gay* netizens in China are constantly borrowing language and images from global flows of information and people, while adapting themselves locally. This is a gesture of *gay* netizens in China to imagine themselves as part of the international same-sex community through the 'global' reach of the internet (at least among wired areas in urban China). In this light, Crystal's comment (cited in Gottlieb and McLelland 2003, p. 8) is a useful reminder: 'Most Internet interactions are not global in character; we are not talking to millions when we construct our Web pages, send an email, join a chat group, or enter a virtual world.'

Gay-oriented websites in China are locally particular in that they localise global identities and ideas for their own use. In other words, they embed the global in a local context. They provide links to services, information and entertainment exclusively for the local same-sex communities. For instance, they feature internet radio broadcasts on <http://blog.sina.com.cn/u/49aea30401000apt>,<sup>4</sup>

a betting corner on [www.boysky.com](http://www.boysky.com),<sup>5</sup> an information centre on [www.aibai.cn/info/index.php](http://www.aibai.cn/info/index.php)<sup>6</sup> or advertising for male massage parlours on [www.pybk.com](http://www.pybk.com).<sup>7</sup> Some websites have links to regional same-sex attracted netizens, such as [www.bjtongzhi.com](http://www.bjtongzhi.com),<sup>8</sup> [www.tianjincool.com](http://www.tianjincool.com)<sup>9</sup> and <http://www.pybk.com/>.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, chat rooms and the bulletin board system (BBS) on Chinese gay-oriented websites are represented and seen by *gay* netizens as local spaces. These two spaces are extremely popular on the internet in China, representing a distinct set of online experiences of Chinese (*gay*) netizens. These spaces facilitate a discussion of issues in an interactive environment. They also emerge as a social space of convergence, where (*gay*) netizens of similar views and experiences come together for mutual support. To an extent, they operate as an imagined community network for (*gay*) netizens to advertise for a relationship and post messages or photographs, all of which can be viewed by members of the community, as well as visitors. As an example, some of the content from the BBS on the Shanghai Lesbians website, <http://lesbiansh.diy.myrice.com/index2.htm>, is reproduced below:<sup>11</sup>

I am a woman who is attracted to the same-sex. Having chosen to be attracted to the same-sex, I am almost destined to be an abnormal person in the eyes of society. Perhaps, I have to live in darkness for the rest of my life and to have my deepest desire hidden at the bottom of my heart until death. Then, I will disappear from this world without even making a sound. Whether we are attracted to the same sex or the opposite sex, our love is all the same. What is the difference between same-sex and opposite-sex attraction? Whether you accept it or not, I can tell you that I only wish to look for my own happiness and felicity. Those girls, who are from Fujian and Anhui, please contact me on ICQ 195xxx290. Of course, no matter where you come from, you are also welcome to contact me.

I only wish to look for a T [a tomboy lesbian] who really loves me. For a long time, I thought a man could love me very much. But he ended up leaving me. Perhaps, God should not have created men. After having been tormented by men, I now do not trust them any more. I hate them. I only want to be myself. I do not want to change for anybody. I am a P (a feminine lesbian). I really hope that I can find a T who will always be good to me, and we can share a life together, forever. I look forward to hearing from you. My mobile phone is 057xxxx9761.

The above BBS postings are examples of localisation of cyberspace, a space that is increasingly localised by people around the globe to suit their own needs. In this case, these BBS postings show that (*gay*) netizens in China make use of cyberspace, a global context, to express personal concerns that can reflect certain socio-cultural specificities. We see two women pouring out their personal experience online. This disclosure of personal experience online is based on the presumed anonymity and safety of the internet. In fact, it is quite common to

see many Chinese *gay* netizens speak of their personal experience online with great ardour. For Ken Plummer (1995, p. 83), this enthusiasm for telling one's subjective experience makes sense, precisely because an important understanding of one's same-sex identity usually finds expression in coming-out stories and in revelations of the 'truth'. It is common, too, to see some *gay* netizens tell stories about their sex life. For instance, there is a great deal of talk about autoeroticism (*ziti huanyu*) and passionate intercourse (*jiqing zhijiao*) on <http://lalabar.com/news/type.asp?typeID=18>,<sup>12</sup> and same-sex intercourse (*tongzhi xing'ai*) on <http://www.pybk.com/LiteSeryRead.asp?BoardID=16&SeryID=9898>.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, other *gay* netizens take delight in sharing stories about one-night stands (*yiyeqing*), which are now becoming one of the most popular subjects of discussion in Chinese cyberspace (Mao 2005). For instance, the website <http://she.21cn.com/lovesex/sex/2006/08/15/2942483.shtml><sup>14</sup> provides people with information on locating others who are interested in one-night stands. There is insufficient research into the phenomenon of one-night stands in contemporary China, yet it can be argued that the emergence of one-night stands coincides with China's opening up, coupled with the problematic discourse of sexual openness. *Tianliang Yihou Shuofenshou* (*Say goodbye at daybreak*) is a popular Chinese book that claims to document the stories of one-night stands of 19 cosmopolitan women in China.

Browsing through some of the postings on the Shanghai Lesbians BBS (<http://lesbiansh.diy.myrice.com/index2.htm>),<sup>15</sup> it is also evident that Chinese *gay* netizens focus on personal, rather than community matters. In particular, the need for forming friendships or relationships is a primary concern. There are two possible answers to this concern. One obvious one is that many same-sex attracted people in China, and elsewhere, are badly in need of emotional support as a result of isolation and the oppression of heteronormativity. The other answer is that mainland Chinese society has little room for the expression of alternative sexual identities and individual freedom. The following extracts highlight certain personal concerns that are at times expressed in the Shanghai Lesbians BBS (<http://lesbiansh.diy.myrice.com/index2.htm>):<sup>16</sup>

I am a lesbian. I only know that I am attracted to the same-sex. I now understand that I am a lesbian. I would like to look for a P in Shanghai. I am a T.

I am so lonely. Is there any single PP in Shanghai? Can we make friends? If you become my girl friend, I will be very good to you. Send a text message to 1381xxx3105 QQ 195xxx66.

Are you a lesbian and interested in SM? My QQ is 151xxx274.

Hi, to all handsome Ts, I have what you need for breasts binding. Interested parties, please contact me on 180xxx66.

I have recently graduated from university. I have reached 26 years old and have a boy friend. My boy friend and I have been going out for two years,

and we adore each other. Because of family pressure, I would like to look for a lesbian to get married so that we can live together. I am working for a government organisation and have entitlements as a government functionary. Interested parties may contact me on QQ 183xxx456 or on 280xxx592.

On many *gay* and *lesbian* websites in China, addressing personal matters takes up a huge portion of the BBS and chat rooms. As Mark McLelland (2005, p. 10) states, the internet enables ‘the widespread dissemination of first-person narrative about sexual minorities ...’. The above examples serve to illustrate that the internet facilitates a dialogue of individual agency. To a degree, the internet allows marginalised people in China to discuss sensitive and personal matters – for example, same-sex relationships, emotional needs, alternative sexuality, marriage, and breast binding. That said, the internet in China is also typically used not only by marginalised groups, but also by ‘non-conformists’, to challenge norms and authorities. Zhou Yongming’s (2005) study of *minjian* (unofficial) political writers in Chinese cyberspace is a shining example, revealing that some of these *minjian* writers are posing challenges to the Chinese state. One of Zhou’s arguments is that the ability of this *minjian* online group to express itself politically is generally underestimated and is therefore deserving of more critical attention.

Additionally, the specific online environment in China, characterised by increasing self-censorship and commercialism, appears to promote ‘tabloidisation’. This tabloidisation, according to Colin Sparks (cited in McCormick and Liu 2003, p. 152), can be interpreted ‘as a shift from hard news (news about politics, economics and society) to soft news (news about diversions such as sports, scandal and celebrities) and a shift from concentrating on public life to concentrating on private life’. There is indeed an explosion of storytelling in contemporary Chinese society. To an extent, Chinese (*gay*) citizens and netizens appear to be interested in relating gossip and stories about personal matters. Often, these personal matters revolve around relationship affairs, sex life and family dramas; all these are often represented with an affective tone of voice. In this light, Fran Martin’s (2008) research into Chinese-language *lesbian* cyberspaces emphasises that ‘for many women the sense of being part of a lesbian (*nütongzhi*; *lazi*, or *les*) online community was a particularly useful emotional resource to draw on when dealing with “real life” problems associated with their sexual preference’. Given the possibilities of affective and political dialogues that cyberspace offers, Comrade Literature (*tongzhi wenxue*) has emerged. This emergence is the focus of the next section.

## Comrade Literature

Remy Cristini’s (2005) research reports that a new literary genre, generally known as Comrade Literature (*tongzhi wenxue*), has come into existence in Chinese cyberspace. Cristini’s research signifies a pioneering research effort; it is richly contextualised and is highly mindful of the question of authorship. My intention is thus not only to build on Cristini’s research, but also to contribute to

the modest scholarship on Comrade Literature, which appeared in the 1990s when many *tongzhi* in China began to find a voice through posting private matters in the public domain of cyberspace.

Comrade Literature has emerged as an online, not offline, local literary genre due to the sensitive nature of *tongxinglian* in China. Comrade Literature primarily features romantic and heartbreaking narratives on same-sex experience in China. Usually, these narratives are posted by email and then edited by website operators (Tong 2004, p. 191). Many of these narratives are set on a (university) BBS, and have been published and re-published on numerous Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* websites (Cristini 2005, p. 82).

As an example, *Beijing Gushi* (*A story from Beijing*) is a Chinese *gay* novel that is published online and has been adapted for the film *Lanyu*, directed by the Hong Kong *gay* film director Stanley Kwan. *A story from Beijing* tells a tragic love story about a poor student (Lanyu) and a wealthy businessman (Handong). Lanyu and Handong meet when Lanyu prostitutes himself for money. Handong is Lanyu's first customer. Not without drama, this sexual transaction is gradually developed into a genuine same-sex relationship. As *A story from Beijing* ends, Lanyu dies in a car accident. The following is an extract from the story, obtained from Remy Cristini's (2005, p. 12) thesis:

It has been three years now ... Three years ago, I dreamed every night that he would come back. Astonished and wild with joy, I would ask him: 'Aren't you dead? Haven't you died?' Now, three years later, I still have the same dream very often. The difference is that now I keep telling it's a just a dream, until I wake up.

A taste of *A story from Beijing* is offered to emphasise that Comrade Literature is of great significance for the *gay* world in China in meaningful ways: (1) it reflects the harsh reality of the *gay* world in China, alongside the growing awareness of same-sex identity; (2) it demonstrates the link between online and offline same-sex experience in Chinese society; (3) it captures aspects of the *gay* world in China that are culturally grounded and shaped by specific characters; (4) it represents a vital part of the cultural heritage of traditional Chinese literature to embrace the need 'to communicate moral and meaning', something the Chinese may call *wenyizaidao* (Cristini 2005, p. 8). In other words, Comrade Literature is a local genre that has its antecedents in other forms of Chinese literature.

On the other hand, Comrade Literature as an online literary genre provides a valuable space for many *gay* netizens in China to represent themselves, to themselves and to the wider Chinese community. In particular, the self-described *gay* webmasters I interviewed insisted on representing themselves to the general public through reporting healthy (*jiankang*) and positive (*zhengmian*) narratives about the (Chinese) same-sex community. This insistence is to avoid negative attention being brought to the already stigmatised same-sex community. For example, <http://gaychinese.net/news/open.php?id=13860><sup>17</sup> featured an article on the coming out of a 25-year-old Guangzhou man on its front page, with a

photograph capturing the smiling face of a mother and son, captioned *yonggan de muqin, chujing zhichi tongxinglian erzi* (a courageous mother, appearing in front of the camera to show support for her gay son). To give another example, the operators of gay-oriented websites [www.gaychinese.cn](http://www.gaychinese.cn), [www.soyoo.com](http://www.soyoo.com) and [www.tianjincool.com](http://www.tianjincool.com), whom I interviewed during fieldwork, all think that it is vital to make use of cyberspace as a productive site to formulate objective (*keguan*) social perceptions of same-sex experience in China (2004, pers. comm., March to May). Tong Ge's (2004, p. 199) study shows that gay and lesbian website operators in China shoulder responsibility for reporting news and telling stories about same-sex experience to the public in a timely (*jishi*), comprehensive (*quanmian*) and neutral (*zhongli*) manner. According to Hui Jiang (2005), over the past six years [www.gaychinese.cn](http://www.gaychinese.cn) has posted more than 10,000 news articles and narratives about same-sex practice and gay rights, many of which have been re-posted on other websites.

In short, gay netizens in China show great appreciation for information and knowledge that deals with both domestic and international gay and lesbian literature. Importantly, Comrade Literature is gaining voice and visibility in the gay space of Chinese cyberspace, which is increasingly commercialised.

### Commercialisation of gay-oriented websites

A study by Yuezhi Zhao (1998, pp. 1–2) shows that, since 1992, commercial forces have penetrated mass-media networks in China, largely due to an introduction of economic reforms and the Open Door Policy. Research generally suggests that the internet industry in China will continue to develop under market mechanisms (Zhao 1998; Donald, Keane and Hong 2002; Lee 2003; McCormick and Liu 2003; Hughes 2004; Liang 2005). In a way, the state government generally considers commercial websites to be a new trend that has a beneficial effect on China's social and economic development. As Karsten Giese (2004, p. 24) comments, internet service providers, both local and foreign, 'basically comply with [Chinese] government requirements' because of their interest in making a profit.

The increasing commercialisation of electronic media ownership in China has a tendency to challenge the traditional relationship between the party-state and the public sphere. This relationship is arguably steadily transformed by the collective desire of contemporary Chinese society to promote economic development and nation building, while wanting to guard against undesirable foreign influence. This argument refuses to subscribe to the mainstream Western model of media commerce, which generally suggests that the practice of online commercialisation typically promotes the consumption and dissemination of entertainment, thereby reducing opportunities for holding public or intellectual debates (McCormick and Liu 2003). Importantly, this online commercial practice in China should take into consideration at least two issues: (1) the specific cultural and historical conditions in China; and (2) the paradoxical situation in Chinese cyberspace, where a degree of freedom of expression and self-censorship always coexist. Special attention should also be paid to how the increasing commercialisation of electronic media in



China allows for the public (mis)representation of individual identities, including same-sex identity. This is a recent social development, albeit measured, that could never have been imagined before China's opening up.

Indeed, the ever-increasing publicness of electronic media in China, together with much-needed foreign interests and foreign technologies, has given rise to an online commercial culture since the 1990s (McCormick and Liu 2003). There is evidence that electronic media in China are increasingly geared towards commercialism, while remaining conscious of (self)-regulatory control (Donald and Keane 2002; Lee 2003). In other words, there is a connection between the online commercial culture and the party-state. Inevitably, the internet in China is a space in which online commerce can survive only through a kind of self-conscious control. It is also a space in which commercialism thrives on multiple imaginaries by those living both inside and outside China – that is, China is emerging as a massive market and is also collectively imagined as a potential market to initiate a consumer 'revolution'. The internet in China is imagined as a channel to reach out to a global consumer market, alongside global flows of business, capital, commodities and consumers. Online commerce in China is targeted at the masses that are thought by both local and foreign investors to have great potential purchasing power.

To what extent does online commercialism in China, and elsewhere, shape same-sex identity? For some researchers, online commercialism has significant implications for the (mis)representation of same-sex identity in cyberspace. Jonathan Alexander (2002a, p. 100) states that some gay-oriented website operators resist 'normalisation by commodification in that they refuse to mark/market their Web pages as only gay sites' for commercial purposes. Chris Berry and Fran Martin (2003, p. 88) even go to the extent of arguing that the financial circumstances of websites 'have determining effects on the online subjectivities of those involved in them'. Similarly, Hui Jiang (2005) urges us to consider the material reality in Chinese cyberspace, where many *gay* and *lesbian* websites operate initially on a non-profit-making basis, but, with a significant increase in operational costs, many of them have become partially or fully commercialised. According to Jiang, some of these websites have to work with telecommunications companies to provide text messaging services on mobile phones, at a cost. Guo Yaqi (2005, p. 119) reports that the website [www.tianjincool.com](http://www.tianjincool.com) worked as an advertising agent for a Tianjin *gay* bar in May 2003. Again, [www.tianjincool.com](http://www.tianjincool.com) signed a contract with two local bars in an attempt to increase the revenue for its website between May and October 2003 (Guo 2005, p. 119).

What is more, many of the advertisements on (gay-oriented) websites in China are becoming commercialised or even sexualised. For example, the website [www.yiyeqing.com](http://www.yiyeqing.com)<sup>18</sup> is operating as an online shopping corner, selling sex toys for all sorts of sex acts, SM outfits and products, aphrodisiacs, erotic literature, porno VCDs (video compact discs), contraceptives, and so on. Another example is <http://www.111k.com/male/index.asp?referer=pybk>,<sup>19</sup> which posts advertisements with captions such as *xing'ai yanchang banxiaoshi* (prolonged sexual intercourse for another half an hour), *yingjing zengda* (penile enlargement) and *niuyin suoxiao*

(vaginal reduction). It is generally agreed that *gay* netizens in China are targeted as potential consumers, taking interest in such commercial goods as sex toys, sexual health products, erotic DVDs/VCDs, sexy lingerie, and so on.

