Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis or dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis or dissertation. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

Signature:

_____   _____
Shunyuan Zhang   Date

Unmaking Identity: Male-to-Female Transgenderism in Southwest China

By

Shunyuan Zhang
Doctor of Philosophy

Anthropology

_____
Carla Freeman
Advisor

_____
Michael Peletz
Advisor

_____
Lynne Huffer
Committee Member

_____
Megan Sinnott
Committee Member

Accepted:

_____
Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

_____
Date

Unmaking Identity:
Male-to-Female Transgenderism in Southwest China

By

Shunyuan Zhang
M.A., The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2007
M.A., Shanghai International Studies University, 2002
B.A., Shanghai International Studies University, 1999

Advisor: Carla Freeman, Ph.D.
Advisor: Michael Peletz, Ph.D.

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Anthropology
2016

Abstract

Unmaking Identity: Male-to-Female Transgenderism in Southwest China
By Shunyuan Zhang

China has long been regarded as an authoritarian Party-state where economic growth has been accompanied by stringent control of civil society, including LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) human rights. Intriguingly, in my field research in the southwestern city of Kunming from November 2011 to July 2013, a thriving business of transgendered sex work and performance coexisted with transgendered individuals' non-recognition of and/or nonchalance towards a transgender identity. My dissertation thus looks into the space of (un)becoming with regard to the constitution of a Chinese transgender identity and community from the perspective of a diverse array of social processes in mainland China, including international and national HIV/AIDS intervention projects, the emergence of transnational LGBT identity-based human rights movements, the neoliberal turn to cultural economy that embraces desires, and the trajectory that state-individual relationships have gone through. I argue that the indifference (or non-recognition) I discerned from many of my transgendered informants with regard to their gender/sexual identities is contingent upon an assemblage of social processes that have given rise to the confusing and even contradictory condition of life with which transgendered individuals have struggled.

Through traversing the different domains of life where transgendered practices appear and are submerged, I aim to achieve two conceptual goals. First, rather than present the constitution of a transgender identity in China, my project demonstrates the dispersion of it via ongoing ethnographic encounters that constantly sidestep, if not disregard, seemingly apparent practices of transgenderism. This problematization of identity as a valid analytic category leads to the second conceptual goal of my dissertation, i.e. the use of queer perspective that can better capture the ways in which lived experience overflows analytic categories. While queer studies have made as almost paradigmatic the analytic and political commitment to antinormativity (or typically anti-heteronormativity), my ethnographic encounters suggest that queerness can be more fruitfully deployed to problematize heteronormativity *from within* rather than carve out an alternative space to it.

Theorizing through ethnography, this project brings into conversation cross-disciplinary concerns that include international public health intervention, neoliberal globalization, China studies, and feminist and queer studies.

Unmaking Identity:
Male-to-Female Transgenderism in Southwest China

By

Shunyuan Zhang
M.A., The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2007
M.A., Shanghai International Studies University, 2002
B.A., Shanghai International Studies University, 1999

Advisor: Carla Freeman, Ph.D.
Advisor: Michael Peletz, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Anthropology
2016

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Introduction

"The very constitution of the field of transgender studies as a
field must remain a central question in the field."

(David Valentine 2007: 172)

I started my dissertation field research in Kunming, China in November 2011.

Kunming is the capital city of Yunnan Province, situated in the southwestern part of

China, bordering on Burma in the west, and Vietnam and Laos in the south. My

dissertation project proposal focused on gender performativity among male-to-female

transgendered[1] individuals, mainly cabaret performers and sex workers, in Kunming.

Why Kunming? Are there proportionally more transgender people in Kunming? These

are some of the initial questions people had upon hearing my project. Kunming

became my field site because the only self-identified transgendered activist Gina,

whom I was granted the opportunity to meet with at that time lived there.[2] Gina

started her transgendered practices in the late 1990s and has remained committed to

HIV/AIDS intervention work in the local community. Her fluency in English and

extensive travel and conference experiences made her a most outspoken

representative of the transgender community in mainland China.

But the city proved to be a lot more than this sheer convenience. It challenged

my presumptuous neglect of HIV/AIDS in a most direct way—in my proposed plan

---

[1] Unless specified, the terms "transgendered" and "transgender" refer only to
male-to-female transgendered practices in this dissertation. While I did encounter
female-bodied individuals who identified themselves as "transgender", this project
cannot do justice to the complexity of female-to-male transgenderism with only a
handful of cases. I thus prefer to restrict my discussion here to male-to-female
transgendered practices.

[2] Not long after I arrived at my field site, a transgender support group was established
in Beijing, under the supervision of Aibai Culture and Education Center, Beijing.

of the research, I dismissed HIV/AIDS as furthering social discrimination against my

target population and was thus not a focus of my academic inquiry. From the very first

community meeting I attended to the end of my field research in July 2013,

HIV/AIDS was penetrating in almost every fabric of life among the people I met. It

was in the name of HIV/AIDS intervention that major community-based grassroots

tongzhi[3] organizations were initiated. And it was through participation in the series of

internationally funded intervention projects that many of my gay, lesbian, and

transgendered informants came to know each other. As it turned out, HIV/AIDS

intervention programs became one indispensable prism through which I tackle the

notions of transgender, identity, and community.[4]

Nevertheless, this prevalence of public health concerns also demonstrated to me

how transgender as a community was more of a naïve imagination than reality. The

public health initiated top-down approach to assuming and building MSM (men who

have sex with men) communities in Kunming and Yunnan Province points to the

mutually constitutive relationship between identity and community. That is, once the

behavior-centered identity of MSM is established, a community is automatically

---

[3] *Tongzhi*, a Chinese equivalent of "comrade", was initially a translated term of a
Soviet communist term "comrade," referring to "revolutionaries who shared a
comradeship. The term was further popularized after 1949 by the Chinese Communist
Party as an address term that denote "the most sacred ideal of a classless society
where sisters and brothers share a selfless vision of fighting for the socialist collective
interest" (Chou 2000: 1-2; Thomas Gold 1985: 658, endnote 3). Since 1989, when a
Hong Kong gay activist appropriated the term in the first Lesbian and Gay Film
Festival in Hong Kong, the term has been intended to be used as an "indigenous"
cultural identity that covers a broadly defined range of non-normative erotic practices
(Kong 2011: 1). Nonetheless, *tongzhi* is still often used to refer to gay men..
[4] As was indicated in Kath Weston's review of lesbian/gay studies in anthropology,
the AIDS pandemic is also instrumental in provoking the scholarly fascination with
the topic of sexuality (Weston 1993: 355).

assumed to exist, which then further consolidates the validity of that very identity. In an interview with a provincial CDC liaison with grassroots MSM organizations, I was told that within the current public health intervention framework, transgender was not listed in the four groups of target population, namely homosexual men, bisexual men, money boys (male sex workers who engage in sexual transaction with men), and situational MSM. I later realized that my initial frustration at not being able to local a transgender community was partly a result of this arbitrary categorization. Perhaps the assumption *per se* of the existence of a ready-made transgender community awaiting me to explore and explain is dangerous.

In the Introduction, I will present the initial frustrations and on-going puzzles and struggles I had in conceptualizing transgenderism in Kunming. Rather than take these struggles as anecdotes that spiced up ethnographic stories, I regard them as indicative of the very messy and queer way of living that could be easily glossed over by my single-minded obsession with identity and community. With the help of these ethnographic vignettes, I will discuss how my own conceptual categories of gender and sexual identities encountered my informants' lived experiences that unsettle the neat and tidy analytic separation between gender and sexuality, and between heterosexuality and homosexuality. I hope to demonstrate how ethnographic encounters and grounded experiences challenge our much taken-for-granted understanding of identity categories, upon the basis of which major arguments of this dissertation will be carried out. In a sense, this dissertation critically examines and challenges the assumptions I had before (and perhaps even after) going to the field. It

is a self critique as well as a critical examination of the anthropological studies of

gender and sexual diversity. It also serves as an engaged response to Povinelli and

Chauncey's (1999) call to think of sexuality transnationally, to a queer inquiry of

desire that goes beyond the binary of hetero/homosexual identity (Valentine 2003), to

Biehl and Locke's (2010) proposition of the anthropology of becoming, and to

Wiegman and Wilson's (2015) reconsideration of queer studies' analytic and political

commitment to antinormativity.

"We Are Not Transgenders!"

The first time my pre-conceptualization of transgender was challenged happened

in one of the major *tongs* workgroups[5] of Kunming: Spring Rain Workgroup, where I

was directly told that transgendered performers were not transgender. Before coming

to terms with that statement, a brief introduction of SpringRain might be of help.

Like the majority of *tongzhi* workgroups in Kunming and Yunnan Province,

which were initiated by government-led health institutes to target HIV/AIDS

intervention projects specifically at the local MSM (men who have sex with men)

population since early 2000s, SpringRain worked on HIV/AIDS intervention

programs under the supervision of the Municipal Health Education Institute. In

addition, from 2003 to 2013, SpringRain had been financially supported by FHI 360[6],

---

[5] Many of the *tongzhi* grassroots organizations in Kunming call themselves *gongzuo xiaozu*, literally translated as workgroup here. As I will discuss in detail in Chapter One, workgroup entails one significant work/mission of these organizations, i.e. HIV/AIDS intervention programs under supervision of government-led health institutions.
[6] FHI 360 ended its program in Kunming in 2013. The other four cooperating

one of the five USAID-funded (United States Agency for International Development)

cooperating agencies in Kunming. Regarded as representatives of the target

community, *tongzhi* workgroups work in collaboration with both local health

institutes at different administrative levels and international funding agencies. Their

major responsibilities include outreach activities among target population to distribute

condoms and introduce safer sex practices, voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) of

HIV and STDs (sexually transmitted diseases), and a more recent focus on treatment

follow-up services for PLHIV (people living with HIV).

Workgroups usually differentiate from each other in terms of the types of

cruising spaces and target populations they aim to provide service for, although

people's mobility and social network make it impossible for workgroups to claim any

exclusiveness. In this respect, SpringRain distinguished itself from the rest of the

workgroups in Kunming with its additional teahouse-style drop-in center and

transgendered performances every weekend night. Located on one end of the second

floor of a two-storey old-fashioned commercial building, SpringRain divided its

rented space into a long, narrow "teahouse" (*chashi*) and a smaller general office

where HIV counseling and testing took place. A slightly raised small stage on the

left-hand side of the room, small tables each with three or four chairs dotted the left

half of the teahouse space. Farther off from the stage, the right half of the room is

partitioned into two halves facing the stage, one with a bar counter and a few more

---

agencies—including PSI (Population Services International), the International
HIV/AIDS Alliance, Pact, and Research Triangle International (RTI) were also
withdrawing from their programs in Kunming.

tables and chairs, the other with couches and lockers.

During the day, small wholesalers do their business in the rented spaces along the long and straight corridor of the building. Stores were closed in the evening, leaving only the security guard sitting at the entrance in dim yellow light. No traces of performances or grassroots organization seemed to be discernible from the outside. Or not even the inside unless one is guided directly to the "teahouse". Notwithstanding its low-profile, or even secluded façade, SpringRain has never been clandestine. Staff members of the workgroup have maintained long-term relationship with the neighborhood committee (*juweihui*)[7]. I still remember the several times when I was surprised to see middle-aged men and women coming to watch the show, their toddlers running around, greeted occasionally by transgendered performers' hugs. Though not celebrated with publicity, SpringRain has in its own way integrated into the daily rubric of life in the neighborhood.

In addition to the occasional presence of neighborhood residents, public health practitioners were integral to the daily operation of SpringRain, as ideally, only qualified personnel can administer HIV testing[8]. Yet most of all, SpringRain served as a drop-in center for members of the local MSM community, with its primary mission of peer education and HIV testing service. Audience was composed mainly of middle-aged gay men[9] whom staff members have made acquaintance of during

---

[7] Administrative office of small residential community in mainland China.

[8] Although qualification has been stressed in administration of HIV testing, some staff members or core volunteers who had been taught how to do this on informal occasion did offer HIV testing when needed.

[9] Some of my gay friends tended to think of transgendered performances as old-fashioned and therefore could only attract elder gay men. But a gay friend of mine

various outreach activities. Every Friday and Saturday nights, dancing and singing

performances by core volunteers and staff members of the workgroup were staged

from around 10 pm till midnight. Performance styles varied depending upon

individual performer's preference, ranging from ethnic dances, lip synching, short

play, and exotic Thai lady-boy cabaret show. To match the several transgendered

performers, there were two or three male-role performers, who were also volunteers

and/or staff members of the group. Interestingly, some of the performers switched

between feminine attire and masculine one according to the specific gender ratio

requirements of the program. After every performance, performers not performing in

the next program would remain in their costume and join the audience sitting at

different tables, sharing beer and cigarettes. To boost business and draw more

audience, SpringRain organized beauty pageants regularly. In these pageants,

contestants would usually be divided into two groups, one for male-to-female

transgendered contestants, and the other for gay male contestants. As far as I know, no

female-to-male contestants partook in these contests, nor were there lesbian

contestants[10].

Whatever performances were being put on stage, knowledge of HIV/AIDS and

safe sex practices occupied a most conspicuous place. Being totally ignorant of the

overwhelming presence of HIV/AIDS intervention projects in the local *tongzhi*

---

from Beijing used to tell me the following: "It's not that young gay men don't like
watching drag shows. The fact is that if you could only meet elder gays in these
shows, how could you be interested?"

[10] This is by no means to say that transgendered practices were not found among
lesbians. My visits to a local lesbian bar revealed a lively transgendered subculture,
specifically embodied by the tomboyish waitresses.

community, I was quite shocked when I first went to SpringRain's weekend evening show, where the anchorperson made full use of every interval between shows to introduce knowledge about HIV/AIDS. I was naively rejecting this association between *tongzhi* and HIV/AIDS, which turned out to be an indispensable precondition for these workgroups and performances to exist and survive.

As SpringRain was then the only place where I could meet with some transgendered performers, I went there quite often at the beginning of my fieldwork. Although often accompanied by Gina, transgender activist and one of my key informants, I had a hard time conquering my own sense of displacement. To lessen the degree of awkwardness of my presence, I greeted everyone I met there with a friendly smile. Then one day, when I was talking with a new transgendered friend at SpringRain, the manager and workgroup director Zip came up to me and asked what I was doing here. I explained nervously to him that I was a PhD student studying in the United States and was doing research on transgender in Kunming. He responded immediately, "We are not transgender. We only *fanchuan* for stage performance." For fear that he would not allow me further chance to visit SpringRain, I just nodded and smiled in agreement.

For transgendered performers, *fanchuan* might be a more acceptable term. Coming from traditional Chinese operatic performance, the term encompasses both colloquial and proper uses. In its "proper" use, *fanchuan* refers to "actors who *occasionally* act in parts outside their (role) specialization," including cross-gender performances (Tan 2000: 206, italics in origin). In its more colloquial and popular use,

the term refers specifically to "performers who specialize in cross-gender roles, or who especially act in roles whose gender does not correspond with their biological one" (ibid.). Used as both noun and verb, *fanchuan* denotes more of an occupational identity and preferably professionalized genre of performance than a gendered self.

More significantly, the distinction Zip stressed between transgender and *fanchuan* served also to distance on-stage performance from the dubious gendered identity of transgender. I have argued elsewhere about the indispensability of off-stage "straightness" from the recognition of on-stage performative sophistication of *nandan* (male actors playing leading female roles in traditional Chinese operatic performances) in the nationalization process of Beijing opera. That is, in the process where Beijing opera and *nandan* artistic skills were upheld and celebrated as symbol of national treasure and cultural legacy, the anxiety over *nandan* actors' gendered and sexual identities necessitated extra efforts that secured their off-stage "normative" lives.

In the case of SpringRain, it was not off-stage "straightness" that Zip wanted to stress, as he happily and readily identified himself as *tongzhi*. Rather, it was the off-stage "femininity" of transgenderism that he wanted to avoid association with. The significance of normative gender practices became more obvious in a later interview I had with him, where he emphasized the distinction between on-stage perfection of femininity and off-stage "normal" masculinity, although this spatialized gender boundary might not necessarily be upheld by everyone performing there.

Diversely Transgendered

Zip's upfront refusal to identify himself (and his fellow performers) with transgender made me wonder how transgender was understood. In the first few months of my field work, when I was still insistent upon nagging my informants with a definition of transgender and an identity label they preferred to wear, I was surprised and confused by the diversity and sometimes even contradiction of these definitions.

When I met Wendy, a transgendered waitress, she[11] was *fanchuan* performer at SpringRain and occasional transgendered sex worker. She told me in our interview that she understood *kuaxingbie* as sex workers, both money boys[12] and transgendered sex workers. In the formal interview I had with her, where she dressed in male attire, Wendy stressed that her occasional engagement in sex work was only for meeting good-looking men. Wendy's understanding of transgender struck me in at least two ways, the first being the association of transgender with sex work, both cross-dressed sex work and male same-sex sex work. In this way, transgender stops being an identity category that designates gendered expression and starts to assume an occupational label that seems to have more to do with, intriguingly, male-bodied same-sex sexuality—whether transgendered practices were involved or not. Secondly, it is probably because of this very association she made that she, and probably Zip, refused to align themselves with this category of transgender.

But not everyone shared this readiness to reject the term transgender. Minami,

---

[11] I have made a totally arbitrary designation of proverb use in this dissertation. I use either "she" or "he" to refer to transgendered individuals, depending on the frequency I saw them in male or female dress.

[12] "money boys" refer to men who have sex with men in exchange of money. In colloquial language, it is often abbreviated as MB.

who was then leader of a *tongzhi* workgroup in another city of Yunnan Province,

explained to me that transgender and *tongzhi* are basically the same. "We differ only

in whether we cross-dress." If what I discern from Zip's response is an emphasis on a

stable gendered essence attached to the gay male body, then Minami's answer

revealed the easy transition from gay to transgender with the sole sartorial marker of

gender.

Different from Wendy's and Minami's straightforward definitions of transgender,

Kay and Koo, key members of the *tongzhi* workgroups they worked for respectively,

brought in more complicated layers of meaning to this term.

Right after I made a summary presentation on an online survey among

self-identified transgender people about their health concerns in a regular meeting of

the Yunnan Provincial MSM Network, I found myself stumbling awkwardly to initiate

conversation with Kay, who sat right behind me. He turned out to be quite open on

this topic. According to Kay, gay men are all "C" (camp, effeminate) to a certain

extent, although they do not like being described as such. To my great surprise, Kay

considered himself as *kuaxingbie*. He explained this self-identification as transgender

as follows:

> I am a feminine "one" (*mu yi*; *mu* corresponds to feminine, while *yi*, the
>
> number "one" refers to the insertive role in male same-sex behavior), as
>
> opposed to masculine "zero" (*gong ling*; *gong* corresponds to masculine,
>
> while *ling*, the number "zero" refers to the receptive role in male same-sex
>
> behavior). I only accept insertive role when it comes to sex. Yet

psychologically, I think I am quite feminine, as I am sensitive and I enjoy

being cared about and consoled by others. Although I do not wear women's

dress, I think I cross the gender line with my biological behavior (insertive

sex role) and my psychological gender of femininity. (March 23, 2012)

Similarly, when we were chatting over the dinner table, Koo told me that he identified

himself as *kuaxingbie* because psychologically, he strayed away from the traditionally

defined divide between "tough-guy" masculinity and gentle and fragile femininity,

thus crossing the gender line.

Interestingly, Kay saw the "contradiction" between his penetrative sexual role

and psychological femininity as indicative of himself crossing the gender line,

exemplifying a stereotypical association between masculinity and active sexuality (or

likewise femininity and passive sexuality). This emphasis on the psychological gender

of femininity is echoed in Koo's self identification with transgender. Intriguingly,

neither Kay nor Koo seemed to view their identification with transgender as

incompatible with being gay or *tongzhi*. That seems to echo with what GZ, a part-time

transgendered sex worker, said when she explained her preference for straight men:

"Gays all tend to be feminine. They are all 'zero' (*ling*, receptive role in sex). They

could barely do it even when they perform penetrative role." (October 30, 2012)

Small Circle vs. Community

The flat denial of Zip and the diverse understanding of transgender expressed by

gay and transgendered friends constituted several moments of crisis in my fieldwork,

as the lack of an at least vaguely shared imagination of transgender identity pointed to the difficulty, if not impossibility of locating the community, the place where I was supposed to do participant observation.

The major venues for me to meet transgendered people were SpringRain and the various red-light districts and cruising areas where I did outreach work among female and transgendered sex workers (see Chapter Three). Although I did manage to meet some transgendered performers and sex workers, there never seemed to be a community of people who share an identity of transgender, or *kuaxingbie*. Nor did there seem to be a group of people building a community around a however vaguely defined notion of transgender. Among the transgendered performers and sex workers that I met, some of them did hang out quite frequently (not exclusively) with their transgendered friends. Some of them prefer to keep company with women. Some found themselves among a mixture of gay, transgendered, and straight acquaintances. Bitter squabbles, lack of shared values, and gossip about each other seemed to have kept individuals from staying too close to each other.

Small circles of friends did hang out more often. But people come and go. These circles of friends dwindled, dissipated, or disappeared, sometimes because of new work opportunities elsewhere, sometimes because of squabbles, and sometimes because of AIDS and death. Notwithstanding transgender activist Gina's efforts at introducing and embodying transgender, she did not seem to have successfully brought the assumed constituents together in the form of community.

If the distance maintained and loose connections between transgendered

individuals made it impossible for me to insist on the notion of community, the

rampant use of "sister" (*jiejie* or *meimei*) to address each other between both gay and

transgendered friends further complicated the picture. When I attended for the first

time the regular meeting of the Provincial MSM Network of Yunnan—participants of

which included leaders from most *tongzhi* workgroups across the Province,

representatives from international donors' agencies, and local HIV/AIDS intervention

officers, I was surprised by the way workgroup leaders and volunteers greeted each

other with "elder sister" (*jiejie*) or "younger sister" (*meimei*), preceded by their

nicknames[13]. While this does not necessarily entail workgroup leaders' intention to

feminize (or transgender-ize) their friends or themselves—in fact, they used these

address terms more to establish and consolidate rapport, the general circulation of the

discursive sense of sisterhood both within these regular meetings and outside among

my gay male friends was hard to miss.

I remember asking myself how I should interpret these address terms; whether

female address terms should be regarded as part of the marker for transgender identity;

if not, why feminine dress is entitled to do so, or is it? I am reminded of Kath

Weston's caution against the insufficiency of behaviorist definitions that rely upon

formal properties, such as who puts on what clothing or the use of feminine address

terms (1993: 347). Why should I be obsessed with locating markers of transgenderism

when they are used so casually in everyday encounters?

---

[13] Among the gay and transgendered friends I met in Kunming and other cities of
Yunnan Province, most of them use self selected nicknames rather than real names.

Identity and Community in Postsocialist China

The need for at least some markers to constitute an imagination of transgender community kept troubling me. The ethnographic vignettes presented above are just part of the murky and messy picture I have been struggling with. Nevertheless, they pointed to some critical questions that call for a serious reconsidering of my project.

First, what term should I use when people refused to be labeled as such, as in Zip's case? Second, how should I locate *the* transgender community when there did not seem to be an agreed upon understanding of transgender or a set of identifiable markers that denote the boundary of such a community? Third, how to make sense of the overlapping, fuzzy and even contradictory lines people draw between themselves and others? In all, where is *the* transgender community? Or is there a transgender community?

I remember myself complaining to a straight friend of mine about the anxiety and frustration I constantly felt over my failure to locate *the* transgender community. He casually dismissed my obsession and said, "Perhaps the idea of identity and community has never been popular or welcome by the Chinese state." That was one of those awakening moments in my fieldwork. True, the idea of people sharing certain "characteristics, culture, history which comes to have real meaning for those who espouse it" might have never been entertained in China, unless it is mobilized by the nation-state (Altman 2001: 86). If an identity-based community of transgender people is currently unavailable in spite of the obvious presence of variously defined transgendered practices, what analytic framework should be adopted then?

A formative story of a transgender community loosely defined amidst growing lesbian and gay visibility is of course one option, as transgendered practices are indeed given increasing visibility not only in scandalizing news reports on cross-dressed sex work, but also in social activism and scholarly discussion. My final decision to opt out this formative approach however has to do with a general indifference towards transgender as an identity shared by many of the transgendered individuals I encountered during my field research. I define identity (as in identity politics) as the "actual experiences of belonging" (Liu 2002: 110), a shared sense of belonging. Instead of an active tendency towards community building and self identification, transgendered individuals demonstrate a greater readiness to be submerged and diffused, simultaneously or alternatively, into categories such as gay, woman, and man. My dissertation therefore seeks to understand why and how this should be the case; and what historical and social processes have animated this general sense of indifference.

Remember Abu-Lughod's critique of earlier feminist obsession with attributing forms of consciousness or politics that are not part of women's experience—something like a feminist consciousness or feminist politics" (cited in Mahmood 2005: 8). In her self-reflexive ethnographic studies of women's involvement in Islamic Revival movement in Egypt, Saba Mahmood further the critique of the feminist tendency to "romanticize resistance" to a critical examination of feminism as "an *analytical* and a *politically prescriptive* project that pre-determines the politics of resistance in women's lives (Mahmood 2005: 10).

I believe it is critical that we ask whether it is even possible to identify a

universal category of acts—such as those of resistance—outside of the

ethical and political conditions within which such acts acquire their particular

meaning. Equally important is the question that follows: does the category of

resistance impose a teleology of progressive politics on the analytics of

power—a teleology that makes it hard for us to see and understand forms of

being and action that are not necessarily encapsulated by the narrative of

subversion and reinscription of norms? (Mahmood 2005: 9)

In a similar vein, I think of the analytic and the politics of identity and

counterhegemony as deeply ingrained in the American-centric queer studies to the

extent that queer is increasingly employed to as an umbrella category that sets itself

against—while unwittingly establishes and mythicizes the normativity of—the norm

(or what Eng, Halberstam, and Munoz [2005] term as "queer liberalism"). This

insistence on locating progressive political value is also obvious in Travis Kong's

(2011) observation of Hong Kong gay groups and their lack of enthusiasm towards

formal politics. According to Kong, the lack of accessibility to political democracy

typical in the colonial legacy of Hong Kong has made economic consumption and

cultural representation a significant mode of sexual politics that challenge the

heteronormative social codes (2011: 60). The diverse discursive practices should thus

be read as part of political participation (see also Ho and Tsang 2000).

Working around the notion of identity from different aspects that include

HIV/AIDS intervention, LGBT movements, the cultural economy of transgendered

sex work, and the individualization process in mainland China, I aim to problematize

the analytic centrality of identity (politics) in conceptualizing transgendered practices

in Kunming, China. I argue that transgendered practices are better understood not as a

category in the making but as a mercurial space of practices whose political potential

remains to be defined. Drawing insight from Ki Namaste's (1996) critique of queer

theory's erasure of transgender subjectivity due to its neglect of gender regulation and

transgendered people's everyday struggles, I regard this approach as part of a queer

effort at revealing the arbitrary categorizations of gender and sexuality through a

critical feminist engagement with everyday struggles. I hope this re-framing of the

queer perspective serves to bridge the gap between a postmodern pursuit to

deconstruct gender and sexual categories and an engaged concern with the real-life

experiences of transgendered individuals.[14] It also aligns with the emerging queer

scholarship in the global south that troubles the queer liberal (see Eng, Halberstam,

and Munoz 2005)[15] equation between queerness and

counterhegemony/antinormativity, and the necessary connection between queerness

and transformative politics (Varela, Dhawan, and Engel 2011; Engebretsen 2014;

Wiegman and Wilson 2015). For example, in their introductory essay to the special

issue of *Social Text*, Eng, Halberstam, and Munoz define "queer liberalism" as an

---

[14] See Ki Namaste (1996) for a critique of queer theory's erasure of transgender
subjectivity due to its neglect of gender regulation and transgendered people's
everyday struggles.
[15] In their introductory essay to the special issue of *Social Text* (2005), Eng,
Halberstam, and Munoz define "queer liberalism" as an attempt to "reconcile the
radical political aspirations of queer studies' subjectless critique with the
contemporary liberal demands of a nationalist gay and lesbian U.S. citizen-subject
petitioning for rights and recognition before the law" (2005: 10).

attempt to "reconcile the radical political aspirations of queer studies' subjectless

critique with the contemporary liberal demands of a nationalist gay and lesbian U.S.

citizen-subject petitioning for rights and recognition before the law" (2005, 10). I do

not mean to deny the value of the queer politics of antinormativity. I am only skeptical

of the exclusive reliance of the political utility of queer studies upon radical alterity,

while leaving unquestioned *the* norm. In my ethnographic experimentation with a

queer project that troubles heteronormativity from within—instead of claiming

counter-space vis-à-vis heteronormativity (Chapter Five), I hope to maintain a

nuanced yet critical boundary between a self-complacent neoliberal project of

lesbian/gay identity politics (homonormativity in Lisa Duggan's term) and a mercurial

space of queer practices—always in the process of becoming and

unbecoming—informed by "a number of historical emergencies…of both national

and global consequence" (Eng, Halberstam, and Munoz 2005: 1). (a bit overly

telegraphic/condensed, need to unpack)

Tracing the Anthropological Categories of Transgender

Anthropological attention to transgendered practices emerged along with the

increasing visibility of lesbian and gay studies. Although the distinction between

homosexuality and transgender now sounds too evident to merit explanation, earlier

ethnographic data collection of "homosexual" behaviors across the globe was seldom

far away from a discussion of gender ambiguity (e.g. Donham 1998). One of the

significant earlier analytic attempts in anthropology at tackling divergent sexualities

and gendered classifications in the non-Western world is Gilbert Herdt's proposition of "third sex" and "third gender". Moving away from the reproduction-based and morally loaded sexual dimorphism and the homosexual/heterosexual duality prevalent in Western culture, Herdt claims fully independent status for cross-cultural sexual and gender variations with the help of what he terms as "cultural ontologies"[16] (Herdt 1996).

From the "ethnocartography of homosexuality" that seeks out "indigenous" genders and sexualities beyond the two (Weston 1993) to a later deconstructionist critique of homosexuality as an institutionalized category that needs to be de-centered, lesbian/gay studies in anthropology transition into a more broadly defined field of queer anthropology that contextualizes same-sex sexuality and gender ambiguity with locally recognized cultural categories amidst transnational flows of sexual identities (Weston 1993; Cruz-Malave and Manalansan 2002; Boellstorff 2007a, 2007b). Ethnographies proliferate that prioritize culturally and historically legitimized (Peletz 2009) terms of identity such as *ban tut* in the southern Philippines (Johnson 1997), *travesti* in Brazil (Kulick 1998), *hijra* in India (Reddy 2005), *mati* work in Suriname (Wekker 2006), *bakla* in the Philippines (Manalansan 2003; Benedicto 2014), *toms* and *dees* in Thailand (Sinnott 2004), *buggerones* and *sanky pankies* in the Dominican Republic (Padilla 2007), the list goes on. The on-going anthropological attention to sexualities situated within transnational settings addresses questions of "globalization,

---

[16] Gilbert Herdt defines cultural ontologies as "local theories of being and the metaphysics of the world; of having a certain kind of body and being in a certain kind of social world, which creates a certain cultural reality; and of being and knowledge combined in the practice of living as a third sex or gender" (1996: 61).

race, political economy, immigration, migration, and geopolitics" (Grewal and Kaplan 2001), constituting what some scholars term as the "new queer studies". This new queer studies expand and problematize the seemingly stable borders of gay and lesbian identity categories and cultures by "illuminating the different ways in which various queer subjects located in and moving in between specific national locations establish and negotiate complex relationships to each other and to the state" (Manalansan 2003: 8).

Several points stand out for further consideration. First, moving away from an essentialist claim of cultural particularism, these researches engage in, explicitly or implicitly, critical conversation with the globalization of sexual identities with a much more fluid and dialectic conceptualization of the global and the local (Altman 2001), whether to challenge the applicability/translatability of identities such as lesbian (Sinnott 2004; Wekker 2006), to signify the mutually defining relationship between a privileged global gay identity and "outdated" *bakla* culture (Benedicto 2014), to present ways in which Filipino queer diaspora navigate gay identity through drawing upon the creolizing power of swardspeak (Manalansan 2003), or to problematize global gayness as "fragmented concepts of [globalized] homosexuality gleaned through the mass media" (Boellstorff 2004: 185).

Second, notwithstanding the centrality of gender and sexuality as analytic categories in these works, they complicate gendered and sexual practices with structural and institutional forces such as religion (Sinnott 2004; Reddy 2005), feminization of poverty (Wekker 2006), global restructuring of economy (Padilla

2007), race and ethnicity (Johnson 1997; Manalansan 2006; Wekker 2006; Benedicto 2014). An understanding of gender and sexual practices is thus incomplete without resort to these intertwining and mutually constitutive factors. This echoes what Judith Halberstam (2003) observes as a paradigmatic shift in queer studies that "refuses to see sexuality as a singular mode of inquiry and instead makes sexuality a central category of analysis in the study of racialization, transnationalism and globalization" (2003: 361).

Third, rather than take gender and sexuality as separate domains of experiences (Rubin 1984), many of these monographs challenge this analytic separation through tracing the cultural logic that sidesteps the proclaimed experiential distinction and demonstrates different ways in which gender circumscribes sexuality (Sinnott 2004; Donham 1998; Manalansan 2003), or sexual acts demarcate gender categories (Kulick 1998; Reddy 2005).

Fourth, while transgression of norms could be expected in these geographically diverse practices of gender and sexuality, transcendence is not taken for granted. That is, acts of transgression explicated in these monographs express much less a celebration of free-willed gender and sexual choices than contingent modifications of gendered and sexual practices predicated upon constraints that are both material and cultural.

Fifth, although an increasingly explicit integration of queer perspectives can be detected from many of these monographs, specifically with their efforts at de-centering a Western-originated teleological trajectory of gay/lesbian identity,

identity remains more or less a central analytic trope through which embodiments of non-normative genders and sexualities are studied, however complicated the formative processes may have been.

Sixth, although aimed at troubling Western sexual identities and the analytic separation of gender and sexuality since Rubin's proposition of sexuality as an independent vector of oppression distinct from gender (1984), these efforts to articulate erotic desire beyond a claim to sexual identities might have also unwittingly validated a gender-normative lesbian/gay identity model. That is, the proliferation of socioculturally specific same-sex transgendered practices across the globe might have unintentionally consolidated the hegemony of the Western model of homosexuality that is gender normative, against which non-Western homoeroticism is measured according to their varying shades of transgenderism. A possible result is the constitution of an array of cross-cultural transgendered categories, while leaving lesbian/gay practices in the U.S. as too standard to need any exploration.[17][18] Although increasingly, local claims of a global lesbian/gay identity—not without complications—are also being documented along with the transnational flows of liberal human rights discourse and the expansion of modern urban gay spaces (Johnson 1997; Donham 1998; Rofel 1999, 2007; Manalansan 2003; Sinnott 2004; Kong 2011; Naisargi 2012; Benedicto 2014; Engebretsen 2014; Stout 2014).

That being said, non-normative gender and sexual practices that do not bear the

[17] Mary Gray's (2009) recent ethnographic work on queers in small-town Kentucky, US represents a critical examination of the queer liberation discourse that posits "the antipathy between familiarity and queerness" (2009: 5).