Online commercialism in China also coexists with the growing sexualisation in Chinese cyberspace, including the *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace. Despite a ban on online pornography, sexually explicit images do exist. For instance, there have been female bloggers who post titillating details and images. Mumu, Furong Jiejie, Liumangyan, Muzimei and Zhuying Qingtong are female bloggers known by many Chinese netizens. They have gained fame and fortune from publishing sensational narratives on sex and sexual encounters. Presently, there is also a huge number of adult websites characterised by strong sexual overtones.

The internet has somewhat changed the ways in which Chinese ordinary citizens are exposed to sexually explicit images. Quite characteristically, these images are posted online for public viewing. It is claimed that these images are taken by self-photo-taking. Such images are both amateur and audacious. They capture both female and male genitalia, often enlarged and highlighted, while concealing the face of those who are being photographed. The reason for this can probably be explained by Jonathan Alexander (2002b, p. 80), who suggests that cyberspace is a safe space for those who wish to explore their identities and selves, but are apprehensive about serious personal and political repercussions. In contemporary China, this practice of self-photo-taking seems to appeal to an increasing number of individuals who attempt to talk back to authority or look for fame and fortune.

As a general rule, *gay*-oriented websites in China seldom provide links to sexually provocative images. If they do, they are often shut down very quickly. This partly explains why some *gay*-oriented websites have chosen to register abroad in order to claim more authorial autonomy. The websites [www.gaychinese.net](http://www.gaychinese.net) and [www.gtz.org](http://www.gtz.org), for example, have been hosted abroad. *Gay*-oriented websites in China rarely display stark-naked bodies, but they occasionally display pictures of young-looking people – mostly semi-naked, underwear-clad masculine men.

Online commercialism has led many Chinese (*gay*-oriented) websites to focus on providing netizens with various forms of entertainment, such as online dating, gambling and interactive games. Online entertainment is increasingly integrated into a wide spectrum of both the homosexual and heterosexual communities to the extent that it has become a social phenomenon. In recent years, this phenomenon has become the subject of press reports and raised the concerns particularly of political leaders, educators, community leaders and parents. As shown in Yin Hong's study (2002, p. 33), 'commercialisation [in China] has challenged the centrality of official ideology while the trend towards hedonist and individualist values found in entertainment fare has eroded the moral standards cherished by state ideology'.

What does this online commercialism tell us about the *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace? As emphasised earlier, most of the *gay*-oriented websites in China lack financial support and survive on limited funding donated by international voluntary groups or members of the same-sex community. Increasingly, they are dependent on revenues generated from advertisements, memberships,

sponsorships and donations. This reality is also complicated by the fact that gay-oriented websites in China are affected by two major factors: (1) limited support from policy-makers and the wider community; and (2) a lack of available resources and technical expertise. These two factors considerably hinder online representation of same-sex identity as an individual identity.

### **Electronic technology and identity**

To sum up, the advent of the internet in China has opened up a whole sphere for the public articulation of Chinese same-sex identity in ways that could never have been imagined before opening up. Many (*gay*) citizens and netizens in China genuinely believe that cyberspace is an important space for promoting the expression of identity or individuality (Liang 2005), yet it is important to stress that the party-state's control over 'free' speech in cyberspace has been tightened. In fact, what is happening is merely a loosening, rather than a losing, of control over the electronic media.

This chapter is a contribution to research into the relationship between electronic technology and identity. Cyber anthropology has been utilised as a research methodology to problematise this relationship. This methodology has enabled me, as a researcher and a participant netizen, to observe and analyse how identity is actively played out in a space that is both imagined and real. Scholarship in internet research in China and media research has also been drawn upon to probe questions of self-censorship, commercialisation and identity reinvention. This task has helped identify contradictions that are specific to the *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace, where freedom/control and homogeneity/diversity coexist. Significantly, such contradictions have heightened my sensitivity to how *gay* netizens in China find new ways to imagine a collective identity and community across local, national and international borders. This chapter has stressed that the internet in China offers an interactive medium for many Chinese *gay* netizens to link up through thoughts and interests across boundaries, and, most importantly, create a collective imaginary for a shared identity or community. Very crucially, the internet affords an enormous increase in 'communities of imagination and interest', which are characteristically 'diasporic' (Appadurai, cited in Gottlieb and McLelland 2003, p. 1). The chapter has also pointed out that the internet is capable of creating as much homogeneity as diversity in the *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace by circulating hegemonic ideas about aspects of international gay and lesbian practices and lifestyles – and yet many of these ideas are fragmentary and sometimes distorted.

Evidence of the development of a *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace has been provided. The need for coming out of isolation into a network of perceived safety and anonymity is a primary reason for the explosion of many *gay* and *lesbian* websites in China. The emergence of Comrade Literature (*tongzhi wenxue*) on these websites reflects this need. Comrade Literature, exploring same-sex themes through fine works and literature, is not merely about imagining a shared identity or community across the globe, but about virtually all the social aspects of what it means to be *gay* or *lesbian* in contemporary China.

Gay-oriented websites in China encounter certain difficulties. Mainly, many of them are becoming commercialised or sexualised due to an increase in operating costs, causing them to run as online shopping corners, advertising agents, entertainment centres or telecommunications companies. These activities are organised in order to increase revenue for the websites, and hardly represent the interests or perspectives of the Chinese same-sex community, thereby undermining their agency. Finally, the reality of strict online censorship in China raises important questions about how *gay* and *lesbian* website operators establish their authorial autonomy or represent same-sex identity via the electronic media.

It is against this backdrop that, throughout this chapter, I have argued that online commercialism ensures misrepresentation of same-sex identity and produces as much homogeneity as diversity in the *gay* space of Chinese cyberspace, where control, self-censorship and freedom coexist.

This chapter has offered a few glimpses into the websites under discussion. These websites are not identified to represent the complexity and ambiguity of the *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace. Obviously, given the ambitious and broad-based theoretical background of this chapter, there are gaps or omissions. It is my intention that the following questions can provide food for thought for future research into the *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace: (1) How does the *gay* space compare to other spaces in Chinese cyberspace? (2) What difference does the Chinese internet make to the Chinese same-sex community? (3) How do online and offline Chinese same-sex communities compare? (4) How is the Chinese online same-sex community different from other online same-sex communities?

## 6 Modernity and authenticity

As noted in the preceding chapters, the recent emergence of *gay* and *lesbian* identities in urban China can be understood in terms of four competing trends. First, there is an emergence of a ‘global’ gay identity. This is an identity constructed through the complex interplay between Western configurations of gender and sexuality, and unequal global flows of people, information and capital. Second, there is the ongoing development of an indigenous Chinese identity that acts as a counter to an increasingly globalised gay culture. Third, there is the rhetoric of a hybridised transnational/Chinese identity. This is a rhetoric that falls between the global and the indigenous. It supports difference and diversity, and treats sexual minorities as ‘equal’ bearers of rights alongside the sexual mainstream. Finally, there is the emergence of a *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace where Chinese gay-oriented websites, together with Chinese same-sex identity, are increasingly self-censored and commercialised. Against this background, the author has put forward the argument for understanding a paradoxical expression of same-sex identity in urban China in the context of China’s opening up to globalisation.

The main concern of this chapter is to develop a critical understanding of two discourses: ‘modernity’ and ‘authenticity’. In particular, the chapter aims to rationalise how ‘modernity’ and ‘authenticity’, as markers of identity, capture the renewed tensions of local/global, traditional/modern and authentic/inauthentic constructions of Chinese same-sex identity in urban China.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first sets the scene for a study of the globalising effects and cultural politics of modernity in China. This study is then wedded to an exploration of how ostensibly modern forms of Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities are (re)produced, desired and imagined in contemporary China. My concern here is to evaluate how a modern Chinese same-sex identity can actualise, without compromising its ‘authentic’ Chineseness, in view of China’s commitment to modernity.

In the second section, the chapter explains how authenticity has additional meaning for those who call themselves *gay* or *lesbian*, and for those who choose to organise themselves around gay-friendly social spaces in urban China. Ultimately, their search for authenticity is a question of seeking out not only an ‘authentic’ sense of Chinese same-sex identity, but also a cultural affinity with a ‘newly’ emerging national China and the diasporic Chinese communities.

In conclusion, the chapter advocates that, without denying the discourse of hegemonic global gayness, the forms of *gay* and *lesbian* identities in China have emerged and multiplied in ways that cannot simply be the result of being informed by Western theoretical formulations. It proposes a framework that examines how modernity and authenticity shape, but do not determine, a paradoxical articulation of same-sex identity in urban China.

Essentially, this chapter argues that same-sex attracted individuals in urban China selectively (re)appropriate patterns of gayness through a Western model of modernity, while still continuing to defend an 'authentic' Chinese same-sex identity and sense of belonging. It is within this context that their sense of identity is primarily situated in relation to what Charles Taylor (1991, p. 33) calls 'significant others'. In this instance, 'significant others' are family members and close friends. As Taylor (1991, p. 45) argues, when it comes to defining the deepest sense of self, human subjects are always in negotiation with significant others through the practice of ordinary life, which entails 'the life of production and the family, or work and love'. This position is extended to demonstrate that being *gay* or *lesbian* in urban China assumes a connection to both local and transnational gay and lesbian networks, a connection that forms an important component of everyday life.<sup>1</sup> And yet such a connection arguably constitutes something of a decentred identity. This decentred identity is characterised by a growing disassociation from Chinese traditions of the family and homoeroticism, as stressed in Chapter 1, 'Opening up to *gay* and *lesbian* identities'. This decentred identity is also often interpreted as a desire to abandon 'authentic' traditions for the lure of capitalism or modernity.

Let us now begin with the first section of this chapter, which covers four main areas of discussion: (1) the cultural politics of modernity in China; (2) producing a Chinese *gay* or *lesbian* identity; (3) desiring a Chinese *gay* or *lesbian* identity; and (4) a break with tradition.

## 'Modernity'

The term 'modernity' must always be historically grounded and contextualised. That is, it is essential to contextualise the history of modernity before we can understand its complexity and dynamics. Not only scholars and researchers, but also ordinary people around the world have been grappling with the understanding of what constitutes 'the modern' (Dikötter 1995, 1998; Jervis 1998; Rofel 1999b, 2001, 2002; Knauft 2002). This is mainly because modernity has life-shaping effects and assumes a measure of globalising power. As Lisa Rofel (2002, p. 176) writes: 'Modernity is something people struggle over because it has life-affirming as well as life-threatening effects.' Indeed, the history of colonialism has powerfully established modernity as a 'global' agenda that is intimately intertwined with capitalist influences and impositions (Rofel 1999b, p. xi; Knauft 2002, p. 1). It would be fair to say that the globalising power of modernity is possibly the most compelling question in contemporary public and academic discourses.

Having said that, caution should be exercised in order not to interpret the effects of modernity as overpowering or homogenising. Clearly, not all people around

the globe are equally subject to the conditions of modernity. As Arjun Appadurai (1996, p. 3) aptly points out, modernity in today's society is 'decisively at large, irregularly self-conscious, and unevenly experienced'.

### ***The cultural politics of modernity in China***

Building upon conceptualisation of modernity by Larissa Heinrich and Fran Martin (2006), Wang Gungwu (1991, 2000, 2003), Bruce M. Knauft (2002), Lisa Rofel (1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2002), Frank Dikötter (1995, 1998) John Jervis (1998) and Charles Taylor (1991), the author joins the large debate to address the cultural politics of modernity in China. Much importance is attached to the historical, cultural and moral dimensions that have come to represent elusively modern forms of Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities in urban China. This approach to modernity differs from that of, for example, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel and Max Weber (cited in Knauft 2002, pp. 9–10), who tend to put greater emphasis on the economic and political determinism of modernity. Here, what is central to this section is the question of the relationship between modernity and Chinese society.

Wang Gungwu (2000, pp. 1, 14) reports that modernity has been keenly pursued in China over the past 140 years. Modernity, in this sense, is synonymous with the Western social sciences and technological innovations. Modernity in China has come to be the *raison d'être* for navigating social development, with an aim to empower the nation and overcome its weaknesses in comparison with the capitalist West. At this present historical juncture, the Western experience of modernity in China is even more rigorously desired than ever before. This desire coincides with China's opening up to global capitalism to further push for national empowerment by way of economic reforms. Significantly, this appeal for national empowerment symbolises a heightened sense of Chinese nationalism. This is a self-conscious and elusive form of modern Chinese nationalism that has developed out of China's recent emergence as a global power.

In contemporary China, modernity is arguably all the more intensified. This growing intensification is largely attributable to China's recent rapid opening up, bringing about changes in almost all aspects of Chinese society. For instance, Larissa Heinrich and Fran Martin (2006) concur that the era of opening up, among other historical movements in China, has brought modernity to a heightened point. To quote Heinrich and Martin (2006, p. 118):

The 'Chinese modern' of the contemporary People's Republic is conditioned by three decades of 'modern-ist Marxism' under Mao, followed by violent shattering of the utopian promise of socialist modernity in the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). In the wake of that historical trauma, during the New Era of the 1980s under Deng Xiaoping, 'culture fever' – an intellectual reengagement with Euro-American modern-ist culture and philosophy – spawned distinctive forms of 'modern consciousness' (*xiandai yishi*) as well as literary and cultural postmodernism.

Heinrich and Martin identify that modernity is always historically grounded and thus contextual. Since China's opening up, there has been a stronger national yearning for modernity. More precisely, there is a heightened consciousness in contemporary China that modernity is a means to social and economic success, offering the hope or illusion of civilisation, progress and development. Citizens in China, particularly those who live in urban centres, tend to assume that these characteristics are the core elements of Western modernity. What is more, these characteristics are deeply internalised and localised by the Chinese to cultivate a national sentiment for initiating change and challenging cultural tradition. Similarly, as Lisa Rofel's (1999b, p. xi) ethnographic research suggests, there is 'a pervasive concern with modernity' in contemporary China. According to Rofel, most ordinary Chinese insist that contemporary Chinese society is now becoming more and more 'modern' and 'open'. They appear to be very enthusiastic about the subject of modernity, and often hold strong views on 'modernisation', 'Westernisation', 'sexual openness', 'progress' and 'backwardness'. This enthusiasm demonstrates that modernity in China can be characterised in these elusively local ways, and that many of these localities serve to reflect a relatively simple set of concepts of social change in contemporary Chinese society.

Interestingly, many of the defining features mentioned above may mark China as a 'modern' society that has 'a deferred relationship to modernity' (Rofel 1999a, p. 3). This deferred relationship to modernity is typically occurring in non-Western societies and is identified by some researchers as the condition of 'late modernity' (Rofel 2001, 2002; Boellstorff and Leap 2004; Heinrich and Martin 2006). In the context of China's opening up to cultural globalisation, late modernity bespeaks a Chinese identity that is intensely national, and yet increasingly decentred from local traditions (Heinrich and Martin 2006, p. 3).

The cultural politics of modernity in China is discussed, as it underlines the cultural values and beliefs that are particularly meaningful for the Chinese. It is a cultural politics that signifies what the Chinese imagine and want for China's future. It helps us better understand why modernity in China symbolises a long-awaited national aspiration of the Chinese to see China come into a position of leadership in the new world order. It also sheds light on moral concerns about how the Chinese view certain conditions of modernity. These conditions are generally identified with an unequal distribution of wealth and opportunity, a decline in sexual morals, Westernisation, a heightened sense of individual desires, freedoms and rights, and a break with tradition (Taylor 1991; Wang 1991, 2000, 2003; Dikötter 1995, 1998; Jervis 1998; Rofel 1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2002; Knauff 2002; Heinrich and Martin 2006). I will discuss these conditions further in this section.

Hence, modernity in contemporary China is often taken as the rationale for social change and economic development. Indeed, contemporary Chinese society articulates an ever more self-conscious form of modernity. This self-consciousness symbolises a long struggle over self-empowerment and self-making, intensified and localised since the era of opening up. This heightened form of self-consciousness is central to the question of how an 'authentic' sense of Chineseness is enunciated



through China's 'search' for modernity. Ultimately, this question bespeaks a fresh form of modern Chinese nationalism.

Let there be no misunderstanding – by attaching a culturally specific meaning to modernity in China, this is not to claim a singular 'authentic' Chinese modernity. Neither does this suggest that modernity in China simply mimics various projects of science and technology originating in the West, which are then established as a set of uniquely local practices. The intention here is, rather, to further the analysis of how the globalising effects of modernity have come to reproduce various forms of social change, forcing many Chinese, especially those who live in urban China, to adapt to the hegemonic model of Western ideas and practices, while looking for cultural authenticity and national significance.

### *The (re)production of locality*

Elusively modern forms of Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities have been, to some extent, forcefully produced first through the long-term impact of Western colonialism and, more recently, through unequal global intersections of people, capital and information. In particular, these Chinese identities are entangled with the importation of Western sexual science between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. As Michel Foucault's (1976, 1984, 1986) *The history of sexuality* so amply shows, sex and sexuality in the twentieth-century Western episteme was heavily institutionalised by a medical discourse, granting psychologists and doctors the power to construct the pathologies of gender and sexual identities.

Indeed, the period of the early twentieth century witnessed the emergence of European sexology in academic and popular discourses in the West, which in turn then spread to non-Western societies (Jackson and Sullivan 1999; Chou 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Altman 2001a, 2001b; Vanita 2002; Sang 2003). This period also saw the burgeoning of a medical literature that gained worldwide recognition in two significant ways. It represented a unified system of thoughts and values in articulating heterosexism and Victorian morals, and regulating sexual and social relations. It also, arguably, marked the invention of categories such as 'invert', 'homosexual', 'lesbian' and 'heterosexual' by European sexologists and psychologists, categories that are largely based on sexual behaviours rather than identities or desires (Vanita 2002, p. 1).<sup>2</sup> It is against this historical background that self-conscious and ambivalent forms of Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities have been produced, along with the medicalisation of (homo)sexuality and Western-style/Christian homophobia imported into contemporary China, and elsewhere.

This brief historical background is reviewed to underline a point. That is, the importation of Western sexual science into China in the early twentieth century has come to shape and produce the modern discourse of Chinese gender and sexuality quite profoundly. It is worth examining this impact. This is because, as Rofel (2002, p. 175) contends quite rigorously, this Western importation reflects the everyday social struggles that are 'fully imbricated in their materiality as transnational policies, labor migration, gendered divisions of labor, and the articulations of race, sex, and

gender with nationalism'. These struggles are often confronted with resistance during the complex process of 'translingual practice', a process that is infused with various forms of hierarchy, discrimination and domination that permeate the social realm (Liu 1995). In China, it was during this period that 'local' sexual patterns were redefined, and a host of other categories were generated anew through complex processes of cross-cultural (re)appropriation and translation (Chou 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Sang 2003).<sup>3</sup> For instance, studies by Tze-lan D. Sang (2003) and Chou Wah-shan (2000b, p. 14) illustrate that the meanings of 'local' categories *qing* (feelings), *seyu* (erotic desire), *ai* (love), *xingyu* (sexual desire) and *xingbie* (gender) were reproduced on the basis of 'Western industrial-capitalist, positivist, biological determinist, and individualist traditions'. Such reproductions may be described as, to use the words of Lisa Rofel (1999a, p. xii), the hybrids of 'forced cross-cultural translations of various projects of science and management called modernity'.

Furthermore, these reproductions were not limited to a proliferation of such categories as 'gender' or 'erotic desire'. Western/Christian homophobia associated with such medicalised concepts as 'abnormal' and 'perverse' were also forcefully imported into the Chinese language (Chou 2000b; Sang 2003). Simultaneously, the importation of Western-style homophobia into China brought with it the modernising discourse of Western gay and lesbian identities and stereotypes. Michel Foucault (1976, 1984, 1986) has stressed that the presence of Western/Christian homophobia is unmistakably responsible for the launch of the confrontational gay and lesbian movements in the West, together with the assertion of strong Western gay and lesbian identities.

The modern discourse of Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities, and indeed other identity categories, during the period of the early twentieth century is clearly linked to the history of colonialism and modernity. However, this modern discourse should not be taken as a direct mimicry of the West or a simple matter of (re)producing local subjects. Rather, it represents an expressive desire for modernity. This desire has been further augmented by China's recent policy of reform and opening up since the late 1970s, as this chapter has demonstrated. This modern discourse also involves a clever mix of local (re)appropriation of and resistance to foreign patterns that can be located in a rich and diverse past in China itself (Dikötter 1995; Sang 2003). It is thus important to stress that the production of ambivalent Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* moderns is not merely the importation of a Western discourse of gender and sexuality. The production of these Chinese identities is not necessarily 'indigenous', but hybrid. More importantly, this production indicates how unequal local and global practices intersect and resist each other, reproducing new identity categories, values and meanings that enunciate the tensions between traditional/modern and authentic/inauthentic conceptions of Chinese (same-sex) identity and culture.

### ***Modernity and Chineseness***

China's opening up generally allows its people to experience a modern consciousness. To reiterate, this modern consciousness is increasingly characterised

by an acute sense of self-autonomy, a questioning of the self, and a great striving for self-betterment (Wang 1991, 2000, 2003; Dikötter 1995, 1998; Rofel 1999b; Heinrich and Martin 2006). On the one hand, these characteristics, according to the theoretical formulations of Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, Max Weber and others, are considered to be Western configurations of modern cultural and social identities (cited in Knauff 2002, pp. 9–10). On the other hand, they are said to be too often associated with Western ideologies and strategies. Researchers of this view basically challenge the universality and dominance of Western theoretical paradigms in articulating the formation of modern identities in non-Western societies (Rofel 1999b, 2001, 2002; Brownell and Wasserstrom 2002; Y. Yan 2003).

The point of speaking of these modern characteristics is to highlight the relationship between modernity and Chineseness. More precisely, this is to demonstrate how modernity in contemporary China has come to construct a notion of modern 'Chineseness', which is in the process of transformation and contestation. To an extent, the sense of 'authentic' Chineseness, including 'authentic' Chinese same-sex identity, in contemporary China is being forcefully transformed and contested by an ever more self-conscious form of modernity, shaped by the universalising influence of modernity originating in the capitalist West.

This line of argument is indebted to the scholarship of Wang Gungwu (1991, 2000, 2003) and Allen Chun (1996) on Chineseness. Wang (1991, p. 2) suggests that 'modern' Chineseness is a dynamic and elusive concept; 'it is also the product of a shared historical experience whose record has continually influenced its growth; it has become increasingly a self-conscious matter for China ...'. In a similar vein, Chun (1996, p. 111) rightly points out that modern Chineseness is a rapidly changing notion. For Chun (1996, p. 126), the notion of modern Chineseness is continuously transformed and is 'rooted in local contexts of power-in-meaning and meaning-in-power that cannot be encompassed by universal definitions of "Chineseness"'.

The conceptualisations of Wang and Chun point to an emerging social fact. That is, there is now a more intense problematisation around the articulation of 'modern' forms of Chinese identities. This development is occurring in tune with how violently China has transformed, and is still transforming, in almost all aspects of Chinese society, rendering new ways of constructing and imagining modern forms of Chineseness. It is thus helpful to question whether modern forms of Chineseness can ever be unambiguously understood, given its ever-increasing complexity, fluidity and self-consciousness. What is more, this development has emerged as a compellingly global phenomenon, forcing many Chinese to transform themselves into different identities in order to adapt to the new world order. Hence, the implication is that modern forms of Chinese identity can be interpreted as categories that are constituted by way of negotiation.

In the same-sex community in Beijing, there is such negotiation between, or mutual exclusion of, a 'modern' Chinese *gay* or *lesbian* identity and an 'authentic' Chinese same-sex identity. Self-conscious 'modern' *gay* and *lesbian* individuals

in urban China tend to desire and imagine alliances with Western gay and lesbian networks, and yet they also reject Western dominance and are in constant conflict between desiring a modern Chinese *gay* or *lesbian* identity without compromising an 'authentic' Chinese same-sex identity. For self-conscious *gay* and *lesbian* moderns living in urban China, this conflict is especially intense and has brought about a paradoxical Chinese same-sex identity. In a way, a self-consciously modern 'Chinese' *gay* or *lesbian* identity is paradoxically articulated through a number of discourses. This articulation involves a rejection of hegemonic global gayness, and yet, at the same time, a subtle alliance with Western-style politics of identity. Simultaneously, this articulation enunciates an increasing detachment from Chinese traditions of family ties and homoerotic history, but an engagement with local and diasporic Chinese same-sex communities. This development points to the fact that the search for modern Chineseness, including modern Chinese same-sex identity, is fraught with curious paradoxes.

A Western-style politics of identity is, to some extent, shunned by *gay* activists in China, despite its role in mobilising Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* movements. Above all, the centrality of a Western politics of identity, stressing the legitimacy of individual sexual rights and 'coming out' activism, is seen as incompatible with 'authentic' Chinese values. Such authentic values are premised upon social harmony and community/family ties, rather than individual interests or confrontational Western *gay* and *lesbian* movements (Chou 2000a, 2000b, 2001). Perhaps equally important, according to a *gay* activist I spoke to during my fieldwork, the Western politics of identity is not welcomed by either *gay* activists or government authorities in China simply because it is highly politicised. For this reason, Chinese *gay* activists are extremely suspicious of the (mis)representation of *gay* rights in China by foreign *gay* activists, who are often seen to obtain experience and research data through collaboration with local groups, rather than improve the general well-being of the same-sex population in China. The fact is that Chinese government authorities view the Western politics of identity, with its politicising of human rights concerns in China, as foreign intervention in local affairs. Most important of all, Chinese authorities view it as a challenge to their leadership of the relatively disciplined Chinese society whose urban citizens are being increasingly influenced by the 'liberating' notions of modernity.

A Western-style politics of identity in China is seen as a modernising agenda that is still under construction. As I observed in my fieldwork, this Western-style politics of identity does not have a huge amount of influence over the formation of elusively modern forms of *gay* and *lesbian* identities in urban China. It is vaguely understood as a modernising agenda to advocate the legitimacy of human rights, a concept that started to circulate in China near the start of the twentieth century (Brownell and Wasserstrom 2002). Otherwise, it merely provides same-sex attracted people in China with some vague ideas to imagine a connection with transnational gay and lesbian communities. This imagining of having a transnational connection is often interpreted by some as a betrayal of 'authentic' Chinese tradition.

***A break with tradition***

At this juncture, it is pertinent to bring in Michel Foucault's formulation of modernity (cited in Knauff 2002). In his formulation, Foucault stresses how references to modernity often signal a break with cultural authenticity and belonging. Foucault (cited in Knauff 2002, p. 7) remarks: 'Modernity is often characterised in terms of consciousness of the discontinuity of time: a break with tradition.' For Foucault, modernity has the globalising power to subvert traditions and rituals, but only offering individuals an apparent sense of freedom and progress, and a highly self-conscious identity and autonomy. At the same time, Lisa Rofel (2001, 2002) argues by way of Michel Foucault that modernity signifies a more organised form of social control. For Foucault, modern power operates most powerfully when individuals exercise self-policing and self-censorship in everyday religious, social and political practices. To some extent, Foucault is right in stating that the globalising effects of modernity tend to undercut traditions and give a false sense of hope or liberation. And yet, following Stuart Hall (1996, p. 12), Foucault's theorisation on self-disciplinary power should not be assumed as an unduly singular force that permeates all social relations. This is not to suggest that traditions are no longer relevant to the modern era. The mere fact is that the onslaught of modernity has come to impact upon, but not eradicate, traditions. Take contemporary Chinese society as an example; the author would claim, together with Wang Gungwu (2003, p. v), that rich Chinese traditions still continue to shape Chineseness and stimulate the Chinese imagination of the 'Other'.

As signalled above, modernity in China has been pursued for more than 140 years. This pursuit symbolises China's long struggle to 'free' itself from the trammels of tradition. As Wang Gungwu (2003, p. 4) comments, the contemporary dominant discourses of reform and revolution in Chinese society indicate how much China desires to detach itself from its socialist past and become a 'modern' nation. For self-conscious Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* moderns, China's opening up to modernity allows them to recognise the limits of certain traditions and look outwards to explore modern ways of becoming *gay* or *lesbian*. This exploration may bespeak a measure of tension between a yearning for modernity as a marker of identity and a disengagement with cultural traditions.

Drawing from *Male homosexuality in modern Japan*, by Mark McLelland (2000b, pp. 20–42), the author argues that the same-sex tradition in Chinese history, as well as in that of Japan, can no longer authentically represent the social reality of modern same-sex life. McLelland (2000b, p. 20) writes: 'Despite the fact that same-sex eroticism is celebrated in much of premodern Japanese art, poetry and literature, this has little relevance for the way in which homosexuality is understood today either by the wider society or by homosexual men themselves.'

At this point, it is essential to clarify that this chapter is not the place to trace the history of Chinese or Japanese homosocial tradition. McLelland is cited merely to illustrate the parallels between ancient Chinese and Japanese same-sex cultures and, more importantly, to underline how the history of Chinese homoeroticism is gradually of less significance for both the same-sex community and self-conscious *gay* and *lesbian* moderns in contemporary China, for a number of reasons.

There is, first of all, still a lack of research into the early patterns of same-sex relationships in ancient China. Most of the accessible research features age-stratified, class-bound and male same-sex bonding, rather than lesbianism (van Gulik 1961; Hinsch 1990; Ruan 1991; Sang 2003). Scholars in the field generally express difficulty in obtaining material about female same-sex experience in China (Ruan 1991; Evans 1997; Sang 2003; Li 2006). The formation of seemingly modern *gay* and *lesbian* identities in contemporary China does surface in academic papers, but it lacks critical attention.

Second, there are obvious disparities in same-sex relationships between ancient and modern China. In ancient China, a homosocial/homosexual relationship and a heterosexual marriage often coexisted to ensure that the family lineage was not disrupted (Hinsch 1990, p. 19). However, the flexible nature of this relationship is no longer an easy option for contemporary same-sex attracted Chinese in urban China, who often experience difficulty in meeting the demands of their family. Still, the discourse of the Chinese family is an important cultural ideology and a disciplinary regime through which Chinese same-sex identity is expressed in China and across the diasporic Chinese communities (Chou 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Kong 2002; Fang 2004; Sun, Farrer and Choi 2006). In contemporary China, most same-sex attracted individuals are still compelled to form a (heterosexual) family due to the pressures of parents, heterosexism and homophobia.

Some Chinese do show passive resistance to familial and social pressures. Instead of using what is seen as a confrontational 'coming out' approach, they engage in a pro forma marriage as a strategy to free themselves from the trammels of prejudice and tradition. Fang Gang (2004) defines a pro forma marriage as a collaboration between a same-sex attracted man and a same-sex attracted woman, in which they agree to perform a heterosexual marriage in the public eye in order to live homosexually in their private life. (This is not to suggest that every same-sex Chinese would subscribe to this kind of marriage alliance.) In this sense, the notion of the family reflects how the 'relational self' is necessarily valued over the individual self in the Chinese scheme of things (Chou 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Kong 2002).<sup>4</sup> As Travis S. K. Kong (2002, p. 41) argues, the centrality of family captures the notion of "relational self" – how one defines oneself relationally with respect to others within the pattern of a hierarchical society'.

Third, there is historical discontinuity. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a shift had taken place, the origins of which are highly disputed, from a friendly social attitude to a fear of homosexuality in Chinese society (Hinsch 1990; Furth 1994; Dikötter 1995; Evans 1997; Sang 2003). One main dispute revolves around how the confluence of foreign and local cultures, together with Western medical/sexological discourses, has come to shape various social understandings about homosexuality and homophobia in China since the early twentieth century.

Finally, there is a significant shift in social understanding of same-sex experience when comparing 'premodern' and 'modern' China. Historical and literary sources, which focus on the lives of the social elites such as the emperors, aristocrats and eminent scholars, show that, in many periods of Chinese history, same-sex bonding was understood as an intimate social relationship (van Gulik 1961; Hinsch 1990;

Ruan 1991; Sang 2003). In contrast, same-sex experience is now understood as the pursuit of individual sexual rights, identities and desires by many self-conscious *gay* and *lesbian* moderns in urban China. On the whole, the pursuit of individualism has become a 'new' modern ideology in contemporary Chinese society.

The desire for an individual same-sex identity in contemporary China is often interpreted as a gesture of breaking with tradition and succumbing to the lures of globalisation and modernity. This desire is sometimes also portrayed as 'the depraved individualism of Western capitalism' (Evans 1997, p. 212). It is commonly pointed out by Chinese scholars that the cultural product of individualism has surfaced very rapidly in urban China (Y. Yan 2003; Pan and Wang 2004). Yunxiang Yan's (2003, p. 220) ethnographic research in a Chinese village suggests that there is now far too much emphasis on 'spouse selection, postmarital residence, and conjugal power to fertility choices' (Yan 2003, p. 220). The implication is that these emphases on the interests of the individual are not recognised as part of 'authentic' Chinese tradition. Rather, they represent a break with tradition. Y. Yan (2003, p. 235) even goes to the extent of arguing that 'the development of individual identity and subjectivity [in China since the 1980s] has been confined mostly to the private sphere and has evolved into a kind of egotism'. This perspective reflects a moral concern about the spread of what Y. Yan describes as egotism in contemporary Chinese society. The concern is that 'authentic' Chinese identity, affiliated with the family and community ties, is being threatened by the Western imposition of individualism.

All in all, many same-sex attracted Chinese in urban China express their sense of identity through a highly self-conscious form of modernity. For them, modernity is a self-conscious struggle to break with the past. The reality of this struggle is quite complicated. On the one hand, it denotes an alliance with and an anxiety over Western-oriented gay and lesbian ideologies and strategies. On the other, it is deeply entrenched in China's proud cultural heritage. Self-conscious Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* moderns almost cannot escape the moral and national responsibility to express solidarity with the cultural traditions they have inherited. At the same time, they cannot help breaking free from the impositions of tradition. Within the competing discourses of tradition/modernity and East/West, cultural authenticity appears to find expression in elusively modern forms of *gay* and *lesbian* identities in urban China. There are at least two questions that deserve critical attention. Why is cultural 'authenticity' a peculiarly significant term for qualifying or disqualifying same-sex identity and culture in urban China? And what does it mean when something is said to be 'authentic'?