[18] This is reminiscent of the gendering of globalization that feminizes the non-West local (Freeman 2001).

name of lesbian/gay within western contexts are receiving increasing academic

attention. For example, "transgender" is said to have become a growing topic of

studies in the U.S. since the late 1990s (Stryker 2008). In the field of anthropology, as

early as in the 1970s, Esther Newton's (1972/1979) ethnographic research into the

lesbian/gay community in Cherry Grove revealed how transgendering was an

indispensable part of gay male culture of the U.S. in the mid-1960s. Combining

empirical and textual analyses, Judith Halberstam (1998) traced the genealogy of

female masculinities— "masculinity without men"—that debunk the ontologized

connection between masculinity and male bodies. Elizabeth Povinelli (2006)

illustrates how the U.S. radical faeries innovate countercultural communities through,

among other things, resort to the rituals of indigenous cultures. The juxtaposition of

individual autonomy and claims to cultural genealogy exemplifies a queer attempt at

stepping outside the liberal opposition between the autonomous individual and the

constraining social order.

In his more genealogically critical inquiry into transgender as a category and a

field of studies, David Valentine (2007) problematizes the ontologized dichotomy of

gender and sexuality that has facilitated the institutionalization of transgender as a

category distinct from the lesbian and gay community, where sexuality not gender

holds the key. He argues that the active and conscious creation of transgender

community is inseparable from contemporary U.S. discourse of civil rights and

identity politics in a liberal democratic political system. The making of distinct

communities thus spells claims for political representation.[19] This attachment of

identity claims to liberal democratic politics might be one reason why, although

similar in its allegiance to the neoliberal rationality of governance with the U.S.

(Chapter Four), China does not uphold the proliferation of identity categories such as

through the separation of transgender from homosexuality.

Lesbian/Gay Studies in Chinese Society

If attention to culturally legitimized, or at least acknowledged, gender variances

marks a queer anthropological turn away from earlier ethnocartographic efforts to

document cross-cultural "homosexuality", emerging scholarship on queer

subjectivities in China does not seem to follow a similar pattern. In its stead, emphasis

is put on ways in which "global gayness" has been translated, appropriated, claimed,

and incorporated into the socio-cultural configurations of Chinese societies. As

Howard Chiang points out, the emerging scholarship of queer China studies "pays

scant attention to gender and sexual variances beyond a 'homonormative' framework"

(Chiang 2014b: 354). Academic attention to gender variance, or transgender *per se*,

was initiated by historians and literary scholars rather than anthropologists. In this

section, I will give a brief summary of the literature on lesbian and gay studies in

contemporary China. I will then introduce some of the recent works that bear the

---

[19] Alternatively, historian Susan Stryker (2008), in celebration of the emergence of
transgender studies or "transgender phenomena", thinks of the growing prominence of
transgender issues in the humanities and social sciences since the late 1990s as
attributable to, among other things, the reflexive approach of feminist and lesbian/gay
politics upon transnational encounters with difference experiences of gender and
sexuality, and the AIDS crisis and the ensuing queer politics that breaks down "old
divisions between sexual identity communities" (2008: 26).

name of transgender in Chinese societies.

Although historical and literary studies have documented a well-articulated homosocial/homoerotic past in mainland China (e.g. Furth 1988; Hinsch 1990; Vitiello 1992; Volpp 1994; McMahon 2002; Sang 2003; Wu 2004；Kang 2009),[20] researches on contemporary practices of non-normative genders and sexualities in China remained limited until the 1990s. The 1990s witnessed the publication of several path-breaking monographs on same-sex erotic practices in mainland China, including sociologist Li Yinhe's co-authored book *Tamen de Shijie* (Their World) in 1992, medical professor Zhang Beichuan's *Tongxing'ai* (Homosexual Love) in 1994, and Fang Gang's journalistic report of *Tongxinglian zai zhongguo* (Homosexuality in China) in 1995. Although significant in breaking the silence on homoerotic practices in post-socialist China, publications at that time more or less viewed homosexuality as a pathological outcome—or at most a benign interest or obsession—that called for social tolerance. Furthermore, narratives of same-sex sexuality in these monographs were more or less characterized by continuity with the medical and psychological recognition of homosexuality as "gender inversion" (*xingdaocuo*)—a "scientific" interpretation of same-sex eroticism introduced into China in the Republican era (Dikötter 1995). That is to suggest that a clear-cut distinction between gender variance and same-sex sexuality in either scholarly works or popular conceptualization was not

---

[20] Although some scholars argue that the great number of writings on male homoeroticism in late imperial China reflects less a uniform social acceptance of male same-sex relations than an interest in classifying lust and its permutations among the social elite (Brook 1998; Volpp 2001). In a similar vein, Kang (2009) demonstrates ways in which Chinese translators during the Republican era selectively translated Western sexological works to either pathologize homosexuality as corrupting moral values or a foundation of a utopian society.

yet evident. The fact that HIV/AIDS constituted one of the few appropriate accesses to discussion of homosexuality has made existent Chinese literature on same-sex practices further slanted largely towards public health intervention.

Moving away from the pathological framework, Hong Kong activist Chou Wah-Shan (2000) presents an account of a Chinese family-centered *tongzhi* politics—a discourse of "coming home" as opposed to "coming out"—that is simultaneously sexual, cultural, and political. Anthropologist Lisa Rofel (1999b, 2007) distinguishes the 1990s from the previous period with a marked humanist attempt at the construction of a gay identity framed within cultural citizenship, specifically among the younger generation who came of age after Maoist socialism was dismantled. Similarly, Loretta Ho (2009) traces the fragmented articulations of Chinese same-sex identities caught in the paradox between opening up and renewed form of nationalism. Travis Kong (2011) examines the making of sexual citizenship by Chinese gay men in Hong Kong, London and China amidst transnational flows of capital, bodies, ideas, images, and commodities. Sociologist Wei Wei (2007, 2012) studies the increasing publicity of gay life in Chengdu and complicates the construction of gay identity through bringing in the local term *piaopiao* (*piao* literally means to wander, metaphorically referring to the rootless life of gay men cruising in one after another area). Anthropologist Fu Xiaoxing (2012) examines the *tongzhi* community in northeast China through the perspective of spatiality across three domains of lives, i.e. cruising spots, family and commercial space. Lucetta Kam (2012) documents the formative period of lesbian community in Shanghai amidst

intense pressure to conform to heterosexual norms and marriage. Elisabeth

Engebretsen (2014) situates women's experiences of same-sex desires and the

construction of *lala*[21] identity in Beijing within a discourse of desire for a normal life.

One analytic objective of her project is thus to trouble the incommensurability in

Western queer studies between queerness and normativity in the Chinese context.

The emerging literature on same-sex sexuality in contemporary China—along

with a growing imprint of transnational LGBT human rights based discourse and

activism in the country—has adopted increasingly critical perspectives that challenge

the liberal opposition between an unencumbered independent sexual subject and the

regulatory national, social and familial obligations, and that between queerness and

counterhegemony (Varela *et al.* 2011; Yau 2010; Ara Wilson 2006). For example, in

her problematization of the American-centric (subjectless) queer resistance to (queer)

normativity, Hong Kong-based scholar in cultural studies Yau Ching points out that

"normativity as a relative ideal might not be accessible for many people in most parts

of the world" (2010: 3). I regard this as one major intervention of queer studies in the

global south that "provincializes" American-centric queer studies—an alternative way

of defining politics, acknowledging that there needs to be a critical line drawn

between self-complacent homonormativity and alternative ways of thinking about the

political (Varela *et al.* 2011). From a celebration of the cultural politics of

"coming-home" (Chou 2000) to a cautious observation of the construction of *lala*

selfhood caught between a complicit desire for normativity and an inspiration drawn

---

[21] *Lala* is a Chinese term for lesbians generally used among people who are more
familiar with the community

from globally circulating symbols of independence and individualism (Engebretsen 2014), the making of the sexual subjects is complicated through on-going negotiations instead of confrontation with normativities that are contingent and diverse.

Within this still nascent literature of non-normative sexualities in contemporary Chinese societies, transgendered practices remain largely understood as part of the *tongzhi* and *lala* subcultures, as could be seen from the lively drag parties among urban gay men (Kong 2011) and the tomboy subculture in *lala* community (Engebretsen 2014). According to Engebretsen, even when "trans" is explicitly used as a self-labeled identity among younger activists *lala*, the term *lala* "remains a collective umbrella term that covers *kuaxingbie*" within the community of Chinese lesbians (2014: 55).[22]

Transgender and Renyao with a Mutable Body

Translated in Chinese as *kuaxingbie*, the term transgender did not make its major appearance in mainland China until perhaps the 2000s. In spite of the proclaimed existence of the grassroots workgroup TransChina (*kuayue zhongguo*) in Kunming, and the transgender support group established by Aibai Culture and Education Center (a Beijing-based major LGBT NGO) in 2012/2013, most of the people I encountered during my fieldwork did not have a clear idea of what counts as transgender, including members of the lesbian and gay communities, activists, and journalists.

---

[22] Although according to my very limited contact with one female-to-male transgendered individuals, *lala* did not seem to be compatible with the transgender identity he claimed.

Perhaps no one else did a better job of popularizing the term than the leading Chinese

sociologist Li Yinhe, when she openly acknowledged her more than decade long

"heterosexual" relationship with a transgender man in response to a scathing attack on

her sexual orientation in 2014 (see Chapter Two). Putting aside applause for her

bravery and critiques against her defense of her own heterosexuality and adherence to

dichotomized categorization of gender and sexuality, Li's revelation of her personal

life triggered intense discussion—gossip and scholarly comments included—on

transgender, a category that had seldom before actualized its nominal presence in the

LGBT family of mainland China.[23]

In a recent edited volume *Transgender China*, Howard Chiang notes that

"[p]articularly missing from the field of queer studies is a sustained critical

engagement with Chinese transgender identity, practice, embodiment, history, and

culture" (2012: 6). He then listed three major approaches for Chinese transgender

studies: (1) "by adopting a focused definition of transgender to refer to practices of

embodiment that cross or transcend normative boundaries of gender"; (2) "by

building on case studies of gender ambiguity or androgyny, rather than concrete

examples of gender transgression"; (3) by "leaving behind Western-derived meanings

of gender altogether—or at least problematizing them" so that "Chinese 'gender'

variance on its own unexpected terms" could be identified and understood (2012:

---

[23] In her ethnographi study of queer women in Beijing, Elisabeth Engebretsen (2014)
mentions that in her revisits in Beijing in 2009 and 2012, some younger activists *lala*
started explicitly calling themselves trans and using the Chinese term *kuaxingbie*
(2014: 55). In my ethnographic research in Kunming, I met one self-identified
kuaxingbie in a local *lala* gathering. In our later conversation, he demonstrated a
well-articulated narrative of why and how he thought of himself as *kuaxingbie* instead
of T (tomboy in lesbian relationships).

7-11). This section will focus on review of literature that takes an identification

approach to transgender.

Compared to the obscurity of translated term "transgender", *renyao* stands out as

a more readily understood terminology of transgenderism for the Chinese audience.

Translated as "human prodigy", *renyao* juxtaposes *ren* (human) and *yao* (demon,

evilness) to designates a being that crosses the boundary of human and non-human.

Originally used to refer to "any human physical anomaly or freak" that bespeaks evil

omen, *renyao* started to assume the sense of "impersonator of a member of the

opposite sex" in the *History of the Southern Dynasties*, compiled in 659 (Zeitlin 1993:

104).[24] A most often cited example of its transgender reference comes from the early

Qing writer Pu Songling's (1640-1715) story entitled "Renyao", where a heterosexual

female impersonator was caught by an almost cuckolded husband, who then castrated

the *renyao* and made him a maidservant and eunuch concubine. Because of this very

incident, the castrated (domesticated) concubine—no longer a *renyao* with dislocated

gender—escaped public execution (as a member of the gang crime of deception) and

since then gratefully stayed with the family until death. In this sense, the disturbance

of *renyao* and the disorder that follows could only be solved and restored through

death, including his social death of castration. In spite of this time-honored use of the

term, in modern colloquial Chinese usage, *renyao* often refers to lady boys and male

transsexuals in Thailand (Wong 2012: 128). In fact, I first heard of this term when my

---

[24] According to Judith Zeitlin, the first use of *renyao* as impersonator appeared in an official report about a woman who cross-dressed as male and assumed official position. Nonetheless, although the term used to be applicable for both female and male impersonators, female-to-male transition was rendered much less problematic and less sexual (Furth 1988; Zeitlin 1993).

friend in junior high told me about her father's trip to Thailand and his paid tourist

picture with a Thai *renyao* back in the early 1990s.

In addition to gender dislocation and impersonation, *renyao* has also been tied to

thematic discussions that include sex transformation (Furth 1988; Chiang 2012

unpublished dissertation), same-sex relations (Kang 2009; Wong 2012), the

boundaries and meaning of humanism (Wong 2012; Chiang 2014), and male

prostitution (Kang 2009; Huang 2011).[25] Perhaps most related to my dissertation

project here is the equation between *renyao* and male same-sex prostitution.

According to Kang (2009), although *renyao* was traditionally related to *dan* actors and

their engagement in sexual entertainment in late imperial China, the term was also

used during the first half of the twentieth century to refer to "men who were engaged

in same-sex relations, especially those who were assumed to play the passive sexual

role, and particularly male prostitutes" (Kang 2009: 34). Huang also points out that

during the early 1950s, male same-sex prostitutes in Taiwan were generally

recognized as *renyao* in news coverage, although by the late 1970s and early 1980s it

was increasingly reserved for transgender or transsexuals (Huang 2011: 101). During

my fieldwork, I once heard the term *yaotong* (demonic child) used to refer to a male

coach of square dance who had a fine physique and was very pliable in his dancing

movements.

In the special journal issue of *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* they co-edited on the

budding transgender studies in Asia, Fran Martin and Josephine Ho define transgender

---

[25] A most recent use of *renyao* appears in cyber games to refer to female roles played by male gamers, see Lin (2006).

as "a practice of ongoing self-fashioning rather than once-and-for-all

self-realization…of endless becoming rather than of simple being" (Ho and Martin

2006: 186). Place specificity stands out as one significant contributor that defies a

transcultural universality of transgender experience. For example, Robyn Emerton

(2006) studies the legal status of transgender people in Hong Kong. through

observation of the Hong Kong Transgender Equality and Acceptance Movement

(TEAM). She points out the discrepant agenda among transgender people of different

social strata, the general fear of publicity, and their strong desire to "pass" and blend

into "normal" society. Josephine Ho (2006) situates the self-reflexive fashioning of

"trans subjects" in Taiwan against the social cultural contexts that include the local

state-feminist movement, the lesbian movement, sensational reports in local media,

and the availability of embodiment techniques. Dennis Lin (2006) elaborates on the

commencement of "an era of online sissy queer politics" in Taiwan through research

on online sissy performance of "male queers". Juxtaposing "queer effeminacies" in

the cyberspace with the regime of compulsory gay masculinity and the "desexualized

and increasingly destigmatised effeminacies" represented by self-identified

heterosexual men, Lin points out the "multiple ongoing processes of interactions as

well as a variety of contested sites of power relations" through which sissy queer

subjectivities have taken shape. Lucetta Kam's (2008) research looks into the gender

negotiations of eighteen Chinese women in Hong Kong who share the experience of

being misrecognized as men on various occasions. Kam then redefines masculinity as

"a set of gender attributes" that could be "actualized on all kinds of bodies," echoing

Judith Halberstam's decoupling of masculinity from maleness in her theorization of

female masculinity. Kam's demonstration of the various motivations involved in these

women's performance of masculinity beyond lesbianism, pathology, or valorization of

masculinity reveals the very limited availability of cultural framework to render

intelligible gendered bodies beyond the biologically endorsed dichotomy of

femaleness/femininity and maleness/masculinity.

Gender Fluidity

Adding to the lore of Chinese transgender studies is the notion of gender fluidity

found in historical and literary researches. As Susan Brownell and Jeffrey

Wasserstrom have observed, while anthropological literature on gender and sexuality

has been keen on the cross-cultural possibilities of third genders or other more

malleable embodiments of gender variance, in the realm of China studies, it was not

anthropologists but historians—and I should add literary scholars—who had initiated

significant academic interest in transgender studies, or gender variance more

generally (Susan Brownell and Jeffrey Wasserstrom 2002).

In his groundbreaking theorization of Chinese masculinity, Kam Louie (2002)

problematizes the normality of "maleness" via the cultural attainment-martial valor

(*wen-wu*) dyad of masculine ideals (2002).[26] Keith McMahon (1988) points out a

---

[26] See also Robert van Gulik (1974[1961], *Sexual Life in Ancient China*) for an
explanation of the transition of masculine ideal from bodily strength and martial arts
to delicacy and hyper-sensitivity since the Qing dynasty. According to van Gulik, this
turn away from the martial arts resulted as a response of the Chinese literati to the
Manchu occupation and their monopoly of the martial arts, to the extent that the ideal
lover shifted from the middle-aged, bearded men in the Tang and Song periods to the

progressive feminization of male characters in late Ming fiction to the extent that the

romantic young scholars prevail over the chivalric heroes. Although he also cautions

that despite the crossing of gender characteristics in the scholar-beauty romances,

cross-dressing is mostly restricted to women (1988; 1995: 107).[27] In his examination

of fictional works—specifically exploration of pornographic fictions—in late imperial

China (1550-1849), Giovanni Vitiello (2011) moves beyond the formalized dichotomy

to incorporate the dynamic and syncretic ideological development of masculinity into

the understanding of male homoeroticism. These analytic frameworks interpret

masculinity in a more malleable and fluid way, echoing what Michael Peletz (2009)

terms as "gender pluralism" widely observed in southeast Asia since pre-Modern

time.

These representations of the masculine "gender fluidity" are joined by the

time-honored appreciation of male beauty, embodied by teenage boys, that is

comparable to female beauty. The gender and sexual ambiguity suggested by male

beauty is perhaps most prominent in the word "boy-girl" (*ji*), one of the terms for

male prostitutes found in both seventeenth and eighteenth-century sources. The

graphic composition of *ji* is obtained through replacing the lower half of the character

"delicate, hyper-sensitive youngster with pale face and narrow shoulders… and who falls ill at the slightest disappointment" (1974[1961]: 295-296).

[27] The prominence of androgyny in scholar-beauty romances of the late Ming, according to Zuyan Zhou (2012), has also to do with literati's ideological defiance against the antithetical treatment of heavenly principle (*tianli*) and human desire (*renyu*) advocated by the Neo-Confucian School of the Principle since the Song Dynasty. Therefore, "the ideal of androgyny celebrated in scholar-beauty romances is…charged with a strong note of self-expression and self-aggrandizement. It is through the stylistically inflated and artistically idealized characterization of caizi (scholar) and jiaren (beauty) that literati scholars project their preferred values, liberal outlooks, and their ideal of androgynous personality" (Zhou 2012: 121).

meaning "man" (*nan*) with the character meaning "woman" (*nv*), meaning treating a

man as a woman sexually. Yet if the boy prostitutes in the late Ming did involve "a

form of physical and psychological transvestism and the partial adoption of a female

persona," the ideal boy's beauty lies in gender ambiguity rather than "femininity

tout-court" (Vitiello 2011: 36). The same seems to be true for *dan* actors—female

impersonators in operatic performances, a significant group in male (same-sex) sexual

entertainment that flourished in urban centers throughout the entire late imperial. It is

thus fair to say that male homoeroticism in imperial China—even extending to the

early Republican era—is inseparable from a valorization of gender ambiguity

embodied by the receptive role in a relationship, as could be seen in Kang's (2009)

and Huang's (2011) researches mentioned above. In this sense, so long as

heterosexual marriage and reproduction is upheld, it is the heterogender relationship

(Peletz 2009)—be it same-sex or opposite-sex, crosscut by age and class distinctions,

that successfully incorporated homoeroticism as one legitimate form of male sexuality

(Vitiello 2011; see also Van Gulik 1974[1961]; Furth 1988). I would immediately add

that the boundary between the delicate scholar and the effeminate boy is by no means

solid. As presented in Vitiello's analysis of pornographic fiction from the late Ming to

the mid-Qing period (2011), the feminized and well-educated libertine in some

pornographic fictions did fall prey to homosexual desire, not only disrupting the age

and class distinction maintained in previous homoerotic relationships, but also

significantly compromising the boundary, if there is any, between the

gender-ambiguous boy and the delicate young scholar, both of whom shared

exceptional beauty like that of a woman. As Furth points out, "[b]road and flexible notions of what was sexually compatible with maleness stopped only at the extreme: only the eunuch could be seen as a concubine," as was shown in Pu Songling's story mentioned in the previous section (Furth 1988: 14).

It is unfair perhaps to apply the historical observation of gender fluidity to contemporary embodiment of gender and sexuality. Scholars have demonstrated ways in which national crisis was translated into growing anxiety over gender and sexual impropriety, including the Ming-Qing transition that saw growing social critique of male effeminacy in the literati, the founding of the Republic of China that officially banned male (cross-dressed) prostitution (*xianggong, xianggu*) as against "human nature", the national crisis during the Republican era that facilitated an equation between homoeroticism and male effeminacy on the one hand, and national weakness on the other, culminating in the total erasure of homosexuality in the early years of the People's Republic of China. When the term homosexuality reemerged in the early 1980s in mainland China, the case study was taken not from real-life experience, but from *Dream of the Red Chamber*, one of China's Four Classical Novels. Homosexuality was then treated as abnormality and gender inversion, a standard pathological definition derived from Western sexology and medical science not readily distinct from that in the Republican era.

But what made male beauty intelligible and legitimate in the late imperial no longer works in the same way now. Gender seems to have assumed a more precarious position in the contemporary conceptualization of (homo)sexuality. On the one hand,

gender variance serves almost as a default index of homosexuality, while

cross-dressed operatic performance is professionalized and dislodges itself from

explicit homoerotic sentiments—thanks perhaps to the world renown *dan* actor Mei

Lanfang's efforts to uncouple the male body from its sartorial expression, establishing

male authenticity that is "sartorially neutral, historically abstract, and politically

uncompromised" (Zou 2006: 88). On the other hand, gender fluidity and androgynous

beauty finds its most explicit reincarnation in popular culture embraced no longer by

the Confucian literati but by the Chinese young women.

The incorporation of gender fluidity (and even androgyny) into the

representations of Chinese masculinity and the intertwining relation between gender

variance and homoeroticism stand out from these historical and literary studies. This

is reminiscent of historian Afsaneh Najmabadi's (2006) questioning of the analytic

utility of gender and sexuality beyond the Americas and the modern. Najmabadi

critiques the definitional matrix of gender and sex that has established a

complementary opposition between female/femininity and male/masculinity, when

womanhood is not necessarily defined against manhood and vice versa. The

categorization of modern sexuality based on gender binary further translates "any

fractures of masculinity into effeminization" (2006: 14). Therefore, rather than

recruiting all representations and embodiments of gender liminality into the very

category of transgender, I recognize this as evidence that cautions against a premature

institutionalization of transgender studies in the Chinese context.

Transgender as a Heuristic Device

Putting aside transgender or *renyao* as an identity with pre-determined definition, scholars are increasingly using transgender as an open-ended heuristic device to look at gender and erotic mutations that disrupt not boundaries making beyond the dichotomized mechanism of gender and sexuality—from gender crossing to the crossing of genres. It is in this respect that the emerging Chinese transgender studies make critical intervention to queer studies. For example, Tze-Lan Sang (2006) explicitly points out the "transgender body" of the Manchurian female protagonist in the novel *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, whose transgression violates socially intelligible gendered lines that are simultaneously embedded in a discourse of ethnicity and female compulsory heterosexuality. Following Michele Aaron's use of the term "queer" that emphasizes "non-fixity of gender expression and the non-fixity of both straight and gay sexuality," Helen Leung's queer reading strategy of two Hong Kong films interprets transgenderism as "gendered self-fashioning" that could not be "fully intelligible in hetero- or homonormative understanding" (2008: 2, 83).

In his cross-historical endeavor that treats transgenderism as "a heuristic open signifier," Alvin Wong extends the trope of *renyao* to cover a malleable range of transgression that, among other things, confronts the demarcation of human and the demonic, and disrupts any preconceived notion of femininity and masculinity that defines transgenderism—an approach that reminds me of Sandy Stone's call for a posttransgender/posttranssexual politics. What is specifically insightful is his analysis of the 1992 Taiwan TV series the *New Legend of Madame White Snake*, which

juxtaposes the performance of "transgender femmeness" (feminized masculinity performed by a cross-dressed actress) with that of hyperfemininity in a romantic homo-gender relationship (Wong 2012). In this sense, *renyao* or transgender as a trope is much more nuanced and useful than *kuaxingbie* as a newly imported identity label distinct from gayness.

Howard Chiang's (2011, 2012) revisionist study of Chinese eunuchism problematizes the universality of transgenderism as a category of experience. Chiang traces the widening gap between the global historical narration of castration and Chinese eunuchs' embodied lives, pointing out that contributable to the growing pathologization and unintelligibility of the eunuch's body is the "epistemic modernity" brought forth through Western colonial encounters and biomedical spectatorship that objectified the castrated body and simultaneously made the Chinese nation inferior.

Organization and Contribution

The efforts to problematize transgender as a universal category of experience serve as a critique of the initial obsession I had in my field research with locating markers of transgender—signs of intelligibility—that could define a community for me to observe and record. Moving away from a focus on constructing a grid of intelligibility that defines the transgender body and a transgender community, I seek to capture a glimpse at a process of (un)becoming that takes as its central conundrum transgendered practices. In other words, I hope to look at transgendered practices

from shifting vantage points outside the currently available grid of intelligibility, outside the cultural script that renders transgendered practices readable. That is why I opt for a poststructuralist approach that circumscribes the formation of a transgender identity. With an emphasis on ethnographic observations and the lived experience of transgendered individuals, this dissertation hopes to complement current ethnographic researches on Chinese non-normative gender and sexual practices with queer analytic tools that flourish most fruitfully in literary and cultural studies—an integrated approach between the material and the cultural.

In the following chapters, I will examine from different aspects the validity of identity and community as analytic perspectives to understand non-normative gendered and sexual practices in Kunming. Chapter One discusses HIV/AIDS interventions and the top-down making of the MSM collective. Chapter Two relates the transnational flows of lesbian and gay identity-based movements to the cracks between a proliferating assemblage of *tongzhi* politics and the mundane experience of those it claims to represent. In Chapter Three, gender and sexual performances embodied by transgendered sex workers and performers will be detailed vis-à-vis economic and erotic exigencies. Chapter Four steps back and looks into the society-individual trajectory in the Chinese context specifically since the end of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s. Altogether, these four chapters offer different perspectives to examine the futility, in spite of the growing media and activist exposure of transgendered embodiments in mainland China, of an identity-based claim at a transgender community that is in the making. Putting aside an emphasis on

identity as an analytic perspective, Chapter Five adopts a queer analytic tool that embeds transgendered practices within the queerness of everyday life. That is, rather than propose an alternative space for transgenderism that counters heteronormative, I hope to reveal, from the marginalized—and probably not readily intelligible—queer sociality, the saturation of queerness in the everyday life.

I thus frame my research within the realm of feminist and queer studies that suspend an analytic separation of gender and sexuality. That is, I do not view transgender as adding a gender piece to the queer studies of sexuality. Instead, I think of queer studies as already rooted in a feminist poststructuralist critique of gender and identity. In this respect, anthropologist David Valentine's ethnographically informed genealogical study of the institutionalization of transgender as a category is most illuminating.

> While the separation of gender and sexuality has been a theoretically productive tool, I will argue here that—ironically—this separation implicitly underpins the identity labels that feminist and queer scholars are at pains to deconstruct…My argument is that a progressive political and theoretical move to make a space for 'sexuality' as a field of investigation and activism has unwittingly produced a system whereby those who are already disenfranchised—through poverty and racism—cannot be fully accounted for in contemporary theorizations about gender and sexuality. (Valentine 2003: 127)

I regard this dissertation as part of a feminist ethnographic tradition not in the

sense of any heavy employment of feminist theories. My feminist engagement lies

most explicitly in the self-reflexive approach to gender and sexuality that has threaded

through the whole project. As shall be recognized in the following chapters, most of

the observations I garnered from the field and the doubts I had recorded in my

fieldnotes were derived from my on-going struggles with multiple notions such as

identity, human rights, and liberal democracy.

In addition to problematizing the analytic separation of gender and sexuality and

the institutionalized demarcation of transgender and gayness, my use of queer as a

verb and a reading strategy seeks to complement queer counter politics with an

ethnographic deconstruction of the norm. That is, if both identity-based lesbian and

gay politics and the queer embrace of counterpublics are in different ways engaged

with a politics of inclusion—be it an aspiration to be included or a conscious

renunciation to be included, what I hope to explore here is something outside of this

logic of inclusion/exclusion, something that is simply there, facilitated by shifting

configurations of social and cultural contexts that are both immediate and more

distant to relate.

It is with this ethnographically informed theoretical engagement with feminist

and queer studies that I hope this dissertation go beyond simply adding another piece

of fact to the anthropology of gender and sexuality and China studies. Rather, this

dissertation aims to respond to the on-going theoretical debates that cross the

disciplinary boundaries between feminist and queer anthropology, NGOs and global

governance, neoliberal consumption of desire, and individualization amidst the

background of modernity and globalization.

Terminology

Last but not least, I would like to clarify major terms used in this dissertation. In the previous sections, terms such as *kuaxingbie* (Chinese translation of transgender), *tongzhi*, *renyao*, *dan* actors, and gay have been mentioned as possible terms to refer to people whose behaviors can be read as transgressing gender boundaries.

As I mentioned earlier, in spite of its emerging visibility, the Chinese term *kuaxingbie* remained largely obscure in my field site. For one thing, although transgender activist Gina started her advocacy work in Kunming (and China) a few years ago, continued lack of financial support was said to be a major roadblock. Partly due to the lack of sustained and sustainable social advocacy, seldom did transgendered individuals I met (and I recognized as transgendered) in Kunming—mostly transgendered sex workers and performers—express affinity to this label. As a matter of fact, they did not seem to care about what *kuaxingbie* was. Nor were they interested in whether they belonged to this category or not. By saying that they did not care whether they were transgender or not, I am not launching a critique against their lack of consciousness. It is the sense of indifference that I hope to grapple with.

The discrepancy between behaviors and self-identification is not new (D'Emilio 1993). In her study on the *mati* work among Afro-Surinamese working-class women, Gloria Wekker (2006) challenges the necessary correspondence between sexual

behavior and sexual identity. She points out that same-sex relationships among women do not posit a fixed notion of "sexual identity". Rather, the emphasis on reciprocal obligations between female partners and the transactional nature between female and male partners demonstrates ways in which sexual relationships have been interwoven into everyday survival strategies of working-class women. That is, sexuality does not constitute the core understanding of the self among *mati* workers. Similarly, Tze-lan Sang makes a conscious distinction between lesbian as a personal identity and lesbianism as a category of eroticism that "rang[es] from longing, idealization, infatuation, worship, attachment, protectiveness, jealousy, and passion to the physical sex act in various forms" (2003: 34). For one thing, the all-inclusive notion of lesbianism is useful in exploring female same-sex relationships that can be implicative of but not necessarily conducive to preference for same-sex eroticism. This is important considering the comparative lack of discursive representations in China of female-female sexuality if sex is a prerequisite (2003: 42).[28]

The politics of naming is not new in the scholarship on gender and sexual diversity. Caution has long been taken to avoid thrusting Western terms such as gay, lesbian, and transgender onto non-Western practices that are presumed to originate from their own cultural logics (e.g. Vance 1991; Blackwood and Wieringa 1999). To clarify the distinction between identity and practices, I use *transgender* as identity to

---

[28] Contrary to this presumption of "radical cultural differences", anthropologist Naisargi Dave (2012) questions, along with Ruth Vanita (2005), the meaningfulness of substituting Western identities such as "lesbian" or "queer" with descriptive terms that attempt to de-centralize Western identities. For Dave, the use of "lesbian", though not necessarily recognized by practitioners, yields inventive potentiality that spells political possibilities.

refer to the institutionalized category of transgender that emerged in the United States since the early 1990s, and that signifies a distinction between gender variance of transgender and sexual orientation of homosexuality (Valentine 2007). I use "transgendered" to refer to "individuals involved in practices that transcend or transgress majoritarian gender practices" (Peletz 2009: 4-5), but who do not wear the identity label of transgender or *kuaxingbie*.

This distinction between transgender as *identity* and transgendered as *practices* is useful in that it enables discussion and analysis of the various transgendered phenomena while not yielding to a pre-determined category of identity which few transgendered people feel ready to occupy. The distinction maintained between identity and practice also derives its strength from Foucault's notion of ethics as contrasted with morality. For Foucault, identity, a fixed position, or a vantage point, denotes a closure of possibilities and predictability of what one is. Yet who one is, "emerges acutely out of the problems with which one struggles" (Rabinow 1997). That is, who you are remains one unfinished project (see also Butler, Derrida's différance).

But why not use the Chinese term *kuaxingbie*? For one thing, this literal translation of transgender in Chinese does not reflect indigenous or local use of terminology. Seldom did transgendered individuals I met identified themselves as *kuaxingbie*. As a matter of fact, most of them did not even know this term. The lack of an appropriate term to refer to this group of people generated many awkward moments in my fieldwork, where I stumbled while struggling to find a suitable

expression to refer to my informant and her friends. I ended up sometimes using "those who wear make-up" (*huazhuangde*) to continue the conversation. While wearing make-up constitutes one significant contrast between transgendered sex workers and female sex workers (who were mostly middle-aged women and not wearing makeup), the descriptive term *huazhuangde* lost its relevance when it comes to transgendered performers and other transgendered practices.

For transgendered performers, *fanchuan* would be a more acceptable term. Coming from traditional Chinese operatic performance, the meaning of *fanchuan* differs in colloquial and proper uses. In its "proper" use, *fanchuan* refers to "actors who *occasionally* act in parts outside their (role) specialization," including cross-gender performances (Tan 2000: 206, italics in origin). In its more colloquial and popular use, the term refers specifically to "performers who specialize in cross-gender roles, or who especially act in roles whose gender does not correspond with their biological one" (ibid.). Used as both noun and verb, *fanchuan* denotes more of an occupational identity and preferably professionalized genre of performance than a gendered self.

Another (add a discussion about emic/etic?) possible term to use is *yao*—literally translated as demon, and evil spirit, reminiscent of the tourist image of Thai lady boys with implanted breasts and are termed as *renyao* (human demon) in Chinese. While I did occasionally hear people identify transgendered people with this term[29], I find it

---

[29] In one of the advocacy campaigns in 2013, Gina appeared on the street in her feminine attire and heavy make-up. She attracted great attention from passers-by and was called several times as *renyao*. In a most recent report I found on transgendered sex work in China, *renyao* was used to refer to the two culprits who had their surgery

dissatisfactory to simply take it as an identity category. For one thing, no one seemed

to readily identify themselves with *yao* or *renyao*[30], probably due to its very

association with Thai ladyboys or the imagination of them, although I did hear

transgendered performers used *yao* as adjective to distinguish their Thai style

performance from those with more Chinese elements such as ethnic dances. Second

and also more central to my argument here is the fact that they did not seem to care

about what identity category they fall into. As a matter of fact, they call each other by

nicknames. I was even given a nickname (*yuansui*, meaning cilantro) when I first met

with one of the transgendered friends I made in Kunming[31].

Scholars familiar with the sexual landscape of mainland China may be well

aware of the term *tongzhi*. Originally used as gender-neutral address term in

Mao-socialist China, the term was appropriated in 1989 to refer to a broadly defined

LGBT community in Great China area. In spite of the normative inclusiveness of the

term, *tongzhi* has been more often regarded as synonymous with "*tongxinlian*"

(homosexual), specifically gay men (Kam 2013: 3-4). In the dissertation, I use *tongzhi*

and lesbian and gay interchangeably.

---

done in Thailand, advertised themselves online as *renyao*, and solicited male
customers.