Let us now move on to the second section of this chapter, which concentrates on three threads of discussion: (1) individual authenticity; (2) authenticity and gay identity; and (3) a fragmented same-sex identity.

### **Articulating 'authenticity'**

Being true to myself means being true to my own originality, and that is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am also

defining myself. I am realising a potentiality that is properly my own. This is the background understanding to the modern ideal of authenticity, and to the goals of self-fulfilment or self-realisation in which it is usually couched. This is the background that gives moral force to the culture of authenticity, including its most degraded, absurd, or trivialised forms.

(Taylor 1991, p. 29)

As Charles Taylor's *The ethics of authenticity* (1991) points out, 'authenticity' is a fundamental aspect of modern individualism, which stresses individual liberty, self-fulfilment and self-reliance. The centrality of this modern culture of authenticity is marked by a self-conscious effort to identify an individual's essential difference from others. On the other hand, Taylor adds, the modern personal goal of self-actualisation means that the individual is less concerned with others, resulting in more alienation and fragmentation in society. Taylor's conception of authenticity engages with an exploration of the relationship between urban experience and individual identity, and the fragmentation and totality of modern life. Taylor seems to interpret an authentic identity as an autonomous subject, almost unaffected by external pressures or contingencies. In this perspective, authenticity is framed upon a clear distinction between the self and the other. An authentic identity is essentially to remain true to one's own values and principles rather than succumb to social hierarchy or authority.

In addition to Taylor, it is also useful to bring in Michel Foucault's conceptualisation of 'truth and power' (cited in Faubion 2000, pp. 111–33), as he provides insights into claims or commitments to authenticity. For Foucault, the political struggle over respect for rights and freedom in modern Western society always seeks to establish individual authenticity. Crucially, this struggle articulates the complex entanglement between truth and power. In general terms, 'truth' is interpreted by Foucault (cited in Rabinow 1997, p. 132) as 'a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements'. 'Power', according to Foucault (cited in Barrett 1991, p. 134), is imposed from the top down, and is enacted by way of institutional strategies and modern technological innovations. It is worth noting that the Foucauldian notion of power is not necessarily negative; it always produces pleasure, meaning and coercive practices (Barrett 1991, p. 135). Most importantly, Foucault's attention to the production of truth and authenticity is thoroughly imbued with relations of power. Foucault (cited in Faubion 2000, p. 131) writes:

The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power or lacking in power. Truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power.

That is to say, the production of truth and authenticity is always controlled, validated and organised by a particular set of regulations in society. Foucault (cited



in Rabinow 1997, p. 131) calls this 'a regime of truth', something that has been historically constituted by every society to authenticate its own values, beliefs and morals. As Foucault (1986) argues, individuals in society would benefit by demonstrating an ability to follow the rules of this regime of truth, an ability that is closely related to 'knowing oneself' and 'taking care of oneself'. This argument follows that there is an intriguing relationship between telling the truth and forms of reflexivity of the self. By and large, Foucault posits that individuals cannot avoid being shaped by the cultural and historical determinants in which they are immersed from birth. But, at the same time, they retain a degree of autonomy to resist, even where individual resistance cannot challenge the dominant hegemony in society. Foucault makes it clear that the weight of customs and traditions will remain dominant in constructing the discourse of authenticity, particularly in Western social and medical sciences. In other words, there is no such thing as authentic identities that are enacted without being tainted by the dominant culture.

Foucault is primarily interested in how truth is inevitably produced as an act of power, reflecting his concern for the continuous preoccupations with truth and authenticity in modern Western societies. This Foucauldian theoretical framework, like that of Charles Taylor, is premised upon a Western-oriented understanding of truth and power and authenticity. Thus, it is absolutely vital to rethink 'authenticity' in an ever-wider social context. Clearly, the processes shaping authenticity vary from society to society. In what is to follow, I will highlight this socio-historical diversity when discussing how the rhetoric of authenticity is enunciated by self-consciously modern *gay* and *lesbian* Chinese through the tension between tradition/modernity and East/West.

In speaking of *gay* identities in Japan, Mark McLelland (2001) emphasises that authenticity can be invoked as a legitimising principle in the formation and contestation of identities in modern society. McLelland (2001, p. 3) argues that the sensitivity around gender and sexuality tends to allow those who are 'speaking from subaltern gendered, raced or sexualised positions' to lay claims to authenticity that 'deters academics from subjecting them to the same kind of scrutiny as is typical of other cultural productions'. What McLelland suggests is that gender and sexual identities are, as other cultural products, equally subject to interpretation and representation. Thus, the tendency to insist on an authentic standpoint is problematic as it claims a fixed, unitary 'authentic' identity. This insistence only represents the values and beliefs of a particular group, thereby excluding other identities that do not fit the dominant paradigm. McLelland's argument is in resonance with that of Stuart Z. Charme (2000). In his study of contemporary Jewish identity, Charme (2000, p. 134) reports that the discourse of an 'authentic' self may be seen as a collective agenda to preserve 'the normative superiority of one form of Jewish practice' or 'group survival'. Stuart Hall (cited in McLelland 2001, p. 7) also believes that the compelling rhetoric of an authentic identity always 'provide[s] a kind of silencing in relation to another'. In a nutshell, according to Mark McLelland, Stuart Z. Charme and Stuart Hall, references to authenticity are often employed to invalidate and exclude other forms of identities, and assume a superior representation of a particular viewpoint or a group.

It is crucial to note that certain claims to authenticity are particularly attractive to those whose core identity is troubled or stigmatised in everyday lived experience. One important reason is that, as suggested by Stuart Z. Charne (2000, p. 134), claims to authenticity may offer 'recognition and respect' for some marginalised individuals who need acknowledgement by other members of society. This, too, resonates with Charles Taylor's (1991, pp. 45, 49) claim that, 'our identity requires recognition by others', and recognition plays a key role in shaping 'the growing ideal of authenticity'. In a similar way, Craig Calhoun (1995) argues that the formation of modern identity is a struggle over both recognition by others and self-recognition in the wider moral and social contexts. In theory, the ideal of authenticity gives recognition for the 'equal' and 'authentic' existence of various values and rights. In practice, it is not enough simply to recognise others as equal identities or to have self-recognition. The question lies, as Stuart Hall (1991a, pp. 41–68) notes, in the individual's capacity for self-recognition, which is a fundamental process to reconcile with the core aspects (such as 'the unconscious', 'desire' and 'drive') of the self. What Hall simply suggests is that when individuals have the ability to recognise and comprehend their essential values of existence, they demonstrate a measure of understanding of the ideal of authenticity.

### ***Authenticity and gay identity***

Recent research shows that authenticity has special meaning for some gay men and lesbians who look for modes of expression to articulate their deepest desires and different senses of being (Plummer 1995; McLelland 2001; Boellstorff 2003, 2004a). For them, the search for authenticity is arguably to assert the authentic value of their same-sex identity and seek out where they belong. In his study of male same-sex desire, Paul Robinson (cited in McLelland 2001, p. 5) argues that 'coming out' has become an authentic narrative in constructing the modern gay life in the West. To an extent, this narrative is represented by two opposites: 'phoniness versus authenticity, nothingness versus life' (Robinson, cited in McLelland 2001, p. 4). While recognising the growing significance of these coming-out narratives, Robinson also doubts their authenticity and is fascinated with why 'coming out' is now a dominant narrative that many people use to describe modern gay life. In *Telling sexual stories*, Ken Plummer (1995, p. 82) writes of the omnipresence of coming-out stories 'in biographies, edited collections of letters and interviews, in poetry, on tapes, on film, on chat shows, in newspapers ...'. For Plummer, coming-out stories have been perceived as a dominant representation of an authentic way of coming to terms with an individual's sexual identity in the modern era. This is a peculiarly narrative identity that is expressed and constructed through storytelling. Chapter 2, 'The problematics of storytelling', examined the construction of coming-out narratives, focusing the analysis on self-conscious *gay* and *lesbian* moderns in urban Beijing.

In contemporary urban China, the sense of same-sex identity can be enacted by claims or commitments to authenticity. It is noteworthy that authenticity invokes the competing notions of tradition/modernity and East/West when articulating

'Chinese' same-sex identity. And yet, this articulation of an authentic same-sex identity is infused with paradoxes that may not be apparent to those who call themselves *gay* or *lesbian* in urban China. These paradoxes are by no means easy to identify or explain. The biggest paradox seems to be that while Chinese *gays* and *lesbians* in urban China continue to appropriate ideas and tactics through a mainstream model of Western gayness, they still proclaim a *tongzhi* identity that 'need not reproduce the Anglo-American experiences and strategies of lesbigay liberation' (Chou 2000b, p. 1). This *tongzhi* identity, however adapted or appropriated, is considered to be both 'authentic' and 'local'. This consideration is based on a cultural assumption in which same-sex attracted Chinese are not supposed to overtly push for their visibility or assert their individual sexual identities, desires and rights in public. Most importantly, these paradoxes display articulations for authentic or inauthentic ways of becoming *gay* or *lesbian* in urban Chinese society, legitimised and de-legitimised by both heterosexual and homosexual communities.

On the other hand, the search for an authentic Chinese same-sex identity is arguably linked with China's rich same-sex tradition. China has a long homosocial/homoerotic tradition that may date back to the Bronze Age (van Gulik 1961; Hinsch 1990; Ruan 1991). Same-sex bonding played an important part in ancient China: same-sex practice was widespread among the upper-middle classes, while same-sex relationships were understood as a form of fraternal solidarity. Literary and historical sources generally reflect a friendly social attitude towards same-sex eroticism during the last thousand years (Hinsch 1990, p. 2). In many periods of Chinese history, an 'indigenous' Chinese same-sex relationship has been shaped by the guiding ideology of Confucianism, where same-sex activity is tolerated on the basis that the heterosexual family is well maintained and the paternal line continued.

The 'authenticity' of a Chinese same-sex tradition may be understood through the notion of 'belonging', which assumes a pivotal relationship with a politics of location. This assumption follows that Chinese same-sex tradition is intertwined with a 'Chinese' geographical origin. This politics of origin serves to set out parameters for authentic ways of being, and put individuals in a legitimate position to express feelings of cultural solidarity and affinity with China. As Lisa Rofel (1999a, p. 457) argues, cultural belonging is a compelling notion for same-sex attracted Chinese in contemporary China where 'culture has replaced politics as the site on which citizenship is meaningfully defined, sought, and conferred or denied'.

Rofel brings our attention to a fundamental issue. There is a political dimension to the invocation of cultural belonging and authenticity in contemporary Chinese society. References to cultural belonging and authenticity in China can be strategically employed as a source of authority for constructing not only a boundary between tradition and modernity, but also a competing discourse between ancient and modern Chinese same-sex cultures. This insistence on authority reflects an anxiety among the Chinese that the cultural authenticity of a Chinese same-sex tradition will be lost to the processes of modernity, capitalism and globalisation.

This anxiety is intensified by China's rapid opening up, which has brought about the disintegration of certain Chinese traditions. As mentioned before, historical and literary depictions of Chinese same-sex culture do not seem to hold much significance for either the wider community or same-sex community any more. The sense of Chinese same-sex identity is all the more fragmented; it is gradually divorced from what are seen as 'authentic' Chinese traditions of the family and kinship, and homosocial/homoerotic tradition. Increasingly, there are heightened tensions between tradition and modernity, tensions that are characteristic of the emergence of elusively modern identities in urban China.

The conflict between cultural authenticity and modernity is central to the everyday experience of being Chinese or being *gay* or *lesbian* Chinese in urban China. This conflict is not merely about an increasing self-consciousness of modernity, but also about a shared cultural and national identity. (The author is aware that this is a vast subject. The aim here is therefore to explain, in brief, why the Chinese appear to be quite concerned about their loss of cultural identity to the onslaught of modernity.) As suggested by Wang Gungwu (2003, pp. 147–71), the Chinese have been, and still are, deeply conscious of their cultural authenticity and national identity for two reasons. The first is related to the historical fact that China has a proud cultural heritage that has 'never been [directly] colonised by culturally dominant foreigners' (Wang 2003, p. 147). The other reason is that the Chinese have always been instilled with an intense consciousness of their past especially after the Han dynasty (206 BC to AD 220) (Wang 2003, p. 147). It is evident from certain texts in *Lunyu* (*Confucian Analects*) that the Chinese have long been taught to be always 'loving the ancient; believing in it; transmitting and not creating; seeking knowledge or learning from the past' (Wang 2003, p. 149). These teachings serve to prescribe, to a certain degree, that the Chinese have a moral and national obligation to show appreciation and respect for their cultural legacy.

In addition, the search for cultural belonging and authenticity in China may be interpreted as an ongoing self-identification process. The sense of Chinese same-sex identity in urban China is arguably self-constructed as a form of modern and authentic identity. This self-construction articulates the tension between East/West, which is represented by a desire to forge a connection with global gay and lesbian networks without losing the cultural authenticity of Chinese gayness. However, in practice, this self-constructed modern and authentic identity is fragmented with disjunctures, divisions and conflicts, intertwined with local and global politics. In this flux and chaos, *gay* and *lesbian* Chinese in China envision their cultural belonging to local and the diasporic Chinese same-sex communities. These collective 'Chinese' same-sex communities are perceived as 'authentic' and meaningful, even if they represent a fragmented community that supports their shared identity.

### *A fragmented same-sex identity*

Typically, the emerging *gay* and *lesbian* identities in urban China signal an affinity for a transnational gay lifestyle. As discussed before, this emergence coexists with

a desire for modernity and individual freedom associated with the affluent West and the capitalist diasporic Chinese communities. This emergence, in the words of Tom Boellstorff (2003, p. 22), also significantly points to a contingent process by which fragmented images and signs of Western gayness construct 'a sexual self felt to be fully modern and authentic, yet at a disjuncture from the local'. That is to say, the newly emerging forms of Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities in urban China are not necessarily 'modern' or 'authentic'. Rather, they represent a fragmented sense of identity, produced by incomplete or dominant notions of Western gayness, represented particularly via the Chinese internet. During my fieldwork, I learned that many ostensibly modern *gay* and *lesbian* individuals were exposed to images and information about mainstream Western gay culture via the Chinese internet. The internet has opened up a public space for Chinese *gay* netizens, especially for the young, urban and educated ones, to express what they imagine as a 'modern' same-sex identity, which is based on an incomplete understanding of a Western gay lifestyle.

In effect, the mass media are often held responsible for disseminating fragmented or even misleading ideas of Western gayness in many non-Western societies, including China. As Tom Boellstorff (2003) comments, Indonesians learn of incomplete or distorted Western gay and lesbian narratives largely through the mass media. Boellstorff (2003, p. 36) writes:

Indonesians learn of the possibility of gay or lesbi subjectivities through the intermittent reception of messages from mass media. These messages do not intend to convey the possibility of a kind of selfhood. They are often denigrating and dismissive, but above all, they are *fragmentary*.

Indeed, research shows that the proliferation of Western gay and lesbian cultural and political products in Asia, which are often represented as universal trends, is intimately linked to the development of information technology throughout the region (Berry, Martin and Yue 2003).

In urban China, incomplete and fragmentary notions of Western gayness are grounded in the everyday experience of the local *gay* scene. During fieldwork, I observed that some Chinese individuals had been calling themselves *gay* or *lesbian* for a few years without knowing the history and meaning of these Western terms. Quite comfortably, they believed that these terms represented the everyday practice of sexual diversity and individual sexual rights in the West. In their imagination of Western gay and lesbian culture, they frequently thought of pride parades and the legitimacy of gay civil rights as markers of an 'authentic' and 'modern' same-sex identity. Out of admiration for Western gay and lesbian culture, many of them were keen to enquire into how Western capitalist societies could generate a relatively tolerant atmosphere towards same-sex practice. When asked why they chose to call themselves *gay* or *lesbian*, rather than *tongzhi* or *tongxinglian*, some said that the categories *tongzhi* and *tongxinglian* were heavily medicalised and stigmatised. Others said that the use of the Western terms *gay* and *lesbian* for self-identification gave them a sense of freedom.

Such fragmentary ideas of Western gayness are largely deployed by *gay* and *lesbian* individuals in urban China as a means of self-constituting and reinforcing 'modern' and 'authentic' forms of Chinese same-sex identity. These fragmentary ideas fail to reflect the social realities of the local *gay* scene in urban China, because they do not correspond to what is regarded as Western gayness. There are no pride parades in China. The rainbow flags or pink triangles would not mean much to many Chinese *tongzhi*. The mainstream Western gay agenda, emphasising 'out' activism and equality rights, is almost non-existent because it is disallowed in China. Only a few *gay*-run groups organise *gay*-activist-like events or activities in a low-profile manner. The political context of *gay* rights in China is compounded by an ambiguous legal system that silences homosexuality. The phrase *tongxinglian* is not mentioned in Chinese law.

Furthermore, many self-consciously modern *gay* and *lesbian* Chinese are obviously unaware that 'the closet' remains a defining reality for many *gay* and *lesbian* Westerners. Urvasi Vaid (cited in Seidman 2004, p. 5) explains, 'the closet' in the United States is still 'dominated by fear, permeated by discrimination, violence, and shame. [It is] a place where people are still governed primarily by the fear of disclosure of their sexual orientation.' In reality, many of these Chinese individuals are not conversant with English, despite the fact that they are generally aware of the importance of English and are keen to learn. This explains why Chinese *gay* netizens browse mostly (*gay*-oriented) websites in Chinese when logging on to the internet (Liang 2005, p. 32). Most of them have never travelled outside China, although a journey to the West is becoming increasingly common. Their knowledge of Western *gay* culture is thus necessarily mediated by the mass media.

The need to imagine the West as an important source of sexual modernity is related to the ways in which Chinese cultural traditions are increasingly dismantled and dissolved into the fragments of globalisation. From my fieldwork observations, these fragments correspond to a set of paradoxes. On the one hand, ostensibly Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* moderns are not seen as compatible with the 'authentic' Chinese same-sex tradition. On the other hand, these 'modern' Chinese are seen by the Chinese heterosexual community as 'turncoats' of cultural traditions and are still marginalised as sexual and social minorities, or stigmatised as perverse. Paradoxically, they identify with local and diasporic Chinese same-sex communities in order to authenticate their Chinese same-sex identity. This paradoxical condition is a response to the fundamental question of how Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* individuals can actualise a 'modern' identity without losing their 'authentic' identity in the context of China's opening up. They are in a battle against the globalising power of modernity, while striving to preserve their cultural authenticity. The significance of this paradox is what the author has been trying to demonstrate.

## Conclusion

In contemporary China, modernity has become an ever more conscious matter for many self-identified *gay* and *lesbian* Chinese. They are actively consuming

cultural and political products of ostensibly Western gayness that are assumed to be a model of sexual modernity. This consumption may be interpreted as a desire to authenticate a 'modern' Chinese *gay* or *lesbian* identity at the expense of Chinese traditions. Besides, as emphasised earlier, these self-consciously modern Chinese desire alliances with global same-sex networks, while embracing an 'authentic' Chinese same-sex identity within local and diasporic Chinese same-sex communities. This means that they are making conscious efforts to balance the conflict between local and global sources. This conflict is an increasingly routine part of urban Chinese *gay* life, although some *gay* and *lesbian* Chinese are indifferent to or ambivalent about both local and global same-sex politics.

Overall, this chapter has been a critique of the coming into existence of what the author describes as a paradoxical same-sex identity in urban China. This identity cannot merely be interpreted as 'modern' or 'authentic'. Rather, it is intimately linked with the proliferation of fragmentary, but dominant, images and signs of seemingly Western *gay* and *lesbian* identities through the everyday practice of cross-cultural appropriations of gender and sexual identities. Most important of all, without disputing the enormous influence of Western gayness, this paradoxical identity has materialised and been reproduced in 'new' forms that cannot be simply articulated by Western paradigms of gender and sexuality. This chapter has proposed a framework using the notions of 'modernity' and 'authenticity' to explore the complexities and fluidities of the emergence of *gay* and *lesbian* identities amid China's opening up and ascendancy to the global stage as an economic power.

## 7 Conclusion

### The internal paradoxes in Beijing

This book proffers an understanding of how a renewed form of Chineseness, with an emphasis on an emerging form of Chinese same-sex identity, is paradoxically enacted and enunciated through four competing discourses, framed within the paradigms of opening up. The four discourses are predominantly represented in the contexts of: (1) an increasingly globalised gay culture; (2) the ongoing construction of an 'indigenous' Chinese identity; (3) a hybridised transnational/Chinese identity; and (4) the emergence of a *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace. Crucially, these discourses have emerged to contest one another and to create new forms of tension, inequality, knowledge and identity.

All the four discourses have come to constitute a paradoxical articulation of Chinese same-sex identity in urban China. In a way, same-sex identity in urban China has shown itself to be favourably expressed by a group of social identities who call themselves *gay* or *lesbian*. This manner of same-sex identification is more about an individual's social status than simply a marker of identity. In particular, it offers clues to an individual's urban or rural origin, education level, ability to make money, age, access to the internet, exposure to the global gay world and level of 'quality' (*suzhi*) in the Chinese scheme of things. As emphasised throughout this book, the articulation of these Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities symbolises self-consciously modern and authentic forms of Chinese same-sex identity. These identities are steadily decentred from local Chinese traditions, but are progressively allied with the global and diasporic same-sex communities. Paradoxically, this alliance is not a simple matter of opening up to the global gay world, but rather a national statement. It is a statement about a renewed form of Chinese nationalism, and by extension, a newly emerging national Chinese (same-sex) identity. This emergence is a recent social fact that is tied tightly to China's recent ascendancy as the fastest-growing economy of our time. The question of *who* is to represent a 'new' sense of Chinese national pride and identity, materialised in terms of China's recent economic achievement, is therefore becoming all the more a national matter for the Chinese in this new global order.

The other major conclusion the author would make is that the development of self-consciously modern and authentic Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities in urban China is organised around the elusively liberating discourse of opening up. And yet, this development is simultaneously implicated in self-censorship



over the expression of identities and desires. That is to say, these Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities are not articulated through a simple liberating discourse of opening up, but through political thought and action that seek to shape individuals into self-regulating their different senses of being. To an extent, most same-sex attracted Chinese are self-conscious that they should not openly express an individual sexual identity without being directed by the government. In a word, the expression of Chinese identity, along with Chinese same-sex identity, is always subtly self-censored and is necessarily constructed through state-directed ideology and indoctrination.

On the whole, the articulation of Chinese same-sex identity in urban China is far from straightforward. It is an articulation that often brings to the fore the ongoing collisions between old/new, authentic/inauthentic, state/individual, local/global, public/private and socialist/capitalist. Significantly, these collisions serve to reveal that being *gay* or *lesbian* in urban China is a rapidly changing notion that is continuously formed and transformed by the contingencies of China's opening up to globalisation.

It is within the flux and fusion of China's opening up to globalisation that this book has endeavoured to sustain this overall central argument. That is, the articulation of seemingly modern and authentic *gay* and *lesbian* identities in urban China is paradoxical: open and decentred, but at the same time, national and conforming to state control. Most fundamentally, this openness marks the constant fluidity and adaptiveness to the contemporary state politics. That is my contribution to the scholarship in same-sex studies in contemporary China, something the author would want the reader to take away from this book.

This central argument has been developed by adopting an approach to conceptualisation used by many social and cultural theorists. However, this differs from some of theirs in offering an approach that does not aim to claim authenticity or objectivity. This approach may seem like a simple rejection of authenticity or objectivity, but to think so would be incorrect. Rather, the approach recognises the usefulness of de-essentialising and deconstructing the notion of identity by attaching importance not to the search for an ostensibly modern or authentic identity, but to a discovery of how multiple and cross-cultural identities intersect and contradict on a quotidian basis. What is thus significant for this approach is that, first, it illuminates how the everyday practice of appropriating and resisting cross-cultural same-sex identities captures the malleability and mobility of emerging identities and processes that are localised and selectively enacted. Second, this approach elucidates how the richness of everyday experience can be used as an interpretive model to appreciate how local same-sex practices, as a set of lived experiences, intersect with a vast amount of global interaction, something that is often elusive and paradoxical.

A reiteration is necessary. This book is intended to offer a glimpse into the diverse and sometimes paradoxical articulation of same-sex identity in urban China. It is a glimpse that aims to capture the everyday social realities of marginalised identities. Indeed, the practice of everyday life for many same-sex attracted Chinese, to borrow insight from Michel de Certeau (1984, p. xix), is both complex and contradictory;

it is a constant, subconscious struggle where they need to use ‘clever tricks’ or ‘hunters’ cunning’ to fight against discrimination or oppression. Thus, there is ambivalence about positioning this book to represent a total social fact of *gay* life in urban China. The aim has been, rather, to illustrate dominant trends and themes that are suggested in this book and other research. This positioning is hardly an ethical concern or false modesty, but is primarily a political consideration of the knowledge claims about the representation of the Other.

The author has reached the conclusions in this book through engagement with a wide range of disciplinary sources. There is the use of literature (both in Chinese and English) from disciplines subsumed under the titles of China Studies, Asian Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Sociology and Anthropology. There is also the use of material obtained from fieldwork in Beijing and from Chinese-language gay-oriented websites. All these sources have been sought out in order to comprehend the celebrations and contestations of both national and global constructions of same-sex identity in urban China. That has been the ultimate concern in this book. The following sections will review some of the major themes as a way to conclude.

### **A heightened form of Chinese nationalism**

China’s opening up is conjoined with the party-state’s agenda to re-create the imaginaries of a collective vision of a powerful China and a proud national identity. Opening up has manifested in itself an explicit desire for modernity, cultural authenticity, economic growth, technological innovations, self-actualisation, a gradual divorce from tradition, and many other things. Significantly, opening up has provided citizens, particularly in urban China, with potent sources to imagine a renewed form of Chineseness, expressed paradoxically both through a heightened sense of national importance and an increasing affinity with global and diasporic cultural identities. This paradox is a product of China’s recent ascendancy as the fastest-growing economy of our time, an elevated position that compels the question of *who* is to lead a powerful China into this new world order.

The era of opening up has thrust Chinese (homo)sexuality into urban China as a renewed national force – a manifestation that seems to have been fashioned more profoundly than ever before. And yet, this national force does not take place solely domestically. It is also potently driven by an ever-growing self-consciousness of an alliance with global and diasporic same-sex communities. To an extent, as paradoxical as it may sound, the articulation of Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities is a national idea, which is tied to China’s eagerness to imagine itself as a world economic power parallel or comparable to those in developed countries. That is to say, these Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities are not enunciated through the cultural and historical specificities of Chinese culture, but through China’s ever-growing engagement with the global economies. While China continues to prevail economically via opening up, this articulation of Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities has come to signal a Chinese national identity, something that invokes the problematic notions of cultural authenticity and nationalism.

## **Rising visibility of gay and lesbian identities in urban China**

China's opening up coincides with an explosive increase in the number of Chinese who call themselves *gay* or *lesbian*, and embrace these identities, in urban China. These self-described Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities are decentred. They are gradually detached from local cultural traditions, but are reproduced by an increasingly globalised gay culture that is characterised by problematic binarisms and reductionisms. Tom Boellstorff (2005, p. 27) has captured this point quite eloquently:

The first binarism ... focuses on political mobilisations that recall Western gay and lesbian movements. This genre tends to produce stories of convergence, assuming that terms like *gay* or *lesbi* are spread through international activism ... . A second binarism consists of two recurrent reductionisms. The first – the reductionism of similitude – sees these persons as ‘just like’ gay and lesbian persons in a homogenised West ... . The second reductionism – the reductionism of difference – assumes these persons suffer from false consciousness and are traitors to their ‘traditional’ sexualities, victims of (and, ultimately, collaborators with) a global gay imperialism. The third binarism concerns spatial scale: nonnormative sexualities and genders outside the West are seen as fundamentally local phenomena (altered or not by globalisation), or as fundamentally global phenomena (altered or not by local contexts). The fourth binarism concerns celebratory or pessimistic attitudes toward globalisation.

In urban China, it is the proliferation of these problematic binarisms and reductionisms, shaped by an increasingly globalised gay culture, that is highly sensitive to the question of becoming or being *gay* or *lesbian*. This globalised gay culture has shown itself to be intersected with various forms of political aspiration and economic domination. This is a form of hegemonic culture that has the power to dislocate identities. This hegemony is disseminated in the forms of pirated foreign DVDs, MTV, popular magazines and, most importantly, via the electronic media. These cultural products tell stories of ‘Western’ gay and lesbian ideas, practices and lifestyles that focus on activism and visibility, but not homophobia or oppression. These stories are highly mobile, but unevenly distributed around the globe. They are also somewhat incomplete and fragmentary, but are readily consumed by a group of newly emerging identities who call themselves *gay* or *lesbian* in urban China.

There are key political issues around this globalised gay culture. First, this dominant culture does not make everything and everywhere the same. Neither does it eliminate difference. Rather, through establishing its hegemony, dominant Western gay and lesbian identities also find a way to reproduce difference. Second, local cultures are not always negatively affected by globalised cultural identities. Neither are local cultures essentially structured by their ‘unique’ difference. Third, there is no arbitrary relationship between the loss of local identities and the

globalisation of cultural identities. In other words, the conditions of globalisation do not necessarily cause a loss of cultural identities or values. In fact, my fieldwork in Beijing has shown that it is often the well-to-do and the educated, those who have access to foreign contacts and transnational ideas and practices, that have the privilege to cultivate tastes in cultural traditions.

### Same-sex subjectivity and modernity

The self-described *gay* and *lesbian* Chinese in urban China have recognisable characteristics of modernity. These individuals are the most visible representatives of the ‘modern’ urban *gay* scene in Beijing. They are young (in their early twenties to early thirties), educated, socially well connected, internet literate and financially stable. Many of my interviewees and informants can be described as such. And yet, their representations are infused with paradoxes. On the one hand, ostensibly modern *gay* and *lesbian* Chinese are not seen as compatible with the ‘authentic’ Chinese same-sex tradition. On the other, these ‘modern’ *gay* and *lesbian* Chinese are seen by the Chinese heterosexual community as ‘turncoats’ of cultural traditions and are marginalised as sexual and social minorities, or stigmatised as perverse. Paradoxically, they identify with local and diasporic Chinese same-sex communities in order to actualise a ‘modern’ identity without losing their ‘authentic’ Chinese identity. In this sense, to use Lisa Rofel’s (1999b, p. 280) words, a modern *gay* or *lesbian* identity in China ‘is always a relational signifier whose meanings are contested precisely because the stakes are so high ...’.

The modern ways of speaking of Chinese same-sex identities, desires and practices point to a distinct form of social and economic status. The development of same-sex articulations in urban China represents efforts to fix a particular way of speaking of same-sex relationships through exclusion and domination. In a way, this development is inevitably attached to the recent emergence of middle-class social actors, who insist on adopting *gay* and *lesbian* subject-positions and vocalising class distinctions through the rhetoric of *suzhi* (quality). *Suzhi* works as a hegemonic rhetoric that divides people into different classes and identities in both homosexual and heterosexual communities in China. *Suzhi* has culturally specific meaning for the Chinese living in China. It not only reflects the reality of increasing social division and economic inequality between urban and rural regions since the era of opening up, but also expresses an eagerness for the attainment of strength and wealth, on both personal and national levels. For the Chinese same-sex community, the hegemony of *suzhi* has additional meaning as it powerfully represents, to use the words of Richard Fung (1996, p. 190), ‘a site of racial, cultural, and sexual alienation sometimes more pronounced than that in a straight society’.

### Coming out in Chinese cyberspace

The importance of electronic media has facilitated the emergence of a *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace, a space that is increasingly localised. It is this process of

localisation that has energised the *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace and has created unforeseeable online Chinese identities. At the same time, the relationship between Chinese cyberspace and Chinese same-sex identity is particularly interesting as it is embroiled in complex processes of state surveillance, (self)-censorship and growing commercialisation. As examined in Chapter 5, 'The *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace: self-censorship, commercialisation and misrepresentation', online Chinese same-sex identity is considerably (mis)shaped by these processes that are subject to the state discourse. What makes the case of online Chinese same-sex identity special is the almost omnipresence of state control, coupled with self-censorship, in Chinese cyberspace. Apart from the role of the state, the articulation of online same-sex identity is also tied up with contradictions of homogeneity and diversity actively taking place in the problematic sphere of cyberspace. Crucially, such contradictions serve to reveal the ways in which *gay* netizens in China discover themselves and embrace the transnational same-sex communities through an imagined and real sphere in Chinese cyberspace.

### **Future research**

Research interest in the articulation of same-sex identity in contemporary China has been growing for some years, particularly outside China. For one thing, same-sexness is still a taboo subject in academic and popular discourses in mainland China. In this case, researchers who are not based in China have helped to highlight how same-sex identity in contemporary China is variously celebrated and contested.

Currently, most research is concerned with how Chinese same-sex identity has been shaped, or will continue to be shaped, by hegemonic Western ideologies and practices. There are two major approaches to the study of the articulation of same-sex identity in contemporary China and elsewhere: (1) decentre the hegemony of a global gayness; and (2) de-Westernise gay and lesbian studies and now queer studies. Both of the approaches reveal that global gayness, and gay and lesbian and queer studies are basically informed by the assumptions of Western history and ideologies that seek to extend their dominion. However, it can be argued that Western models of gayness are not necessarily hegemonic in non-Western societies. Fran Martin (2008) articulates that Western models of gayness 'often remain, in Raymond Williams' terms, emergent rather than dominant, and their utility lies precisely in their capacity to be wielded as tactical tools to challenge the hegemonies of local regimes of sexual and gender regulation'.

This book, without denying Western formulations of gay and lesbian and queer studies, has advocated a framework to accommodate the diverse and sometimes paradoxical expression of seemingly modern and authentic Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* identities in contemporary urban China. It is a framework that has considered how *gay* and *lesbian* identities in China have emerged as a set of local categories, and how they have multiplied in ways that cannot simply be the result of being informed by Western theoretical paradigms. In doing so, this book has benefited from the scholarship of Western theories and conceptions.