[30] When I talked to Ziyang Guo, director of Beijing Zuoyou Information Center, a
non-profit organization that work for eradication of violence and discrimination
against MSM/transgender sex workers, he told me that transgendered sex workers in
Beijing used "*yao*" to refer to themselves. To what extent this indicates a difference in
the sense of identity or that initiated by the niche market calls for further research.

[31] As I later found out, most of the people I met in Kunming, both gays and
transgendered people, use nicknames rather than real names. This has largely to do
with their preference for anonymity within the gay circle, which has long been
considered as "messy" (*luan*). It also seems to suggest their intentional separation of
their gay life and normative life.

"Queer" is another intriguing and widely circulated term that calls for elaboration. While the term has often been used as an umbrella category to "replace a list of relatively fixed identity categories with a notion of flexible, antinormative, politicized sexualities" (Duggan 2003: 58). My use of queer in this dissertation is closely tied to my position to challenge identity as an analytic category and my attempt to answer Najmabadi's question: "Can we use gender and sexuality analytically without demanding and depending on coherence of these categories?" (2006: 19). I use queer here as a reading strategy that disrupts the connection of gendered and sexual practices with identity. My use of queer here tends to treat it as a verb and a perspective that problematizes the confidence and certainty of heterosexuality *from within*. I owe this endeavor to Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, one of the foundational texts in queer studies. I understand Butler's revelation of the arbitrary equation between sex and gender through among other things, drag performance as fundamental in our understanding of the endeavor taken up by queer studies.

A brief recapitulation of Butler's major analytic thread in the book might be helpful. In her formulation of gender performativity, Butler conceives performative acts such as dragging not as in opposition to gender norms. Rather, dragging serves to reflect "the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality" (1993/1999: 125). That is to say, both dragging and heterogender norms should be regarded as part of the general structure of iteration and citationality. The imitative and the original do not

exist in ontological opposition but find themselves alongside each other within the mechanism of iteration. The power of gender performativity thus lies not in locating an alternative space for the "peripheral" and the "imitative" but in queering—revealing the queerness of—the "original".

Although it was performed with the presumption of heterosexuality, sexual transactions between transgendered sex workers and male clients represented the very disruption of it (heterosexuality). Rather than categorize this as homosexuality, imitation of heterosexuality, or heterogender relationships (Peletz 2009; Sinnott 2004), I hope to leave open the possibilities for diverse articulations of desires that do not take as point of departure the dichotomy of heterosexuality and homosexuality, and that of straight and queer.

Chapter One: The Community in the Making

"I should say that I am thankful for AIDS for making us (*tongzhi*) visible in this country." --- Sister Nine

I started my dissertation research on transgenderism in Kunming, the provincial capital of Yunnan Province, China, with a naïve hope that I could add another piece to the political economy of sexuality (Altman 2001; Padilla 2007) and "queer sexualities" without necessarily touching upon issues of HIV/AIDS, which to me has greatly stigmatized the group that I wanted to work with. However, from the very first meeting that I attended in Kunming to my everyday conversation as volunteer in a local LGBT workgroup, the talk of HIV/AIDS prevailed and there was no way to escape it. I was even told by one public health practitioner that without HIV/AIDS intervention programs, there might not even have been *tongzhi* (a Chinese term for "comrade", used to refer generally to LGBT community in the Great China area starting 1989 in an LGBT film festival in Hong Kong, although as we will later find, some transgendered individuals do not accept *tongzhi* as their identity) organizations, let alone transgender ones. I should not have been surprised at all when I heard Sister Nine[32] mentioned his gratitude towards AIDS.

As I examined my own ostrich attitude, I went on to expect analyzing interactions between *tongzhi* community and HIV/AIDS intervention programs in

---

[32] The majority of the gay men that I have encountered in my field site have nicknames that carry the Chinese address terms *Jiejie* or *meimei*, meaning elder or younger sister. But this overwhelming use of feminine address term does not seem to bother their gender identity (Chapter Two is devoted to this discussion). So I retain male pronouns unless otherwise.

Kunming, only to find that the majority of local *tongzhi* workgroups were ushered in by health education institutes or CDCs at different administrative levels due largely to requirements stipulated in cooperation projects with international HIV/AIDS intervention programs, and that community (*shequ*) remains more of a word than reality. That is, many *tongzhi* workgroups came into being exactly because of the need of health departments to find out their target population, not that of building community. Most of these workgroups have joined the Yunnan MSM (men who have sex with men) Network at provincial level, which aims to engage in conversation on HIV/AIDS intervention between government-led public health institutes, international organizations, and community workgroups, which are supposed to represent target populations' interests and concerns.

The bulk of my ethnographic fieldwork centered around events and activities organized by the Yunnan MSM Network and its member workgroups. Although I was surprised and puzzled by the ready acceptance of workgroup leaders of the public health and behavior-centered term of MSM, seldom did the parties involved in the Network question the validity of this term. MSM is often used interchangeably with *nantong* (translated literally as "male sameness"), which can mean both *nan tongxinglian* ("male homosexuals/homosexual men") and *nan tongzhi* ("male tongzhi")[33]. At least two issues are related to this slippage in identity terminology.

---

[33] Throughout this dissertation, I maintain the nuanced difference between the terms "gay men", "male homosexuals/homosexual men", and *tongzhi*. While "male homosexuals" (*nan tongxinglian*) carries more medical connotation, "gay men" as a loan expression stands somewhere between "male homosexuals/homosexual men" and *tongzhi*, which (though most often appropriated to refer to gay men) is used to denote the broadly defined LGBT community in the Great China area and has

Firstly, starting from 2005, the term "male homosexual population" (*nan tongxinglian renqun*) was replaced by "men who have sex with men" (*nannan xingxingwei renqun*) in the assessment report jointly issued by China's Ministry of Health and the United Nations Theme Group on HIV/AIDS in China (Xing & Zhang 2008: 23).[34] This indicates not only a shift of China's HIV/AIDS prevention focus to MSM—in line with the "Second generation of HIV surveillance" that focuses more on "sub-populations at highest risk of infection" (WHO/UNAIDS, 2000), but also a public health intervention approach more in line with international epidemiological practices. Secondly, many of the workgroups in Yunnan Province were brought into being during the time when international funding was most abundant and the need for community workgroups most urgent. The urgent need of local health institutes to find out community workgroups and its failure to do so often led to the fact that when a community member was finally identified—who might have known little about what MSM, male homosexual, or *tongzhi* could mean, he was soon pushed into office to implement HIV intervention project among MSM.

Yet if gay men are included in the public health-defined domain of MSM—or more often than not "gay men" is used interchangeably with MSM, transgender was totally out of the picture until very recently when WHO started its initiative to look into HIV/AIDS intervention among male-to-female transgender people in China. In my conversation with a local public health practitioner, he explained to me the term

---

stronger political underpinnings since its creation in 1989 (see also Chapter 2).
[34] According to Zhang and Chu (2005), the term MSM was introduced into mainland China in 2000.

MSM as including four sub-groups: homosexual men, bisexual men, Money Boys
(male commercial sex workers for male clients), and situational homosexual men.
Transgender, recognized as part of the umbrella MSM community, was seldom listed
as a distinct sub-population that calls for different intervention strategies, although
their existence as sex workers has always been felt, and although a local transgender
group (TransChina) has been founded for several years. I remember myself asking a
project officer from the Alliance China program (Kunming office of the International
HIV/AIDS Alliance) whether they have program that caters specifically to the needs
of male-to-female transgendered people. He smiled elusively and said apologetically
that they did not yet distinguish that specific sub-group in their local projects.
Transgendered people's biological maleness—regardless of whether they have breast
implant, hormonal therapy, surgery, or simply cross-dress—and thus their same-sex
sexual behaviors seem sufficient for them to be tucked into the umbrella identity of
MSM.

This chapter starts with a general introduction to the AIDS epidemic in China
and Yunnan Province specifically. Entry of international NGOs and their HIV
prevention programs will be discussed to illuminate how prevention programs have
affected and even shaped ways in which members of their target population view their
behaviors and its connection with their identity. Three major layers of interactions will
be examined: (1) local MSM workgroups' heavy reliance upon international donors
and their cooperation with local government, putting them in an awkward position
between the government and the target population to which they are supposed to

belong; (2) ways in which structurally imposed obstacles to independence on the part

of community workgroups has dampened the possibility of equality between

workgroups and health departments, let alone expanded political space in China's

emerging civil society; (3) ways in which *the* community serves more of a pre-defined

public health framework that recruits its members based on sexual behaviors. I argue

that while not discrediting the contribution of international NGOs to the accessibility

of HIV testing and treatment services in China and Yunnan Province, the lack of

equality between local workgroups and the donor/government dyad and the

epidemiological and behavioral model that has put MSM as central bloc in

conceptualizing *the* community have greatly weakened the possibility of a well

developed community in response to the AIDS epidemic. What is now perceived as

the community is thus more of a behavior-centered MSM "community" recruited

through intervention strategies and international collaborative HIV/AIDS programs.

AIDS in China: A Brief Introduction

On the morning of December 6, 2011, I arrived at the Yunnan's Provincial Center

for Disease Control and Prevention for the first time to attend a meeting on expanding

HIV testing and treatment and reducing new HIV infections among the MSM

sub-population. That was the first time for me to attend meeting with local *tongzhi*

organizations, international NGOs, and CDC staff. At the meeting, representative

from the National Center for AIDS/STD Control and Prevention of China CDC

briefed findings from "the Eleventh Five-Year Plan" (2006-2010), demonstrating the

alarming HIV infection rate—5% on average—among MSM in eight cities in China

(including Kunming)[35]. To more effectively bring under control the mounting

infection rate, the AIDS/STD intervention expert proposed, among other things,

immediate antiretroviral (ARV) treatment after HIV infection regardless of the

infected individual's own immune status (CD4 T-cell number). He detailed

international research findings about ways in which immediate ARV treatment among

HIV-infected individuals with uninfected partners (what is termed as "serodiscordant

couple") has actually reduced the risk of transmission, and therefore should be

included as trial project among chosen sub-populations in the Chinese Government's

up-coming "Twelfth Five-Year Plan".

Heated discussion followed as to how to talk newly infected individuals of the

MSM population into starting immediate ARV treatment, when CD4 count[36] of below

200 and later on below 350 used to determine a patient's eligibility for treatment. One

of the greatest concerns expressed at the meeting was how to make people believe that

early treatment betters their life when it appears to benefit only the HIV-negative

partner, and when delayed treatment used to be recommended due to limited number

of antiretroviral medications that can be combined to formulate the "AIDS cocktail"[37].

---

[35] Statistics tend to vary from difference sources. In an online report that appeared in May 2013, HIV infection rate among MSM nationwide was said to be 6.3% in 2011, and above 20% in some southwestern cities. http://www.xiuzheng.org/xianzhuang/xianzhuang320.html, retrieved on Nov. 29, 2013.

[36] CD4 cells are white blood cells that fight infection and are thus vital to the human immune system. CD4 counts refer to number of CD4 cells in a cubic millimeter of blood. In China, CD4 count test is usually done after confirmation of HIV infection to determine eligibility for the free ART program. A normal CD4 count is from 500 to 15,000 cells per cubic millimeter of blood.

[37] According to a report by Reuters in 2009 and a training session I attended in

I remain disturbed on one hand by the ease with which knowledge of the disease shifted, giving rise to treatment narratives that mark the skillful manipulation of expertise, and on the other by the (dis)continuity of this trial project depending upon financial support. Meanwhile my initial surprise at the heavy reliance of China's HIV/AIDS intervention projects upon international data was gradually tamed in the process of my field research, when I have finally realized the close connection between international HIV/AIDS intervention programs and their counterpart in China since as early as 1988 (Sun, Liu, Li *et al*. 2010), in the form of not only sharing research data, but also funding and technical support. But before we dig into the global cooperative campaigns against HIV/AIDS and ways in which they have affected the borderland of Yunnan Province, a brief introduction to the general picture of the epidemic in China and Yunnan Province is necessary.

China's first case of HIV infection was diagnosed in 1985 in a foreign tourist traveling in Beijing. In the following five years, reported cases of HIV infection were either infected overseas or by imported blood products, giving rise to a strong held misconception that HIV/AIDS is product of "decadent lifestyles of Western capitalism"—AIDS was once transliterated as *aizibing*, the "loving capitalism disease" in Chinese, and a prevention focus on keeping the virus out of the nation-state's geographical borders, such as the creation of a "border quarantine belt"

Kunming, China has altogether nine ARV medications available. http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/01/20/us-china-aids-idUSTRE50J0M820090120. Access on Nov. 30, 2013. My conversation with a German volunteer indicated that there are 30 antiretroviral medications in Germany, which seems to entail many more possible "cocktail" combinations.

in Yunnan Province (*People's Daily Online*, 2012; *BMJ*, April 27[38], 1996; Hyde 2007;

Kaufman 2010). The first domestic outbreak of HIV/AIDS was diagnosed among

injecting drug users in Yunnan Province along the China-Burma border in 1989 (Hyde

2007; Xing and Zhang 2008; Kaufman 2010). By 1998, the virus has spread to all 31

provinces and autonomous regions of the country (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 The geographic distribution of cumulative reported HIV-1 infection in
Mainland China [source: State Council AIDS Working Committee Office and UN
Theme Group on AIDS in China, *A Joint Assessment of HIV/AIDS Prevention,
Treatment and Care in China* (2007)]

By October 2012, national accumulated reported cases of HIV/AIDS have

reached 492,192, with the number of reported AIDS related-deaths at 108,906. The

Ministry of Health (*2012 Progress Report-China*) has summarized characteristics of

the HIV epidemic in China as follows (2012: 5): (1) low level of national prevalence

(0.058%) as compared to high-prevalence pockets among high-risk groups, what has

---

[38] "China steps up battle against AIDS", Richard Tomlinson, *BMJ*. 1996 Apr. 27; 321
(7038): 1056. Retrieved on September 24, 2013.

been termed as a "concentrated epidemic" according to categorizations indicated in

the second generation of HIV surveillance (Sutherland and Hsu 2012: 22); (2)

increase in number of PLHIV (people living with HIV) as compared to comparatively

low level of new infections; (3) increase in AIDS-related deaths as result of gradual

progression from HIV to full-blown AIDS; (4) sexual transmission as major mode of

HIV transmission, accounting for 76.3% of all reported cases in 2011; (5) diverse and

evolving nature of China's epidemics. Among the rapidly growing cases of sexual

transmission, the subgroup of MSM (men who have sex with men) has occupied

prominent position due to its alarming increase of infections since 2005.

According to the *2012 Progress Report* issued by the Ministry of Health,

homosexual transmission of HIV increased from 2.5% in 2006 to 13.7% in 2011

among sexual transmission. Given the fact that many new cases of infection have

already developed into full-blown AIDS at the time of diagnosis, this sharp increase in

male same-sex transmission could have resulted from the shift of Chinese

government's—along with international cooperative projects—emphasis on

prevention project among homosexual men since 2004. Although HIV was detected

among homosexual men in Beijing in the early 1990s, and a seminar on AIDS

education and related issues about homosexuality was held in Beijing in as early as

1994[39], homosexual men were not listed as among MARPs (most at-risk populations)

by the Ministry of Health in China until 2002, when the Chinese government seemed

to be more ready and more willing to incorporate its fight against HIV/AIDS into the

---

[39] *Aizhi Action*, December, 1994. Source: *Ecological Report on the Chinese Homosexual Population (Part 1)*. 2008. Ge Tong, Xiaopei He, Yaqi Guo *et al*. eds.

global frame. Another indicator—coincidentally or not—of this greater willingness to be part of the international community is China's depathologization (at least partial depathologization) of homosexuality in 2001, when the Chinese Society of Psychiatry published the third edition of the *Chinese Classification and Diagnostic Criteria of Mental Disorders* (*CCMD-3*), in which distinction has been made between "sexual love" (*xing'ai*) and sexual orientation so that "only those who cannot adapt themselves to their homosexual orientation are still defined as suffering from" sexual orientation disorder (Kang 2012: 244). That is to say, although the entry of homosexuality is still retained in the *CCMD-3* as sexual orientation disorder, it has been modified to denote only those who are "anxious about, depressed, or agonized by [his (or her) sexual orientation]" and who want to "find treatment in order to change" (ibid.). It is said that in this way, the *CCMD-3* can meet the international standard (specifically the *ICD-10*, the tenth revision of the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems* completed by the World Health Organization in 1992) while at the same time retain Chinese characteristics, the "twin guidelines" for the compilation of *CCMD-3*[40].

Shortly after that in 2002, Yin Dakui[41], the former Vice Minister of Health called

---

[40] But it is also this retaining of Chinese characteristics that have contributed to the existence of quite a few clinics that claim to be able to "cure" homosexuality. These therapeutic clinics that boasted of "conversion therapy" in different cities of mainland China have been complained and reported to the municipal bureaus of health and municipal bureau of industry and commerce administration recently by two LGBT-identified individuals in Guangzhou.

[41] Yin was the first senior Chinese government official to visit Henan Province in 2001, where the AIDS epidemic broke out in large scale due to illegal blood plasma donation during the 1990s. His subsequent admission in a news conference of a "serious epidemic" resulted in his forced early retirement in the spring of 2002 (Kaufman 2010).

for high attention to the role (male) homosexuals play in the transmission of STDs

and HIV and the urgency of carrying out propaganda and education work among

(male) homosexual population[42]. Starting from the Fall of 2003, Fudan

University—one of the top universities in mainland China—offered the very first

course in the nation on the topic of homosexuality and health intervention[43] (Gao

2006). The year 2004 witnessed the Chinese government's shift in focus of HIV

intervention to male homosexuals (*nanxing tongxinglian renqun*), as HIV prevalence

among male homosexuals were first released in public by the Ministry of Health, and

homosexual men were listed as the most at-risk population—second only to injecting

drug users—in China's future HIV intervention prevention. According to the official

data, homosexual men have accounted for 2-4% of the sexually active male

population in China. That entails an estimated total of homosexual men at between 5

to 10 million. HIV infection rate among homosexual men was then estimated to be

around 1.35%[44]. The term "male homosexuals" was rephrased as "men who have sex

with men" in the 2005 assessment report jointly issued by the Ministry of Health and

---

[42] There is great tendency in China that homosexual men are the default population whenever the word "homosexual" is mentioned. The official negligence of the lesbian component seems to have altered as evidenced in the lifting of the 14-year ban on homosexuals' blood donation by allowing lesbians to donate blood starting from July 1, 2012.
http://www.latitudenews.com/story/china-says-lesbians-may-donate-blood-but-not-gay-men/, retrieved on Dec. 1, 2013.
[43] "Sexual revolution is boosted by university course." By Bill Savadove, *South China Morning Post*, Dec. 11, 2013.
http://www.scmp.com/article/434961/sexual-revolution-boosted-university-course. Access on Dec. 10 2013.
[44] http://aids.immunodefence.com/2006/10/china-higher-hiv-infection-rat.html. Access on Dec. 1, 2013.
http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2004-12/01/content_2280169.htm. Access on Dec. 1, 2013.

international organizations (Xing & Zhang 2008). As a matter of fact, MSM has been listed as one of the key target populations in the Fifth Round of Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) that started in 2005. But the Chinese authorities' first national anti-AIDS campaign that focuses on homosexual men did not start until 2008, when the number of homosexual men diagnosed as HIV positive climbed dramatically since 2005[45][46]. Again, this dramatic increase in infection rate among MSM seems to have more to do with the scaling up of HIV testing services—specifically the much debated national program of "active testing" system that started in 2004—among this sub-population than to the actual increase.

According to Xing & Zhang (2008), China's HIV/AIDS epidemic has roughly gone through four phases (see also Figure 2). The first phase (1985-1988) is characterized by sporadic cases of HIV infection and the Chinese government's attribution of HIV/AIDS to "the decadent lifestyles of Western capitalism" such as sex work, homosexuality, and drug use (Hyde 2007; Xing & Zhang 2008). The second phase (1989-1994) started when 146 injecting drug users (IDUs) in Southwest Yunnan Province were diagnosed as HIV positive (*People's Daily Online* 2009), followed by the Chinese government's initial preventive measures among sex workers, sexual consumers, and drug users. The third phase (1995-2000) is marked by sharp increase

---

[45] "China sees sharp rise in HIV-positive gay men", Nov. 28, 2008. Retrieved on September 7, 2013, http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/11/28/us-china-hiv-idUSTRE4AR5OP20081128

[46] The term "gay men" is retained here to align with the original news report. But it should be noted that MSM is not equivalent with "gay men". While the former emphasizes sexual behaviors between men and is often used in the realm of public health, the latter is used to signify sexual identity. And since 2005, MSM was used instead of gay men (or male homosexuals) in China's public health campaigns against HIV/AIDS.

in reported cases of HIV/AIDS, covering all 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities. The mode of transmission further diversified to include infection through blood donation and heterosexual sex (*People's Daily* Online)[47]. As has been mentioned by Kaufman (2009, 2010), the 1990s was characterized by on one hand the government's denial and inactivity towards the AIDS epidemic, and on the other hand public fear and ignorance of the disease. In 1998 and 2001, the government issued respectively *Medium-Long Term Plan on Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS (1998-2010)* and *Action Plan on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Containment (2001-2005)*, signifying its greater commitment to the global fight against HIV/AIDS. Although paradoxically condom use was frowned upon by the authorities as indicated in the ban of the country's first television advertisement in 1999 promoting condom use to prevent the spread of HIV virus, as the advertisement was "too sexually explicit" and thus violated advertising regulations on pornography of the country[48] (Kaufman 2010: 67). The fourth phase (2001 to present) witnesses a series of national policies that

---

[47] According to *Southern Weekly* (*Nanfang Zhoumo*), Wu Zunyou, director of the National Center for AIDS/STD Control and Prevention of China CDC, stated in an online interview that sexual transmission has accounted for 90% of all new infection cases reported up to June 2013. Contrast to this official emphasis on sexual transmission and individual high-risk behaviors, Gao Yaojie, a Chinese gynecologist and AIDS activist who is now living alone in New York due to her split with the Chinese authority in 2009, stresses that blood transfusion remain significant in HIV transmission in China and that the government should take on more responsibility rather than blaming victims for their behaviors. http://www.infzm.com/content/95923, access Nov. 14, 2013.

[48] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/546420.stm; http://www.avert.org/hiv-aids-china.htm. Access on Dec. 7, 2013. Condom was later no longer regarded as "sex products", and its Chinese translation has changed from meaning "sheath to avoid pregnancy" to "safety sheath". The ban on condom advertisements was not lifted until 2003, and China's major television campaign to promote condom use was finally launched in 2007. For a more detailed discussion of suppression and promotion of condom use in China, see also Xiaofei Guo (2012).

indicate the Chinese authorities' commitment to its campaign against HIV/AIDS, such

as the China Comprehensive AIDS Response (China CARES, launched in 2003) and

the "Four Free and One Care" policy (launched in 2004) that provides, among other

things, free voluntary HIV counseling and testing (VCT). It also saw the emergence of

men who have sex with men as increasingly prominent target sub-population in

China's HIV/AIDS prevention programs. The National Center for AIDS/STD Control

and Prevention, China CDC estimated in 2011 that 32.5% of the people living with

HIV/AIDS were MSM.
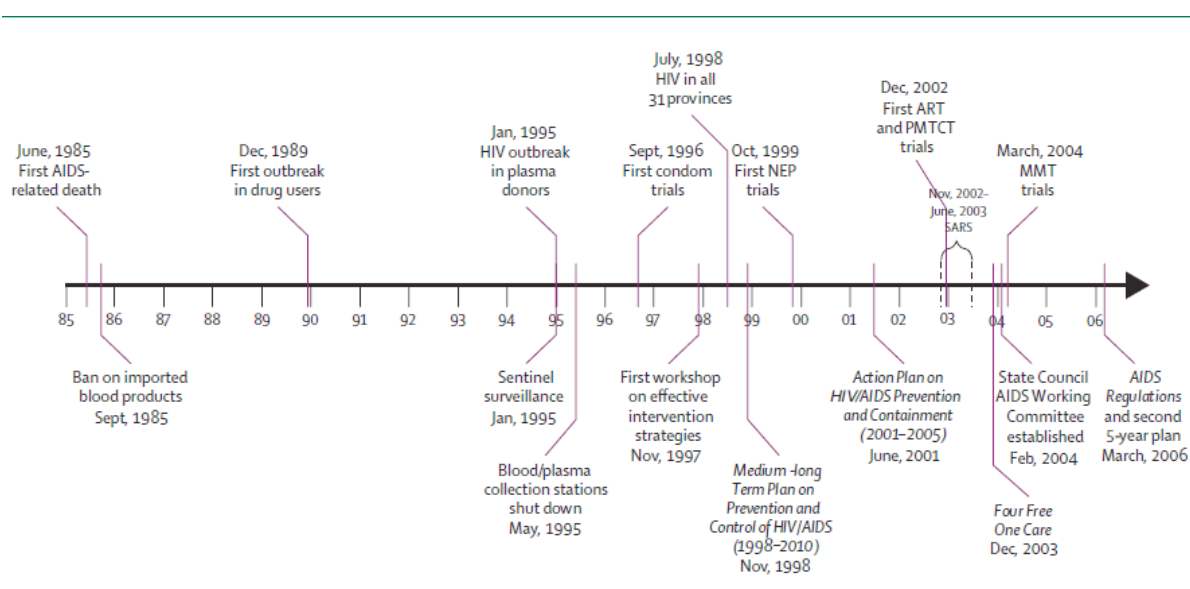
Figure 2 Important events in China's HIV/AIDS policy development, 1985-2006
(source: Wu, Sullivan, Wang *et al*. 2007)
ART=antiretroviral therapy, MMT=methadone maintenance treatment, NEP=needle
exchange program, PMTCT=prevention of mother-to-child transmission.

Ever since its first case of HIV infection was detected in the late 1980s among

injecting drug users (IDUs), Yunnan Province has been identified as one of the places

in China most severely ravaged by the epidemic. In the early 1990s, 80 percent of

China's HIV/AIDS cases were detected in Yunnan Province (Hyde 2007: 41). Ever

since it began taking records of HIV/AIDS cases in the 1980s, Yunnan Province has

reported more than 100,000 cases of HIV/AIDS, an accumulated number that

exceeded any other in China. Within the single year of 2011, 10,447 new cases of

HIV/AIDS—compared with the country's total new reported cases of 48,000 in

2011[49]—and 2,411 HIV/AIDS-related deaths were reported by Oct. 31. Although

injecting drug use remains a significant contributor to the mounting infected cases,

sexual transmission was reported to have surpassed any other mode of transmission

within the province to account for over 51% of HIV/AIDS infections in 2011[50]. And

similar with the epidemic trend of the whole country, male same-sex sexual

transmission has been on the rise.

One puzzle expressed by a local doctor I interviewed was the high percentage of

HIV infection rate among homosexual men in southwestern part of the

country—according to three rounds of surveys done between 2008 and 2009 among

homosexual men in 61 cities in China, HIV infection rates among participants in four

southwestern cities have exceeded 10%, as compared to the average of 5% in

2009[51]—as compared to that in metropolitans such as Beijing, Shanghai, and

Guangzhou. This disproportionate burden undertaken by "less developed" areas might

have pointed to one largely ignored phenomenon of the epidemic in China, the great

[49] "China Releases Updated Statistics on HIV/AIDS".
http://kff.org/news-summary/china-releases-updated-statistics-on-hivaids/. Access on
Dec. 2, 2013.
[50] "HIV/AIDS cases in Yunnan exceeds 100,000".
http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/746809.shtml, retrieved on Dec. 2, 2013.
[51] "Zhongguo Aizibing Chenji Sannian Jin Baofa, Huoxiang Putong Renqun
Manyan" (AIDS erupted in China after three years of silence, general public might be
affected). http://news.bandao.cn/newsprint.asp?id=882257, access Dec. 2, 2013. See
also "HIV and Syphilis Prevalence Among Men Who Have Sex With Men: A
Cross-Sectional Survey of 61 Cities in China." Wu, Zunyou, Xu Jie, Liu Enwu et al.
2013.

overlapping and fluidity between the separately categorized sub-populations, such as injecting drug users, clients of sex workers, and men who have sex with men, for which the "bisexual bridge" theory might not be able to account (Padilla 2007). Detailed discussion in this respect will be out of the scope of this dissertation. We will now turn to ways in which the China's HIV/AIDS epidemic interacts with global initiatives.

International and National HIV/AIDS Intervention Programs

The first years of the twenty-first century witnessed dramatic increase in development assistance for health, the surge of which was largely sparked by the AIDS epidemic (Messac & Prabhu 2013). According to Ravishankar and colleagues (2009), $21.8 billion was disbursed for global health programs in 2007 as compared to $5.6 billion in 1990 and $9.8 billion in 1999 respectively (Ravishankar, Gubbins, Leach-Kemon *et al*. 2009; Messac & Prabhu 2013). China is one of those developing countries that have benefited from these global health initiatives.

In 1988, the World Health Organization's (WHO) provision of 500,000 USD to support HIV testing reagents and equipment in eight cities in China marked the beginning of international collaboration of HIV/AIDS prevention programs (Sun, Liu, Li *et al*. 2010: ii15). While the initial stage (1988-1994) of international cooperation featured mainly advocacy, education, and training offered by international organizations, the second stage (1995-2003) witnessed the Chinese government's more active experimentation with international practices and the introduction of

interventions among high-risk groups and hard-to-reach populations. Starting from

around 2003 and 2004, the Chinese government began greater financial involvement

(as demonstrated in Figure 1) and policy integration in HIV/AIDS initiatives—many

attribute this major policy change to the outbreak of SARS (Kaufman, Kleinman,

Saich 2006; Schwartz 2009; Kaufman 2009, 2010). Examples include: (1) the

launching of China CARES in 2004 to improve HIV/AIDS treatment and care, (2) the

"Four Frees and One Care" policy[52] that started in December 2003, (3) the then Vice

Premier Wu Yi's open advocacy of behavioral intervention among high risk

populations at a national working meeting on HIV/AIDS in 2004, and (4) the much

debated national program of "active testing"[53] that started in 2004 (Wu *et al*. 2006).

Specifically, Wu's open advocacy signified an unprecedented step forward in China's

campaign against the epidemic[54] (Sun, Liu, Li *et al*. 2010). With the gradual

withdrawal of international funds, the Chinese government is said to be now funding

80% of the country's HIV/AIDS programs, with the recent introduction of a new

national initiative that promotes government contracting of social services to NGOs

(*zhengfu goumai fuwu*)[55].

---

[52] The "Four Frees" refers to free ARV drugs for eligible infected individuals, free prevention of mother-to-child transmission, free voluntary counseling and testing, free schooling for children orphaned by AIDS. The "One Care" refers to care to people living with HIV/AIDS.

[53] What has been called *da shaicha* in Chinese, meaning literally "big screening". It refers to routine HIV testing in populations at high risk of infection, including injection drug users, sex workers, men who have sex with men, and plasma donors.

[54] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HIV/AIDS_in_China. Access Dec. 2, 2013.

[55] News about the government's purchase of social services has been around in Kunming since 2012. But no one seems to be clear how exactly this is going to be implemented. One major obstacle for social organizations like MSM workgroups in Yunnan Province to bid on social services contracts is their ability to meet the contracting requirements, such as being registered, having qualified staff, and being

As we can see in Figure 3, the number of reported cases of HIV/AIDS changes

along with those in financial resources, both domestic and international. It might be

premature and pessimistic to say that testing only takes effect when funding is

abundant. But I have heard it said for more than once that all workgroups in Kunming

(and Yunnan more generally) were "thrown into being with money" (*yong qian za*

chulai de). I was even told that it is not possible to talk about *tongzhi* or transgender

organizations without HIV/AIDS. While this statement might have exaggerated a bit

the indispensability of HIV/AIDS for the existence of *tongzhi* organizations, it is

however true to at least say that it is HIV/AIDS intervention programs that have

brought to public attention this largely hidden population. Talks and training about

China's LGBT "movement" always dated its beginning as early as the mid-1990s,

when sporadic gatherings in Beijing happened among those Chinese gays and lesbians

whose partners were foreigners, and when the Fourth World Conference on Women

was held in Beijing in 1995, during which a special panel for lesbians (in a place

remote from the conference center) triggered general agreement for the need of a

conference on homosexuals in China. Yet the time period that witnessed emergence of

great number of *tongzhi* organizations is said to be around 2003 and 2004, when

international funding opportunities were most abundant (as could be seen in Figure 4)

and when realizing its limits in social service provision, the country started integrating

international projects into its national programs of HIV/AIDS, including those among

the MSM sub-population (Kaufman 2009).

---

able to meet reporting requirements. http://ngochina.blogspot.com/. Access Dec. 12,
2013.
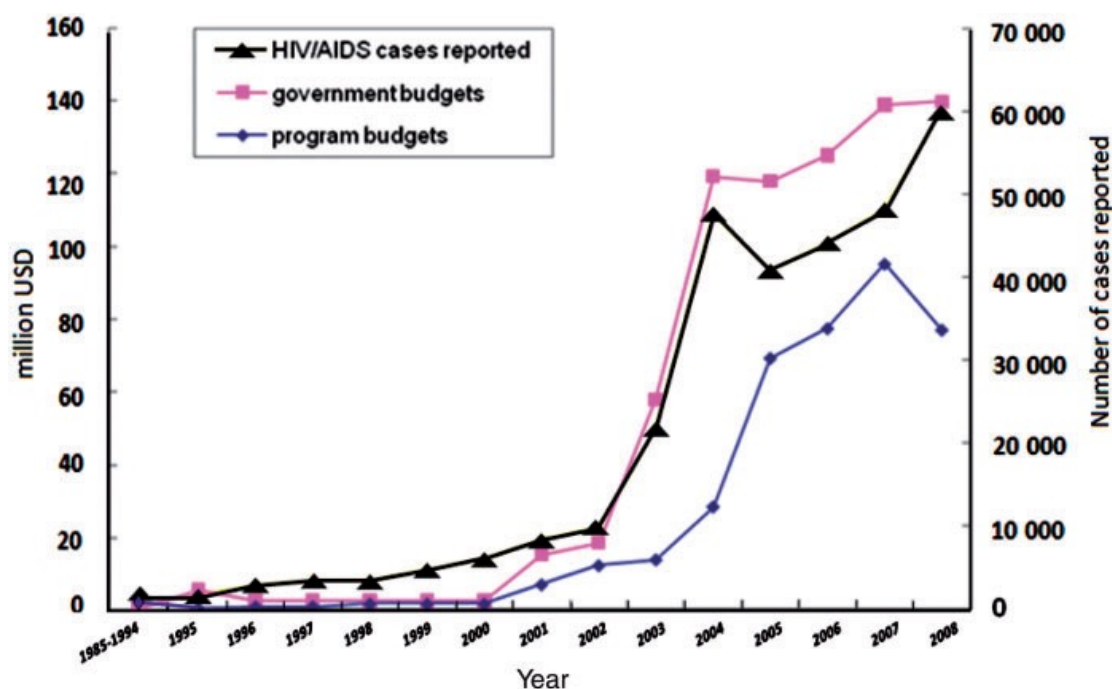
Figure 3 Annual financial support allocated to AIDS programs in China from Chinese government and from international programs between 1995 and 2008 (source: Sun, Liu, Li *et al*. 2010: ii15).