With regard to future research engagement, Zhongxin Sun, James Farrer and Kyung-Hee Choi (2006) suggest that more research efforts should be spent on uncovering the diverse and contradictory ways of articulating same-sex identities, desires and practices. Wan Yanhai (2001) indicates that HIV/AIDS education has recently emerged as a fruitful site for the development of same-sex sexual health in urban China. Wu Cuncun (2004) argues that it is essential to shift the present focus on same-sex identity to an analysis of same-sex relations, with particular reference to the discourses of class and power.

At the same time, future research may focus on four other areas that are under-researched and deserve critical attention. These are: (1) the emergence of a *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace; (2) the relationship between China's opening up and the emerging gay-oriented resources and establishments in urban China; (3) the widening division and exclusion within the same-sex community in urban China; and (4) the representation of male homosexual prostitution (*nantongxing maiyin*) in the Chinese media.

In addition to these four research angles, there is the exciting possibility of inverting Chinese same-sex studies to offer a source of inspiration for Western theoretical formulations on gay and lesbian studies. It is pertinent and timely to ask the following research question: how can this articulation of a paradoxical Chinese same-sex identity be useful for constructing and contesting sexual and gender identities in Western theoretical paradigms? Above all, this book has inverted Western gayness to reveal the internal paradoxes of Chinese same-sex identity in Beijing itself. It has also demonstrated the benefits of shifting our focus from representation to cross-cultural appropriation of identities on an everyday basis.

Indeed, these four competing discourses are constantly held in tension, namely: (1) an increasingly globalised gay culture; (2) the ongoing construction of an 'indigenous' Chinese identity; (3) a hybridised transnational/Chinese identity; and (4) the emergence of a *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace. It is precisely this ongoing tension that makes an essentialised or a global gay identity in Beijing impossible. All that is apparently possible is to encapsulate the articulation of a paradoxical same-sex identity in Beijing.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Questions to informants and interviewees

It should be stressed that most of the interviews in fieldwork were conducted in an informal or semi-structured manner. The following questions form a guideline only.

### (a) Identity

- 1 Where do you come from?
- 2 Do you speak any Chinese dialects?
- 3 What do you do for leisure?
- 4 Do you smoke? Are you a social drinker?
- 5 Would you like to share some of your best memories?
- 6 Would you like to share some of your bad experiences?
- 7 Have you ever read any gay or lesbian books? If yes, what are they?
- 8 Have you ever watched any gay or lesbian films? If yes, what are they?
- 9 Are you satisfied with your life in general?
- 10 What are the important things for you?
- 11 Do you have any plans for the near future?
- 12 How do you make a balance between your private life and your public life?
- 13 Would you mind telling me how old you are?
- 14 Are you married? If yes, how long have you been married? Any children?
- 15 Are you in a relationship? How is it going? How long have you been going out with this person?

### (b) Sexuality

- 1 What does *tongxinglian* bring to your mind?
- 2 Do you see any link between *tongxinglian* and same-sex attracted people?
- 3 Would you distinguish the difference between *tongxinglian* and *tongxing'ai*?
- 4 What do you think of these terms: *tongzhi*, gay, lesbian, *les*, *lala*, *P*, *T*, and *bufen*? Could you think of any other terms that are used to refer to the Chinese who are attracted to the same sex?

- 5 Where and how did you learn about *tongxinglian*?
- 6 What is your view of same-sex marriage in some States of America and parts of Europe?
- 7 What is your view of same-sex relationship with non-Chinese?
- 8 What does sexual openness (*xingkaifang*) bring to your mind?
- 9 With reference to the opening up (*kaifang*) to foreign influences, capitalism and the internet, could you comment on the (homo)sexual culture of contemporary Chinese society?

**(c) Chinese society**

- 1 How should contemporary Chinese society treat *tongxinglian*?
- 2 What is the legal standing for *tongxinglian* in contemporary China (from 1980 to present)? How should Chinese society establish moral and legal rules for same-sex relationships? Do you think that the legalisation of same-sex marriage is going to happen in China?
- 3 Could you comment on the development of *gay* bars in China?
- 4 What is your view of the emergence of *money boys* in *gay* bars in China? What are the causes for and characteristics of this emergence?
- 5 Where do these *money boys* come from? What activities do these *money boys* engage in?
- 6 How should Chinese society deal with these *money boys* who are assumed to be prone to the infection of HIV/AIDS?
- 7 What is the place of same-sex relationships in Chinese culture?
- 8 What do you think about the attitude that *tongxinglian* is a 'Western' vice?
- 9 How should same-sex attracted individuals cope with the tension between traditional marital values and their own sexual preference? How should society deal with this? How should *tongzhi* treat themselves or each other?
- 10 What is your opinion of the government attitude towards *tongxinglian*?
- 11 What is the future (trend) for *tongxinglian* in China?
- 12 What do you think about the idea of *tongzhi* which is being talked about by some Chinese *gay* rights activists?

**(d) The gay scene in Beijing**

- 1 What is your view of the Beijing *gay* scene?
- 2 What do you think of places like Dongdan Park, Sanlihe or public toilets?
- 3 What do you think of the *gay* bars in Beijing?
- 4 What do you think of the cross-dressing shows in Beijing?
- 5 What do you think of the cruising culture in Beijing?
- 6 In your view, what is the trend of *nantongxing maiyin* (male homosexual prostitution) in China?
- 7 What do you think of the Beijing police's attitude towards *tongxinglian*?



**(e) Chinese gays in cyberspace**

- 1 Do you visit *tongzhi* websites? Which ones? Any favourite websites? What are the main attractions and features of these websites?
- 2 How often, where, and for what purposes do you visit these websites?
- 3 To what extent can the internet be used as a tool for *gay* netizens to look for friends and partners and find knowledge of same-sex issues from around the world?
- 4 What are the differences and similarities between Chinese *gay* and *lesbian* websites?
- 5 Are these websites created and maintained by *tongzhi*?
- 6 How do *gay* netizens present themselves on the internet? How do they interact with each other?
- 7 What is your view of one-night stands, pornography and deception on the internet?
- 8 How do Chinese censorship authorities control electronic media?
- 9 How do Chinese censorship authorities control the *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace?

**(f) Family**

- 1 Could you describe your family?
- 2 Who is your closest sibling?
- 3 What is your relationship with your family?
- 4 Are you living with your family? If not, do you see them much? How often do you see your family?
- 5 Do your family know that you are attracted to the same sex? If yes, how do they know? Who knows? If no, will you tell them later? Why? Why not?
- 6 Do you want your family to see you as someone who is attracted to the same sex?
- 7 Are you under any family pressure to get married?

**(g) Education**

- 1 What is your level of education?
- 2 Where did you study?
- 3 Do you have plans to do more studies?
- 4 What does education mean to you?
- 5 Are you aware that Fudan University opened a course in 2003 on sexual health and homosexuality? If yes, where did you hear about it? What is your view on this course?
- 6 Some *tongzhi* said that the course on *tongxinglian* in Fudan University was run rather late. What is your view of this statement?

**(h) Work**

- 1 What do you do for a living?

- 2 Where do you go to work?
- 3 How long have you been doing your present job?
- 4 What are your working hours?
- 5 Do you enjoy your job?
- 6 What are the main duties of your job?
- 7 What is the workload of your job?
- 8 Are you doing any part-time jobs?
- 9 How do you get on with your colleagues and supervisors?
- 10 Have you got any career plans?
- 11 Do your colleagues know that you are attracted to the same sex?
- 12 Have you experienced any discrimination on the basis of your sexual difference?

**(i) Gender and sexuality research**

- 1 What research are you doing now?
- 2 Are you writing any new books on gender and sexuality?
- 3 Have you conducted any courses on *tongxinglian*? Where did you run them? What was the content of the courses? What were their aims?
- 4 What is your current estimate of China's same-sex population?
- 5 What is your view of the social attitude towards same-sex relations in China?
- 6 Have you worked with any local *gay* and *lesbian* groups to promote *tongzhi* culture? Who were these groups?
- 7 Why do you research *tongxinglian* in China?
- 8 Have you got surveys to show how many same-sex attracted people have chosen to get married?
- 9 Regarding the practice of *money boys*, have you or any other mainland scholars conducted research into it?
- 10 Anglo-European academies seem to have theories on gay and lesbian studies. Should China have its own *tongxinglian* theories? What kind of theories should China have?
- 11 What do you think of my research? In your view, in what ways does my research contribute to knowledge in this field?
- 12 What are your comments on the books by Cui Zi'en, Chou Wah-shan, Chu Tian, Fang Gang, Tong Ge or Zhang Beichuan?
- 13 What are your comments on the *gay* and *lesbian* films by Cui Zi'en, Chen Kaige, Li Yu or Zhang Yuan?
- 14 In your view, what is the trend of male same-sex trade in China?
- 15 What is your view of some *tongzhi* who feel inferior because of their own sexual difference?
- 16 How should same-sex attracted Chinese in China perceive their sexual identity?
- 17 What is your view of Chinese law on same-sex practice?
- 18 How can we get rid of social misunderstanding towards the link between HIV/AIDS and homosexuality?

- 19 What is your view of same-sex couples adopting children?
- 20 Have you noticed any marked changes in social attitude towards *tongxinglian* in recent ten years in China?
- 21 What is your view of same-sex practice in China?
- 22 What is your view of the proforma marriage (*mingyi hunyin*) between a same-sex attracted man and a same-sex attracted woman? What would be their biggest challenge if they got married?

**(j) *Tongzhi* hotlines**

- 1 When was the Beijing Tongzhi Hotline set up?
- 2 What are the aims of the hotline?
- 3 Could you explain the nature of work involved in the hotline?
- 4 How many staff members are there working?
- 5 Who makes calls to your hotline? Do you know their background?
- 6 What makes you persist in running this hotline?
- 7 Has the emergence of the internet affected your hotline?
- 8 Are you undertaking any projects related to the hotline?
- 9 Have you obtained funding from foreign organisations for the hotline? Where did you get funding? What organisations have you worked with? What are these organisations?
- 10 Have you been engaged in any promotion of the hotline? What are your future plans? What do you intend to achieve? What do you intend to contribute to the same-sex community in China?

**Appendix B: Interviewee profiles**

In this appendix, I include an alphabetical list of all the people that I interviewed during fieldwork. All these interviewees are identified by their most salient characteristics. They provide a supplement to this research. In order to protect their anonymity, I name none of those interviewees who self-identified as *gay*, *lesbian*, *lala*, *les* or *tongzhi*. Thus, the names that I use in this book have been changed or withheld to ensure their privacy. The only exceptions are Cui Zi'en and Zhou Dan. Cui Zi'en is widely known to be one of the most public *gay* figures in China. With regard to Zhou Dan, I have his permission to use his real name. All these interviews were conducted between the period of March and June 2004, in Beijing. All biographical data cited refer to this period of interview.

- 1) Amy: 31 years old, married twice, a university graduate. She comes from Shandong. She understands herself to be a bisexual. She works in the advertising industry. She is married to Stanley who is a self-identified *gay* man. She describes her marriage as a kind of *mingyi hunyin* (pro forma marriage). *Mingyi hunyin* is a collaboration between a same-sex attracted man and a same-sex attracted woman to perform

a heterosexual marriage in the public eye in order to live homosexually in their private life, as mentioned before. She is actively involved in a local *lesbian* group in Beijing. I was introduced to her through a key figure of this lesbian group. I first met her at the Half & Half bar.

- 2) Amy's husband (Stanley): 32 years of age, married to Amy, graduated with a master's degree in the English language. He comes from Yunnan. He self-identifies as *gay*. He sees marriage as a tragedy for many same-sex attracted people in China. He considers this *mingyi hunyin* because he does not want to disappoint his aged parents who are in their seventies. He does not have a boyfriend. Occasionally, he goes to local cruising grounds for casual sex. I met him through Amy.
- 3) Cathy: 21 years old, unmarried, a fourth-year Sociology student at Beijing University. She is involved in a student programme of the Beijing Aizhixing Institute, where she completed a survey into some of the *tongzhi* hotlines, in China in August 2003. This survey, called *Zhongguo Bufen Tongzhi Rexian de Xianzhuang Diaocha* in Chinese, identified 16 *tongzhi* hotlines in China. According to her, of these 16 hotlines, 14 could be contacted by phone. Of the 14 accessible hotlines, seven refused to offer help with investigations of any kind. When asked about the greatest challenge in conducting the survey, she told me that many of these hotline operators did not welcome this survey partly due to the confidentiality involved in operating a hotline for same-sex attracted Chinese, something that is still looked upon with suspicion in China. Another reason was, according to her, that many of them did not support this survey because it was linked with Wan Yanhai's Beijing AIDS Institute of Health Education. Wan is generally regarded by some members of the Chinese same-sex community as a controversial figure, partly because of his active involvement with foreign HIV/AIDS networks in order to obtain funds and support, and partly because of his blatant opposition to the sexual health policies of Chinese authorities. I met her through Wan Yanhai.
- 4) Cong Zhong: 43 years old, he is a psychiatrist working at the Centre of Clinical Psychology and the Institute of Mental Health, Beijing University. He says: 'same-sex attracted people are confronted with two major problems: self-acceptance and the self-acceptance of their own sexual preference.' He has collaborated with the Beijing Tongzhi Hotline and Zhang Beichuan on projects relating to the development of mental health of same-sex attracted people in China. I was put in

touch with him through an interviewee of mine, who is a clinical supervisor at Qinghua University.

- 5) Cui Zi'en: 38 years old, unmarried, graduated from the Chinese Academy of Social Science with an MA in Chinese Literature. He is a director, film scholar, screenwriter and novelist. He is one of the most outspoken *gay* activists, based in Beijing. He is currently Associate Professor at the Film Research Institute of the Beijing Film Academy. He is one of the avant-garde DV makers of Chinese underground film. I located his contact details on the internet. Our initial contact was made possible by email.
- 6) Chao Ying: 27 years old, unmarried, a university graduate. He comes from Shanxi. He is a gymnasium and yoga coach. He self-identifies as *gay*. He has a boyfriend who has studied in Japan for a few years. They have been together for about six months. He has strong views against male same-sex trade and *money boys* in China. In his view, *money boys* bring shame to the same-sex community in China. He has a low opinion of the local *gay* scene in Beijing. He never goes to bath houses or cruises in public toilets. I met him and his boyfriend at a dinner.
- 7) Chu Ting: 31 years old, unmarried, a university graduate. He self-identifies as *tongzhi*. He is operator of the gay-oriented website <http://www.gaybyte.com>. He used to have suicidal thoughts, as he found – still finds – it extremely hard being *gay* in China. He has a boyfriend who is a university professor. According to him, it is extremely important for gay-oriented website operators to convey a healthy (*jiankang*) and positive (*zhengmian*) image of same-sex attracted people to the general public via the internet. He published a book entitled *Zhongguo tongxinglian diaocha* (*A survey into same-sex eroticism in China*) in Hong Kong in 2003. I met him through an interviewee.
- 8) David: 31 years old, unmarried, graduated with a master's degree. He grew up in the city. He works in the information technology sector. He calls himself *gay* and *tongzhi*. He has had relationships with women before, but has found it hard to relate to them. He has a boyfriend. They have been together for about two years. I met him at a dinner party.
- 9) Di Xiaolan: 43 years old, she is a clinical psychiatrist and a researcher into sexual psychology. According to her, masturbation by teenagers and *tongxinglian* represent two main major problems of sexual psychology in contemporary Chinese society. As she explains, *tongxinglian* is a particularly

sensitive issue for those educated people who suspect that they are attracted to the same sex, mainly because they are worried that their sexual preference will seriously affect their personal development. She believes that *tongxinglian* is a biological construction in which same-sex attracted people are born with a desire for the same sex, and that it is impossible to change one's sexual preference. I met her through Ma Xiaonian.

- 10) Fan Ling: 42 years old, unmarried. He is an insurance agent. He calls himself *gay*. He has gone out with women before, but prefers men. He has a boy friend. I met him and his boy friend at the On/Off bar. He has cheated on his current boy friend. He is interested in having casual sexual relationships with other men. I met him through Amy.
- 11) Fang Gang: 36 years old, married. He comes from Tianjin. He is a prolific writer. Broadly, his writings are concerned with issues and social phenomena pertaining to the formation of sexual identities, desires or practices. He published a book entitled *Tongxinglian zai zhongguo (Same-sex eroticism in China)* in 1995. According to him, 'The development of *tongxinglian* identity is closely linked with China's economic reform.' He is currently doing a PhD under the supervision of Pan Suiming. I met him through Pan Suiming.
- 12) Guo Jun: 38 years old, married. He heads the Beijing Gender Health Education Institute. He is one the important figures in the development of *tongzhi* hotlines and HIV/AIDS sexual health programmes in China. I met him through Wan Yanhai on the day I arrived in Beijing. He has edited a book entitled *Experience compilation on gay community activities*, which was published in January 2005. I met him again at the First International Conference of Asian Queer Studies at Bangkok in 2005.
- 13) Han Yan: 37 years old, a university graduate. He comes from Sichuan. He is a social worker. He works with Wan Yanhai at the Beijing Aizhixing Institute. He has been involved in HIV/AIDS and NGO projects in China. He thinks that Chinese government authorities, as well as Chinese society, do not take a strong position against same-sex practice. He says that discrimination against *tongxinglian* is a result of social misunderstanding and ignorance. I met him through Wan Yanhai.
- 14) Jiang Yu: 26 years old, married for ten years, with children. He completed a lower-middle education. He moved from Anhui to Beijing to find work. He works as an adverting

agent. He goes back to Anhui once a year to see his wife and children. They got married through match-making (they married two months after meeting). He has complex feelings about his marriage. He feels very guilty about his wife, because she cannot remarry. He does not love her, and he feels only obliged to have sex with her. He also feels that he is not a good father to his children. He calls himself *tongzhi*. He meets other *tongzhi* in parks, bars or through friends. His family members do not know of his same-sex attraction. I met him through an informant.

- 15) Jie Fan: 40 years old, married for ten years, with a son. Graduated with a degree in Property Management. She comes from Beijing. She is quite distressed about her marriage. She often has dark thoughts of committing suicide because of her marriage, which she finds basically loveless and sexless. She has had a relationship with a woman for half a year. She has been missing her for more than ten years since she went to Singapore for good. She appeared to be uncomfortable and nervous in our interview, which was conducted in the presence of her close friend, who was another interviewee of mine. Her family members know something about her same-sex attraction, but none of them wants to bring it up for discussion.
- 16) Lao Jin: 61 years old, divorced, two children. He was under family pressure to marry a woman; this marriage lasted for 30 years. He completed a lower-middle education. He had some ambiguous sexual relationships with men in Sichuan between 1966 and 1969. He is my oldest interviewee who is attracted to men. He comes from Sichuan. He is a worker. According to him, it is easy to contract HIV/AIDS from foreigners. He often goes to Dongdan Park for casual sex. He has his blood tested every year. He has a close relationship with a man who is 25 years of age. I met both of them through Xu Jun in Dongdan Park.
- 17) Li Han: 34 years old, he refuses to label himself with any sexual category. According to him, more people have started to reject the necessity for sexual self-identification. He works for the Beijing Gender Health Education Institute. One of his major duties is to administer a *tongzhi* hotline, answering enquiries from all over China about same-sex issues. I met him when I visited Guo Jun at the Beijing Gender Health Education Institute.
- 18) Li Ming: 22 years old, unmarried, a university graduate. He comes from Shandong. He works in the computer industry. None

of his friends or family members knows that he is attracted to men. He had his first sexual experience with a man at 20 years of age. He does not have a boy friend, but hopes to look for his love on the internet. He has met some *gay* men through the internet. I approached him in Dongdan Park, where we first met.

- 19) Li Yinhe: 45 years old, widowed. She started her pioneer research into *tongxinglian* in the 1980s. She is Professor and Senior Researcher at the Department of Sociology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. She is widely acknowledged as China's foremost female scholar on sex-related issues. She has published extensively on the subjects of male same-sex relationships and female sexuality. I located her contact details on the internet. Our initial contact was made possible by email.
- 20) Li Yu: 31 years old, a university graduate from Shandong Normal University. She comes from Shandong. She is a film director. She produced the first Chinese *lesbian* film *Jinnian Xiatian* (or *Fish and Elephant* in English). I located her contact details on the internet. Our initial contact was made possible by email.
- 21) Lin Yang: 21 years old, unmarried. He comes from Heilungjiang. He completed a lower-middle school education. He self-identifies as *gay*. He has never been with a woman. He makes a living by working as a *money boy* and as a cross-dressing performer. He once told me he was penetrated by a fat, old Western man in a bath house without a condom. That was his first experience with a Western customer. He earned 330 *yuan* in this sexual transaction. He is not too concerned that he will contract HIV/AIDS. I approached him in Dongdan Park, where we first met.
- 22) Liu Ning: 40 years old, a doctorate graduate. She is a clinical supervisor at Qinghua University, where she provides counselling services to students who experience problems of various kinds. She has come across some students who suspect that they are *tongxinglian*, and are seriously disturbed and depressed. She has cooperated with the Beijing Tongzhi Hotline and Zhang Beichuan on programmes relating to the mental health issues of the same-sex population in China. I met her through an informant.
- 23) Ma Xiaonian: 60 years old, obtained his degree in medicine in England. He is a clinical doctor and a well-known sexologist in China. He specialises in sexual diseases. He published an article on *tongxinglian* in 1996. Since then, he has received



- many different enquiries from same-sex attracted people. He played a leading role in organising a sex exposition in Beijing a few years ago. I initiated an interview with him.
- 24) Martin: 34 years old, unmarried, a medical doctor in Tianjin. He is from Tianjin. He runs a *tongzhi* hotline and a gay-oriented website. He has a live-in relationship with his boy friend. At first, his family members strongly opposed this relationship, but now they are slowly beginning to accept it. It is only through Martin that I was able to interview, for one and an half hours, a brothel manager who ran the male same-sex trade in Tianjin. I met Martin through Hui Jiang.
- 25) Qui Renzong: 70 years old, married. He is Professor of Bioethics and a contributor to the magazine, *Pengyou (Friends)*, which is circulated to same-sex attracted Chinese men and women who go to *gay* bars in Beijing. He thinks that the subject of *tongxinglian* is under-investigated in China. This under-investigation is attributed to two main reasons: first, there is a lack of financial support and resources in Chinese academia; second, the significance of same-sex research in China is often marginalised by other pressing issues such as poverty and pollution. I initiated an interview with him.
- 26) Ou Yang: 40 years old, unmarried, a university graduate in Arts. She comes from the southern part of China. She calls herself *les* and *lesbian*. She is a scriptwriter. She is from a privileged background. Her mother is a medical doctor and her father is involved in the military. She has been refusing to get married. She has had a relationship with a Japanese woman who seduced her into having sexual intercourse. That was her first sexual experience. She often makes disparaging remarks about those *lesbians* who are interested in one-night stands. She finds that the same-sex community in Beijing is quite rough (*luan*). Only her sister in Japan knows that she is attracted to women. I met her in the Half & Half.
- 27) Pan Suiming: 45 years old, married. He is Professor and Director of the Institute for Research on Sexuality and Gender at the Remin (People's) University of China, Beijing. He is widely regarded as one the most eminent scholars in the field of Chinese gender and sexuality. He gave me an intensive course not only about *tongxinglian*, but also about the national conditions of China (*guoqing*) during my fieldwork in Beijing. I located his contact details on the internet. Our initial contact was made possible by email.
- 28) Shi Tan: 36 years old, a university graduate majoring in Arts. She comes from Guizhou. She is an artist. Her home is full of

her own paintings; most of them focus on the theme of female same-sex eroticism. She considers herself an ‘out’ lesbian in China. To an extent, she has a live-in relationship with a woman and her family members know about this relationship. I met both of them in her home. But typically, none of her family members wants to talk about this relationship. I met her through an informant.

- 29) Tan Han: 32 years old, married with a child. He completed a high-school education. He is from Beijing. He does not identify as *gay*. He is the boss of the Half & Half bar. He opened this bar business in 2001 in order to make money. It is a non-issue for his parents, wife and child that he runs a *gay* bar business, but he often gets asked why he runs this business, given the fact that he is not *gay*. In his view, running a *gay* bar in China has a lot of potential as a profitable business. He says, ‘I support (*wo zhichi*), but cannot accept (*bukeyi jieshou*) *tongxinglian*.’ I approached him when I visited Half & Half, where we met for the first time.
- 30) Wang Jun: 45 years old, married for 17 years, with a son. He completed a high-school education. He comes from Beijing. He regularly practises ‘SM’ (in his words), sadomasochism, with the men he meets via the internet. He sees *tongxinglian* as an individual way of life. Wang’s wife has come to know about his same-sex attraction; he came out to her a few years ago. Wang’s son knows about his father’s same-sex attraction, but father and son never discuss this subject.
- 31) Wang Jun’s wife: 42 years old, married. She completed a high-school education. She comes from Beijing. She works as a supervisor in a private enterprise. She ‘accepts’ that her husband is attracted to men. She sees him as a role-model husband who contributes a lot to the family: he does housework, looks after his son, does not smoke or drink. According to her, Wang Jun’s interest in sex with her has begun to flag (*danbo*) since he started going out with other men that he met via the internet. I met Mrs Wang through Wang Jun.
- 32) Wang Yan: 23 years old, unmarried. He completed a lower-middle education. He is attracted to both men and woman. He works as a cross-dressing performer and has been doing this job for about five years. With the exception of Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, he has performed as a cross-dresser in most major cities in China. He earns between 200 and 400 *yuan* for each performance. Sometimes, some of his customers offer to pay him for penetrative sex and they treat him like a woman. I met him through Martin.

- 33) Xiao Xie: 31 years old, unmarried, graduated in Economic Management. He is the boss of On/Off. His family members in Shenzhen and Shanghai do not know that he runs a *gay* bar in Beijing. When he first took over the bar business, he just wanted to give it a try and did not think of making money, but now he wants to make a contribution to the same-sex community in Beijing by providing a friendly meeting place for *tongzhi*. I met him through Amy.
- 34) Xiao Xiong: 31 years old, a university graduate. She thinks that she is attracted to women. She has a girl friend. She seldom mixes with other same-sex attracted women, neither does she go out to *gay* bars to look for friends or partners. According to her, most people who go to bars tend to start fast and end fast. But she keeps herself updated with same-sex issues and news via the internet. I met her through Cathy Cai.
- 35) Xiao Ban: 31 years old, unmarried. He completed a master's degree in the Chinese Language at Beijing Normal University. He is currently pursuing his doctoral studies. He has been working in digital media for two years. He has been volunteering for the gay-oriented website <http://www.gaychinese.cn>. He is not active in the local *gay* scene. He considers it very important for *tongzhi* to enhance self-knowledge and self-awareness through learning about news and information from both local and international sources. He is a private man and is not willing to discuss much about his personal life. I met him through Hui Jiang.
- 36) Xiao Zhong: 30 years old, unmarried, graduated in the English Language and Photography. She comes from Guangxi. She has a girl friend (Xiao Zhou). But she does not identify herself as a *lesbian*. They have been together for about a month. To her, *tongxinglian* is something that is very consciously linked with the subjects of gender and sexuality. It refers to people who are merely drawn to homosocial or homoerotic relationships. She considers her relationship with Xiao Zhou a personal matter to the extent that her family members do not need to know. I met her in Half & Half.
- 37) Xiao Zhou: 31 years old, studied in Singapore, a university graduate. She comes from Shandong. She calls herself a *lesbian*. Her girl friend is Xiao Zhong. She came out to her family after her return from Singapore, where she was an overseas student. When she first came out to her parents, they wanted to take her to see a psychiatrist. But they have taken time to come to terms with this fact. According to her, they now

will not force her to marry a man again or to go for match-making. I met her in Half & Half.

- 38) Xu Jun: 48 years old, unmarried, graduated in Chinese Literature at a university in China. He has an adopted a son, aged 19, a university student. I met his adopted son when I was invited for dinner at his home. Xu calls himself *tongzhi* and *gay*. He runs a paying hotline, answering same-sex enquiries and providing assistance and counselling services for those who phone in. According to him, most *tongzhi* call his hotline to express the sheer frustration of their sexual attraction. Others use the hotline to enquire on matters to do with sexual health. Prior to running this hotline, he has helped Li Yinhe and Wang Xiaobo (Li's deceased's husband) to obtain research data about the same-sex communities in China in the 1980s. He has also worked for a government health department, where he and Wan Yanhai were colleagues. Both of them manned a nationwide hotline on HIV/AIDS. When I began conducting fieldwork, he assisted me a great deal by introducing many same-sex attracted Chinese men to me, who were mostly middle-aged and from lower classes of society. Many of these introductions involved an acceptable cultural practice, albeit not compulsory, of treating them to meals or drinks. I met Xu Jun through an Australian sinologist at a party. Xu Jun was my key assistant and adviser in the field.
- 39) Zhang Yun: 30 years old, unmarried. He comes from Zhejiang. He completed a middle-school education. He ran the On/Off bar for two years. He is very open about his sexuality. For the past ten years, he has slept with more than 100 men. According to him, there are about 100 cruising grounds in Beijing. He works in a factory. He does not have a boy friend, and now he is considering having a relationship with a woman. His family members know that he is attracted to the same sex. My initial contact with him was made through a long-distance call from Perth to the Beijing Tongzhi Hotline. I then managed to maintain contact with him and interviewed him in Beijing.
- 40) Zhe Bing: 31 years old, a university graduate in Cosmetics. He comes from Beijing. He used to be a cross-dresser. He works in the fashion industry. He loves attention and he gets a lot of it in the street. He is very out in his own image and attire. He wears rings in many parts of his body. His mother knows that he is attracted to men. He thinks very positively of the same-sex circle (*quan*) in Beijing, in which many

people are talented and competent. He has had a six-year relationship with a man. That was his longest relationship. I met him at On/Off.

- 41) Zhu Chuanyan: 31 years old, unmarried, graduated in Journalism and Mass Communication with a master's degree from Beijing Broadcasting University. She completed an MA book in Chinese, entitled *Internet's effect on homosexual identity*, in 2004. She takes part in activities organised by local same-sex groups in Beijing. I met her through Chu Tian.

### Appendix C: Examples of Chinese gay-oriented websites

Below, I give examples of some of the Chinese-language *gay* and *lesbian* websites.<sup>1</sup> They are identified as examples as they are accessible for direct observation, data collection and content analysis. I have to stress that these websites are generally up to date and accurate, but occasionally deny access for reasons that are not entirely clear; some of those listed were operational when I first accessed them, but have since been shut down or access denied. The following links are thus shown in order to give a glimpse of how *gay* and *lesbian* websites in China are generally represented.

- 1 爱情白皮书 (<http://www.gaychinese.net>)
- 2 阳光地带 (<http://www.boysky.com>)
- 3 桃红满天下 (<http://www.csssm.org>)
- 4 朋友通讯 (<http://friend.qdeol.com.cn/20031213.htm>)
- 5 男孩之间 同一片天 (<http://www.homosky.com/2002/>)
- 6 同心驿站 (重庆同志) (<http://xzz.9xc.com/2003/index.htm>)
- 7 相遇太美内蒙同志 (<http://www.nmtz.net>)
- 8 淡蓝色的回忆 (<http://www.gengle.net>)
- 9 朋友别哭 (<http://www.notearsky.com>)
- 10 华人拉拉 (<http://www.chinalala.com>)
- 11 新好男孩 (<http://www.21cnboy.com>)
- 12 花开的地方 (<http://www.lescn.net/main.asp>)
- 13 拉拉俱乐部 (<http://www.lalacub.net>)
- 14 男儿岛 (<http://www.5iboy.net>)
- 15 爱心天空公益网 (<http://www.xiaobie.com>)
- 16 北京同志热线 (<http://www.99575.com/map.htm>)
- 17 北同网络 (<http://www.bjboy.net>)
- 18 西陆拉拉社区 (<http://lalachat.xiloo.com>)
- 19 我们啊我们 (<http://www.weandwe.com/2002/>)
- 20 拉拉真情网 (<http://zqlala.9126.com>)
- 21 同志交友 (<http://www.chinatongzhi.com>)
- 22 酒吧男孩 (<http://www.98boy.com>)
- 23 天涯社区同性之间 (<http://www.tianyaclub.com>)
- 24 同志社区 (<http://www.gaychina.com>)

- 25 博亚网 (<http://www.boyair.com>)
- 26 华人姐妹网/花开的地方 (<http://www.lescn.net/index2004.asp>)
- 27 北京拉拉沙龙 (<http://www.lalabar.com>)
- 28 阿拉岛 (<http://www.aladao.net>)
- 29 北京同志 (<http://www.bjtongzhi.com>)
- 30 广州同志 (<http://www.gztongzhi.com>)
- 31 天津酷 (<http://www.tianjincool.com>)

# Notes

## 1 Opening up to gay and lesbian identities

- 1 In this book, the adoption of the metaphor 'opening up' is partly derived from James Farrer's (2002) *Opening Up*, which uses Shanghai as a case study to examine sexual opening as a crucial feature of social and economic change in contemporary Chinese society.
- 2 Geremie R. Barmé's (1995) 'To screw foreigners is patriotic' gives vivid examples of what is considered by Chinese people to be essentially Chinese or a unique Chinese spirit (*zhongguo jingshen*). Barmé (1995) informs us that internal Chinese propaganda often stresses the ability of the Chinese to overcome difficulties and rebuild the future. A typical example of this Chinese propaganda can be found in 'The spirit of the Chinese people can move mountains and drain the oceans (*zhongguorende jingshen neng yishan daohai*)', Beijing *qingnian bao*, 2 August 1991 (Barmé 1995, p. 214).
- 3 Stuart Hall's (1985) conception of 'articulation' is used to open inquiry into problems of articulation in ways that are fluid, contingent and multi-dimensional. Chapter 4, 'Speaking of same-sex subjects in urban China', will focus discussion on the politics of articulating same-sex identities, desires and practices.
- 4 For an understanding of 'the era of globalisation', refer to the writings of Dennis Altman (2001a, 2001b) and Anthony D. King (1991, pp. 1–6). For instance, Altman (2001a, p. 14) writes that 'globalisation was already well under way in the nineteenth century, through the rapid expansion of world trade, the major migrations from the Old World to the New, and the impact of new technologies such as the railway and the telegraph. Others trace it back to the expansion of Europe from the fifteenth century on, or even to conceptions of the world in Greece and Rome.'
- 5 The tension between 'old' and 'new' forms of Chinese same-sex identity will be discussed in Chapter 4, 'Speaking of same-sex subjects in urban China'.
- 6 This fresh form of Chinese nationalism will be investigated later in this chapter.
- 7 Cyber anthropology is a relatively new research method to study a culture or community on the internet. In this book, the research method of cyber anthropology involves obtaining data from Chinese-language gay-oriented websites. One primary aim of employing this method is to illustrate how electronic technology can be used by marginalised individuals to (re)find themselves, explore their identities, tell stories and imagine a community. Chapter 5, 'The gay space in Chinese cyberspace: self-censorship, commercialisation and misrepresentation', is devoted to an examination of the ways in which Chinese same-sex identity is (mis)represented by electronic mass media.
- 8 Throughout this book, the term 'gay' is sometimes used as referential shorthand to address issues of same-sex identities, desires and practices of both same-sex attracted Chinese men and women.