This entails at least five significant aspects. Firstly, the majority of community workgroups only came into being along with the entry of international cooperative HIV/AIDS programs. Secondly, the survival of community workgroups relies heavily upon abundance of funding, facilitating a business-like operation of HIV testing services. Thirdly, the general attitude towards the indispensability of HIV/AIDS funding in operating workgroups has facilitated a testing-oriented and sexual behavior-centered conceptualization of *the* community, the members of which are a muddled group of men gathering in dimly lit cruising areas (*yuchang*) seeking sex with men. Fourthly, the sexual behavior-centered understanding of *the* community seems to explain the ease with which MSM has been equivalent to gay men, or *nan tongzhi*, both within and outside *the* community, if there is one. Last but not least, this

easy slippage between MSM and *tongzhi* has ironically put male-to-female

transgendered individuals somewhere in between—when they actually belong

nowhere. That is to say, while their biological sex and their sexual behaviors might

categorize them into MSM, the slippage between MSM and *tongzhi* makes at least

some of them at odds with both. One of my transgender informants has repeatedly

explained to me how much she disliked hanging out with "those homosexuals" (*naxie*

tongxinglian).
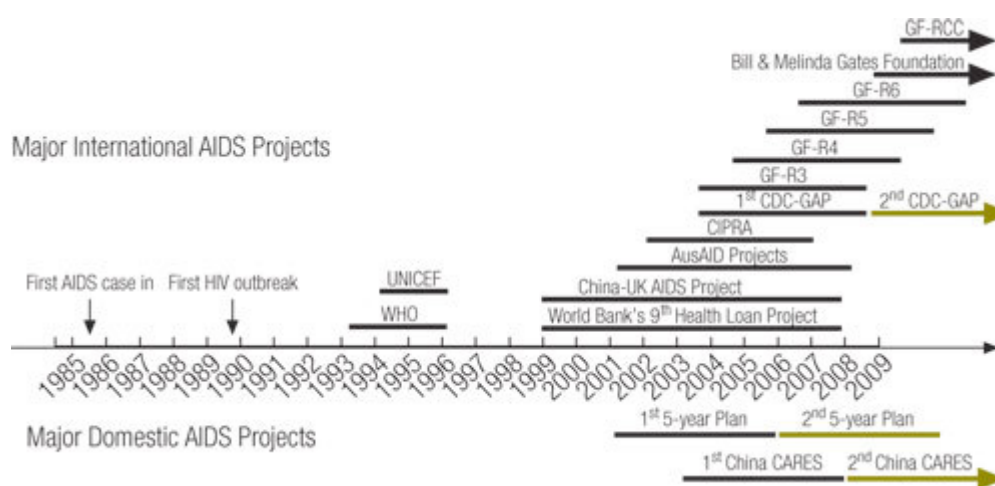
Figure 4 Major international and domestic HIV/AIDS projects in China, 1993-2009
(source: Wu, Wang, Mao *et al.* 2011)
(AusAID, Australian Agency for International Development; CDC-GAP, United
States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Global AIDS Program; China
CARES, China Comprehensive AIDS Response; CIPRA, Comprehensive Integrated
Programs for Research on AIDS, awarded by the United States National Institutes of
Health; GF, The Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Rounds 3 to 6);
RCC, Rolling Continuation Channel (with The Global Fund); UK, United Kingdom
of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; UNICEF, United Nations Children's Fund;
WHO, World Health Organization.)

The influx of international funds was specifically palpable in Yunnan Province,

where the epidemic of the country made its first local appearance and where the total

number of reported HIV/AIDS cases has continued to take the lead. Ever since my

arrival at Kunming, international collaborative projects that most often appear in my

daily conversation and meetings include China-UK AIDS Project, China-Gates

Foundation AIDS Project, and the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and

Malaria. Another significant international participant in Yunnan's campaign against

HIV/AIDS is the USAID and its cooperating agencies—including Family Health

International, the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, and Population Services

International, all of which have been providing both financial and technical support to

major local MSM workgroups; and all of which had basically stopped their operations

in Kunming by the time I started writing this dissertation in the Fall of 2013.

The earliest workgroup that focuses on health intervention programs among

homosexual men in Kunming is "Colorful Sky", which was founded in 2002 under

the supervision of the provincial Health Education Institute, with support from the

China-UK AIDS Project. With the help of Zhang Beichuan, professor from Qingdao

University, who started *Friends Exchange*—a journal that is part of the "Health

Prevention Project for Homosexuals" in China (Cao 2009)—in 1998 with support

from the Ford Foundation, staff members of "Colorful Sky" were recruited by the

provincial Health Education Institute to start outreach programs. As almost the earliest

and the only one *tongzhi* organization in Yunnan (and probably one of a few in China)

at that time, "Colorful Sky" is said to have attracted great attention and served as

cornerstone of *tongzhi* related work at that time—finding the hidden population. At its

peak, "Colorful Sky" has drawn as many as about 200 participants from all over the

city of Kunming[56]. Similarly, with the financial support from cooperative projects

---

[56] "Gay Community Joins in Battle against AIDS." Lin Gu.
http://www.hellojihui.wordpress.com/2006/08/13/gay-community-joins-in-battle-against-aids-by-lin-gu/. Access Dec. 3, 2013.

between health departments and international HIV/AIDS organizations such as the

China-US Cooperation on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control and Family Health

International, major community workgroups in Kunming sprung up, including

"Spring Rain", affiliated to the municipal Health Education Institute, and "Rainbow

Sky", affiliated to the provincial CDC. It is said that with the support of the China-UK

HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care Project, more than 20 grassroots community groups

like these have emerged in Yunnan Province. But how many of them have actually

survived when funding resources have gradually diminished?

In its most recent (at the time of my writing) regular conference that was held in

November 2013, the Yunnan MSM Network has listed altogether fourteen member

workgroups (six workgroups from Kunming, three of which have no government

affiliation) and 12 non-member workgroups. From 2012 to 2013, when international

funding institutions have gradually withdrawn their financial support from Yunnan

Province and MSM-related intervention projects, including the most resourceful

Global Fund[57], and the cooperating agencies sponsored by USAID, the heavy reliance

of community workgroups upon project funding has become painfully

prominent—although limited financial support has been a recurring complaint by

community workgroups in every meeting I attended organized by the Yunnan MSM

Network. Among the three major workgroups in Kunming that have affiliation with

the government (either health education institutes or CDCs), only one has managed to

---

[57] The Global Fund was established in 2002. It required "the establishment of a group
made up of civil society representatives to review, approve, and submit all
applications." China has succeeded in getting four rounds (starting from Round 3) of
funding for HIV/AIDS, the total amount of financial support is close to $180 million
(Kaufman 2009: 167).

maintain its usual operation under the auspices of the provincial CDC. For the other

two, one was divided into a business-registered gay bar—which was later sold due to

slack business—and an office under the municipal Health Education Institute that

works on HIV/AIDS intervention and education among MSM; the other ("Colorful

Sky") basically changed its staff members due to irreconcilable conflicts between the

supervising unit and workgroup leaders.

The lack of independence of workgroups is represented not only in financial

support, but also in the desirability of workgroups to be affiliated with government

institutes. As a matter of fact, affiliation with government agencies is not only

desirable but required so as to channel money from international donors, since the

majority (if not all) of these MSM workgroups in Kunming are unregistered NGOs

(Schwartz & Shieh 2009). For community workgroups to make use of international

funding, government support is essential. That is, international funds have to be

funneled through bureaucratic organizations so as to reach grassroots organizations,

constituting a working model in which simultaneous involvement of the three parties

is indispensable—government, international funds, and community workgroups. We

could see how this model of operation has actually left little space, if any, for

independent development of community workgroups, let alone political space. For

one thing, most workgroups came into being out of the need of international

HIV/AIDS collaborative projects, in which participating health institutes are expected

to "find out" *the* community through recruiting community members and setting up

workgroups. That means most of these workgroups work for intervention projects

under the supervision of health institutes. Their existence and continued survival is

contingent upon continuity of intervention projects, both international and national.

Second, categorized as NGOs according to the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA),

these workgroups need to satisfy some daunting requirements to be registered—and

independent. Not only is a supervising unit in the same field and within the same

locality required for registration with the MOCA—the "dual supervision"

(*shuangchong guanli*) of the MOCA and a professional supervising organization,

registration capital of more than 30,000 RMB and regular business location are also

prerequisites hard to meet by many workgroups[58][59].

Third, the institutionally and structurally imposed impossibility of independence

and the centrality of fickle intervention projects also entail difficulty, if not

impossibility, in securing daily operating expense, which is essential for the survival

of these workgroups. In fact, one of the major workgroups in Kunming fell apart

within months after an international agency stopped funding their operation. It ended

up being subsumed as an office under the municipal Health Education Institute that

works on HIV/AIDS intervention and education among MSM. Four, although

[58] According to Kaufman (2009), the original regulations for NGOs were put in place
in the 1950s to eliminate counterrevolutionary organizations. In 1990 the MOCA set
up a nationwide system to deal with NGOs through tightening the registration
process, one measure of which is the "dual management" system that required a
sponsoring organization and yearly re-registration. Registration capital then was a
minimum of 100,000 RMB (Kaufman 2009: 161).

[59] It is said that new revision will be made by the end of 2013 to the current
administrative regulations for NGOs. One significant breakthrough is direct
registration—meaning no supervising agency is needed—for four categories of
NGOs: industrial associations, charities, community services, and organizations
dedicated to promoting science and technology. Another major move is the decrease
in registration capital to 10,000 RMB.
http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-04/17/content_16413055.htm. Access 11
December, 2013.

self-reliance of workgroups has been stressed time and again in meetings and

workshops organized by the Yunnan MSM Network, the employer-employee/

supervisor-supervised mode of relationship between government health agencies

(and/or international donors) and community workgroups seems to doom open and

equal conversation. The split-up between "Colorful Sky" and the provincial Health

Education Institute is a case in point (see next section).

Thus, although these workgroups have been regarded by government agencies as

representing *the* community—as staff members have been recruited from *the*

community, and although staff members do believe that they are so, the absence of a

well developed community—or imaginary of community (see Chapter 2)—and their

preoccupation with HIV/AIDS projects and the bio-medical discourse advocated by

international donor programs and domestic supervisors have facilitated a

testing-oriented and sexual behavior-centered conceptualization of *the* community,

where the term MSM can be easily and unconsciously uttered to refer to *nan tongzhi*

(gay men), both within and outside *the* community[60].

"Only health departments (within the government) are concerned with this

population, as it (HIV transmission among this population) has garnered enough

public health significance," a local health practitioner told me so. One ambitious

objective of the provincial CDC of Yunnan—I heard it said—is to have *tongzhi*

organization at every city of county-level or above. One might wonder how this could

---

[60] One example of this slippage is found in research papers, where MSM is used in
the English version while *nan tong* (male *tongzhi*) or *nan tongxinglian* (homosexual
men), rather than *nannan xingxingwei zhe* (standard translation of MSM in Chinese)
is used in the Chinese version of the same paper.

be an objective or mission at all of a public health bureaucratic organization. What community are these community workgroups providing service for? For whose good?

Whose Community? For Whose Good?

In the review and documentation of their MSM projects in China, the International HIV/AIDS Alliance China—one of the cooperating agencies supported by USAID—has titled their document "Community Response to HIV among Men who have Sex with Men in China". But the questions are: Where is the community? Who are members of the community?

My question of *the* community (*shequ*) arose in the very first meeting that I attended in the provincial CDC, when participating community group representatives complained to experts from Beijing about the awkward position they found themselves between the community and the government (CDCs and health education institutes at different administrative levels): while members of the community view them as working only for the government, CDCs regard them as representing the community. Tong Ge, gay writer and independent scholar, expressed his dissatisfaction with the lack of progress made by community organizations in Yunnan. He directed his critique specifically at the monetary compensation for HIV testing in Yunnan, asking for whose health and benefit people should be taking tests, and for whose good community groups should be working. He called upon community group representatives to think about the needs of the community by throwing out the question: where is the community?

Yet if Tong's question hoped to alert representatives from local workgroups to the needs of the *tongzhi* community so that a stronger community could be built, I take this question literally and wonder whether there is a *tongzhi* community out there. This chapter aims to challenge the assumed existence of *tongzhi* community—and transgender community—from the perspective of global HIV/AIDS intervention programs. While critical medical anthropology pays attention to the political economy of health and the biosocial approach to examine how structural violence and inequalities perpetuate vulnerability to diseases (Singer 1989; Padilla 2007; Farmer, Kleinman, Kim *et al*. 2013), what I hope to grapple with here is the failure of international AIDS initiatives to realize the ill-fated possibility of a ready-made community that responds to the AIDS epidemic. It might be true to say that it is not *the* community that is responding to the outbreak of HIV/AIDS; but it is HIV/AIDS that has built *the* community, however loosely it has been. The split-up between "Colorful Sky" and the provincial Health Education Institute might be able to demonstrate why this is the case.

One major argument between the "Colorful Sky" and the provincial Health Education Institute involves to whom "Colorful Sky" should belong. In an openly circulated notice to recruit staff members for "Colorful Sky", the provincial Health Education Institute removed the then group leader from her position due to her ineffective management of the group and consequently the group's inability to fulfill quota requirements of HIV testing demanded by the China-Gates Foundation HIV Project. The announcement of the group leader's deposition was followed by a draft

by the provincial Health Education Institute about the establishment of a board of

directors for "Colorful Sky".

In order to promote standardized development (*guifan hua fazhan*) of

"Colorful Sky" so as for it to eventually become independent

community-based organization, we name "Colorful Sky" temporarily as

"Colorful Sky Community Service Organization" according to current

regulations for civil society organizations.

In the list of principles regarding the composition of the board of directors, the very

first principle stated that the "Colorful Sky Community Service Organization is an

organization initiated by community members (*shequ renqun*)." The seven listed

members of the board of directors include: (1) the person in charge of "Colorful Sky",

(2) one core member of the organization, (3) compassionate member of the MSM

community, who should have no direct connection with the organization, (4) one from

the provincial Health Education Institute, (5) one from the Yunnan Association of

STD/AIDS Prevention and Control, (6) one from the provincial CDC, and (7) one

from project funding party that funds the organization with more than RMB 30,000

for a period of more than six months.

There seems to be several perplexing and self-contradictory statements here. The

biggest contradiction lies in the fact that leader of a community-based organization

that claims to be "initiated by community members" should have been hired and fired

by the provincial Health Education Institute, which is not supposed to be part of *the*

community. Second, the reason of her being thrown out of office was her inability to

meet the HIV testing quota stipulated in the China-Gates HIV/AIDS project, and the

group's inability to serve *the* community— "the group has almost stopped serving the

population (*renqun*), losing the impact and adhesive power that it used to boast of",

although what constitutes "serving the population" in addition to HIV testing was not

made clear. Third, among the seven members of the board of directors, four of them

are from HIV intervention-related agencies or programs, drawing almost an equation

between the community-based group and HIV/AIDS intervention programs. Fourth,

the emphasis on "standardized development" of the community-based organization

according to state regulations has signified the degree of state control over civil

society organizations via health departments. How should we interpret the ownership

of community workgroup? How to make sense of community workgroups

"employed" by health education institute?

In his analysis of state-NGO relations in China, Shawn Shieh (2009), director

and editor of *China Development Brief* (English), proposes a more dynamic and

multidimensional mode of interaction for understanding state-NGO relations in China:

regulation, negotiation, and societalization.

Regulation refers to formal state initiatives and mechanisms designed to

control and manage social organizations involved in the provision of social

services. Negotiation refers to consensual, and generally more informal,

interactions between state and social actors in the provision of

services…societalization refers to a mode whereby NGOs provide social

services through initiatives in which the state is not a partner. (Shieh 2009:

23)

According to Shieh, these three modes of interaction overlap and interact with each other. While societalization signifies "greater distance from the state" and can be viewed as offering greater potential for the emergence of "a more autonomous and assertive civil society in China", Shieh nevertheless points to the lack of equivalence between greater "ownership and moral autonomy" and "institutional autonomy", the latter being "more of a function of having the resources and influence to resist state interference" via "close ties with the state" (2009: 23, 32). It is this paradoxical coexistence of autonomy and necessity/desirability of close ties with the state that characterizes the ideal of "embedded autonomy" pursued by many NGOs in China (Shieh 2009; Wexler, Ying, Young 2006).

In the realm of AIDS, the limited capacity of the government to tackle AIDS through the country's public health system is said to have opened up space for NGO participation in China's AIDS response, contributing to a new type of partnership between the government and NGOs for social service provision (Kaufman 2009; Saich 2000). MSM community groups provide one significant example. Citing examples like the outspoken AIDS activist Wan Yanhai and his group AIZHI Action and the election controversies related to China's Global Fund governance mechanisms in 2007, where Chinese AIDS NGOs voiced dissatisfaction with government manipulation and thus pushed forward a new election (Kaufman 2009), Kaufman argued for the expanding political space of AIDS NGOs in China as a result of their "learning norms of democratic interaction" (2009: 162), in spite of the on-going

debate as to whether Chinese NGOs should be considered truly non-governmental and thus representative of an independent civil society (Shieh & Schwartz 2009). Disappointingly, the Round 6 HIV/AIDS Global Fund proposal—entitled "Mobilizing Civil Society to Scale Up HIV/AIDS Control Efforts in China", which claimed to be a project "wholly owned by NGOs"—ended up having China CDC (a government entity) as Principal Recipient (PR) and local branches of the China AIDS Association and two GONGOs (government-organized NGOs) as Sub-Recipients (where the money go to), with grass-roots or community-based NGOs brushed aside as sub-sub-recipients (*Global Fund Observer* 2007).

The promise of a better developed civil society via mobilizing full participation of AIDS NGOs is compromised, signifying among other things the ambivalent attitude of the state between soliciting social services (and social services only) from community groups while maintaining its grip on the outgrowth of them. Similarly, in the case of "Colorful Sky", provision of HIV counseling and testing and satisfaction of project quota are prioritized and deemed almost as the only needs of *the* community, when the needs and the solutions are often more of a top-down imposition than community response; and when *the* community is imagined according to the imposed bio-medical and social-behavioral paradigms (Altman 2001; Easterly 2006; Weigel, Basilico, Farmer 2013).

The colonization of regimes of gender and sexuality—and understanding of the body—through "the diffusion of a particular language around sexuality and sexual identities" entrenched in programs around HIV/AIDS has constituted one major

building bloc of *the* community in Kunming and Yunnan Province (Altman 2001: 74).

As a matter of fact, the public health usage of MSM has so dominated the local

conceptualization of same-sex relations that the term LGBT was little known to many

people working in the Yunnan MSM network as late as 2010—a volunteer friend of

mine said when he first noticed the term LGBT in the mail listserv early 2010, no one

around him, including the workgroup leader, was able to tell him what that referred to.

From peer outreach programs to HIV counseling and testing services and positive care,

to large-scale surveys tracking sexual behaviors, sexual partners and sexual decision

making conducted by various national and international agencies and researchers,

knowledge has been accumulated and consolidated to facilitate a taken-for-granted

imagination of *the* community, occupied by scientifically pre-determined group of

people, for whose identity sexuality—or more crudely, sexual behaviors—has become

central (Foucault 1978; Halperin 1997). In a conversation with a local researcher who

participated in a large-scale Routine Behavioral Tracking (RBT) survey among MSM

in Yunnan and Guangxi Provinces, I was told that although qualitative survey would

be designed for follow-up research, he was already able to anticipate the final "result".

I wondered to myself how the "result" could deviate from expectation when the whole

set of toolkit—risk appraisal, categorization, management, surveillance, and

intervention—has been streamlined and reified through each repetition (Hanna &

Kleinman 2013).

It is the centrality of same-sex sexual behaviors—not even sexuality in its more

encompassing and multidimensional sense—that has defined *the* community. It is thus

a community pre-defined by public health framework, which then set out to recruit its

members, who in turn are regarded as constitutive of *the* community. This seems to

echo what David Halperin interprets Foucault's notion of modern techniques of power:

"Modern techniques of power make use of sexuality in order to attach to us a personal

identity, defined in part by our sexual identity; by attaching that identity to us, they

attach us to themselves" (1997: 95). That might explain why setting up *tongzhi* group

in every city above county-level could be a mission of the provincial CDC, rather than

that of a community-based organization. That might also explain why the term MSM

has been so easily interchanged with *nan tongzhi* (male *tongzhi*, or gay men) to the

extent that men who have sex with men almost come to explain what *tongzhi* is[61]. It is

perhaps this very ease with which MSM is interchangeable with *tongzhi* that makes it

harder for transgendered individuals to fit in, regardless of the fact that they have

always already been included in *the* community by health practitioners and

researchers.

Towards the end of my fieldwork in Kunming, I was told that the provincial

CDC, in collaboration with WHO, was about to carry out an intervention project that

focuses specifically on transgendered individuals. Whether this specific emphasis on

"transgender" will result in a new sexual and gender category in Kunming and

Yunnan Province remains unknown. But there is still much more to say about *the*

---

[61] I encountered this equivalence most explicitly when I was hosting a discussion
about gay pride month in Yunnan Parallel, the LGBT group where I have worked for
as volunteer during my fieldwork. When I threw out the question what being *tongzhi*
meant for us, one of the participants told me somewhat impatiently that *tongzhi*
referred to men who have sex with men and urged me to go on with other discussion
topics.

community—*tongzhi* community and transgender community likewise—in addition

to the behaviorally defined MSM population. In the next chapter, we will be

examining the concept of community itself and the notion of identity that has been

central in the conceptualization of community. We will be able to see how the

assumption of transgender community and/or *tongzhi* community might be

problematic, in Kunming and Yunnan Province at least, not only because of the

overwhelming influence of HIV/AIDS intervention programs, but also due to

multiplications of ways in which LGBT identities have been represented, circulated,

and manipulated in the emerging LGBT identity politics in post-socialist China.

Chapter Two: Emerging LGBT Identity Politics

"Gay liberation is a movement of human sexual liberation. It aims to institute a sexual regime in which sexuality is not defined by a mutually exclusive gender preference. A political strategy that centers on legitimating a homosexual identity perpetuates a divided sexual self and society. It does not contest a sexual regime that reduces eros as a genital-centered, penetrative sexual norm."

(Steven Seidman 1993: 113)

It was one early evening at the beginning of June 2013. I was to give a talk on the historical development of gay and lesbian movement in the United States as part of the series of events hosted by Yunnan Parallel (hereafter referred to as Parallel) to celebrate the LGBT Pride Month. My presentation was preceded by a historical review of *tongzhi* movement in mainland China, given by another volunteer of Parallel. I was holding in my hands pages of materials I collected and rearranged in table format, with columns that included major event, year of events, brief summary, and political accomplishments attained. While listening to his talk, I was surprised by the way that he introduced *tongzhi* movements in mainland China as revolving around key players of the game rather than following chronological order of events that signified progressive achievements. Although there does exist chronological delineation of lesbian and gay-related events in mainland China[62], the key person-centered approach—specifically at the earlier stage of the movement—is

---

[62] For example, in a self published collection of oral histories of lesbian community development, *Tongyu* (one major lesbian organization in China) presented a chronological delineation of lesbian related events and movements in China since the early 1990s.

meaningful in its own right.

In this chapter I will briefly lay out the history of LGBT movement in mainland China that stretches from the early 1990s to present. I suggest that together with the creation of the public health-oriented MSM community discussed in Chapter One, the emerging LGBT identity politics advocated by up-and-coming *tongzhi* organizations facilitated a movement like momentum that seems to have further complicated the notion of community and identity at the discursive level. I will then juxtapose the multitude of discursive constructions of the Chinese *tongzhi* community with vignettes of lived experiences I observed from my fieldwork. My analysis focus on the overlapping, discrepancies and incoherence between the discursive community of lesbians and gay men advocated by activists and the messy everyday life lived and struggled by people who are supposed to be members of the discursive community.

While recognizing the generative effect of the discursive, I use this juxtaposition to complicate a direct causal correlation between the discursive and the experiential with a contingent plurality of discourses. The stress on plurality of discourses bears resemblance to Nancy Fraser's pragmatic theory of discourse (Fraser 1990). In her critique of French discourse theories represented specifically by Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva, Fraser advocated a pragmatic approach to the study of language that is meaningful to feminist politics. One significant advantage of this approach is demystification of essentialist views of gender identity through an emphasis on the historicity and social situatedness of discursive construction. This feminist constructionist view of social identities could then facilitate agentive struggles over

social discourse conducive to formation of social groups— "a discursively

self-constituted political collectivity" (Fraser 1990: 84, italics mine).

Although I do not necessarily agree with a constructionist view that puts agency

outside of the discursive, what I find useful in Fraser's pragmatic theory of discourse

is her emphasis on the complex and plural discourses and the equally contested

plurality of social practices. I hope to highlight the contingent and confounding

negotiations of *tongzhi* community, amidst which transgendered practices are to be

understood. I argue in this chapter that, in addition to the making of the public-health

orientated and behavior-centered community of MSM (men who have sex with men),

co-existence of multiple discourses on LGBT identities and community building

facilitates the largely confused and contested understanding and embodiment of

non-normative gender and sexual identities. The difficulty I had in locating a

transgender community is indicative of this confusion. Therefore, my focus on

transgendered practices—and my failure in locating the transgender

community—both resulted from this confusion and helps illuminate the instability of

gender and sexual categorization in postsocialist China that has informed the

confusion. As Stallybrass and White have noted, "what is *socially* peripheral is often

symbolically central" (1986: 5, italics in origin).

Initial Stage of Tongzhi Movements in Mainland China

I sometimes find it hard to describe lesbian and gay related events and activities

in mainland China as movements, although that is how LGBT activists there have

been doing. For one thing, when Barry Adam talked about the rise of a gay and

lesbian movement, he made as prerequisite "[a]n identifiable social group with

considerable political awareness" (Adam 1995: 1). According to Adam, only when

"homosexuality is transformed into a people", could the idea of a gay movement be

conceivable (1995: 2). And one significant marker of modern homosexuality is "the

development of social networks founded on the homosexual interests of their

members" (1995: 7). The emphasis on both sexuality-based social network and

political awareness seems to cloud the Chinese case. Although according to Chinese

gay activist and independent scholar Tong Ge (2008), informal gay institutions such

as cruising spots in parks, baths, and public toilets appeared in the 1970s,

homosexuality did not make its group appearance until the early 1990s when a

handful of health practitioners and scholars started to pay attention. As I have argued

in Chapter One, the ensuing scaling up of HIV/AIDS intervention projects and

collaboration with international public health practices had pushed forward the birth

of a pre-defined and behavior-based MSM community, where political awareness is

least useful, if not tabooed.[63]

For another, if "social movements" should be considered as "including all

---

[63] It should be noted that in Guo's (2014) and Tongyu's historical review of China's *tongzhi* movement, the 1990s witnessed the transition of the movement from family gathering to dawning awareness of group identity. One significant anecdote at that time was recorded as follows: In June 1996, more than sixty people attended a birthday party hosted in a local bar in Beijing. Among them 8 were self-identified lesbians. After singing together a birthday song, the hostess asked those who knew whose birthday it was to whisper to her their answer. The story about Stonewall was spread among participants. Finally, one gay man went to the hostess and whispered in her ear: "I know, I know now, today is the birthday for us all!" www.sex-study.org/news.php?isweb=2&sort=66&id=2094 retrieved on December 29, 2014.

attempts to influence patterns of culture, social action, and relationships in ways that depend on the participation of large numbers of people in concerted and self-organized (as distinct from state-directed or institutionally mandated) collective action" (Calhoun 1993: 388), then the *tongzhi* movements in China do not seem to qualify such an interpretation. In spite of the increasing number of LGBT grass-roots organizations that have surfaced in recent years and the diversity of intervention activities they had engaged in, there still seems to be lacking the kind of momentum made possible through participation of large numbers of people. But there is no one standard module that all political movements could fit in. In their studies of *tongzhi* movements in Hong Kong, Ho and Tsang (2000) and Kong (2011) point out that given the limited accessibility to political participation since the colonial past in Hong Kong, market freedom has largely substituted political democracy. Thus lack of political enthusiasm among tongzhi groups in Hong Kong and their attention to economic consumption and cultural representation should not be easily dismissed as "apolitical". Here is what I learned about *tongzhi* movements in China when I attended different workshops and talks in Kunming.

The story of China's *tongzhi* movements usually begins with the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, and NGO Forum held in Beijing in 1995, when many lesbian participants from across the world gathered in Beijing and initiated heated discussion, especially during the non-government organization discussion session, on issues such as identity politics and equal rights[64]. Specifically, the panel discussion

---

[64] *Oral History of Lesbian Community in Beijing, Part I: Community History*, written by Luo Ming, Da Na et al., published by *Tongyu*, or Common Language in English, a

triggered desires among Chinese gay and lesbian participants to start their own meetings and organized events.

In August 1998, the first gay and lesbian meeting in mainland China was held at the Temple of Enlightenment (*Dajuesi*) in Beijing. For fear of police harassment, strict code of anonymity was implemented to the degree that no one knew who else was attending. Another code of the meeting was to refuse participation of experts, including the two most renowned HIV/AIDS experts/activists Zhang Beichuan and Wan Yanhai—neither identify themselves as gay, who started their respective work on HIV intervention among homosexual men even before the 1995 conference (Rofel 1999b; Zhang and Chu 2005).

In November 1992, as an employee and researcher of HIV/AIDS in China's Health Education Institute, Wan Yanhai initiated the homosexual cultural salon "Man's World" in Beijing, which attracted not only homosexual men, but also scholars and journalists. Yet before long, the salon was forced to close by the Public Security Bureau in July 1993 because it "advocated publicity and legalization of homosexuality…and demanded the human rights of homosexuals be protected…"[6566]

Wan launched the Beijing Aizhi Project (*aizhi* comes from two Chinese characters,

community-based organization founded in 2005 for lesbians, bisexual women and transgendered people in China.

[65] "Situation Report on the Cancellation of Homosexual Cultural Salon 'Men's World' by the Ministry of Public Security," accessed September 14, 2014 http://china.findlaw.cn/fagui/p_1/185860.html

[66] According to Zhang and Chu (2005), the Chinese government denied prevalence of male same-sex sexuality in China in as early as 1987. Official documents at that time were said to have imposed a "strict ban on homosexuality". It could thus be less surprising to see the quick switch of state attitude towards Wan's project. The failure of Wan's project is also indicative of the intertwining relationship between health intervention and the Chinese government's political agenda.

meaning "love" and "knowledge") in 1993, which started compiling the *Love Knowledge Briefing* to promote awareness of AIDS prevention and safe sex practices among homosexual men. Wan established the first HIV/AIDS telephone hotline in China and the first website where comprehensive information on HIV/AIDS could be obtained by Chinese people[67]. He is now the director of *Aizhixing* Institute of Health Education (the Chinese character *xing* means "action"), an AIDS-awareness group that concerns not only homosexual men, but also migrant workers, female sex workers, and injecting drug users.

In 1994, Zhang Beichuan, professor of Qingdao Medical College, published one of the first academic works in China to comprehensively discuss homosexuality—*Same-Sex Love* (*Tongxing'ai*). With the support from Ford Foundation, Zhang started *Friends Exchange* (*pengyou tongxun*) in 1998 to promote health education on HIV/AIDS among homosexual men. Although Zhang's concern with HIV/AIDS and the homosexual community made him a target of the hospital where he used to work, his milder approach and his focus on the disease itself won him support from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Public Security. Zhang distinguished his approach to issues of homosexuality with his, among other things, continual use of *tongxing'ai* rather than *tongxinglian* as reference to homosexuals in Chinese in an attempt to de-stigmatize homosexuality with a touch of love. The replacement of *lian* with *ai* lies not so much in the distinct meaning these two

---

[67] "Detained AIDS activist Wan Yanhai Released, But HIV/AIDS Information Still Restricted," September 21, 2002. Accessed on September 14, 2014. http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2002/09/19/detained-aids-activist-wan-yanhai-released

characters have from each other—the two characters are usually combined (*lian'ai*) to mean love relationship—as in avoidance of the pathological stigma that the term *tongxinglian* had been burdened with. The use of *ai* is also indicative of Zhang's stance and approach to issues related to AIDS and homosexuality through discourse of love and science, which remains the main ingredient of equal rights advocacy deployed by many lesbian and gay organizations.

   Through their early involvement and ensuing influence in HIV/AIDS interventions among homosexual men, Wan and Zhang became significant contacts through whom both international and national funding sources built connection with, and as has been shown in Chapter One, initiated community-based HIV/AIDS intervention workgroups across the country. The following is excerpt taken from the official website of the Barry and Martin's Trust[68], an English registered charity active since 1996 between England and China in AIDS education, prevention and care.

   When Martin started the Trust's connexions in China on HIV/AIDS in
   1996, he called on the senior health officials in Beijing, and was told that
   they had absolutely no contact with MSMs. They were aware that MSM's
   were a high-risk group, but they did not know how to access them. However,
   with the help of UNAIDS, we heard in 1997 of the work of Professor Zhang
   Beichuan in Qingdao and visited him there, and we immediately started
   supporting his work among MSM's in China…

Their indispensable role in the earlier stage of HIV/AIDS interventions and advocacy

---

[68] Accessed on September 14, 2014 http://www.barryandmartin.org/BMT-MSM.html

of publicity rights among homosexual men could be felt from the way people referred

to their groups as bearing the family name of Wan or Zhang, meaning receiving

funding through either of their help.

How then should we understand Wan and Zhang's involvement in China's LGBT

movement, specifically considering the fact that they are not members of the

community[69]? One conundrum here is whether Wan and Zhang's activities should be

included as part of the *tongzhi* movements in China. They might not be included

necessarily. More precisely, the historical review of LGBT movement in China

offered in Parallel was the only one I had heard in mainland China   that had laid

much emphasis on these two individuals and their impact upon the possible contours

of *tongzhi* related activities.[70]   One reason why I elected to present this

individual-centered picture of the movement is that in addition to the efforts they had

made in support of the on-going development of *tongzhi* movement in China, they

were indispensable in bringing up publicly and in more positive light the community,

however diversely it had been defined and understood. Furthermore, my deliberate

inclusion of Wan and Zhang into the picture of *tongzhi* movement in China takes into

consideration the heavy imprint of personal elements when policy and law

implementation and compliance are concerned in mainland China.

In explaining the "fragmented authoritarianism" model of Chinese bureaucratic

practice, Kenneth Lieberthal (1992) pointed out that structural and procedural reforms

---

[69] Wan did once claim himself to be bisexual, although whether this was done out of
strategic consideration or not remains unknown.

[70] Lisa Rofel (1999b) did attribute the emergence of gay identities and practices in
China to some of the critical work initiated by Wan and Zhang.

since the late 1970s—such as enhanced availability of information and the gradual

decentralization specifically in the domain of economic decision making—had

increasingly facilitated the fragmented and disjointed authority below the very peak of

the Chinese political system. One resulting situation was the phenomenon of

"bureaucratic bargaining" in China, where the lack of specificity and consistency of

reform policies facilitated greater maneuvering space in the interactive processes

among the constituent elements of the Chinese polity. Within this maneuvering space,

personalities and personal ties play a tremendous role. This seems to be happening

specifically at the initial stage of HIV/AIDS intervention attempts in China, when few

people, including government officials knew what exactly should be done and what

results might have been yielded. According to one of my volunteer friends at Parallel,

at the initial stage of the epidemic, the Chinese officials hesitated even to make

available HIV testing to a broader range of population, as they had little idea about

what should be done next once people were tested positive. This reluctance and

uncertainties, and the ensuing lack of clarity in actions to be taken had made Wan and

Zhang's pioneering work more significant, although they were at the same time

pushed to a more precarious position.