- 9 For more details on the cultural politics of *kaifang*, see Jos Gamble's (2003) *Shanghai in transition*, particularly pages 16–57.
- 10 An unpublished source has estimated the number of sex shops in China: 'A July 1999 estimate suggested that there were 200 to 300 [sex] shops nationwide, and just over one year later estimates had increased to around 200 sex shops in Beijing alone.' This source came from an academic.
- 11 In the cultural politics of China, there has been a reliance on nationalism as a unifying ideology for the Chinese. The Chinese are always fed with political indoctrination to believe in having a patriotic (*aiguo*) duty to China. They are also constantly reminded of China's humiliating modern history especially when the threat of China's sovereignty is concerned. Geremie R. Barmé's (1995) research reports that the sense of nationalism in contemporary China has not abated, but is all the more on the rise. The Chinese party-state has made strenuous efforts to promote 'patriotic indoctrination' and 'state-of-the-nation education' (*guoqing jiaoyu*) since the Tiananmen protests in 1989 (Barmé 1995, p. 212). Besides, the programme 'Outline for the Implementation of Patriotic Education' (*aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu shishi gangyao*) was solemnly launched by Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin in 1994 (Barmé 1995, p. 212).
- 12 Geremie R. Barmé (1995, p. 234) provides useful sources in Chinese that focus on a discussion of what can be interpreted as Chinese chauvinism.
- 13 Kam Louie's (2005, p. 189) 'Decentring orientalist and ocker masculinities in birds of passage' offers an insightful reading of Tu Wei-ming's 'Cultural China: the periphery as the centre'. As Louie (2005, p. 189) reports, although Tu's argument that essential Chinese culture is found outside China has troubled some researchers, 'Tu [is] welcomed by many, and a number of his speeches and reflections have been widely published and publicised in China.'
- 14 Chou Wan-shan's (2000b) *Tongzhi: politics of same-sex eroticism in Chinese societies* gives a critical analysis of the term *tongzhi*. Literally, the Chinese character 'tong' means sameness or togetherness; 'zhi' has the meanings of ambition, aspiration or spirit. Taken collectively, in modern Chinese, the term *tongzhi* is generally understood as a same-sex attracted Chinese man or woman. The term '*tongzhi*' will further be explained in Chapter 4, 'Speaking of same-sex subjects in urban China'.
- 15 Notice that 'pride parades' in Western societies are no longer seen as confrontational, as Douglas Sanders (2005 p. 19) reports. Pride parades are increasingly called 'festivals', while Western gay men and lesbians are now targeted as a desired market and a potential voting bloc.
- 16 The term *tongxinglian* will be elaborated in Chapter 4, 'Speaking of same-sex subjects in urban China'.
- 17 Shi Tou is perhaps the first to come out as a same-sex attracted woman in China. Back in 2000, she was the star of the first Chinese *lesbian* film, *Fish and Elephant*, directed by Li Yu. Recently, Shi Tou has produced a documentary called *Women 50 Minutes*, featuring female same-sex relations in China generally.
- 18 This web link shows that *tongxinglian* as a form of illness was officially deleted from the Chinese Psychological Association's list in 2001: *Glbtc: China 2005*, retrieved 26 February 2007, from <http://www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/china,7.html>.
- 19 'Chinese university offers course on homosexuality', 9 September 2005, retrieved 21 February 2007, from [http://www.ilga.org/news\\_results.asp?LanguageID=1&FileCategory=1&FileID=698](http://www.ilga.org/news_results.asp?LanguageID=1&FileCategory=1&FileID=698).
- 20 'The international lesbian and gay association', 1999, retrieved 28 February 2007, from [http://www.ilga.info/Information/Legal\\_survey/Asia\\_Pacific/taiwan.htm](http://www.ilga.info/Information/Legal_survey/Asia_Pacific/taiwan.htm).
- 21 'Taiwan holds its first gay parade', 1 November 2003, retrieved 26 February 2007, from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3233905.stm>.
- 22 Research by Tze-lan D. Sang (2003) and Fang Fu Ruan (1991) offers explanations as to why same-sex attracted Chinese women are typically less visible than men through literary and historical approaches to same-sex relations in Chinese society.



- 23 Chapter 5, 'The *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace: self-censorship, commercialisation and misrepresentation', will offer a detailed investigation of coming out in Chinese cyberspace.
- 24 In this book, '*gay* netizens in China' are identified as those Chinese-speaking same-sex attracted people who visit Chinese gay-oriented websites on a regular basis.
- 25 The term 'rhizome' 'has acquired a more idiosyncratic meaning in the collaborative writings of the French post-structuralist philosopher Gilles Deleuze and the French psychiatrist and exponent of the "anti-psychiatry" Felix Guattari (notably *A Thousand Plateaus*). In their work, *rhizome* is a complex metaphor that contrasts with the "rootedness" of traditional metaphysical systems ... Much as they celebrate the "nomadic" qualities of the schizophrenic, Deleuze and Guattari see the rhizome as an alternative to the repressive notions of territoriality concealed in the metaphor of "roots"' (Childers and Hentzi 1995, pp. 263–264).

## 2 The problematics of storytelling

- 1 The social implications of seduction in ethnographic research will be studied later on in this chapter.
- 2 The flow chart (Figure 2.1) is an adaptation of Ken Plummer's (1995, p. 23) stories as joint actions.
- 3 Research by James Farrer (2007, pp. 9–44) and Pan Suiming (2006, pp. 21–42) suggests that there is a call for 'sexual revolution' in urban cities of contemporary China.
- 4 The name of Wan Yanhai is revealed here as he is actively involved in HIV/AIDS projects and is known especially for this involvement, inside and outside China. Wan was the director of the Beijing Aizhixing Institute (the Beijing HIV/AIDS Institute) at the time when I met him.
- 5 For more information about new *gay* venues and resources in China, refer to the following online article, which was accessed on 25 February 2007: <http://www.fridae.com/news/features/article.php?articleid=1829&viewarticle=1&searchtype=section&ca t=N&title>.
- 6 This website ([http://www.floatinglotus.com/news/cnews.html#\\_Chinaprost](http://www.floatinglotus.com/news/cnews.html#_Chinaprost)), retrieved on 18 January 2005, contains some stories relating to male same-sex trade in China.
- 7 The social implications of the discourses of socialist spiritual civilisation and quality (*suzhi*) are examined in Chapter 4, 'Speaking of same-sex subjects in urban China'.
- 8 Jiang Zemin's speech is taken from John Zou's (2006, p. 79) 'Cross-dressed nation: Mei Lanfang and the clothing of modern Chinese men'. My fieldwork has informed me that Mei Lanfang's cross-dressing performances are highly appreciated as an art form by some of my interviewees. For biographical detail about Mei Lanfang, see John Zou (2006, pp. 79–97).

## 3 Fieldwork: filtering the field

- 1 This extract of a quotation is obtained from an article written in 1923 by Dziga Vertov, a revolutionary Soviet film director.
- 2 Evelyn Blackwood (1995) offers a useful discussion about the concept of friendship or friend in the context of fieldwork. For instance, Blackwood (1995, p. 53) writes: 'We constitute ourselves as "friend", a neutral entity that embodies our belief that the relationship between ourselves and at least some of our informants is one of equality. But the category of "friend" that we so readily apply to cross-cultural situations actually masks a much greater complexity in our field relations.'
- 3 My understanding of Baudrillard's notion of simulation is based on the readings of Carl Rhodes (2001, p. 12), Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi (1995, p. 280), and John Lechte (1994, pp. 233–6).

- 4 Appendix A presents most of the questions that were asked in interviews and in casual conversations.
- 5 As mentioned earlier in this book, Dongdan Park in Beijing is generally known and seen as a cruising ground for those same-sex attracted men who are often seen as low quality (*suzhi di*).
- 6 Appendix B presents profiles of these 41 interviewees.
- 7 To protect their anonymity, none of them is named, except Cui Zi'en and Zhou Dan. Cui Zi'en is considered one of the most public *gay* figures in China. Zhou Dan has kindly given me permission to use his name for this book. Thus, the names used in this book have been changed or withheld to ensure anonymity.
- 8 Tze-lan D. Sang's (2003) *The emerging lesbian*, which examines the representation of female–female relationship in Taiwan and China through elite literature, gives reasons for this disparity. As Sang suggests, female–female relationship was silenced by the legal discourse and the heterosexual marriage during the Mao era. However, since the implementation of the Open Door Policy, China has been experiencing a degree of sexual openness, leading to the emergence of both *gay* and *lesbian* communities in the public sphere in urban China.
- 9 Appendix A contains most of the questions that were raised in conversations over the subject of *tongxinglian*.
- 10 Beijing, the capital of China, is the nation's political and cultural centre. In Beijing, as well as in many major cities in China, younger generations and educated people generally link rapid social changes with the notion of *kaiifang*, which was discussed in Chapter 1, 'Opening up to *gay* and *lesbian* identities'. Similarly, China observers and international media speak of 'opening up' in various aspects of contemporary Beijing society. All in all, they stress that social and economic transformations have 'opened up' Beijing society, bringing about 'Westernisation', 'capitalism', 'modernity', 'progress', 'liberation', 'revolution' or even the privilege to host the Olympic Games in 2008, a subject that most Beijingers would take delight in discussing with great enthusiasm. During most of the fieldwork period, I stayed with an Australian sinologist and another Australian visitor in a 150 m<sup>2</sup> apartment, which was centrally located right opposite the Australian Embassy in Beijing.
- 11 Li Yinhe is a contemporary Chinese sociologist in mainland China. Li is generally known for her pioneer research into the Chinese same-sex experience in the 1980s, both in China and overseas.
- 12 My first day in Beijing was wintry (below 10 degrees Celsius). I was kept waiting at the airport because my luggage had not arrived and would arrive in the next two days. I was given about 300 *yuan* as compensation for this delay. (One Australian dollar was then equal to 5.8 to 6.2 *yuan*.) David Kelly is an Australian sinologist. He is a doctoral graduate in China Studies from the Australian National University. I came into contact with him through one of my supervisors. Both Wan and Kelly offered me a place to stay. I chose to stay at Kelly's place because he offered a clean unit and a hot water system in Beijing winter. I stayed there until I had completed my fieldwork. As mentioned before, Wan Yanhai is actively involved in HIV/AIDS projects and is known especially for this involvement, inside and outside China. Wan is the director of the Beijing Aizhixing Institute (the Beijing HIV/AIDS Institute).
- 13 It was not sheer coincidence that I was put in a private room of a restaurant. Privacy was a concern for them. In fact, I met most of my informants in a private space.
- 14 One Australian dollar was then equal to 5.8 to 6.2 *yuan*.
- 15 There are some other *gay* and *lesbian* meeting places in China, which can be found on Chinese-language *gay*-oriented websites. For a list of these websites, see Chapter 5, 'The *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace: self-censorship, commercialisation and misrepresentation'.

16 *Xiaolingtong* can be described as a personal handy-phone system (PHS), or a kind of wireless local phone system in mainland China. It is known for its reasonable price (about 500.00  *yuan* each), unlimited calls, but weak reception.

#### 4 Speaking of same-sex subjects in urban China

- 1 Same-sex attracted women are typically less visible than men in Chinese literature or history for reasons that can be found, for example, in research by Tze-lan D. Sang (2003) and Ruan Fang Fu (1991). As Sang (2003, p. 3) explains, female same-sex relationships are often uncritically linked with such notions of friendship and sisterhood. The other explanation is that female–female desire is particularly at the mercy of the patriarchal familial institution of ancient China (Sang 2003, pp. 6–7).
- 2 As signalled before, Cui Zi'en is considered one of the most public *gay* figures in China. He is a director, a film scholar, a screenwriter and a novelist. He is one of the most outspoken *gay* activists, based in Beijing.
- 3 '*Brokeback*' might not make it to Chinese mainland, 2006, retrieved 12 August 2007, from [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2006-01/20/content\\_4077026.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2006-01/20/content_4077026.htm).
- 4 To reiterate, the names of my interviewees have been changed or withheld to ensure their anonymity.
- 5 Zhou Dan is a real name. He is based in Shanghai. He is one of the openly *gay* figures in China. He is currently Attorney-at-law (China), Researcher of the HIV/AIDS Public Policy Center (China) and Guest Researcher at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. He is open about his sexuality and is able to articulate matters relating to *tongxinglian*. I first met him at the First International Conference of Asian Queer Studies at Bangkok in 2005.

#### 5 The *gay* space in Chinese cyberspace: self-censorship, commercialisation and misrepresentation

- 1 'Agency' here refers to the researcher's capacity to make choices and impose those choices on the researched, involving a set of ethical standards in gaining access to research subjects and material.
- 2 <http://www.aibai.cn/index.php> (re-accessed 16 July 2007).
- 3 *P* refers to a 'pure' girl, a feminine lesbian. *T* refers to a tomboy lesbian.
- 4 <http://blog.sina.com.cn/u/49aea30401000apt> (accessed 16 July 2007).
- 5 <http://mms.boysky.com/> (re-accessed 16 July 2007; operational when accessed, but may since have been shut down or access denied).
- 6 <http://www.aibai.cn/info/index.php> (re-accessed 16 July 2007).
- 7 <http://www.pybk.com/> (re-accessed 16 July 2007).
- 8 <http://www.bjtongzhi.com/> (re-accessed 16 July 2007).
- 9 <http://www.tianjincool.com/> (re-accessed 16 July 2007).
- 10 <http://www.pybk.com/> (re-accessed 16 July 2007).
- 11 <http://lesbiansh.diy.myrice.com/index2.htm> (re-accessed 16 July 2007, but denied access).
- 12 <http://www.lalabar.com/news/type.asp?typeID=18> (re-accessed 16 July 2007).
- 13 <http://www.pybk.com/LiteSeryRead.asp?BoardID=16&SeryID=9898> (re-accessed 16 July 2007; operational when accessed, but may since have been shut down or access denied).
- 14 <http://she.21cn.com/lovesex/sex/2006/08/15/2942483.shtml> (accessed 16 July 2007).
- 15 <http://lesbiansh.diy.myrice.com/index2.htm> (re-accessed 16 July 2007, but denied access).
- 16 <http://lesbiansh.diy.myrice.com/index2.htm> (re-accessed 16 July 2007, but denied access).

- 17 <http://gaychinese.net/news/open.php?id=13860> (re-accessed 16 July 2007, but denied access; may since have been shut down).
- 18 <http://www.yiyeqing.com> (re-accessed 16 July 2007).
- 19 <http://www.111k.com/male/index.asp?referer=pybk> (re-accessed 16 July 2007).

## 6 Modernity and authenticity

- 1 'Networks' in this case refers to any relatively organised small body of people, such as a self-help group.
- 2 However, some scholars dismiss the argument that some of these sexual categories were invented during the nineteenth century. They state that the category 'homosexual', for example, existed in the West and other cultural traditions well before it was coined by Karl Maria Kertbeny in 1869 (Sanders 2005, p. 5).
- 3 This cross-cultural appropriation need not be subversive in character. I merely wish to point out that it is since this period that China has been colonised by modernity in which foreign/Western identity categories have been actively re-contextualised and transported to Chinese society.
- 4 Travis S. K. Kong (2002) provides an informative analysis of the notion of 'relational self', writing that: 'Centred on the notion of a relational self, Chinese society generates a clear-cut distinction between the public and private selves. This distinction between public world and private realities over-emphasizes "face" and "image", which leads to a "shame culture"; in contrast, the "guilt culture" of some Western societies centres around the notion of a confessional self as derived from the Judeo-Christian tradition' (Kong 2002, p. 46).

## Appendices

- 1 All these *gay* and *lesbian* websites I refer to are available in China. At the same time, there are a few government sponsored gay-oriented websites which are set up as Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (or *zhibing kongzhi zhongxin*). The primary function of these Centres is to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, which is assumed to be easily contracted from same-sex attracted men.

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