I am concerned with Wan and Zhang's contribution to *tongzhi* movement in

China also because of their connection with the on-going struggles some *tongzhi*

grassroots organizations have been dealing with in their engagement in HIV/AIDS

interventions, although they are no longer as central a figure as they used to be. Their

retreat in importance signifies among other things the increasingly systematic and

regulated national policies of HIV/AIDS intervention. One expression of this process

of formalization is the gradually routinized and consolidated collaboration between

public health institutes/agencies and *tongzhi* groups. It represents—at least to some

degree—the government's reconciliation between its need to keep under control the

epidemic and its reluctance, if not refusal, to grant legitimacy to homosexuality as an

identity. In his case study of the legal environment for gay people in China, Chinese

legal scholar Guo Xiaofei (2008) points out the paradox between on the one hand the

government's repression of free expressions among homosexuals and on the other

hand its need to find out where homosexuals are. Thus, the established collaboration

between *tongzhi* organizations and government-supervised public health

institutes—and perhaps more significantly the inherent top-down approach that

initiated and defined the MSM community as I mentioned in Chapter One—is

indicative of one possible way in which the Chinese government has been grappling

with the paradox. A pre-defined community contained within the public health domain

sounds safe enough for the government to allow its continual existence.

Simultaneous with this state colonization of the MSM community through the

national AIDS campaigns is the widening divide between groups working in

collaboration with national public health projects and those that align themselves with

global circulation of LGBT human rights. And this divide between groups working in

collaboration with the national AIDS campaigns and those interested in social

advocacy constitutes one distinctive feature of China's LGBT movement. As we will

see later in this chapter, this divide does not simply happen at the level of organization

or institution. It contributes to the confusing discursive representations of what *tongzhi*—specifically gay men—could mean, which in turn facilitate and are facilitated by their on-going embodiments in everyday life.

Before going into the ethnographically informed analysis of embodiment, I will present other emerging trends in China's *tongzhi* movement in recent years to see how diverse discursive LGBT communities have been constructed and are still being constructed.

Emerging LGBT Identity Politics

With the influx of international funding and increasing awareness of the Chinese government of the severity of the epidemic, the early years of the twenty-first century witnessed dramatic growth in the number of *tongzhi* workgroups that worked on HIV/AIDS intervention projects[71], though as I have discussed in Chapter One, many of them were short-lived depending upon availability of funding. At the same time, more and more players became involved with more diversified objectives and strategies. Rather than remain exclusively associated with public health intervention projects, some *tongzhi* organizations found their voice in the emerging global discourse of lesbian and gay rights. This section is going to capture some of the on-going moments of the LGBT identity politics in China through examples collected from four major LGBT organizations active since the early 2000s. I hope to lay out

---

[71] Although many of these workgroups focused their work on HIV/AIDS interventions among men who have sex with men (MSM), the term *tongzhi* was often used interchangeably with MSM.

some of the prominent defining features of the emergent *tongzhi* movement in China

that seems to be departing from the behavior-centered public-health discourse of the

MSM community.

Established in 1999 as a personal website by a Chinese gay couple to share their

coming-out experience, love story and daily life, *Aibai* completed its transformation

around 2004 into a non-government organization that works on collecting and

documenting gay and lesbian-related information, culture, education, and legal issues.

Beijing Gender Health Education Institute was formally registered in Beijing in 2002.

It differs from other major *tongzhi* organizations in its emphasis on the use of media,

represented by three of its current projects: Queer University (summer camp for queer

filmmaking), Queer Comrades (independent LGBT webcast), and Rainbow Media

Awards.

Founded in 2005, *Tongyu* aims specifically at reaching out to lesbians, bisexual

women and transgender from the perspectives of community building, public

education, and policy advocacy. PFLAG China is a comparatively younger

organization that made its debut in 2008. It works on promoting in society scientific

and comprehensive information on homosexuality, helping homosexual people

establish self-identity, and promoting understanding and communication among

homosexual people and their families and friends.

I mention these four organizations here not because they are representative of the

overall situation of LGBT organizations and movements in China. They are

distinctive in that they have manifested in a most explicit way a departure of *tongzhi*

organizations from project-oriented HIV/AIDS interventions. Although some of them

are also involved in AIDS-related services, they have distinctively prioritized public

education and LGBT community building as top of their agenda. More significantly,

their organized events across the country, such as workshops and summer camps that

invite participation of LGBT groups from different parts of the country, signified an

almost parallel thread of campaigns with the HIV/AIDS intervention ones. I will take

PFLAG China as an example to help illustrate prominent characteristics of recent

LGBT movements in China.

In the 2012 China LGBT Community Leader Conference held in Beijing, hosted

by the Beijing Gender Health Education Institute, Ah Qiang, executive director of

China PFLAG, described the last few years as acceleration period of the Chinese

LGBT movement, as "the LGBT community has slowly acquired a solid presence

within mainstream society."[72] One key aspect of this emerging social presence lies in

the use of social media, both traditional and new. By "solid presence within

mainstream society," Ah Qiang referred to the fact that LGBT related issues had made

more positive entry into mainstream media, such as newspapers, TV programs and

major online news portals.

In the Rainbow Media Workshop held in Kunming in April 2013, Ah Qiang

shared his experience of designing and organizing meaningful event to attract

coverage of the news media. One example he cited was PFLAG China's interventions

of the same-sex marriage proposition. PFLAG China's interventions aimed to

---

[72] Accessed Sept. 22, 2014
http://www.queercomrades.com/en/blog/china-lgbt-conference/

coincide with the renowned Chinese sociologist Li Yinhe's fifth submission of

same-sex marriage proposal to the National People's Congress (NPC) annual meeting

in Beijing in March 2013[73]. Ah Qiang stressed the importance of a clear and

executable plan of the event. There should also be a shared understanding among

organizers and participants of the meaning, mode of execution, objective, and

potential risks of the event.

In the same-sex marriage event that Ah Qiang cited, a lesbian couple and a small

group of volunteers went together to a district Bureau of Civil Affair to have their

marriage registered. As had been expected, registration was declined. Yet the point

was not to have the marriage registered after all, but to solicit answers from the

bureau to volunteers' guiding questions, so that certain issues of concern could be

extracted and made highlights for media report. Press conference was also

pre-arranged to make sure of media coverage. One significant tactics employed in this

case was to package the rights to same-sex marriage with tenderness and warmth.

This included the lesbian couple's holding hands, their intimate exchange of words,

and their decision to host a wedding ceremony in recognition of their relationship in

spite of the official rejection.

In addition to the marriage registration event, PFLAG China had organized a

series of intervention activities in 2013 to mark their efforts at advocating legalization

---

[73] Dr. Li Yinhe is a professor of sociology and sexology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. As an advocate of LGBT rights, she started submitting same-sex marriage proposal to the National People's Congress since 2003, although the prospect of legalizing same-sex marriage in China remains doubtful, as a formal legislative proposal requires signature of 30 out of the 3,000 NPC members. No officials have so far supported Li's proposal with their signatures.

of same-sex marriage. Other events included an open letter sent to the NPC that claimed to have represented the voices of over 100 parents who are members of the organization, a week-long daily tweet that updated topic of the day surrounding the visit of Icelandic Prime Minister Johanna Sigurdardottir and her same-sex partner in China, and a letter from a Chinese lesbian's mother to the Icelandic Prime Minister.

We can discern some features of the LGBT movements in China in recent years from these emerging practices of leading LGBT organizations. Firstly, if earlier *tongzhi* groups and organizations were mostly ushered into being by international HIV/AIDS intervention projects that are representative of the population-based public health approach, then these organizations have exemplified a more outspoken and individual rights-based trajectory indicative of lesbian and gay identity politics in the West. Although it should also be noted that this Chinese version of lesbian and gay movement exemplifies increasingly strong semblance with the neoliberal gay politics that seeks social acceptance (Duggan 2003). Second, if, as I have discussed in Chapter One, the making of the MSM community facilitated by both international and national practices of HIV/AIDS interventions has contributed to a blurry imagination of a group of unidentifiable men cruising around in the dark in search of casual sex, then the rainbow image (under the sun as is usually the case) and the gay pride attached to it through advocacy and intervention activities—both online and offline—of these organizations seem to be reclaiming the territory with distinctive identities. It is the claim to the right to publicity that marks the difference, reminding one almost of Michael Warner's queer "counterpublic" (2002). Third, collaboration with the

media—both traditional and new social media, both domestic and international—by these organizations to initiate news topics, and sometimes even prepare drafts for journalists indicates another distinctive feature of current *tongzhi* movement in China.

In a review of media coverage and representation of homosexuality from 2000 to 2006[74], Yang Tianhua (2008) tracked a total of 1,319 pieces of reports on homosexuality from traditional media, including radio broadcasting, TV programs, newspapers and magazines. In spite of the transition into a comparatively more open and positive discussion of homosexuality since November 30, 2004, when the Chinese government for the first time released in public HIV prevalence among male homosexuals, homosexuals and/or their organizations were still given very limited public space to make their voice heard. Skewed and stigmatizing media representation remained largely in view, which in turn further facilitated misunderstanding of same-sex relationship among the general public. This could constitute one major motivation for newly established LGBT organizations to claim their authority in knowledge production through collaboration with various forms of media. To be reported as object of knowing or to report themselves as knowing subjects, that makes a difference. As a matter of fact, in its annual summary report for 2013, one measurement of PFLAG China to mark its annual achievements is the number of original articles that have been used and/or adopted by the media. Public education of correct knowledge about homosexuality is a mission shared by many of the LGBT

---

[74] Yang Tianhua. 2008. "The Traditional Mass Media's Reporting on the Topic of 'Gay'," in Tong Ge *et al*. (eds). *Ecological Report on the Chinese Homosexual Population (Part I)*. Beijing: Beijing Gender Health Education Institute.

groups/organizations operating across China.

Fourth, more and more the Chinese lesbian and gay movement is interlocking its trajectory with the international LGBT community. Not only are pictures of pride parades around the world updated almost immediately on the new social media. Policy changes regarding LGBT rights, specifically same-sex marriage right around the world have become integrated into the source of pride from which members of the Chinese *tongzhi* community are supposed to derive a shared sense of achievement and happiness. The first time that I actually experienced this proximity of the Chinese *tongzhi* community with its international LGBT counterpart was when I was visiting *Aibai* in Beijing.

Almost one year after I had settled down in Kunming and familiarized myself with the overwhelming presence of the AIDS campaigns there, I was invited to Beijing for a short visit at *Aibai* and its transgender project. One day when I was in *Aibai*'s office trying to engage in conversation with the new friends I made there, I was asked if I was interested in attending a home party hosted at one foreign ambassador's apartment for LGBT colleagues from all foreign embassies in Beijing. I was, for sure. I went there and, to be frank, my partial identity as a committed volunteer in Yunnan Parallel made me quite envious. I was envious of the proximity some local LGBT organizations and individuals could find themselves in with representatives of foreign states. In my eye as a volunteer/activist in Yunnan Province, this did not simply mean a free treat of nice food or the distinction of being able to socialize with foreign ambassadors. It revealed to me in a blatant way the stark

contrast in accessibility to information and resources between the handful of invited

organizations and the rest. I was then constantly reminded of the drudging

conferences I had attended about completion of various small-grant HIV intervention

projects in Kunming and the complaint I heard about the lack of money to even help

with workgroups' survival. This is by no means to suggest that by attending these

events, invited organizations could automatically receive funding or any other support.

As a matter of fact, financial resource and, perhaps more significantly, its

sustainability have always been one of the major concerns for LGBT organizations

across the country. It is rather the availability and accessibility to possibilities

otherwise that make a difference, or at least it seems to me.

The on-going interaction between this emerging emphasis on LGBT rights

among China's gay and lesbian organizations and the globalizing discourse of LGBT

movements was even more prominent when I visited two of my friends at the Los

Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center.

In October 2013, I went to the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center (hereafter

referred to as the Center) to visit two of my volunteer friends from Kunming while I

was writing my dissertation. As young leaders of Yunnan Parallel, both of them were

selected as interns in the Emerging Leaders Program of the Center's Leadership Lab[75]

of the Center. I was then granted the chance to watch closely and sometimes even

---

[75] These two interns were not in the same cohort. During my visit there, one of them
was in an extended training program that started some time after he finished his
internship in the Emerging Leaders Program, while the other one just started her
six-week internship in the Program.

participate in the program.[76] The leadership program kicked off in 2008 in

collaboration with, among others, *Aibai* Cultural and Education Center in Beijing.

During the four to six-week capacity building and training program, interns would

first be introduced to the different departments and divisions of the Center. They then

would be given the opportunity to work more closely with divisions/programs they

are interested in. A general idea is supposed to be garnered as to how the Center

engages in a diverse array of LGBT related issues locally, nationally and perhaps even

globally. The goal is that through the immersion program in leadership and NGO

development, interns will be better equipped to carry out their work back in China and

to further drive the "evolution of a Chinese LGBT movement." As it turned out, many

of the leaders and core members of the four LGBT organizations I mentioned above

were alumni of the Leadership Program.

One of the scenarios that provoked me to think is our observation and

participation of the Phone Bank for Equality series in October 2013, where volunteers

gathered at a local university campus and made phone calls to voters in Royal Oak,

Michigan before its local election day to determine whether to enact a human rights

ordinance that would protect LGBT people from discrimination in employment,

housing, and public accommodations. What struck me was the excitement

we—including me—seemed to have shared with the other participants and volunteers

there. What were we excited about? About the final success of the phone bank rally in

---

[76] I feel deeply grateful for the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center for accommodating me during my visit there. I have learned a lot from the friendly and informative conversations, discussions, and activities I was granted the chance to participate in.

Royal Oak? Or were we simply too emotionally drawn to the immediate atmosphere?

I was reminded of two previous snippets of conversation I had with volunteer friends in Kunming. One occurred when we were asked to discuss what we thought *tongzhi* needed. One participant said that he did not care whether gay marriage should be legalized, and that he only wanted a boyfriend. The other conversation happened when I was talking with a volunteer friend about the series of international efforts at legalizing same-sex marriage. My friend shared with me his puzzle as to the excitement people felt about that. For him, the immediate celebration of those remote events did not make much sense to him. I was wondering to myself how to grapple with the simultaneity of both the immediacy and the remoteness of time and space inherent in this juxtaposition of excitement and indifference (see Chapter Four).

I have no intention to deny the significance of the insightful exchanges of experience in international LGBT movements. It is however equally important to point out that amid the accelerating pace of LGBT movement in China and its integration into the imagined international LGBT community, there remain questions unasked and unanswered, and conundrums unresolved. In the following section, I will present a few more emerging discursive communities that have as their segmented target populations non-normative gendered and sexual practitioners. I hope to signal the simultaneity of the discursive plurality, which is indicative of the contingency and disparity of lived experiences I observed in my field research.

Co-Existence of Discursive Communities

On December 19, 2014, Dr. Li Yinhe, renowned sociologist in China and one of the first Chinese scholars to introduce discussions of homosexuality, Foucault, and queer theory into China, posted in her blog her seventeen-year relationship with her partner, a female-to-male transsexual. In response to a previous article that claimed to expose her lesbian identity, Li stated clearly that she was heterosexual, not homosexual. This is because her partner is a "very typical transsexual (T as in LGBT)."

> Though born female, he is psychologically male. People of this kind are
> different from homosexuals. Although his body is that of a woman, he
> identifies himself as a man. He loves only heterosexual woman, not
> homosexual woman.[77]

Following this article, comments exploded as to what should be counted as homosexuality, whether Li should be regarded as "coming out," whether transsexual is the same as transgender, and the difference between gender expression and sexuality. While some people were bitter about Li's clarification of her heterosexuality at the expense of a diverse range of transgendered experience that did not conform to a hetero/homo dichotomy; some regarded it an appropriate opportunity to popularize the scientific explanation of the difference between gender expression and sexuality; some others praised her as disrupting the phallocentric order of heterosexuality through courageously bringing forth a heterosexual relationship where

---

[77] http://blog.tianya.cn/post-361353-75757801-1.shtml, retrieved on December 22, 2014. The English version is my own translation.

the penis is absent. Amidst the cacophonous responses and confusion is a demand for proper categorization of identities, be it a narrowing down of sex-based sexual orientation, or an expansion of heterosexuality to accommodate a distinction between biological sex and gender psychology. I cite this anecdote not to propose a more scientific definition of sexuality but to indicate the representative confusion of non-normative gendered and sexual identities in contemporary China.

In Chapter One, I suggested that contrary to the expectation and assumption of the international AIDS initiatives of a gay community responding to the epidemic, it might be more appropriate to say that it is not *the* community that is responding to the outbreak of HIV/AIDS; but it is HIV/AIDS that has built *the* community and recruited its members. To this I would now add (1) the increasing deployment of international LGBT human rights discourse (as has been illustrated in the previous section), (2) the proliferating claims to more nuanced differentiation of identities, and (3) the suggestion of sexual fluidity by feminist and queer activists. I will use my second trip in Beijing to open up this conversation of the multiple discursive constructions of LGBT communities in China.

I went to Beijing in June 2013, this time with Gaizi—director of Yunnan Parallel and BZ, who was representing transgendered sex workers that Parallel had been working with in Kunming. We were there to attend the Fourth International Conference on "Sexualities in China", organized by the Institute of Sexuality and Gender at Renmin University of China. In one of the panel discussions, I met the young director of the first female-to-male transgender documentary (*Brothers*) in

China and was told that her film was to be screened on that very evening, as part of

the Sixth Beijing Queer Film Festival. The three of us went there with some other

conference participants. It was an evening devoted to films and discussions of more

marginalized groups in "the LGBT movement"[78]—transgender, asexuality, and

intersex. Present at the panel session included Yaoyao, director of the documentary

Brothers, Tony, protagonist of *Brothers*, and Qiu Aizhi, advocate of intersex. In the

panel session, Tony talked about his recent transition of self-identity from transgender

to intersex after a medical examination. I was still ignorant of the medical terms he

used to demonstrate his biologically intersexed condition. But the certainty he

expressed in his newly adopted identity kept me thinking. I was wondering about the

ease with which he embraced this new identity of intersex. I remember asking him

how he shifted from one identity to the other so quickly. He seemed to be confused

and amused by my question, as the result of his medical examination had already had

the decisive say. I am tempted to think that it was also due to the fact that biological

certainty had finally solved his long-term struggle with socio-cultural transgression.

That is, he is no longer a gender outlaw. It is biologically given.

What seemed to be quite striking to me at that queer film event (entitled "At the

Margins of the LGBT Movement") was the need for a sense of security and certainty

in one's gender/sexual identity, and thus the need for more finely tuned

identities/categories to be. Yet intriguingly, this need for proliferating identities is

---

[78] The panel debate was entitled "At the Margins of the LGBT Movement." Accessed on Oct. 4, 2014
http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/m/APParticle.php?AID=43513&i=1&s=Entertainment

juxtaposed with another emerging trend in the *tongzhi* movements that tried to

dissolve boundaries between identity categories in ways distinct from the

pathologized label of MSM in public health intervention.

Not long after I started my dissertation field research in Kunming, I learned that

at least two transgender (or transgender-related) programs had kicked off in Beijing.

One was needs-based and concerned mainly with health-related issues among both

female-to-male and male-to-female transgender people. It aimed at gathering people

with similar needs together, and collecting useful information and guidance for

hormone therapy and sex reassignment surgery. I met with the program director Acid

during a trip in Beijing. A self-identified male-to-female transgender who worked in a

university laboratory, Acid lived twenty-four hours as the feminine gender, although

at the time I met her, she had not started using hormones. Neither did she resemble

any of my transgendered friends in Kunming, many of whom associated the gender of

women with stereotypically sexual attraction (see Chapter Three and Five). Long

straight hair with neatly clipped front bangs, Acid was wearing a pink T-shirt, blue

jeans and sneakers. I wrote down the following in my fieldnotes after meeting with

her:

> Upon seeing her for the first time, I find it difficult to categorize Acid as
>
> transgender in my stereotypical imagination of the term. First, although she
>
> wore long hair, and although her T-shirt and jeans were characterized by
>
> specific curve design for women, Acid did not wear make-up. She just looked
>
> like an avant-garde young man with long hair. Second, she spoke with a male

voice in a way that conveyed her naturally as a young man…In retrospect, I

find myself talking with her as if she was an ordinary male friend of mine.

(September 1, 2012)

In our conversation about the newly launched transgender program that she was

working on for *Aibai* Culture and Education Center, Acid mentioned her key strategy

in reaching out to transgendered people,

I am concerned only with people who want to change their gender/sexual

distinctions (*xingbie tezheng*) through the use of hormones. I think this

needs-based emphasis will eliminate potential problems and disagreement

they have with identity labels, such as TS (transsexual, people who want to

have sex reassignment surgery) and CD (cross-dresser, people who only want

to cross-dress). (September 1, 2012)

This stress on the provision of services while sidestepping possible disagreement over

identities constitutes an interesting contrast with the other transgender-related group,

Bianbian Group (*bianbian xiaozu*)[79].

Founded in 2012, *Bianbian* Group was more into the deployment of feminist and

queer theory in its proclaimed concern with people further marginalized among sexual

minorities, including transgender people. In fact, the name of the group comes from

the very emphasis on the doubly marginalized position of the group's target

population through repetition of Chinese character *bian*, meaning "margin".

---

[79] When I was in Beijing, I tried emailing Bianbian Group to arrange a meeting. Unfortunately I received no response from them. Therefore, what appeared here is based solely upon information provided on their websites.

Notwithstanding their shared (or at least partially shared) attention to transgender

people, *Bianbian* Group's approach differed from Acid's pragmatic strategies with its

outspoken commitment to queer theory, featuring according to the group, an emphasis

on articulations of individual experience and sexual fluidity rather than fixated

identity categories. This notion of fluidity was often (mis)understood, at least by some

of their opponents, as changeability of one's sexual orientation[80].

While both program/group seemed to share an interest in transgenderism and

refusal of identity labels, they are derived from different systems of knowledge and

beliefs. While Acid believed in the urgency in serving the basic needs of

transgendered people who need reliable guidance and information in hormone usage

and surgery regardless of what identity label one prefers to wear; *Bianbian* confronts

identity labels through dissolving their boundaries. This divergence between the two

is indicative of one major internal cleavage within China's *tongzhi* movement that

started close to the end of 2011. One major event that triggered the series of debates

within the *tongzhi* community in China is an article published in major gay portals

that questioned and critiqued queer theory and its value in China's *tongzhi*

movement.[81] According to this article, "Major queer theorists think of sexual

orientation as highly flexible and fluid. Furthermore, they regard any categorization of

gender and sexuality and 'labels' as wrong." For Damien, consultant of Aibai and

author of the article, this queer view of sexual orientation is detrimental to advocacy

---

[80] The limited availability of materials about Bianbian Group makes it difficult for
me to pinpoint how feminist and queer theory has been understood and employed by
members of the group.
[81] http://www.aibai.com/advice_pages.php?linkwords=queer_theory, retrieved on
December 22, 2014.

of rights for sexual minorities in China, specifically their demands for the right to marriage, which is based upon the scientific recognition of the innateness of sexual orientation.

The debate culminated in a most dramatic way during the 2012 China LGBT Community Leader Conference held in Beijing, where one feminist lesbian participant protested against the lack of gender awareness in Chinese *tongzhi* movements with her upper body naked, on which was written: "Did you see? You don't (*ni kanjian le me? ni meikanjian*)." By then, the debate has extended to issues related not only to sexual orientation and queer theory, but also gender identity, *tongzhi* movements, and grassroots organizations. While activists with a strong attachment to biological determinism were referred to as pragmatists, most feminist/queer lesbians were termed as theorists. We could perhaps get a glimpse at the gist of their argument from the position statements of *Aibai* and *Bianbian* respectively.

For *Aibai*, knowledge about sexual orientation and gender identity has been accumulated for decades through scientific research methods in both natural sciences and social sciences. This universally shared scientific knowledge is not to be confused with sexuality theories and expressions in fields such as arts, religion, literature, and language, the argument of which is not unlike Andrew Sullivan, one of the representative American new neoliberal activists mentioned in Lisa Duggan's *Twilight of Equality* (2003)

Science is universally shared across the world. Social environment, politics,

culture, or religion cannot be reasons to obstruct the spread and promotion of scientific knowledge. As a matter of fact, the science community across the world agrees: there is only one science; one standard of judgment. (Aibai Position Statement, October 21, 2011)

Posted on their website on April 19, 2012 (about one month before the 2012 China LGBT Leader Conference), Bianbian Group's position statement aimed directly at the undisputable status of science when sexuality is concerned. For them, queer theory should be regarded as equally significant tool to understand and analyze sexuality and other human experience, just as biology and psychology.

We are **against** crowning one single experience, argument, and explanation as the absolute truth. This is violation of individual autonomy. We are **against** the view that so-called authoritative experts' views are more accurate and reliable than others…We are **against** mainstreaming and elitism in *tongzhi* movement that ignores individual differences, pushing aside lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people, who are doubly marginalized in the overall gender inequality of our society; pushing aside gays and lesbians in (heterosexual) marital relationships and *tongzhi* from grass-roots background.

The juxtaposition of these two position statements is not to evaluate which one is better or truer than the other. What is important here is the fact that they both captured one significant and contested historical moment in China's LGBT movement, when mainstreaming of gay and lesbian identity politics met with demands from more marginalized practitioners of non-normative genders and sexualities; when efforts at

putting in place with scientific certainty identity categories met with poststructuralist attempts at their very problematization, if not dissolution. And on top of all these competing and disorienting discourses that both construct and deconstruct *tongzhi* identity, or below them, there is still the on-going HIV/AIDS intervention projects that aim to scale up testing and treatment trial to include as many as possible members of the target populations (including MSM) in designated areas. These very intervention projects, through their behavior-centered approach to the epidemic that tie their target populations to pathology and (more often than not) illicit moral behaviors, continue to participate in the circulation of discourses that are embodied, lived, and enacted in disparate and sometimes unexpected ways.

In *Desiring China*, Lisa Rofel (2007) points out the simultaneity of on the one hand neoliberal[82] encouragement of desires in terms of "sexual, material, and affective self-interest" (2007: 3), and on the other hand the exclusionary boundaries between licit and illicit desires drawn along the hierarchical lines of "human quality" (*suzhi*) and cultural belonging (see also Kipnis 2007). Thus, the construction of neoliberal subjectivity with Chinese characteristics lies in maintaining a "proper" balance between celebration of proliferating individual desires and self-regulating interests. It is "benign interest" rather than "excessive passions" that is the goal of postsocialist governance. The claim of self-identified-gay people to cultural

---

[82] The use (and abuse) of "neoliberalism" has been well presented in James Ferguson's (2008) and Andrew Kipnis's (2007) articles. Here instead of using "neoliberalism" as encompassing economic and cultural regime, I limit my use of "neoliberalism" to neoliberal techniques that include the valorization of individual choice, autonomy, and skepticism about the state (Ferguson 2008). The ironies and contradictions between neoliberal aspirations to self improvement and structural hierarchy of *suzhi* in China can be found in Kipnis's discussion (2007).

citizenship in China echoes the "new strain of gay moralism" in the U.S. in the 1990s (Duggan 2003). According to Lisa Duggan, the new neoliberal sexual politics centered round privatization and personal responsibility that led to "the new homonormativity".

If both Rofel and Duggan have presented ways in which neoliberal aspirations to self making have facilitated at the same time self-governing techniques that give rise to inequality—which is not supposed to be part of the neoliberal deal, then the multiple discursive LGBT communities in China presented above have further complicated the picture with more players in the game who have different and sometimes inconsistent agenda. The question is, how are these multitude of discourses embodied? The following section aims to answer this question with ethnographic observations in Kunming. (unpack this paragraph, too dense)

What is **Tongzhi** *Community?*

While heated debates about scientific interpretation of sexual orientation and queer theory had been exploded online among lesbian and gay activists from different parts of the country, the *tongzhi* community in Kunming remained more or less intact and complacent with its routine business. I point this out not to criticize the lack of sensitiveness of the Kunming *tongzhi* community to the debates between major national lesbian and gay organizations and activists, but to stress the almost unreal absence of correspondence between the two. Neither do I intend to suggest that gay

and lesbian activists in Kunming were ignorant of the debate.[83] It is the general lack

of response and indifference that is intriguing and that cautions me against any direct

correlation between activists' account and the lived reality of the people they claim to

represent and speak for.

In the summer of 2012, I attended a one-day workshop that concerned *tongzhi*

organizations and collaboration with the media hosted by Rainbow Sky, one of the

major *tongzhi* workgroups in Kunming. In addition to facilitating face-to-face

conversation between representatives of *tongzhi* workgroups and local journalists, the

workshop invited a gay activist from Beijing to talk about *tongzhi* culture. We were

talking about ways to enhance a sense of belonging to the community and to bring in

more people through building *tongzhi* culture, when one of the participants pointed

out the reluctance, if not refusal, of *tongzhi* to attend activities organized by

workgroups.

If they prefer hanging out with a small circle of friends, should we drag

them out to cultivate a *tongzhi* culture? Why should we? (April 8, 2012)

Preference for small cliques is not new either within or outside the homosexual

community (Leznoff and William 1956). I was only surprised to hear this said in such

an open manner. My participation in several organized events of the local gay and

lesbian community had taught me the significance of attracting people to attend, the

need for skillful packaging and advertising of events, and the usual unattainability of

---

[83] I had no idea whether local activists in Kunming had followed the debate, or how
they reacted towards it. As far as I know, there was only one local activist from
Yunnan Parallel who participated in the LGBT Beijing conference mentioned earlier.

either. This question raised significant issue about the legitimacy of community

building and the contrast between the imagination of homogenous community and the

heterogeneous lives lived by its members, although no one present was able/willing to

offer an answer.

In response to participants' puzzle about how a *tongzhi* culture could be

cultivated and what kind of events should be designed to help with the cultivation, the

activist from Beijing cited a private home party of piano recital and movie screening

in Beijing. While a piano recital at a private home sounded too otherworldly, a movie

screening and discussion seemed cliché. As all of us were racking our brains in an

attempt to think of appropriate events to attract members of the community, another

participant raised an important issue of what culture could mean.

I think *tongzhi* culture depends on the people who make up the community.

What they do constitute the specific *tongzhi* culture here. (April 8, 2012)

Fair enough. If the question of "what is *tongzhi* culture" belies the implicit

assumption of a unified *tongzhi* community across gender, education, class, age, and

geography, then perhaps we should step back and ask who constitutes the community.

The following are ethnographic vignettes taken from different time and space of

my field research. They provide perspectives from different people about the kind of

tongzhi community they have inhabited or believed in. In line with Kath Weston

(1991/1997) and other scholars who have challenged the idea of the unity and

consistency of lesbian and gay community (see also Newton 1972/1979; Valentine

2007; Joseph 2002), I hope these ethnographic vignettes will facilitate a dynamic

understanding of the diversity, inconsistency, and sometimes even messy lived

experience of those who are considered as members of the Chinese LGBT community.

I suggest, as will be analyzed later in this section, that the inconsistency and

messiness of these lived experiences be indicative of the effect of the multitudinous

LGBT discursive communities circulating in China. Moreover, they also point to the

existence of more deeply rooted cultural renderings of gender and sexuality that cut

across the (imagined) line between the normative and its non-normative counterpart.

Vignette 1:

Dongfeng Square is one of the tacit cruising spaces for gay men in Kunming. I

was told that the "back garden" (*houhuayuan*) of the Square as cruising spot had

existed for decades.[84] Lacking in proper street lighting, the back garden was largely

hidden in darkness at night and derived its source of light solely from the neon lights

that adorned the surrounding commercial buildings. I was walking with a few friends

from Parallel towards the back garden after dinner. That was the first time Blake—one

of the Parallel volunteers in our company—had been to Dongfeng Square and the

back garden. A smart and well-educated young man who came to Kunming not long

ago and was still navigating the local gay space, Blake used to lead a

research-oriented *tongzhi* group he had established with friends back in GZ. His group

---

[84] Towards the end of my fieldwork, as one of the beautification projects to celebrate the First China-South Asia Exposition in Kunming (June 6-10, 2013), Dongfeng Square was walled in with billboard-like PVC beautification panels, where selected ancient Chinese poems were painted with simple graphic illustrations (see Neves [2010] for more discussion about civic beautification panels in China). Since then, nighttime activities, including square dances, massage, and gay cruising, were forced to move to a nearby public space. Not long after that, the Municipal Workers' Cultural Palace, located in Dongfeng Square, was imploded on the morning of September 7, 2013.

emphasized a scientific approach to the analysis of homosexuality and related cultural issues.

As we walked into the dark area of the back garden, we started seeing small groups of men either standing or sitting in circles talking with each other. Our group of four undoubtedly attracted some scrutinizing glances. Blake became silent, from which I could almost feel his discomfort and anxiety. I tried to engage him in casual conversation while walking along the dark area. He politely complied, though decided to leave not long after.

Vignette 2:

In June 2013, in one of the series of activities in celebration of the Pride Month organized by Yunnan Parallel, I was talking to a group of volunteers about pride and Chinese *tongzhi* movements. I remember asking the audience what *tongzhi* meant to them, whether *tongzhi* should feel proud, and why. Before anyone came up with an answer that could further the discussion, one participant—a well-educated gay man in his late thirties or early forties—stood up impatiently, telling me that *tongzhi* were men who have sex with men and wanted me to proceed to the next topic. Everyone else in the audience frowned upon his statement. I was even asked after the discussion by another participant how I could have tolerated his rudeness.

Vignette 3:

In my conversations with transgendered friends, one of the most common topics we brought up was the difference between straight men and gays. While some of the transgendered individuals I worked with readily accepted their ambiguous status as

between gay and woman, others insisted on their preference for straight men. Here is

how Chin, one of the transgendered sex workers I worked with, commented on the

difference between straight men and gay men.

> First your 'thing' (penis) must be good. Gay man's thing turns soft very
>
> quickly. Then you shouldn't be delicate (*jiaoqi*). Only these men could make
>
> you feel proud and happy. You can't find that feeling if you're with
>
> homosexuals. (July 17, 2013)

Vignette 4:

The first LGBT event I had attended unrelated to HIV intervention was one

organized by *Tonghua She* (translated as House of Fairytales), a local lesbian

organization in Kunming. It was held in a reserved room of a bar. In that gathering,

participants were divided—through lots—into two groups to debate for or against

"cooperative marriage". I remember myself expressing puzzlement and surprise at the

juxtaposition of one the one hand the Western discourse of coming out and self

identity, and on the other the Chinese traditional adherence to marriage as fulfillment

of both societal and parental expectations. Interestingly, although both sides tried to

make their argument through exaggerating the downside of their opponents', many of

them ended up reconciling coming-out discourse with filial piety and social

expectations in different ways in support of their stance to either support or denounce

"cooperative marriage".

Vignette 5:

I went to a speed dating organized for "cooperative marriage" (*xinghun*) between

lesbians and gays at a tea house one evening.[85] Getting married remained a big deal

for many of my gay friends in Kunming. The turnout was quite impressive that

evening, with around fifteen gay men and eight lesbians. Each of us was supposed to

spend only three minutes talking with our partner and then switched to the next one.

While all lesbian participants remained seated in the same place, male participants

were required to change to the next seat after each conversation. Whoever the partner

was, three concerns remained constant in the conversation: whether to have children

and how, whether to remain economically independent, and whether to live together.

While the preferred way to have babies varied a bit, most of the people I talked

to wanted to have their own children. This was not simply considered as satisfying

societal or parental expectations, but was recognized by some as out of their own love

for children. Financial situation and occupation also seemed to carry a lot of weight in

deciding whom one wanted to have further conversation in the hope of a friendly and

sustainable agreement that could finally lead to marriage. While several gay men

stressed their responsibility as husband to take care of their wives financially, some

preferred a more contractual way of marriage that does not involve economic

investment. I remember writing on my fieldnotes about the unexpectedly high

standard many of them held for selecting their collaborator.

I find that everyone has very demanding requirements in their selection.

Furthermore, perhaps because of the assumed exclusion of emotional

---

[85] As I did not intend to do research on "cooperative marriage" at that time, I did not make known to participants of my identity as a researcher or my own sexuality. I was conveniently assumed to be a lesbian volunteer from Yunnan Parallel, although in my self-introduction— which every participant was supposed to do, I did make clear that I did not feel pressured to get married and was thus there out of curiosity.

engagement (in marriage relationship), these requirements sometimes sound

even more realistic and harsh. (July 2, 2013)

Vignette 6:

In another visit to Dongfeng Square, I found myself in conversation with a gay man in the dark about HIV/AIDS and death. While I was not convinced by his equation of AIDS with disgrace and death, I was struck by the story of his life as a gay man.

I found out my interest in men when I was 17. I then decided to get married

when I was 18. Now I have three children and even a grandson at three! ... For

Chinese people, bearing one's own children to fulfill filial piety is the most

important…I decided not to go to college because I couldn't bear living with so

many men together. Just think of the temptation! …I left home ever since I

fulfilled the task (of having children) and (now) I go home about three times a

year. (March 13, 2012)

The indispensability of the patrilineal continuity for him was further expressed when

he told me about his well-thought plan in case HIV infection.

If I were infected (with HIV), I would ride a bike and wait to crash a

government-owned car so that compensation can be made to my sons.[86]…I

wouldn't tell my family either that I'm homosexual or I'm HIV positive…

(March 13, 2012)

---

[86] *Pengci*, deliberately crashing cars so as to demand compensation has been a wide-spread fraud in China these few years. *Peng* means crash, *ci* literally means porcelain.

Vignette 7:

Peacock was a transgendered performer in his twenties who impressed me a great deal with his elegantly feminine ethnic dance. He was one of the most versatile performers at SpringRain and had been performing elsewhere upon invitation to earn extra money. I interviewed him a few days before his invited performance trip to Vietnam. Peacock told me that he was not attracted to women except for his wife, who gave birth to a baby girl not long after their marriage back in his hometown. He came back to the capital city of Kunming to work and visited his family on a regular base.

One could see from the ethnographic snapshots presented above a diverse range of understanding and embodied experiences of *tongzhi*. They all demonstrate contrast of varying degrees with the circulation of lesbian and gay human rights discourse advocated by major LGBT organizations mentioned in the previous section. From vignettes 1 and 2, discrepancy was specifically prominent between the younger generation of gay men and their elder counterparts in terms of their imagination of *tongzhi*. While I was quite surprised to hear the direct equation between *tongzhi* and MSM in Parallel—a local organization that specifically appealed to younger members of the lesbian and gay community, the association of *tongzhi* with sexual behaviors and sexual behaviors alone was not totally unthinkable (see Chapter One for details). If the image of happy and proud lesbians and gay men living openly in the sun is the discursive effect lived, or imagined to be lived by gay people in China, so are the

hidden faces of men who have sex with men part of the popular imagination and lived experiences of gay people. The question is how to make sense of this simultaneity and its generative effect.

I was reminded of Michael Warner's caution on the engagement of alternative publics in social movements (2002). In Warner's conceptualization of publics and counterpublics, one distinctive feature that demarcates the two is ways in which stranger-sociability is (imagined to be) established. While traditional imagination of publics stress the faculty of rational-critical thinking as represented in the rise of print capitalism and the reading public, counterpublics in Warner's term are facilitated by alternative sociality based upon the corporeal. The conundrum that Warner threw out at the end of his discussion is the engagement in social movements of counterpublics that necessitates the acquisition of agency in relation to the state. The troubling incorporation of "state-based thinking" and the adaptation to the "performatives of rational-critical discourse" (Warner 2002: 89) of counterpublics so as to enter the temporality of politics seem to echo the on-going conversation in China's *tongzhi* movements between what Lisa Rofel (2007) observed as the "cultural citizenship" of the Chinese gay identities and what I argued in the first chapter as the coming-into-being of the behavior-centered community of men who have sex with men. But this could be illusory. For one thing, as is indicated in Rofel's argument, Chinese gay identities reflect simultaneously a strong desire for cultural belonging and a recognition of the hierarchy of quality (*suzhi*), which in turn have been intricately intertwined with the state project of nationalism. As I will argue in Chapter

Four, individual-state relationship in China has been one of embeddedness rather than

that of critical opposition. That is to suggest, in spite of the increasing integration of

global LGBT human rights discourse into their tactics, the social activism-oriented

trend of *tongzhi* movements do not necessarily represent a sovereign counterpublic in

relation to the state. On the other hand, while counterpublics, or alternative publics in

Warner's formulation are predicated upon embodied sociability that could spell the

hope of transformation, the HIV/AIDS intervention-initiated community of MSM

seems to be more of a designated space where male same-sex sexual practices were

lumped together as a most at risk population (MARP) of the epidemic. That is to say,

the innovative edge of queer counterpublics in Warner's examples and Povinelli's

(2007) ethnography that makes conscious and reflexive efforts at imagining

alternative stranger-sociability does not seem to be present in the MSM community.

Yet discrepancies do not only exist at this level of discourse. Within the public

health centered MSM community, where male-to-female transgendered individuals

had been encompassed, nuanced boundary making was always at work (see Reddy

2005). Chin's comment in vignette 3 on the dirtiness[87] and dissatisfactory sexual

performance of gay men was indicative of the internalized stigma within the MSM

community of gay men through their on-going associations with HIV/AIDS

intervention projects and perhaps also with the popular feminization of gay men.[88] As

---

[87] The notion of "cleanness" (*ganjing*) was one of the crucial elements in the configuration of the healthy body. In my outreach activities among low-end female sex workers, one of the safety caution we repeated most frequent is that HIV/AIDS and STDs are not necessarily visible so that cleanness was not a guarantee of healthiness.

[88] See Fu Jianfeng (2004), Lisa Rofel (2007), and Elaine Jeffreys (2012) for more

a matter of fact, I heard it said that some gay men preferred to have sex with young

rural migrants who just came to the city and knew little about sexuality or AIDS, as

they would be "clean" and condom use was thus not needed.

Nonetheless, the life of gay people in China does not follow a simple either-or

logic between a globally scripted discourse of individual rights and an epidemic

discourse of sexual behaviors that is perhaps no less global. Vignettes 4 and 5 help

situate *tongzhi* in the larger socio-economic and cultural context. Although it is true

that younger generation of gay people are becoming more outspoken in their sexual

identities and lifestyles—prominent examples include the recent development of pink

economy[89] and youthful leadership of emerging LGBT organizations, seldom would

gay people deny the significance/pressure of familial and social responsibilities to get

married and bear children. As a matter of fact, it is not uncommon for closeted gay

men to get married to a woman who is ignorant of the husband's sexuality,[90] such as

in Vignette 6. Although Vignettes 4 and 5 demonstrated the efforts gay people had

made to avoid "cheating" straight people into marriage, frustrated attempts[91] often

---

discussion on boundary drawing between money boys and self-identified gay men
along lines of education, morality, and the urban-rural divide.

[89] The rapid development of pink economy includes opening of high-end clubs and
bars catering to *tongzhi* (mostly male tongzhi) and development zank, a mobile
startup app that helps gay users find friends, dates, and fun nearby activities based on
their location . See "Gay revolution puts red China in the pink",
www.smh.com.au/news/world/gay-revolution-puts-red-China-in-the-pink/2005/08/26/
1124563027268.html, accessed January 24, 2015; and "Zank is a Slick Chinese
Friend-Finding App for Gays,"
www.techniasia.com/zank-slick-chinese-friendfinding-app-weird-users/, accessed
January 24, 2015.

[90] *Tongqi*, wives of *tongzhi*, has become a much debated social issue in recent years.
Homosexuality does not yet constitute a sufficient reason for divorce, not to mention
the difficulty to find evidence of it (see also Jeffreys 2012: 74).

[91] From my observation of the several "cooperative marriage" events, the percentage

result in their final concession to "normal" marriage.

Among the transgendered individuals I worked with during my fieldwork, some were married and have children but remained closeted. Some plan to get married but would love to leave open a future possibility to pick up transgendered practices. Two of them—in their late forties or early fifties—were "lucky" enough that their wives and children knew about their transgendered practices and were willing to remain on friendly terms.

More intricately, although in the debate at *Tonghuashe*, coming out was set as the opposite of cooperative marriage, confiding one's sexual identity to parents do not necessarily mean the end of the marriage struggle. Quite the contrary, some parents would turn more eager to marry their gay children off so that the personal closet of sexual identity turns into a family closet of shame that requires immediate solution to cover up the scandal. As was expressed by participants of the debate in Vignette 4 and the blind date for cooperative marriage in Vignette 5, getting married is both familial and social responsibilities.[92] As a matter of fact, academics and journalists largely agree to the fact that the majority of self-identified homosexuals in China still enter into heterosexual marriage so as to fulfil their filial obligations through producing offspring (Jeffreys 2012; McDonald 2005; Zheng Beichuan 2000). In Tze-Lan Sang's (2003) analysis of literary representations of women's same-sex romantic feelings in China, she argues compellingly that "[f]emal-female desire does not render a woman

of successful cases seemed to be very low.

[92] As was pointed out by James Farrer and other scholars (Deborah and Friedman 2014), while "sexual intimacy may be detached from marriage in a variety of ways that weaken the previously well-institutionalized links between sexual intimacy and marriage," marriage remains a central social institution (63).

defective or make her a gender outcast so long as it cooperates with the imperative of cross-sex marriage. In sum, female-female desire by itself is not taboo; marriage resistance is" (2003: 93). This top priority given to cross-sex marriage still seems to be highly pertinent here, for both women and men. Similarly, in both Lucetta Yip's and Travis Kong's works on queer Asia, both globalizing forces of LGBT movements and local/cultural exigencies with respect to family life and normativities/legalities were highlighted as integral in conceptualizing non-normative gender and sexual practices in post-socialist China.

The above vignettes demonstrate the contingent and even contradictory "global assemblage" of embodied practices of gender and sexuality amidst the proliferation of discourses on LGBT and HIV/AIDS interventions. They also reflect the on-going process of negotiations between "locally" and "traditionally" informed cultural meanings and practices of sexuality with globally circulating ideas such as sexual identities and coming out. In their problematization of the globalization of sexual identities (Altman 2001), scholars of queer anthropology demonstrated distinct ways in which contingent and shifting sexual and gendered articulations, informed by diasporic lived experiences (Manalansan 2003), socio-culturally informed gender hegemony and cultural belonging (Sinnott 2004; Reddy 2005; Rofel 2007), global economy of queer tourism (Padilla 2007), and nationalist discourse (Benedicto 2013) keep escaping any attempts at celebrating a globally unified LGBT community. But there still seems to be something more elusive underlying the already problematized dichotomy of the local and the global.

In his analysis of Malaysia's *syariah* judiciary, anthropologist Michael Peletz (2013) calls into question the gate-keeping concept of Islamization in Western academic theorization of the Muslim world since the 1970s. To do this, he uses the concept of global assemblage to signify the dynamic assembling and interplay of "globally inflected discourses, practices, values, and interests of disparate origins" that facilitated the on-going transformations of *syariah* court, the process of which is irreducible to a single logic of Islamization or secularization (2013: 607).

In a similar vein, I consider the concept of global assemblage apposite in giving shape—and doing justice—to the messy and sometimes contradictory configuration of the *tongzhi* community in Kunming I have presented above. This effort is also in line with Biehl and Locke's (2010) proposition of the anthropology of becoming that calls upon anthropologists to return complexities to the lives of the people we study. In answering the question of what constitute the *tongzhi* community in Kunming, the use of global assemblage speaks to not only the global circulation of services, discourses, practices, values, and interests of disparate origins, but also the synergistic and non-hierarchical relationships between these diverse constituents that contribute to individuals' articulations of their gendered and sexual self.

While the legacy of global HIV/AIDS intervention projects continues to shape and define a population-based and pathological community of men who have sex with men, increasingly prominent advocacy of LGBT human rights discourse has exerted no less influence upon how erotic practices should be properly understood and

accorded legitimacy.[93] Yet again, to take these two as indicative of a dichotomized

reality of *tongzhi* movements and the lived experience of members of the LGBT

community is to gloss over the vast complexities of life that anthropology and

ethnography are at a best vantage point to capture. As is the case with Malaysia's

syariah judiciary, where disparate constituents are at play from nationalist discourse

of an Islamic state, modeling on the system of civil law, to corporatization and

incorporation of Japanese management techniques and work ethic (Peletz 2013), the

tongzhi community as lived and embodied in Kunming manifested a congeries of

contested discourses, practices, values, and interests that left the notion of community

highly questionable. In the next section, I will turn to a more theoretically oriented

attempt at problematizing the notions of the public and community.

Conclusion: Community and the Efforts of Imagination

So far in this chapter, I have delineated briefly a historical account of *tongzhi*

movements in China, including the initial HIV/AIDS campaigns that brought

homosexuality to social visibility and that initiated the making of public

health-centered community of MSM, the emerging lesbian and gay identity politics

heavily informed by global discourse of LGBT human rights in recent years, and the

highly contingent and contested lived experience of members of local *tongzhi*

community in Kunming. We have witnessed the absence of one-to-one

---

[93] The circulation of the discourse of LGBT human rights was most obvious
following Hilary Clinton's Human Rights Day speech in Geneva on December 6
2011.

correspondence between the discursive construction of *tongzhi* community by activists and the lived experience of members of the community. This is not to separate the discursive from the experiential. Nor do I intend to deny the generative effect of the discursive. I suggest instead that the incoherent and messy lived experience presented above be indicative of the assemblage of non-hierarchical and contingent discursive effects lived by people who have been categorized as members of the *tongzhi* community.

The circulation and selective/contingent embodiment of discourses echo Derrida's (1988) theorization of communication. According to Derrida and his formulation of the structure of iterability, communication is made possible not because of speaker's intentionality or a mastery of the totality of context—what John Austin termed as "the total context", but because of the inherent readability and repeatability of writing "in the absolute absence of the receiver or of any empirically determinable collectivity of receivers" (1988: 7). That is to suggest, notwithstanding the recognition of the generative effect of discourse, the circulation of discourses, due to its inherent mechanism of intelligibility and detachability from intention and context that makes circulation possible, has been lived in a more unexpectedly dispersed, synergistic, and even contradictory manner than the encompassing effect suggested by the uses of term "discourse". Given this contingency and diversity of embodied experience among members of the *tongzhi* community, what sustains the sense of community?

In his historical analysis of the rise of a gay and lesbian movement in the West,

Barry Adam (1995) points out a crucial distinction that separated modern lesbian and

gay worlds from anthropological and historical records of same-sex practices lies in

"the development of social networks founded on the homosexual interests of their

members" and the exploration of new social spaces since industrialization and the rise

of capitalism (1995: 7).[94] Adam's interpretation of the emergence of homosexual

community bears semblance with the Chinese gay activist Tong Ge's (2008) historical

formation of the gay men community in China (Chapter One). For Tong, the

exploration of urban spaces as cruising spots for gay men in the latter part of the

Cultural Revolution in the mid-1970s signified the early appearance of gay

community. In both cases, a shared interest in same-sex practices and the possibility

of locating people with similar indulgences constitute and sustain a sense of

community.

Alternatively, John D'Emilio marked the rise of lesbian and gay community with

the possibility of establishing nonerotic ties among homosexuals (1983, cited in

Weston 1991/1997: 118). Kath Weston added that this also held true for the

"ideological opposition between biological family and families we choose" among

lesbians and gays in the U.S. (1991/1997: 118). In this sense, the notion of community

seems to demand more efforts of imagination beyond sexual encounters with people

of the same kind.

The effort of imagination was made more pronounced in Weston's ethnography

---

[94] John D'Emilio also attributes the expression of homosexual desire and the
emergence of gay identity to wage labor and capitalism that freed the individual from
"an interdependent family unit" (1993: 470). Although as we shall see in the
following paragraph, D'Emilio held a slightly different view as to what gave rise to
lesbian and gay community in the U.S.

on lesbian and gay kinships. For elder informants in Weston's ethnography, community was an anachronistic concept that did not make its debut until the rise of a gay movement and activists' conscious efforts to press the homogenizing concept of community into the service of an identity politics since the late 1960s (Weston 1991/1997). This comment suggests a more conscious effort at shaping the concept of community that is political. Benedict Anderson's theorization of imagined community could be helpful here.

In his classic discussion of the emergence of nationalism and the imagined community, Anderson (1983/2000) pointed out that "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (1983/2000: 6). Anderson argues that the invocation of common symbols and icons made possible a shared imagination of a national community among members who do not need to meet each other. At least three points could be brought forth. First, the imaginary of a shared identity without necessarily knowing each other echoes the sense of belonging—a conviction to be part of a community without being connected with it—that gay people expressed in Kath Weston's (1991/1997) ethnography of lesbian and gay kinships in the U.S. Second, the stress on the effort of imagination points to the fact that there is no ontological status attached to any specific community, lesbian and gay community included. And third, the invocation of common symbols and icons corresponds to the circulation and intelligibility of discourses that facilitate imagination.

If what we have seen in Adam's (1995) and D'Emilio's (1983, 1993) historical analyses is the social and historical contexts that were conducive to the emergence of gay and lesbian communities in Western industrialized countries, then Anderson's stress on the imaginative—made possible again through social historical context of print capitalism—expounds how a shared sense of belonging and community was realized. Given this interval in between, it might make better sense that community could be both homogenizing and heterogeneous. It is homogenizing due to the political mission the term is made to fulfill. And because of the very imaginative efforts required of its collective political mission, community—or elements that are supposed to constitute community—is mobilized despite its ontological heterogeneity.

Yet above all, this transition from contingent diversity to a shared sense of belonging lies, according to my understanding, not simply in imagination, but in *imaginability*—the ease with which certain imagination could be invoked and mobilized into service of the political mission of community. And it is probably this inherent requirement of accessibility in community imagination that "irons out difference and elides power relations"—one major ingredient of identity politics (Valentine 2007: 103), contradicting its own political ideal that aims to, among other things, eliminate inequality. Two points stand out as important. First, the relation between imaginability and intelligibility in Derrida's framework of communication. While one would assume that a more inclusive standard of identification enhances imaginability, which then yields a sense of belonging; intelligibility induced by this accessibility might at the same time entail more disparate interpretations that could

also give rise to dis-identification. In the previous sections of this chapter, we have witnessed at least three distinct manners in which *tongzhi* community has been projected and its members summoned: the behavior-centered notion of men who have sex with men, the scientific certainty of sexual orientation, and the queer advocacy of sexual fluidity. That is to suggest that in spite of the competing epistemologies behind these notions of community, techniques and constituents travel more freely than the label to which they have been attached. That could explain why in Vignette 2, men who have sex with men was taken as defining feature of *tongzhi*; and why sexual fluidity was taken as changeability of sexual orientation. Communication, and circulation of discourses, is never to be taken as enclosed system of exchange in meanings.

Second, and closely related to the first point, is the generative effect of the open-ended discursive assemblage. If in his theory of practice, Pierre Bourdieu (1977) points to the "generative principle" of "habitus" as "regulated improvisations" that facilitates the endless cycle of production and reproduction of structures, then what I hope to further develop here is the multiple and contingent assemblage of "habitus" that give rise to disparate practices not reducible to any single causality. It is against this background of pluralistic contingency that transgendered practices are to be understood.

In the previous sections of this chapter, I have demonstrated that along with the proliferation of competing discourses that aim to represent the *tongzhi* community, the lived reality of those who have been claimed to be represented in these discourses

exhibit much greater degree of disparity and incoherence.

Perhaps heterogeneity within lesbian and gay communities is nothing surprising or new (e.g. Newton 1972/1979). While the emergence of lesbian and gay community has been largely attributable to the advent of industrialization and the rise of capitalism that made possible individual's disintegration from kin-based network and facilitated stranger-sociability in urban spaces that could be mediated through sexual body (Adam 1995; Weston 1991/1997; Sinnott 2004; Warner 2002), community is not necessarily understood as an aftereffect of capitalism. In her critical examinations of the romance of community, Miranda Joseph (2002) points to the complicity between community and capitalism. For her, the nostalgic narrative of community—as epitome of freedom, autonomy, unity and passion—is co-constitutive with the rise of modernity and capitalism. This liberal imagination of the romantic community that serves to unify and enhance social solidarity amid the faceless and dehumanizing advance of capitalism is a myth not to be taken for granted. They are constitutive outside for each other and are thus indispensable from each other.

Similarly, David Valentine (2007) calls into question transgender as a distinct category of gender expression from gay and lesbian communities in his ethnographic studies of transgender communities in New York city. According to Valentine, the institutionalization of transgender as a category is indispensable from the mainstreaming of lesbian and gay movements in the U.S. and the maintenance of an ontological dichotomy between gender and sexuality. He argues that the active and conscious creation of transgender community is inseparable from contemporary U.S.

discourse of civil rights and identity politics in a liberal democratic political system.

In the Chinese context, the institutionalized dichotomy of gender and sexuality, emerging lesbian and gay identity politics and human rights discourse, the public health centered categorization of MSM, proliferation of gender and sexual identities, queer sexuality that stresses sexual fluidity, all participate simultaneously in the imagination and embodiment of transgenderism, a category that is still in the making. That is to suggest, if according to Valentine, the activist imagination and making of transgender as a category is not to be comprehended independently of the historically ontologized dichotomy of gender and sexuality and the mainstreaming of gay and lesbian identity politics, then the Chinese context exemplifies a simultaneous assemblage of diverse elements that had followed a more chronological order of appearance in the Western history of social movements. The result of this simultaneity could be disorienting, as has been discussed the previous sections of this chapter and the range of responses people gave to define transgender in the Introduction.

In a sense, it is the confounding co-existence of discourses that made it hard for transgender to stand out as a category. Nonetheless, transgendered practices offer an excellent prism through which competing forces encounter, integrate, and cancel out one another, striking a temporary balance. Chapter Three is going to concentrate on ethnographic presentation of transgendered practices amidst the dynamic negotiations of not only gender and sexual identities, but also the political economic aspects that are not separable from the performance of gender and sexuality.

Chapter Three: "Joining the Workforce"

During my pilot study in Kunming in the summer of 2010, I met transgender activist Gina[95] for the first time to confirm the possibility of getting access to the transgender community that had until then seemed inaccessible and imaginary to me. In email exchanges before my arrival, he suggested that I stay in a hotel close to her own place. The place was within a few minutes' walk from SpringRain, the very first place he introduced me into and where I watched for the first time in my life transgendered shows. Within the short period of time I stayed there for my pilot study, Gina brought me to different places where transgendered sex workers were expected to be doing their business, including the area surrounding Shuanglongqiao Bridge, Dongfeng Square, and a dance hall. Walking through the dark streets in the immediate vicinity of Shuanglongqiao Bridge, Gina related to me the past glory of this place, when both female and transgendered sex workers gathered in groups and awaited their business in scattered spots of the area. But it was no more, as I gazed into the darkness of the street and saw one or two passersby walking to or from somewhere in the surrounding residential quarters. Gina explained that it was a recent series of police crackdown that made this area deserted. But she suggested that some of the transgendered sex workers might come out later into the night. So the two of us walked on, passing a few mobile police tents where one or two police officers were

---

[95] Although self-identified as transgender activist, Gina intentionally maintained a distinction between his masculine identity and feminine performance. She used two gender specific English names for these two gendered identities.

sitting there looking bored or chatting, while Gina filled me with more stories of her

outreach activities among transgendered sex workers.

I went back in November 2011 to start my field research and visited

Shuanglongqiao Bridge for several times, sometimes by myself, other times with

friends. But I was never able to give witness to the legendary business nights there,

although I did accompany one transgendered friend there one night after a late show

at SpringRain.

I was then walking with Autumn towards Shuanglongqiao Bridge, which was just

a few blocks away from SpringRain when I saw two middle-aged women sitting on a

bench in a dark corner a few steps away from the Bridge. Autumn went up to them

and sat alongside. I decided to stand aside lest they thought of Autumn as introducing

a new competitor to grab the limited business opportunities. I intended to stay longer

and tried to engage in conversation with them when shortly after our arrival, two men

started walking up and down around us and throwing glances at each of us from top to

bottom then back to top. After a few back and forth, the two of them went to a

condom vendor just around the street corner and walked toward an elder

woman—whom they called *laobanniang*, meaning female boss or madam—standing

within a distance from us. I saw them talking and pointing to us as if they were

negotiating the prices. I remember wondering to myself whether the elder woman was

actually a pimp and why they would have needed a pimp when sitting there soliciting

business seemed straightforward. But I was not able to find out the answer, as I soon

decided to leave the place when I saw them pointing vaguely at me. I bid my

company goodbye and walked quickly out of the scene to get myself a taxi without even trying to take another look at the three people standing there negotiating. As I walked out from the dark area onto the Bridge lit with street lights, I heard a man leaning against the bridge railing calling out at me. A bit frightened, I got into a taxi without even trying to understand what he wanted to say to me. I told myself not to look back at him lest I would get myself into trouble. That was one of the few encounters I had in Shuanglongqiao Bridge. But Glass Stockings, one of the elder generation of transgendered sex workers in Kunming, had a different story.

> Back eight or nine years ago, business was much better. I could earn RMB400-500 (about US$80) a day. I didn't need to wait for customers. There were so many of them around…People are not having that much money to spend now…Police crackdowns have also scared people away…I used to work at Shuanglongqiao Bridge. But business is not good there either, ever since Luoshiwan has been moved away. When there was Luoshiwan, there were many people around that area. Many of them were from outside of Kunming doing business there. They had money and wanted to have fun. (February 17, 2012)

The profitability of sex work was echoed further in my conversation with Yanzi, a transgendered sex worker who had been in the business for about ten years by the time I did my field research.

> I started wearing make-up around (the year) 2000. That time, Shuanglongqiao Bridge was having the best business. It was a red-light

district known to all. Even people from outside knew they could find sex

workers there. Every night starting from 10 many real women (*zhennvren*)

and sisters (*jiemei*, meaning male-to-female transgendered individuals)

would line the street. Customers were numerous too. Many of them drove by

every night, picked their choice and drove away. Now you don't see those

kinds of customers any more…Business back in 2002 and 2003 was superb.

But it was turning more stringent since 2004. When business was good, there

could have been as many as twenty or thirty sisters in Shuanglongqiao Bridge.

(February 27, 2013)

Luoshiwan (the old Luoshiwan) was a wholesale market in the vicinity of

Shuangqiao Bridge that started to take shape in the late 1980s. During more than two

decades of development, Luoshiwan had attracted merchants from all over the country

and had grown into one of the top ten wholesale markets in China and the biggest

comprehensive market in Yunnan Province, selling a vast array of commodities that

ranged from household furniture to computers and clothes. In 2008, the Kunming

municipality debuted its construction project of New Luoshiwan International Trade

City six miles outside of the city.[96] Relocation started in 2009 and the old market

place was forced to a final closure on November 30, 2009, shortly after the official

opening of its substitute on December 16.[97]

---

[96] "More than 1,000 protest China relocation",
http://www.newindianexpress.com/world/article159312.ece, accessed January 5,
2015.
[97] While official reports and descriptions of the New Luoshiwan project were
boasting of large scale and most updated business model of the new trade center,
more than 1000 people took to the street in protest against the forced closure of the

How the booming business at Shuanglongqiao Bridge area had initiated the sexual market there is not clear, but its closure had surely contributed to the ensuing stagnant business, so were sporadic police crackdowns and fickle urban planning part of the picture. I remember wondering to myself whether the brightening street lighting system in the Bridge was more a result of my illusory memory or realistic changes that aimed in part to deter illegal activities such as prostitution. As it turned out, city officials in Kunming initiated a road beautification project— "Scenic Avenues" (*jingguan dadao*) program—that kicked off at midnight on June 13, 2012, which was scheduled to be completed by September 30 of the same year, right before the annual celebration of the National Day on October 1. The construction project included twenty-two major roads and streets, where a variety of trees and shrubs were planted to facilitate an all-year-round blossoming picture of the Spring City (*chuncheng*) of Kunming. In compliance with the four aspects of construction stressed by the municipality—"greener, brighter, cleaner, and prettier", the project had included as its components widening of roads to alleviate traffic congestion, reparation of sidewalks, demolition of temporary and illegal buildings along the roads, and upgrading of street lights.[98] [99] That explained why I saw the long stretch of flowers arranged in patterns lining up the Bridge and the ever brighter street lights in the area.

---

market and inadequate compensation.

[98] "Kunming road beautification project initiated," http://www.gokunming.com/cn/blog/item/2733/kunming_road_beautification_project_initiated, accessed January 6, 2015.

[99] "Kunming 22tiao daolu jiangcheng yijuzoulang" (Twenty-two roads and streets in Kunming will become livable corridors), http://qcyn.sina.com.cn/business/xmtj/2012/0717/09062087413.html, accessed January 5, 2015.

While Shuanglongqiao Bridge might have been the point of departure for the initial prosperity of sex work in Kunming, specifically for that among transgendered sex work, the industry was never restricted to that space and time. When I formally started my dissertation field research at the end of 2011, Shuanglongqiao Bridge could no longer boast of its past glory. Instead, I found myself doing outreach work among transgendered and elder female sex workers in areas scattered in the city, including the Dongfeng Square, urban villages, and low-end dance halls.

In this chapter, focus will be brought back to the transgendered individuals whom I encountered in my field research. Most of them were transgendered streetwalkers or performers. In Chapter One and Chapter Two, I suggest that transnational HIV/AIDS intervention projects and emerging global circulation of LGBT human rights discourse have, somewhat unexpectedly, induced dividing line between groups engaged in HIV/AIDS interventions and the consolidation of behavior-centered MSM community, and those that advocate lesbian and gay rights with the help of innovative social media and street interventions. This division of labor in the development of grass-roots organizations and community building projects, I argued, has given rise to a much more contested articulation and imagination of non-normative gendered and sexual practices and identities. I further suggest in this chapter, with the trope of desire—both material and erotic, that economic profitability and erotic desires intertwine to problematize notions of survival, identity, and politics in understanding transgendered practices in post-reform China, where a transition of economic growth from socialist production to neoliberal excitement to consumption has made

prominent and essential the desire for the consumption of erotic services (Pun 2003;

Rofel 1999b, 2007; Davis 2000).

The distinction made between same-sex sexual transaction and globally

circulated sexual identities is not new amidst the global restructuring of economy that

positioned third world areas as tourist sexual enclaves to be consumed. Mark Padilla's

(2007) ethnographic study of the Dominican sex tourism reveals ways in which local

men who do not self identify as gay engage in the informal economy of same-sex

sexual transaction with foreign gay tourists that both transformed and consolidated

aspects of local gendered and sexual relationships. Likewise, Noelle Stout's (2014)

study of erotic economies in post-Soviet Cuba discusses how the loss of Soviet

subsidies in the 1990s and the introduction of capitalism and tourist industry led to

restratification of Cuban society and new norms of sexual propriety and intimacy.

Amidst the radical reorganization of social and sexual classes where education and

cultural capital no longer reign, sex work, authentic affections, and skin color became

dominant themes in the constant reworking of boundaries among self-identified gay

people and hustlers in both homoerotic and heteroerotic markets (Stout 2014). Both

accounts complicate the globalization of sexual identities with, among other things,

the intervention of labor, the labor of performing/embodying certain stereotyped

genders and sexualities to fit into the sexual market niche so that the body is delinked

from the essentialized dyad of heterosexuality and homosexuality. I regard this

approach as queer—post-identity politics of sexuality—in that it seeks no (sexual)

author of the deeds but instead expose the processual and contingent alliance of

diverse elements that constitutes the sexual subject that remains in the making.

The juxtaposition of desire and labor is perhaps better captured through integrating Lisa Rofel's (2007) discussion of desire and Pun Ngai's (2003) critique of the subsumption of production under consumption. In her analysis of the twin process of subjectification of *dagongmei* (working girls) in Shenzhen, China as both a desired producer and a (failed) desiring consumer through an analytic incorporation of Foucault's technologies of the self and Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the "desiring machine", anthropologist Pun Ngai (2003) points out that the consumer revolution in reform China is "in effect a new mode of governmentality of the Chinese state" that produces the ideal desiring consumer-citizen while at the same time subsumes production. This "subsumption of the *political economy* under the new label of *cultural economy*" (2003: 472, italics mine)—instead of substitution as Pun insightfully stressed—is revealed through the ethnographic juxtaposition of on the one hand *dagongmei*'s consumption desire that binds them into a working collectivity, and on the other their failed performance as a consumer-citizen—failed self-transformation. According to Lisa Rofel, post-reform China facilitated the articulations of "a wide range of aspirations, needs, and longs" that encompasses "sexual, material, and affective self-interest" (2007, 3), encouraging the emergence of sexual identities such as *tongzhi*, gay and *lala* (Kam 2012) and the new forms of sociality that is simultaneously intertwined with the consumption turn of economy. If that is the case, then it is equally true that amidst the seemingly overwhelming "phantom of consumer revolution" that centers around desire and its satisfaction,

labor/production remains integral. The low-end sexual market where I encountered many of my transgendered informants demonstrated to me diverse and contingent ways in which desire and labor engage with and motivate each other in constituting the "ideal consumer-citizen" in postsocialist[100] China.

Opening-Up and the "Go West" Campaign

During my pilot study in Kunming in the summer of 2010, I was told that the majority of transgendered sex workers there came from Honghe Prefecture[101] due to poverty. I turned this matter-of-fact statement into question during my field research and asked one transgendered lady from Honghe Prefecture whether that was true and why. She shrugged her shoulders and said casually, "That's perhaps true. Because we are poor."

It turned out that among the transgendered friends I made acquaintance with during my field research, few of them were from Honghe Prefecture. Neither was Honghe Prefecture as a whole as "poor" as I had been told. As a matter of fact, tobacco industry in Honghe Prefecture was cited as one of the most successful examples of agricultural industrialization in China since the 1990s (Zheng 2001: 258), when Yunnan Province witnessed rapid increase in its GDP thanks in large part to its

---

[100] I follow Li Zhang's definition of postsocialism as referring to "conditions of transformation and articulation of socialist and nonsocialist practices and logics regardless of the official labeling of the state" (Zhang 2012: 661).

[101] Honghe Prefecture, also called Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture, is situated in southeast-central Yunnan Province and home to two major ethnic minority groups, the Hani and the Yi. The prefecture was established in 1957, with an area of 32,929 square kilometers.

booming tobacco[102] and tourism spurred by the "culture fever" (*wenhua re*) that

promoted cultural consumption since the 1980s (Donaldson 2011; Tapp 2010).[103] The

1990s also witnessed dramatic and relentless changes in Kunming's cityscape, partly

stimulated by its infrastructural preparation for the Kunming Gardening Exposition in

1999, including development of public transportation network in cooperation with

Switzerland and series of aggressive demolition and relocation projects that aimed at

modernizing the city and accommodating anticipated commercial growth (Fingerhuth

and Joos 2002; White 2010; Zhang 2010a).[104] The development and gradual

expansion of the wholesale marketplace of Luoshiwan was part of the earlier efforts at

commercialization that fueled the relocation and upgrading of numerous individual

traders who used to line up on the close-by Qingnian street in the 1980s. Within a few

years after the collective relocation, the Luoshiwan wholesale market had developed

into the busiest business district of the whole Province, expanding its area from 5,700

---

[102] Tobacco had been one of the two pillar industries of the local economy in Yunnan
Province prior to post-Mao reform, the other being copper mining (Zhang 2010a).
[103] According to Nicholas Tapp (2010), in 2006, tourist industry "accounted for 30
percent of total foreign currency earnings in Yunnan, with related services, such as
telecommunications and transport contributing to 38.5 per cent of Yunnan's GDP
(compared with 42.7 per cent from industry and 18.8 per cent from agriculture)"
(2010: 101).
[104] According to Sydney White (2010), "a conscious policy had been adopted within
Yunnan at the level of the provincial government whereby minority nationality
'ancient cities' (such as Lijiang and Dali) should be preserved as tributes to
'traditional culture' (chuantong wenhua), but major Han metropolitan areas—as loci
of 'progress' and 'development'—should tear down any vestiges of 'traditional'
architectures, as was the template for the entire city of Kunming. In the name of
modernizing Kunming in time for the 1999 World Horticultural Exposition
(Shibohui), all the spectacular Qing dynasty carved wood, tiled roofs and siheyuan
architecture were razed, and the beautiful tree-lined streets were bulldozed and
widened. The replacement architecture and widened streets made Kunming a generic
contemporary Chinese city, albeit unrelentingly 'modern.' Kunming is no longer
seriously in the running in the Yunnan tourism game…" (2010: 152).

square meters to more than one million square meters, and with an increase of traders

from the original 1,260 to more than 12,000 until its final closure in 2009.

Economic expansion underwent more substantial and systematic growth since

the implementation of China's "Great Western Development" campaign (*xibu dakaifa*)

that was officially launched in 2000, one year before China's entry into the World

Trade Organization. Rather than seeing the "go west" campaign as a redirection of

economic development strategies, Tim Oakes pointed out that the campaign was the

culmination of series of "long-term trends" since at least the early 1990s to, among

others, "redress growing inequalities associated with market-oriented reforms and

economic decentralization" (Oakes 2007: 244).[105] With its repeatedly declared aims

to make the west an "incubator for skilled manpower" and a "hot spot for foreign

investments" (Rui Xia 2005), one major objective of the "go west" campaign was to

bridge the expanding rift of economic inequalities between coastal cities in the east

and the western inlands since the post-1978 economic reform. As was further pointed

out by Heike Holbig (2004), the "Open Up the West" policy was not a mere

coincidence with China's WTO accession.[106] Rather, it should be read against the

---

[105] For example, as early as in the early 1990s, series of preferential policies were initiated in Yunnan Province to boost foreign investment, such as Kunming's successful bid to host large-scale export commodities fiar targeted at the Southeast Asian market annually, development of "cooperation zones" and wholesale centers that granted foreign investors with preferential measures, and establishment of the Kunming Hi-tech Industrial Zone in 1992 (d'Hooghe 1994).
[106] The announcement of the Open Up the West campaign in November 1999 coincided with the US-China bilateral agreement on 15 November 1999 that signified a major breakthrough in the then 13-year long negotiation process of China's WTO accession. According to Holbig, the Go West policy "seems to have taken its initial shape against the strategic background of China's expected WTO accession" (Holbig 2004: 28).

strategic background of China's expected WTO accession, one of which being the

painful challenges of international competition to agriculture and heavy industry that

mostly dominated the already economically destitute interior regions. In the case of

Yunnan Province for example, its geopolitical significance during war time as China's

backyard made heavy industry, specifically areas related to national defense and

military needs, a major capital investment to the region by the central government at

the expense of light industry, to the extent that daily necessities were in short supply

in the early 1980s (Gan and Chen 2004). To better comprehend the "Go West"

strategy, a brief delineation of the opening-up policy in China comes in handy.

In 1978, shortly after the end of the ten-year Cultural Revolution from 1966 to

1976, Deng Xiaoping, then leader of China's party-state, initiated the "opening up"

and economic reforms in eastern coastal cities of the country.[107] The release from

plan economy (*jihuajingji*) and the great leap into market economy facilitated

economic growth unheard of in China, with an average annual growth rate of GDP at

10.12% between 1979 and 2010 (Zheng and Xiang 2011). The post-1978 economic

reform and opening up, specifically reconfirmed by Deng Xiaoping's well-known

Southern Tour (*nanxun*) in 1992 after the Tian'anmen Square Incident in June 1989[108],

brought about the "largest internal migration in human history" and sweeping

---

[107] According to Davis (2000), the initial blueprint of economic reform in China did
not intend to allow individuals to accumulate significant capital or property rights. In
fact, in was until the Fourteenth Party Congress of 1992 that the conceptual
framework of "the market" was officially acknowledged as a mechanism of
government by the party-state (Hoffman 2006).

[108] See Zhao (1993) for a detailed discussion of the struggle between Deng's reform
theory (nicknamed as the "cat theory") and another top-tier Chinese leader Chen
Yun's attempted restoration of Mao Zedong's "struggle against peaceful evolution".

transformations of China's economy and society (Jeffreys 2012: 3; see also Delia

Davin 1999). Among the drastic transformations was the collapse of the socialist

urban work tenure system (Rawski 2002), emergence of private entrepreneurship (Liu

2002), and proliferation of "innovative alignments between private businesses and

state elements" that have become signature of the neoliberal processes of

marketization and privatization in China—China's turn towards "state-orchestrated

capitalism" in David Harvey's term (Zhang 2010a: 56; Zhang 2010b; Harvey 2003,

2005).[109] The series of economic restructuring have also witnessed what

anthropologist Pun Ngai termed as the metamorphosis of values that "signals an

entirely new ruse of capital—a new *cultural economy*" that valorizes global

consumption as compared to class-based political economy that focused on the

socialist proletariat production (Pun 2003: 472, italics in origin; see also Davis 2000).

One important indicator of this shift to consumption is then Premier Zhu Rongji's call

to stoke consumer demand in a report delivered to the Ninth People's Congress in

2002:

> We need to eliminate all barriers to consumption by deepening reform and
>
> adjusting policies. We need to encourage people to spend more on housing,
>
> tourism, automobiles, telecommunications, cultural activities, sports and
>
> other services and develop new focuses of consumer spending (Zhu 2002,
>
> *Report on the Work of the Government*, cited in Otis 2012: 43).

---

[109] According to Li Zhang (2010a), two major official motivators that had driven the transformations of ownership in China happened in 1997, when the 15th Chinese Communist Party Congress "announced that shareholding itself should not be labeled as 'socialist' or 'capitalist'," and in 2002, when the 16th Party Congress promoted shareholding as "a way of reforming and organizing state firms" (Zhang 2010a: 56).

Yet three decades of dramatic developments in coastal cities also resulted in

devastating gap of inequalities between the east and the west.[110] During the 1990s for

instance, GDP per capita in Guizhou, the poorest province in China, was only a

twelfth of that in Shanghai, the richest (Wang and Hu 1999). The Western

Development Strategy was born at least in part out of the need to bridge this festering

gap of inequalities that started to instigate increasing instances of social unrests (see

also Solinger 2003; Rui Xia 2005; Oakes 2007).[111]

Kunming in its Double Lateness

As the "Go West" policy shifted the focus of investment and consumer markets

to southwestern cities of Chengdu (capital city of Sichuan Province) and Chongqing

(created as direct-controlled municipality in 1997)—such as Intel's operation of a

large manufacturing and testing campus in Chengdu and APL's (a large ocean

shipping company) move of its 500-person back-office from Shanghai to Chongqing

(Chen 2011: 21), the close-by city of Kunming was put under the radar of more and

more domestic and multinational companies with its lower costs of labor and setup, as

well as a rising population and its potential for urban consumption. Examples include

---

[110] According to Davis and Wang (2009), before market reforms in 1978, China was one of the most equal societies in the world with a relatively flat distribution of income and resources. This is not to deny rural-urban disparity that existed during that period. It might be fair, however, to suggest that the segregation between rural and urban through household registration (hukou) system had made it much less palpable before 1978 (Otis 2012: 5).

[111] Some scholars (Zheng and Xiang 2011) divided different periods of economic development in China in three: balanced development during 1949-1978, unbalanced development during 1979-1991, and coordinated development since 1992. http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/35201/ accessed January 2, 2015.

the first Walmart retail branch in Kunming in 1999 and the booming real estate industry that embraced the aspirations to middle-classness and corresponding patterns of consumption (Otis 2011; Zhang 2010a).

Sharing over 4,000-kilometer border with Vietnam, Laos, and Burma (Myanmar), Yunnan Province resumed its critical role in China's connection to Southeast Asia that was cut short since 1950 out of the party-state's concern with national security (Zhang 2010a: 28).[112] Up to 1990, China resumed its diplomatic relations with all Southeast Asian countries. It became a member of ASEAN Regional Forum in 1994.[113] The launch of the China-ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Free Trade Area in 2010 and Kunming's ensuing strategic position as the "bridgehead city" (*qiaotoubao*) facing Southeast Asia further signified the city's expected economic potentials and its urgent need for well developed infrastructure to facilitate the geopolitical significance it resumed. The re-opening of Yunnan Province to the outside is worth particular attention in that the geographic location of Yunnan has made it oriented not only to Beijing the capital, but also to the Southeast (Evans 2000).[114]

---

[112] A most recent example of Kunming's geopolitical role occurred during the Second World War, when relocation of many people and institutions from eastern China—due to the Japanese army occupation in eastern cities after 1937—facilitated a much delayed take-off of manufacturing in the city; and when the city served as a headquarters for Allied troops' operations against the Japanese in Southeast Asia and a major U.S. Air Force base (Remick 2014). See also Ingrid d'Hooghe (1994) for more detailed discussion of Yunnan's foreign economic relations before the founding of the P. R. C.

[113] Zhu Zhenming, 2008, China's Opening-Up Strategy and Its Economic Relations with ASEAN Countries—A Case Study of Yunnan Province. Institute of Developing Economies, Japan External Trade Organization.

[114] Although as a matter of fact, some scholars readily view Yunnan Province as not really part of China, but a part of world history not only due to its concentration of

The effect of a booming economy was already felt at the beginning of the 21st century, as the city experienced strong macroeconomic growth in GDP and FDI (foreign direct investment). As part of the incentives to prompt local initiative, Kunming was among the western provincial-level special economic zones that were raised by the central government in Beijing to national-level status, which allowed the city much greater flexibility to offer generous incentives to investors (Taube and Ögütçü 2002). In her ethnographic study of the spatialization of class—the making of the new middle classes along with privatizing homeownership in Kunming, anthropologist Li Zhang points out the sense of "double lateness" in Kunming's experiences of economic development in that "it needs to catch up not only with the Western world but also with the more developed coastal regions, special economic zones, and major metropolitan areas in China that opened up earlier and benefited first from reform" (2010a: 47).[115] Added to this sense of double lateness is perhaps also the competition among provincial-level jurisdictions in western regions for preferential measures that range from state investment, infrastructure projects to minority area projects (Holbig 2004: 36).[116] The urgent sense of development is

---

non-Han ethnicities but also its "very real historic economic and trading relations with parts of central Asia, south Asia and south-east Asia" (Tapp 2010: 98).

[115] See Womack and Zhao (1994) for discussion of market localism, provincial diversification and its political implications in China since its economic decentralization ("The many worlds of China's provinces: foreign trade and diversification," in David Goodman [ed.]. China Deconstructs: Politics, Trade and Regionalism).

[116] In Heike Holbig's analysis (2004), China's Western Development Strategy served almost as an emergent counter-strategy to its anticipated WTO accession. As Holbig pointed out, although WTO rules allowed for certain protectionist policies for economically backward regions during a transition period, these policies would not stay in the long run. Thus, in anticipation of the imagined influx of foreign direct investment after China's entry into WTO, and within limited transition period that

perhaps most explicitly expressed by the then municipal governor and chief

administrative officer Qiu He's aggressive statement as follows:

> If China thinks it can afford to spend 50 years to cover the road the West
>
> took 300 years to complete, how can China survive? The only way China can
>
> catch up is to set a blistering developmental pace! (cited in Su and Chen,
>
> 2014: 47)

> Kunming must seize the opportunity to construct the initial bridgehead
>
> and rapidly construct a strategic hub centered on traffic, energy, logistics and
>
> information to boldly underpin construction of a high-speed channel (ibid.).

> Everyone must concentrate on Kunming's industrial breakthrough, go
>
> all out to promote the construction of industrial parks, and mobilize the
>
> people to become involved in trade and investment promotions" (Su and
>
> Chen, 2014: 48).

The massive destruction of urban villages, gentrification of urban spaces and the

relocation and upgrading of the New Luoshiwan into an international trade city were

examples of Qiu's aggressive development style during his four-year term as the city's

Chief Administrative Officer (2007-2011)[117] (Su and Chen 2014). As it turned out,

---

allowed for protectionist policies, provincial jurisdictions in western (and central) regions vied for preferential measures that could help better position themselves vis-à-vis coastal areas in the up-coming global competition. Further, this sense of urgency is also derived from the fact that the western development campaign serves not as replacement of the current regional development strategy or redirection of the state's resources to the development of western regions. As was pointed out by David Goodman (2004), the campaign is intended more as an addendum to the current regional development strategy.

[117] Up until the time of writing, Qiu He is being investigated for suspected involvement in corruption in urban development by the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection. He was taken from a hotel in Beijing by anti-corruption

Yunnan Province had the third fastest growing economy by percentage—a GDP

growth rate at 12.1%—in 2013, a continuation of its 18-year surge of skyrocketing

GDP.[118]

It is perhaps not surprising then to see accelerating increase in salaries along with

rapid economic growth and simultaneous need to boost domestic consumption. Since

its first implementation of minimum wage at RMB 185 (US$ 30.8) in 1995, Yunnan

Province has experienced more than ten readjustments of minimum wage, reaching its

most recent height at RMB 1,420 (around US$ 237) per month in May 2014.[119][120]

More generally, China has experienced robust growth in incomes as part of the

inspectors after attending the final meeting of the annual session of the National People's Congress on March 15, 2015.

[118] Patrick Scally, "Yunnan GDP third fastest-growing in China", published January 21, 2014,
www.gokunming.com/en/blog/item/3145/yunnan_gdp_third_fastest_in_china, accessed Feb. 17, 2015.

[119] According to the central government's five-year plan from 2011-2015, minimum wages should increase by 13 percent a year until they reach at least 40% of average annual urban salaries—which was RMB 46,769 in 2012.
http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-01-06/china-wages-seen-jumping-in-2014-amid-shift-to-services-, accessed Feb. 17, 2015.

[120] The Chinese government started its national minimum wage in 1994 to cover workers' basic living expenses. Standard minimum wage varies by province. Within Yunnan Province, there are three categories of minimum wage: (1) the four main districts in Kunming plus the city of Anning; (2) other county and prefecture level cities in Yunnan, and (3) remaining areas within the province. Against the background of rising minimum wage, two points need to be considered. First, the minimum wage includes deduction of pension, unemployment insurance, medical insurance, and housing fund, the expense of which is expected to be shared by both employers and employees with different percentages. That means, the actual wage received is less than nominal one. Second, the increase of minimum wage has been outpaced by inflation that has at times surpassed 7%.
http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/01/chinas-uneven-labor-revolution/267041/, accessed Feb. 9. 2015. See also
http://www.gokunming.com/cn/blog/item/2962/yunnan_raises_minimum_wage, accessed Feb. 9, 2015. For the newly implemented mandatory social welfare benefits for Chinese employees, see
http://www.china-briefing.com/news/2012/02/21/mandatory-social-welfare-benefits-for-chinese-employees.html, accessed Feb. 17, 2015.

Chinese authorities' concern with the "imbalance between investment and

consumption" and its call for a "long-term mechanism for increasing consumer

demand" during President Hu Jintao's administration (2003-2013) (Hubbard, Hurley,

and Sharma 2012).[121]

Dystopia of the Cultural Economy

Nonetheless, the celebration of the "ideal consumer-citizen" is never attainable

for all (Pun 2003). Neither should the transition from production-centered political

economy to consumption-based cultural economy be regarded as complete. As was

observed in a news report published in *China Daily* in 2010, although salaries are

expected to increase continually, "pay raises may fail to keep up with the country's

price hikes."[122] More intriguingly, as some scholars have observed and argued,

impressive GDP growth in China had been accompanied by decline in urban

employment and expanding income inequalities not only between rural and urban

areas, but also within cities (Solinger 2003; Kuijs and Wang 2005). "[A] structure of

abundance and a structure of want *coexist* in China," as Pun stated (2003: 477, italics

[121] The encouragement of consumption started as early as in the 1990s when the central government took measures to boost domestic consumption, such as the institution of a 40-hour workweek to create a two-day weekend in 1995 and the announcement of two week-long national holidays in 1997 (Pun 2003: 471). These explicit measures signified, according to Pun Ngai, the beginning of the metamorphosis of the discourse of values that subsumes and displaces production with valorization of consumption in the aftermath of the Asian Financial Crisis and in the face of massive overproduction since the second half of the 1990s. It should also be noted that the initiation of minimum wage system took place at roughly the same time in mid-1990s.
[122] "Increased salaries can't fight inflation," by Yang Ning, China Daily, updated 2010-12-28. www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2010-12/28/content_11762557.htm. Accessed Feb. 27, 2015

in origin).

According to Kuijs and Wang (2005), urban employment growth in China slowed from 5.4 percent per year during 1978-93 to 2.9 percent during 1993-2004 due to the specific pattern of economic development since mid-1990s that was characterized by labor productivity growth rather than employment growth (2005: 6; see also Rawski 2002; Solinger 2003). In her analysis of the likely impact of China's accession to the WTO upon urban jobs, Dorothy Solinger (2003) elaborates on several critical issues that might dampen the rosy prospect held by many. Central to her analysis is the difficulty, if not impossibility of re-employment among urban laid-off workforce alongside increasing bankruptcies of state-owned enterprises already underway due to China's structural changes since the late 1980s, unsustainable re-employment programs, influx of rural labor thrown out of employment due to declining incomes in agriculture (Rawski 2002), and foreign investments that favor young and better-educated workers and incoming low-wage rural migrant labor[123]. Specifically hit by the massive urban laid-offs and difficulty of re-employment were women and elder workers, with elder women doubly disadvantaged (Gile, Park and Cai 2006; Rawski 2002; Solinger 2003). During my outreach activities in the

---

[123] One major reason for the preference of migrant labor has to do with the legacy of urban tenure system from socialist China. According to Thomas Rawski (2002), until the late 1990s, state-own enterprises in China were characterized by "employee tenure, narrow wage differentials, and extensive employer-provided benefits," including housing, pensions, health care, and education (2002: 5). Confronted with increasingly fierce competition that demands alternative calculation of costs and profits, coupled with the long-standing spatial income disparities between the urban and the rural (Rawski 2002: 8), some state enterprises sometimes offer migrant workers jobs made vacant by the "accelerated, mandatory early retirement of urban workers over the age of 35" (Solinger 2003: 67-68).

dispersed low-end red-light areas of Kunming, most of the female masseuses and sex

workers were elder women who were married and had children to support, with the

exception of more organized sex business in some urban villages where younger

women worked under pimps or owners of hair/massage salons. As we shall see later

in this chapter, many transgendered sex workers in the low-end sexual market of

Kunming gained the upper hand over their elderly female co-workers with their more

daring and better orchestrated performance of feminine sexuality.

 Solinger (2003) thus tellingly points out the widening gap between on the one

hand urban nouveau riche who benefit from greater employment opportunities and

wider range of consumption choices, and on the other millions more who sink deeper

into poverty, for whom the lack of job opportunities entails a vicious cycle of poverty

inherited by the younger generation.

> The overall picture is becoming increasingly clear. As China enters even
>
> more fully into the global economy, we can expect that, while millions of
>
> better placed citizens rise to the challenge and upgrade their jobs, millions
>
> more will sink, their working lives cut short, their potential undeveloped,
>
> their situation increasingly desperate, and their capacity to purchase any of
>
> those enticing products offered up by the world market and its merchants
>
> nonexistent. (Solinger 2003: 87)

In the case of Kunming, one most explicit demonstration is the juxtaposition of on the

one hand the dark corner at the dilapidated Dongfeng Square waiting to give way to

the construction of a subway station, and on the other hand the close-by shopping

centers and high-rise office buildings that flaunted their existence with flashy neon

lights visible from the square. Or take a look at the Nanping pedestrian street at the

urban center, where shopping malls and big stores line both sides of the street while

blind masseurs and masseuses in lab coats stood along the middle walkway with a

short stool in the front to wait for business every day.

The above discussion highlights at least four issues. First, it demonstrates the

lack of sufficient urban employment in spite of impressive economic performance.

Second, it reveals the limited relevance of salary increases to a growing unemployed

population, although admittedly concentration of high-profit firms, salary increases

and consumption demands of the urban well-off will give rise to new opportunities of

informal economy and low-cost services that help maintain a ceiling on the urban cost

of living while at the same time make available greater variety of urban consumption

(Sassen 1998; Otis 2012). Third, it points to the decreasing affordability of consumer

items for the urban poor along with price rises amidst the consumption revolution in

China since the late 1990s. As anthropologist Pun Ngai has critically argued, "[t]he

movement to consume never reduces the divide [between newly wealthy urbanites

and urban proletariat and the rural poor], though it is often imagined that consumption

has a magical effect of homogenizing difference" and thus facilitating

self-transformation (2003: 477). Fourth, the enlarging gap between urban nouveau

riche and the urban poor further contributes to the "desiring machine of consumption"

that motivates while at the same time displaces the subject of production (Pun 2003).

That is, the neoliberal aspiration to consume and to gratify a desired reality glosses

over the exploitative labor of production—or displaces it as a precondition of self

actualization.

Echoing the general disparities is the higher proportion of poverty in Yunnan

Province (Donaldson 2011; Hyde 2007; Zheng and Xiang 2011). In a comparative

study of the economic developments in Guizhou and Yunnan, two of the landlocked

provinces in southwest China, John Donaldson noticed a confounding contrast

between the two places in terms of both overall economic growth and poverty

alleviation. According to Donaldson (2011), during the ten years between 1997 and

2007, although Yunnan had dramatically outpaced Guizhou in economic growth

rate[124], "the net rural income of the Guizhou poor counties exceeded that of the

Yunnan poor counties by an average of more than 16 percent" (2011: 6). As has been

pointed out by Rui (2005), "[e]ven as a few western cities enjoy unprecedented

prosperity, the rural areas sink deeper into poverty," so that urban-rural divide in the

west is taking the place of, if not co-existing with, east-west divide, to become new

problems of concern.[125] That is to suggest that despite the booming economy in cities

---

[124] Statistics had it that for the first quarter of 2005, Yunnan was put as the fastest-growing provincial economy in China following the country's "go west" campaign (Western Development) that kicked off in 2000 under the leadership of former Premier Zhu Rongji. Although some experts also pointed out that the "go west" campaign, started in the name of bridging the gap between economic inequalities between the east and the west, would ultimately benefit the east more than its western counterpart. http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China_Business/GI15Cb01.html, accessed on January 1, 2015.

[125] Alternatively, Zheng and Xiang's research demonstrated a narrowing down of gap between urban and rural residents with annual growth rate of real PIUH (per capita disposable income of urban households) and real PIRH (per capita net income of rural households). Although later in the same report, they also mentioned urban-rural income disparities (2011: 14). Meanwhile they also pointed out widening intraregional disparities that question uniform development strategies for western

such as Kunming, capital of Yunnan Province, many rural counties of the western regions remained left far behind, giving rise to the more obvious pattern of intra-provincial migration. According to Liang *et al*. (2014), the percentage of intra-provincial migration in Yunnan in 2010 was as high as 77.76% as compared to that of interprovincial migration at 22.24%. As it turned out, among both the female and transgendered sex workers I talked to during my outreach activities, the majority came from other parts of the province or neighboring provinces that include Sichuan and Guizhou. They scattered around different spots of Kunming where a range of sexual services could be sought at affordable prices.

This climbing number of migrant workers to urban Kunming is to be read alongside the gentrification processes of the city in anticipation of foreign investments and the limited attraction in its possession to most investors. It is also to be read against the decreasing attraction of low-skill formal employment due to its limited economic gains and stringent strategies of labor control, such as fines and penalties with the help of technological surveillance. In her study of cashiers working in the Walmart of Kunming, Otis found that in addition to high labor turnover, many casual workers (*linshigong*) hired as cashiers were unwilling to convert to formal employment after a three-month probation due to the large deduction for insurance from full-time payment (200 *yuan* out of a regular 760-*yuan* monthly salary), the resulting amount of salary was even less than that of casual workers at 600 *yuan* (about US$100) (Otis 2011).

---

regions in China (ibid.).

It is thus the coexistence of continual rural-urban migration, urban gentrification that further strengthens boundary making between ideal consumer-citizens and their failed counterparts, limited opportunities of formal urban employment, and lack of attraction of low-value and low-skill formal employment. As a matter of fact, my field research witnessed not only series of urban village demolition that drove its residents further away from the city center, but also capricious police patrolling and crackdowns that dissolved clusters of streetwalkers and shut down dance halls, and reconstruction projects that urged masseuses and sex workers to seek alternative spaces for their business.

Towards the end of my field research in June 2013, the Dongfeng Square, once a public leisure space that accommodated multiple forms of sociality including ethnic group dancing, heterosexual massage, and *tongzhi* cruising, was completely walled off with PVC panels. The Kunming Municipal Workers' Cultural Palace, landmark of the square and the city, was demolished with explosives on September 7 of that year to make way for the construction of a 15,000 square meter public plaza flanked by shopping space and a 456-meter skyscraper, a most explicit symbolic representation of the transition from socialist embrace of hard work to the neoliberal celebration of consumer culture that glosses over inequalities with its proclaimed universal accessibility. As a result, not only were streetwalkers driven farther away from the increasingly gentrified city center, so were rural migrants who used to occupy the space with ethnic group dances, boom box music, and portable karaoke sets. In her ethnographic study of the shifting practices of commercial sexual transactions in

postindustrial globalization, anthropologist Elizabeth Bernstein points out that the

spatial transformation—"a new geography of centrality and marginality"—in San

Francisco that aims at purging sex workers and other deprived underclass from the

"newly desirable downtown real estate" is indicative of the "spatial governmentality"

integral to the political concerns with migration and national identity (2007). Sexual

commerce is thus not so much banned as reallocated and privatized to indoor and

virtual space that features, among other things, a shift of social actors from migrant

streetwalkers to well-educated middle-class white women, and a shift to postindustrial

"fun ethic" where "being a sex worker was about taking pleasure in sex" (Bernstein

2007: 80).

Although similar process seems to have been taking place in China[126], as could

be seen from Tiantian Zheng's (2009) research on the burgeoning sex commerce of

karaoke hostesses as indispensable rituals of business negotiation, and Elaine Jeffreys'

(2012) court cases and media reports of voluntary youth prostitution of high school

and university students, I am more concerned here with the flexibility with which

streetwalkers negotiated everyday business amidst rapidly shifting urban landscapes.

It is against this shifting socioeconomic background and urban re-zoning that

transgendered individuals' participation in heterosexual transactions needs to be

considered.

---

[126] In an interview conversation with the renowned Chinese sexologist Pan Suiming, Pan also hinted at the emphasis on "sex for pleasure" in China's sexual revolution. That is, the transition from sex as in the service of procreation to the stress on privacy and sexual pleasure as a result of diverse social transformations that include the One-Child Family Policy, population mobility, privatization of the home space, and emerging geography of leisure (Sigley and Jeffreys 1999).

Joining the Workforce

I had my first conversation with Yanzi after several fleeting encounters in the dark corners of Dongfeng Square. She was then enthusiastically showing me pictures on her smartphone of a three-story house that her family recently built in her home county. Yanzi had been in the transgendered sexual business for about ten years and had been living almost 24 hours as a transgendered individual, except for her occasional trips back home in a close-by county within the province. Her family knew nothing about her transgendered practices. Yanzi was one of the several transgendered sex workers who always boasted to me the amount of money they earned from a previous business night. She was also among those who treated me to meals at their rented places, although whenever I returned her kindness with fruits, she would ask me not to do that again and reason with me in the following manner.

> You're a student and don't have a job here. We're not the same. We've
>
> already joined the workforce (*canjia gongzuo*). I understand the bitter life of
>
> students… (April 2, 2013)

I was a bit taken aback by her use of the Chinese term *canjia gongzuo*, an anachronistic expression that—with all its formality and serious aspiration—sounded too old and red[127] to me. It reminded me of the old socialist past when college graduates were assigned jobs by the government upon graduation and were expected to stay in it for the rest of their lives.[128] Her positioning of herself being in the

---

[127] The color red is used here metaphorically to refer to the passionate Communist past in China.

[128] Job assignments by government ended altogether in the early 1990s. http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-Pacific/2011/1126/China-s-younger-generatio

workforce while I as a student became more obvious when I noticed unintentionally that my mobile entry in her phone had always been "student" (*xuesheng*) rather than my somewhat complicated Chinese name. But Yanzi was not the only one who positioned me in the category of students who lack and thus desire for money.

When the oddity of my presence in the massage area of the Dongfeng Square was finally tamed by the frequency of my outreach activities there, I found myself standing arm in arm with one of the elderly female masseuses one night, who was persuading me to quit my voluntary work at Parallel to earn myself some pocket money.

I only do massage[129], clean and safe. Around ten minutes each time at 10 yuan. Some generous people would give 20 yuan. That makes about 50-60 yuan a day, or sometimes 30-40 yuan. A bit more than 1000 yuan each month…You shouldn't do volunteer work anymore. Come do massage here. Things are so expensive nowadays. I just bought some beef and other stuff today and it cost me dozens of yuan. You should earn some money and buy yourself some stuff. (September 9, 2012)

During my 18-month field research in Kunming, I made acquaintance with most of my transgendered informants in scattered red-light areas of the city. Most of them

---

n-lifestyle-counts-as-much-as-work, accessed January 26, 2015. See also Lisa Hoffman for an ethnographic discussion of the transition from state job assignments to job fairs (2006).

[129] During my field research in Kunming, I found low-end massage on streets quite popular. In addition to the blind massage along the Nan Ping pedestrian street at city center where blind masseurs/masseuses in white medical coats lined the street with little stools, elderly female masseuses were frequently visible in parks and squares with not only stools but also umbrellas. While umbrellas were used to keep away the sun, they could also be used to hide away any additional services to massage.

maintained a gendered sartorial split between day and night, sometimes with a

transformation so drastic that I could have never recognized them were it not for their

friendly greetings. One of the tales most often told to me by my transgendered

informants was the amount of money they had made the previous night. Economic

profitability and accumulation of capital is undeniably one major concern when

transgendered sex work is concerned. Many of them regarded wearing women's dress

and make-up as a lucrative occupation— "joining the workforce"—that seemed to

bear limited relation to a gendered and sexual sense of self. As mentioned earlier in

one ethnographic vignette of this chapter, most transgendered sex workers started

wearing make-up (and doing sex work) only to make money.[130] One obvious example

was Yulan, a straight man who did transgendered sex work to help support his

family.[131]

I met Yulan for the first time in a focus group meeting for male-to-female

transgender people sponsored by a local HIV/AIDS intervention project that targeted

specifically at transgendered sex workers, almost all of them streetwalkers in

Kunming. A bit bulky for his short height, Yulan was wearing men's black leather

jacket and jeans in dark blue, sitting in the long couch with Fang, a female friend of

his who was also in the sex business. I was a bit confused by their presence and

---

[130] It should be noted that for earlier transgendered practitioners, donning feminine clothing and wearing make-up might have served more for fun and self-expression than economic consideration. BZ once told me that when she did not expect to make money when she first started transgendered practices. Gina also expressed to me her surprise when she accidentally ran into her transgendered friends who were soliciting customers at Shuanglongqiao Bridge in early 2000s.

[131] See Kong (2010), Chapman et al. (2009), Jeffreys (2012) for more discussion on self-identified heterosexual men engaged in male-male prostitution in China.

decided to remain quiet and observe. BZ, an outspoken and easy-going transgendered

sex worker and key informant of my field research, was chatting with them both.

They were teasing Yulan and told us that Yulan's (sex work) business has been one of

the best among them due to her feminine beauty. My imagination failed to stretch

across the gender and sexual line when I was observing Yulan's response. He was

quiet and obviously disinterested. Yulan's lack of interest in others' comments on his

femininity reminded me of Yanzi's reluctance, if not refusal, to hang out with gay

men.

I was then walking with Yanzi toward a bus station right outside the urban village

where she rented her apartment. I told her what I learned about the transgender erotic

market niche in Beijing—that customers knew about transgendered sex workers'

identity and were even willing to pay higher prices for their sexual services. I asked if

there was something similar in Kunming. Yanzi sidestepped my question as was often

the case and responded assertively, "They are all homosexuals. Otherwise they won't

come back for it after they tried it once." I grabbed the chance and followed her

response with another question about her own identity. Glancing at the restaurants that

lined the street close to the bus stop, Yanzi replied in a roundabout way.

> I don't like hanging out with those homosexuals. They don't work, cannot
>
> even afford a meal. You see those waiting tables in the restaurant? They stand
>
> a whole day only to *ku* (earn) a little money each month. I can *ku* that amount
>
> of money within just a few days. It (sex work) makes quick money.
>
> (September 9, 2012)

This was one of those intriguing moments in my field work, when my eagerness to pair transgendered individuals' practices with recognizable identity met with what initially seemed to me an irrelevant answer. Yet on second thought, it was not so much an irrelevant answer as a correction of my assumption. Yanzi's juxtaposition of "those homosexuals", those waiting tables and herself through the trope of money making was a telling example of how economy played an integral part in the conceptualization of one's selfhood (see Chapter Four).

Yanzi did not actually deny her connection with homosexuality; nor did she claim a distinct identity from "those homosexuals". Instead, her emphasis was laid on the willingness and ability to *kuqian* (earn money)—the neoliberal aspiration of self-making and self-transformation through making money. In Kunming dialect, making money is expressed as *kuqian*, with *ku* as a verb that implies bitterness and suffering, echoing the communist work ethic of "eating bitterness" (*chiku*) in pre-reform China. Juxtaposing herself alongside those homosexuals who do not work, or those waiting at tables who stand a whole day only to earn a meager income, Yanzi claimed her difference in her ability to make quick money. And it is through integrating the pre-reform socialist work ethic of eating bitterness and the neoliberal mantra (with Chinese characteristics) of flexibility and self-making that Yanzi skillfully downplayed the assumed difference between homosexual and heterosexual, while augmenting that between herself and "those homosexuals". This is to suggest at least four crucial points. First, economy is indispensable in considering transgendered practices. Second, this priority of economic gains does not necessarily mean a denial

of gendered and sexual sense of self—it is not an either-or question. As a matter of

fact, several of the transgendered individuals I made acquaintance with had involved

in same-sex heterogender relationship for varying length of time. It is rather an

indication of the *non-centrality* of gender and sexuality in the understanding of

transgendered practices against the background of postsocialist China and the priority

it has given to economic developments. Third, the distinction Yanzi maintained

between waiting tables and making fast money through sex work signifies a shifting

moral landscape in neoliberal China, where "money not morality was what mattered"

(Jeffreys 2012: 51). As the Chinese saying goes, "[people] laugh at the poor, not

prostitutes" (*xiaopin bu xiaochang*). Pan Suiming also mentioned in an interview that

along with China's sexual revolution, women's narratives of sex work shifted from

that of trickery or deception in the 1980s to voluntary choice to make "fast" money

(Sigley and Jeffreys 1999: 55). Sex work thus results not so much from forced labor

as from a calculated estimation of possible economic gains and risks amidst the twin

process of dwindling urban employment and neoliberal embrace of consumption.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that alongside the proliferating discourses of

sexual rights (Pan 2006), sexual consumption, and sexual entrepreneurship among

emerging urban middle-classes (Farrer 2006; McMillan 2006; Jeffreys 2006), is

vigorous state intervention at different levels that range from street lighting system,

internet censorship, to police crackdown on prostitution. This differentiated treatment

of sexual rights among citizens of difference classes is reminiscent of what

Nguyen-Vo termed as "differentiated citizenry" her ethnographic study of neoliberal

governance in Vietnam, where "middle-class wifeliness" that "out-whore prostitutes"

within the hygienic conjugal confines coexists with the "true" selves of sex workers

that is docile and obedient—ideal pieceworkers of the global assembly line

(Nguyen-Vo 2008).

In another focus group meeting for transgendered sex workers, participants

generally agreed that the majority of their transgendered sisters started cross-dressing

only for making (more) money. I have heard stories about transgendered sex workers

earning enough money to buy themselves homes in urban Kunming; transgendered

friends such as Autumn had been saving part of her income for her family in a rural

county of Yunnan Province; Mina from another province had been doing

transgendered sex work across the country for years and planned to use her savings to

open a small supermarket in her home city; Yulan and his wife both worked as

streetwalkers to help support the education of their two kids. Meanwhile, the

three-story house in Yanzi's home country, which I had always assumed to have been

built with her income, turned out to have been financed by her father through selling

lands of their household. Whatever the reason, they moved across scattered urban

spaces of Kunming to better capture the ebbs and flows of business opportunities,

including Dongfeng Square, urban villages, and dance halls.

Urban Enclaves of Low-End Sex Work

Dongeng Square was one of the places where I did regular outreach work among

female and transgendered sex workers. The square encompassed not only the city

landmark of the Workers' Cultural Palace, but also a cluster of recreation spaces that range from open-air cinema, a roller-skating ring, a public square where people do ethnic group dance, and several small parklands of which street massage and gay cruising had been known components. Conversation with elder gay men revealed that one of the public gardens at Dongfeng Square, nicknamed as the "back garden" (*houhuayuan*) had been a tacit gay cruising space for dozens of years. Partitioned by an alleyway next to the back garden was the massage area where masseuses and transgendered sex workers waited for their business in the evening. Compared to the surrounding shopping areas that included retail shops and multi-story shopping malls, the square appeared too dark and dilapidated to be noticeable at night. Probably due to its expected reconstruction—though no exact date was confirmed then, the square was already partly separated from its surrounding with blue PVC panels when I started my field research. Yet lively and boisterous nightly activities continued despite undecided date of demolition, limited street lights, and occasional patrolling by *chengguan*[132]. Transgendered sex workers wandered around the dimly lit massage area alongside masseuses to attract potential customers' attention, who were also moving around the space dotted by bushes and stone benches.

Neither massage nor sex work existed exclusively in Dongfeng Square. Scattered parkland in the city, dimly lit alleyways of urban villages, debris of torn down urban

---

[132] Chengguan, literally translated as urban management, refers to the Urban Administrative and Law Enforcement Bureau. The new law enforcement bureau was established around 2001/2002 in most major cities of China to help upgrade urban governance as Chinese cities become more crowded and more urban problems emerged. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2006-08/17/content_666765.htm, accessed March 11, 2015.

villages that awaited to be removed, and low-end dance halls were examples of the diverse urban enclaves of low-end sex work integral to the mobility of their occupants. Compared to their female counterparts, transgendered sex workers seemed to have demonstrated a greater degree of flexibility. Many of them switched places even within one evening. For example, Autumn divided her business night into two parts, with early evening at Dongfeng Square and late night at places closer to her rented room in an urban village; Yanzi spent afternoons in dance hall while evenings at Dongfeng Square or other parkland. Decision of location was also frequently made due to unexpected incidents. Glass Stockings stopped going to Dongfeng Square after rumor was spread about her poor financial situation and the debt she owed; Autumn switched to another place as some masseuses spread news about their transgendered identity; Yanzi left the place because a small group of female pick-pockets disguised as masseuse started to draw attention from the urban management bureau; Chin moved to a newly developed tourist "old town" several kilometers south of downtown Kunming for new business opportunities.

Rumors come and go. So do transgendered sex workers. Most often, they simply rotated between several locations to better capture the ebbs and flows of business. It is thus not uncommon to see the same faces in different locations. In time of extended slow business, some transgendered sex workers would travel to another city upon friends' recommendation or based on their past experience. For instance, BZ used to travel to Xishuangbanna (or Sipsongpanna), a famous tourist city of Yunnan that boasts of its tropical biodiversity and ethnic culture, during the Chinese New Year and

profited a great deal from the local sex business as most female sex workers went

back home for family reunion.

Yet the mobility of transgendered sex workers is not to be taken for granted. My

outreach activities revealed some of the hidden rules in selection of business locations.

One night during our outreach, we were sharing with several transgendered friends

the business information of one *momo* dance hall where customers seemed to have

disproportionately outnumbered sex workers. Unlike discos that boast of metropolitan

style of consumption, *momo* dance halls are poorly furnished indoor dance clubs with

poor sound systems that targeted mostly at migrant workers. Entrance tickets ranged

from 5-10 *yuan*. *Mo* in Chinese means "to touch, usually with hands." *Momo* dance

halls thus refer to dance places where customers could touch dancer's body with

certain amount of dance fee (in addition to entrance ticket), usually around 10 *yuan*

for each dance. Additional sexual services could be provided upon request, or as was

more often the case, through active solicitations by sex workers. Thus the greater

number of customers in a dance hall could suggest better business opportunities. Yet

Wendy warned me with her usual smile, "Shunyuan, we shouldn't go to places we're

not familiar with!" I was all of a sudden reminded of Chin's experience in Honglian

Street, a red-light area in one urban village.

Sex businesses in urban villages took various forms ranging from independent

streetwalkers to massage parlors that offered sexual services upon request. Business in

Honglian Street stood somewhere in between, with sex workers sitting in front of the

bungalow rented by pimps for sexual transactions. In this case, sex workers usually

waited for customers solicited by the madams. Chin started transgendered sex work during my field research and had been working on her own in scattered places. She wanted to see if she could earn a more stable working space there. Yet her comparatively more mature and reserved femininity did not seem compatible with the generally young and fashionable dynamic of the place. She was even driven away while standing at a street corner by a madam who was soliciting potential customers for her girls. Chin did not return to Honglian Street since then.

Wendy's warning against and Chin's encounter in unfamiliar place are indicative of the tactics demanded in carving out one's own space of sexual business. Specifically intriguing is Chin's case, where a performative style of femininity more than transgendered practices *per se*—as there were transgendered "sisters" working in that area either on their own or with pimps' protection—seemed to be given heavier weight. Indeed, the performance of femininity—instead of gendered or sexual identity—played an indispensable part in transgendered individuals' negotiations and exploration of urban sexual enclaves in competition with their female counterparts for straight customers. That is, unlike sexual commerce in some other cities such as Beijing and Shenzhen, where specific niche markets had been created for transgenderism, the transgendered sex workers I encountered in Kunming stood alongside and competed with female sex workers for male customers who sought heterosexual sex. It is thus particularly important for transgendered individuals to better position themselves in a generally heterosexual market of sex commerce.

Performing Gender with Foreign Flavor

The second time I saw Yulan (the first time being the focus group meeting for transgendered sex workers) was in a dark alley of one urban village at the outskirts of Kunming, close to the Dounan Flowers Market—the biggest flower wholesale market in China. She was then wearing a long-hair wig and heavy make-up. Her shiny golden eye shadows and fake eyelashes were specifically eye-catching. Walking in her short tight dress and high heels, giving off sweet perfume with every turn of the body, Yulan struck me as a completely different person from the reticent and countrified father of two children at the focus group meeting. She was standing with a few more transgendered and female sex workers, whose faces and bodies were largely absorbed in the darkness of the night at the narrow alleyway. Potential customers wandering around took out a tiny flashlight to take a passing glimpse or two at each one of them.

One significant distinction of transgendered sex workers from many of their female counterparts, specifically middle-aged ones, is the former's often sexy and comparatively more carefully orchestrated outfit and make-up. As is clearly summarized by Elaine Jeffreys, "In China, as in other parts of the world, prostitution is an ageist, classist, racist and sexist industry that offers short-term financial gain for those who use their bodies as sexual capital" (2012: 5). Though interestingly, in the case of transgendered individuals in the low-end sex market of Kunming, it is the *performance* of gender and sexuality—not the essentialized and ontologized difference of gender and sexuality—that rules the game. Chin, a transgendered sex worker who was comparatively new in the business, once described to me how

customers preferred her over "real women".

> We most of the time stand along with 'real women' (*zhen nvren*). They are
>
> real, but many of them are older and don't dress up. They look sloppy, can
>
> hardly attract customers' attention…For several times when I stood side by
>
> side with them 'real women' at Dongfeng Square, customers always picked
>
> me. I felt really bad that in the end I told them (customers) I was in my
>
> period and asked them to find someone else. (January 26, 2013)

The fact that transgendered sisters could outperform their female competitors in attracting men's attention speaks to Judith Butler's classic theorization of gender as performative that de-essentialized a pre-discursive sexed body (1999[1993]), although this also had to do with the fact that their competitors were mostly elderly women who kept a comparatively low profile and thus much less sexually attractive. This is to suggest, while transgendered sisters' successful gendered performance testifies to the non-essential connection between gender and sex, it is not to be taken as a simple celebration of gender as performative. Transgendered sisters' conscious selection of business space alongside elderly masseuses helped facilitate their performance. At least two points are worthy of further discussion. First, the success of transgendered performance is built upon an assemblage of urban wretchedness that specifically includes middle-aged women's disadvantages. Second, the transgendered sisters' performance was by no means seamless. It requires an orchestrated performance of gender and sexuality, which was then completed with other more contingent elements at their disposal.

Echoing Chin's claim of popularity, Yanzi further explained to me what it meant to dress up for good business.

Those women are just too old-fashioned (*tu*[133]). That's why I am able to grab men's attention whenever I go there…You need to expose more of your body to be touched. Only short skirt, low back and low-cut dress can make good business. That way customers can easily touch the breasts. (February 27, 2013)

For Yanzi, and many of the transgendered individuals I knew in Kunming, a touch of "foreign flavor", sexiness, and femininity constituted an almost enclosed triangle where each reaffirm the other in their successful gendered performance. In my conversation with Malan, an occasional transgendered performer who cross-dressed for fun or for performance, femininity was equated with sexiness. I was then riding at the back of Malan's scooter, heading towards Dongfeng Square to do outreach. Malan was wearing a shoulder-length wig and casual make-up. Her short chiffon dress lightly touched the skin of my hand as we were riding together in the gentle breeze of the night. I asked Malan about her preferred style of feminine dress. She responded with great certainty that when dressed as a woman, one should definitely go for sexiness.

The attachment of femininity with foreign/Western flavor is definitely not new in China studies, neither is the fact provocative that the feminine body should shoulder

---

[133] In addition to being old-fashioned, the Chinese word tu, literally translated as "soil", implies also a connection with the rural. That is, there is a connection implied in tu between rural and being old-fashioned.

the responsibility of representing the "modern"[134]. Historical analyses and studies of

public culture that concern shifting gender politics in China have demonstrated ways

in which "the" Western woman had come to represent modernity, liberation, and

material prosperity through her voluptuous body and "her relentless undress" (Schein

1994: 143; Honig and Hershatter 1988; Yang 1999; Farquhar 2002; Otis 2012).

Although divided in their evaluations as to the effects of economic reform upon

women's status in China, scholars generally agreed that economic reform and opening

up in China since the 1980s had brought about fundamental changes in public

conceptualizations and embodiments of genders, specifically through encouragement

of consumption boosted by the market economy (Yang 1999; Farrer 2002; Jankowiak

2002; Rofel 2007). The first three decades since the founding of the People's Republic

of China in 1949 witnessed increasing conflation of class and gender, complemented

with unisex dress that erased gender difference as indicator of women's equivalent

status with men and revolutionary youth's alignment with the masses. This austerity

gave way to explorations of self expressions since the 1980's, among which was

women's interest in adornment and fashion, what used to be castigated as

counterrevolutionary and belonging to the "decadent style" of the Western bourgeois

(Honig and Hershatter 1988). Not any more since the 1980's, when fashion magazines

made their debut and fashionable clothing, both Western and Chinese, appeared in

these magazines; and when these magazines increasingly featured foreign models in

avant-garde clothing. "Nowhere did the public messages for young women change so

---

[134] Although admittedly and intriguingly, women have also been regarded as gatekeeper of traditional culture (eg. Schein 2000).

radically in the 1980's as in the area of adornment. Opinion about fashion, as about

many other things, reacted against the compulsory austerity of the Cultural

Revolution," noted by China historians Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter (1988: 42).

Similarly, Pan Suiming and Huang Yingying (2013), Chinese scholars of sex and

sexuality, referred to the 1980's as the beginning of China's "sexual revolution" (*xing*

geming).[135] They summarized five aspects of the "sexual revolution", among which is

women's sexual revolution that includes ways of dressing and body images.[136]

According to Pan and Huang, the "sexualized era" of China in the 21st century

features, among other things, publicity and visibility of sexuality, ranging from public

advertisements of things broadly related to sexuality such as breast implant, STDs

treatment, and treatment for sexual dysfunction, to expansion of sexual vocabulary

and sexual expressions as way of self expression (2013: 7-8). That is to say, not only

is the female body increasingly feminized, femininity is more and more sexualized.

For example, if describing someone as sexy (*xinggan*) used to be derogative,

castigating that person as coquettish, the term has come to suggest femininity

(*nvrenwei*, taste of womanliness), that is, having feminine attraction. While urban

women during the Cultural Revolution intentionally bought smaller bras to downplay

as much as possible their body difference from men, having "deep career line"

---

[135] In a separate edited chapter, Pan (2006) suggested that China's sexual revolution resulted not so much from Western influences as from the Chinese party-state's policy initiative.

[136] The other four aspects are: revolution in sexual philosophy; revolution in sexual representation; revolution in sexual behaviors; and revolution in sexual relations (Pan and Huang 2013: 6-7).

(*shiyexian*)[137]—referring metaphorically to the positive connection of the cleavage of

a woman and her success in career—is what defines femininity now (Pan and Huang

2013: 5).[138]

Imagined Cosmopolitanism

It should be cautioned that while economic reforms and opening up have been

mostly regarded as initiating processes of Westernization in China, the West/foreign is

not singularly represented and performed by Westerners.[139] Quite the contrary, at

least in terms of the image of "modern" woman, cosmopolitanism is increasingly

embodied by Chinese women as well[140], a most recent example of which might be the

production of Oriental beauty during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, when roughly

380 Chinese women, aged 18 to 25 and with a "regular appearance with standard

proportion" were selected as the Olympic medal ceremony presenters.[141] It is with

---

[137]
http://chinesefever.blogspot.com/2011/05/euphemism-what-is-film-that-has-smashed.html, accessed January 27, 2015.

[138] However, it should also be noted that the shifting discourse and practices of gender expression and sexual culture did not appear unchallenged. In his ethnographic study of the emerging sexual culture among pre-marriage Shanghai youth through the telling and performance of their everyday sexual stories, James Farrer (2002)

[139] Although in quite a twisted way, the Western face still holds great currency in contemporary Chinese imagination of advanced development and prosperity, as could be seen in more recent reports about foreigners, Caucasians specifically, being "rented" to act as business partners, foreign experts etc. to make an impression upon whoever that need to be impressed.
http://www.cnn.com/2010/BUSINESS/06/29/china.rent.white.people/

[140] It should be noted that consumer culture and its association with image of modern Chinese women is not new. As early as in the 1920's and 1930's, booming consumer culture in Shanghai produced "modern girl" that featured consumption of exotic produce such as alcoholic drinks and cigarette during colonial modernity (Mackie 2012; see more on "Modern Girl" around the world in the 1920's in Alys Weinbaum *et al.* 2008).

[141] Li Hongmei, "From Iron Girls to Oriental Beauty," The China Beat, originally

this conceptualization of foreignness that Yanzi's notion of *yangqi* (foreign flavor)

should be looked at. That is, when Yanzi stressed the indispensability of foreign flavor

in her feminine attire, what she hinted at was less of a clearly indexed Western

femininity that is sexy, but more of a diffused imagination of cosmopolitanism that

she—and her transgendered co-workers—actively participated in shaping and

defining. Louisa Schein's notion of "imagined cosmopolitanism" is helpful here.

According to Schein, as China went deeper into its reform and opening in the

1990's, "the identities they (Chinese people) were forging were decreasingly

structured by an internal Chineseness versus an external foreignness. The Chinese

were fashioning themselves more and more as participants in a global culture of late

capitalist consumption" (Schein 1994: 149). It is this destabilizing of "contrastive

Chineseness" and redistribution of identity—no longer a stereotypical dyad of

Chineseness versus foreignness, the processes of which is suffused with local

practices—that is termed as "imagined cosmopolitanism". The imaginability of

cosmopolitanism as one of its participant instead of a simple imitator is significant in

understanding Yanzi's, and many other transgendered individuals' selective

performance of the feminine gender.[142] It is significant not only in the sense of their

participation, but in the very fact that it is the transgendered feminine body that was

published online on December 9, 2008.
http://thechinabeat.blogspot.com/2008/12/from-iron-girls-to-oriental-beauties.html,
accessed January 18, 2015.

[142] This is not to deny the kind of imitation work that transgendered individuals had
done to perform femininity. I want to stress the fact that whenever I asked my
transgendered informants about where they picked up their specific expressions of
femininity, they almost never gave me any clear answer except that they learned and
perfected their performance from diverse sources, including learning from each other,
sometimes as apprentice, sometimes as friends and co-workers.

participating.

From Yanzi's stress of "foreign flavor" that could have customers touch the breasts, to Malan's direct equation made between being women and being sexy, transgendered individuals are actively defining and embodying cosmopolitan femininity. Intriguingly, if in feminist historian Liz Conor analysis of the historical "appearing" of modern women in the public spaces in the 1920s of Australia, visibility and visuality moved beyond the spectacularisation of women as objectification to become indispensable in the constitution of a new feminine subjectivity in modernity that was itself a "spectacular age" (Conor 2002, 2004), then visibility of cosmopolitan femininity embodied by transgendered bodies added a different layer of complication to the interconnectivity between appearing/visibility and feminine subjectivity. Through deploying and exploiting the desirability and consumability of the cosmopolitan feminine body, transgendered individuals and their performance of femininity were part and parcel of the constitution of cosmopolitan feminine subjectivity. Again, this performance is rendered specifically effective when it is juxtaposed alongside the low-profile and conservative gender expression of elderly women. (see also Illicit Flirtations about Filipino trans in Japan)

It is through this active participation in imagining and embodying cosmopolitan femininity that Yanzi, and many other transgendered sex workers alike, claimed superiority over "real women", mostly elderly female masseuses, although admittedly, their performance of femininity was highly selective on the basis of an erotic market fantasized by potential male clients.

Displacing Subalternity

In her ethnographic analysis of the Miao, one of the 55 ethnic groups in China in addition to Han, Louisa Schein used the concept of "displacing subalternity" to disrupt claims of a unified subaltern positioning of ethnic minorities in China, specifically that of the Miao. For Schein, it is more fruitful to think of subalternity[143] "in terms of the *mobility* of otherness in which sites of subordination are anxiously reconstituted by those seeking to evade them" (2000: 233). Thus in Schein's study, the Miao position themselves relationally to each other—and each other's subordination—through the trope of "modernity" diversely defined, drawing boundaries of subalternity from which they distance themselves. This emphasis on the mobility of otherness is helpful in understanding transgendered sex workers and their interactions with their female counterparts.

As has been represented in Yanzi's self comparison with "real women", transgendered sex workers distanced themselves from their female counterparts with their more carefully orchestrated femininity that had a touch of "foreign flavor". Although this very touch of sexiness complemented with make-up at different levels of sophistication was also made a signature of transgendered sex workers, as was indicated by the fact that they were sometimes referred to as "those who wear make-up" (*huazhuangde*) by others as well as among each other. That is, the way that

---

[143] The term "subaltern" is most known from postcolonial studies in South Asia working under the title of the Subaltern Studies Group. According to Ranajit Guha, historian and political economist who prefaced a selection of subaltern studies, subaltern is defined as "the general attribute of subordination…whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way" (1988: 35, cited in Schein 2000: 232).

they tried to distinguish themselves from the old-fashioned "real women" was at the same time the label to which they were attached. Furthermore, standing side by side with elderly female co-workers, transgendered sex workers distinguished themselves even more conspicuously due to elderly masseuses' usually low-profile enactment of the feminine gender. The downplaying of feminine sexuality was in turn used by elderly masseuses to mark their own boundary from transgendered sisters, as was made clear to me by one elderly masseuse, Wang.

> Don't listen to Yanzi. She's only talking tall about making hundreds of yuan a day…We are women and cannot be as indecent (*xialiu*) as they are. They just pull up their skirt and do that in the dance hall! I only do massage, clean and safe. Around ten minutes each time at 10 *yuan*... (September 9, 2012)

Therefore, within the generally marginalized social space of sex work and that of gender and sexual authenticity, while transgendered sex workers displaced their own subalternity with the trope of "foreign flavor", their female co-workers maintained their own authentic superiority with that of decency and sometimes denigration of sex work.[144] The subordinated *other* was thus constantly being produced and disrupted.

In spite of competition and discordances, many transgendered individuals I know often kept company with women friends. Gossips and squabbles might disband small circles of friends. But the need for company remains in their respective struggles for a better life.

---

[144] Sometime it was this very denial of sex work that made masseuses refuse our outreach conversation and offer of free condoms.

Performing (Hetero)Sexuality with Flexible Improvisations

Wang's remarks about transgendered sex workers' indecency illuminates one indispensable facet of transgendered sex workers' performance of femininity—that of heterosexuality. As I have mentioned previously, transgendered individuals' performance of cosmopolitan femininity is never seamless. As a matter of fact, their success in winning potential customers' attention and favor was largely facilitated by the darkness of the night and the almost exclusive performance of certain stereotype of femininity. As one transgendered sex worker self-mockingly called herself a "ghost" that only made her appearance at night, many of the transgendered sex workers I encountered in Kunming only cross dressed at night, sometimes even late at night. More significantly, I suggest that it is complemented with their equally skillful performance of (hetero)sexuality that transgendered individuals manage to gain the upper hand over their female counterparts. That is, the successful interpretation of the feminine gender is not separable from experienced performance of sexuality. To understand the mutual dependence of gender and sexual performance embodied by transgendered individuals, Chin's story of her initiation into the business could be of help here.

I didn't know men could sell sex as a woman until I saw it in Dongfeng Square. I was completely blown away. I hesitated for more than a month until I went out with Hilton for the first time to sell (sex). We went to Huangtupo [an urban village] after dinner and I only earned 20 *yuan* (a bit more than US$ 3) that night. Hilton urged me to go with her again but I didn't want to. I

was quite scared. She didn't teach me any skills and business was very slow.

It was Daffodil who really initiated me into the business. Daffodil is a "pure

man[145]". He never does anal sex. He only fakes it (*jiazuo*). I started earning

money after I went with Daffodil to stand on streets (*zhanjie*), about 100

(US$ 33) to 300 (US$ 50) *yuan* a night. But I really learned the importance

of self confidence from Fanfan when I met her in Chengdu[146]. Fanfan taught

me how to do make-up and how to 'do' (to fake sex) with customers. I

became totally confident about myself since then. I started going to stores to

buy clothes and accessories. I just told them [shop owners] that I'm buying

all this for evening performances. If it were not for my beard marks, I would

love to wear make-up during the day." (July 17, 2013)

The skills needed to perform (hetero)sex is no less important than the techniques

needed to assume cosmopolitan femininity. Many of the transgendered individuals I

met, performers and sex workers alike, mentioned their semi-apprenticeship with

more experienced peers that belonged to part of their extended social network. As

could be seen in Chin's story, business opportunities increased not simply along with

perfection of make-up, but with that of sexual skills, i.e. knowing how to fake it. It is

this interdependence of gender and sexual performance that facilitates the

(mis)recognition of their feminine identity. I suggest that the mutual dependence of

gender and sexuality problematizes the divide between gender and sexuality as

---

[145] The Chinese term Chin used is *chunyemen*, literally translated as "pure man", or "real/true man". It refers to the fact that although engaged in transgendered sex work, Daffodil is a masculine heterosexual man.
[146] Chengdu is the capital city of Sichuan Province, adjacent to Yunnan Province in the north.

distinct domains of practice and theorization since Gayle Rubin's classic proposition

that sexuality be an independent domain of theorization (Rubin 1984; Valentine 2007).

It also complements Butler's theory of gender performativity from the perspective of

sexuality. Before going into theoretical discussion of the mutual complementarity

between gender and sexuality, a more detailed ethnographic vignette is called for.

One afternoon I attended a transgender focus group meeting hosted at SpringRain

under the aegis of a Global Fund-sponsored HIV intervention project. We had

altogether six people in that meeting, four of whom had transgendered experiences,

either as sex worker or performing on stage. Despite the low turnout, or perhaps

because of the very limited number of people present, transgendered participants

seemed more willing to talk. The atmosphere turned even more lively when someone

brought up the topic of how to fake (vaginal) sex. Chin and Shiliu excitingly

demonstrated with one hand inserted between their thighs from behind how vaginal

sex could be simulated, with the help of some lubricant. To facilitate my

understanding, Chin even pulled down his pants a bit to show me ways in which more

diverse erotic "plays" could be accomplished with greater self-assurance and skills,

such as tucking the penis back to fake the appearance of a woman's private part.

Meanwhile, simulation of the feminine body needed to be coordinated with a

flexible array of improvisations. For fear of being found out during sleep and

probably also out of boredom, Autumn used to tell a customer who paid her for

overnight services that she had to go home earlier to take care of her young children.

Filling condom with just enough water and sealing it into the two halves of her bras,

Yanzi skillfully enhanced her cleavage while she squeezed her own breasts upon customers' request for a sensual touch. For Chin, duplicating vaginal sex requires both a lubricated hand and her well articulated excuses that terminated customers' doubts and frustrated their attempt at turning on the light. "A woman's private part should be kept mysterious (*baochi shenmi*). Once a woman let herself seen, she is no longer craved for." Said Chin in response to a customer's request to turn on the light in her rented room. "He was totally taken in and returned me an expression that said 'You're really good at it'." Chin told me with an air of exaltation, which was followed by a list of motto-like dos and don'ts she had summarized, "To be in this business, you need to be clear-minded, eloquent, think fast and act quick so as to nip everything in the bud." Well said.

The diverse techniques of improvisation adopted to complement gendered performance of transgendered sex workers speak to the indispensability of sexuality in the proper performance of gender. In her study of female same-sex relationships in Thailand, Megan Sinnott (2004) uses the concept of "gendered sexualities" to explicate the prevalence of gender in conceptualizing and practicing sexuality in Thai society to the extent that same-sex relationships among differently gendered people are best described as *heterogender* rather than homosexual (Peletz 2009)[147]. Alternatively, Don Kulick (1998) argues in his study of Brazilian *travestis* that gender

---

[147] See Peletz (2009) for more detailed discussion of the "heterogender matrix" that has informed same-sex practices in Southeast Asia, although as Peletz also noted that since specifically the turn of the twenty-first century, there had emerged burgeoning subcultures of eroticized homogender relationships among men in Southeast Asian countries along with processes of urbanization, industrialization, and the rise of market economies.

is produced through sexuality, specifically the sexual behavior of penetration, so that

penetration—rather than anatomy—is the locus of gender difference between men and

"woman", the identity of which is shared by *travestis*. Similarly, *hijras* in South India

distinguish between *kotis* and *pantis* through the act of penetration (Reddy 2005).

Adding to these ethnographically informed configurations of gender and sexuality, I

would like to argue that in the case of transgendered sex workers I encountered in

Kunming, China, gendered performance of femininity is, and needs to be

complemented with that of sexuality at varying degrees of improvisation. This

requires a brief revisit of the analytic divide between gender and sexuality since

Rubin's call for an independent theory of sexuality.

Almost ten years after her introduction of the "sex/gender system" (Rubin 1975)

as an important attempt to understand the universality of male dominance and female

subordination, Gayle Rubin (1984) rejected this earlier correspondence between sex

and gender, pointing to its inability to account for sexuality and desire. In "Thinking

Sex"—regarded as one of the founding texts of queer theory, Rubin pointed out that

"although sex and gender are related, they are not the same thing, and they form the

basis of two distinct arenas of social practice" (1984: 308). To address issues of

sexuality, a "radical theory of sexual oppression" needs to be developed, as feminist

analysis "lacks angles of vision which can encompass the social organization of

sexuality" (1984: 309). This pressing search for "an autonomous theory and politics

specific to sexuality" laid a significant foundation for queer theorizing and its "split"

from feminist theory, whose priority had been defined as women (and heterosexuality).

I argue that transgendered sex workers' engagement in low-end commercial sex of the heterosexual market in Kunming disrupts the lines drawn between gender and sexual practices, and between heterosexuality and homosexuality.

In explaining transgendered prostitution and transgendered sex workers' popularity among male customers, Chinese sexologist Pan Suiming (2014) suggests the indispensability of sexual seduction (*xinggouyin*) and sexual service in attracting male customers.

Sexual seduction is important; sexual service is even more important, be it [sexual provider] male or female. Of course, some male customers could be able to notice the other party's male identity. But many of them could take it calmly so long as the other party could 'do it right'…That is to say, **sexual pleasure seeks no source or gender identity. Only under the shackles of tradition would people care about 'who is doing (having sex) with whom;' would there be concepts such as 'homosexuality' and 'heterosexuality' and related social status, would there be all kinds of troubles and discriminations that follow**…**Previous society has created the concept of 'gender'. Now people are using their own practices (i.e. transgendered prostitution) to facilitate the condition and opportunities to eliminate it. Therefore, the author of this article would like to express the following vision for the future: to eliminate this element of 'gender' completely from all issues related to sexuality, reaching an ideal state of**

'sexuality without gender' (*youxing wubie*).[148] (Pan, 2004, bold original)

Through characterizing both transgendered sex workers and their male customers as

non-self identified gay men, who "had no sexual interest in men", Pan aims to

problematize the very definition of sexuality—understood largely as sexual

orientation—that has been based upon sexual object choice and to stress the priority

of sexual satisfaction. According to Pan, gender/sex does not matter so long as they

(transgendered sex workers) could "do it right". In Pan's conceptualization, doing it

right involves not so much proper gendered performance as sexual performance per se.

Satisfaction of sexual desires reigns, specifically on the part of male customers.

Notwithstanding Pan's attempt and advocacy to denaturalize the division between

homosexuality and heterosexuality through untethering gender/sex from sexual

orientation and sexual satisfaction, the top priority he gives to the satisfaction of

sexual desires might have glossed over the sedimented effect of gender that

transgendered sex workers have embodied to attract male customers. It has also

downplayed the erotic and affective nuances that undergird the gender and sexual

performances of transgendered sex workers. His valorization of sexual pleasures

unencumbered by gender could have also naturalized the determination of

(hetero)sexuality, as in the baseline of "doing it right". Chin's concern with proper

femininity, some of her customers' preference for the transgendered body, and her

refusal to perform the active sexual role with male customers who found out her

---

[148] Pan Suiming, 2014, " 'Nanbannvzhuang maiyin' daigei women shenme qishi? [What do we learn from male-to-female transgendered prostitution?]" http://helanonline.cn/article/7521, accessed January 29, 2015.

male-bodied identity were excellent examples to counter the exclusivity of sexual

desires.

> Sometimes the customer would be even more ready to play with us when
> he found out our identity. I once had a customer who had agreed to pay me
> 50 *yuan* at first but increased the amount to 200 when he found out. There
> were also customers who wanted me to penetrate them. I didn't like that so I
> usually pushed them to Autumn. She didn't care anyway. (July 17, 2013)

Therefore, in the case of transgendered sex workers in Kunming, gendered and sexual

performance complemented each other to consummate business transactions.

Transgendered sex work in the heterosexual sex commerce problematizes essential

claims of gender and sexuality while at the same time derive this very disruptive

capacity from the prototype of heteronormativity. I thus argue that transgendered sex

work *reveals* the queerness of heterosexuality *from within*. It is in this way that I term

this perspective queer. It is queer not in the sense of claiming a separate social space

from the normative. Rather, it queers—reveals the queerness of—the normative social

space (see Chapter Five for more detailed discussion of my queer perspective).

Marketable Sexualized Femininity

Although many of my transgendered informants thought of femininity as

comparable to sexiness, sexiness is not singularly represented by exposure of the body

and low-cut tight dresses. Staccato clicking of high heels echoing in quiet streets at

night, and darting eye movements to flash eye white accompanied by blinking, were

also mentioned by some transgendered informants as deadly attractive to straight men.

More significantly, it is perhaps not sexiness that determined their selected

performance of womanliness. The preference for specific femininity that aimed to

attract men's—and potential customers'—attention[149] (n. 149 not clear) was shared

by many of my transgendered friends, whether they are sex workers or not. That is to

say, the kind of femininity they imagined and embodied was largely connected to the

demand and consumption of marketable fantasies by potential male

customers—straight men.

In his ethnographic analysis of the Caribbean pleasure industry between local

male sex workers and their global gay tourist clients, anthropologist Mark Padilla

(2007) pointed out that male sex workers such as *bugarrones* and *sanky pankies*

served as fluid and shifting "global commodities" rather than "indigenous" and

"traditional" identities indicative of personhood. According to Padilla, *bugarrones* and

sanky pankies could be viewed as gender—masculine—performances that are

connected both to the material interests and needs of the producers on the one hand,

and to the demand and consumption of marketable fantasies by gay sex tourists on the

other. That is to say, their performance of ethnosexualized masculinity—the

Dominican "animalistic" masculine sexuality—was overdetermined by a globally

distributed market of queer sexual economy.

Similarly, in her studies of the political economy of HIV and its moral and

geographical imaginations in Southwest China, Sandra Hyde (2007) pointed to the

---

[149] This is not to deny the objectification of the female body and render it
unproblematic. It is however beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss this in detail.

cultural politics of HIV that related the epidemic to ethnosexualized culture and behaviors. Against the generally held assumption of China's non-Han southwest border region of Sipsongpanna as "a repository of pleasure, a China that is as highly sexed as it is raced" (2007: 116), where "even the Han women are more open because of the influences of Tai culture and that their openness about sexual promiscuity (*luanjiao*)" (2007: 123), Hyde pointed out that it was usually the consumers—Han Chinese male tourists and businessmen—who drove the market for the exoticized and ethnosexualized image of Tai women, who as was often the case were mimicked and performed by Han Chinese women selling sex there to make a profit.

If this notion of performing marketable femininity that fits into the (imagined) fantasies of men is well taken, it does not only problematize the essentialized authorship of femininity assumed by women, but further challenges the ontological claim of a transgender identity that claims a distinction between physical maleness and psychological femininity, as femininity is determined not by an ontological feminine psychology but by market needs. Together with the performance of heterosexuality, the embodied practices of transgendered sisters illustrate the co-constitution of marketable gender and sexual performances in transgendered sex workers' competition with "real women" *within* the (hetero)sexual market. That is to say, from their preference for cosmopolitan femininity that is sexy to their complementary performance of sexuality that consolidates their feminine attraction, transgendered sisters' gendered and sexual practices were largely dependent upon marketable desires—rather than a desire for self expression in terms of gender and

sexual identity. That is to suggest, if in the previous section the taken-for-granted

boundary between gender and sexuality, and between homosexuality and

heterosexuality, is problematized through the alternative sociality enacted between

transgendered sex workers and their (straight) male customers; then in this section,

stipulation of marketable fantasies further complicates gendered and sexual

performance with the gravitating force of economy. (economy in its broadest sense.

Need to develop a bit more)

Again, this is not to erase the desire for gender identification among

transgendered individuals, at least some of them. Neither do I intend to

over-emphasize the power of market and desire for consumption—on the part of both

customers and transgendered sex workers. It is instead to signify the mutual

implication of market forces on the one hand and gender and sexual expression on the

other in understanding transgendered practices. Amidst this mutual implication is the

more fluid and contingent embodiment of erotic desires that not only problematize

categorization of identity but also complicate the power dynamic between customers

and transgendered sex workers.

Sex Work and the Fun Ethic

On a late morning, I accompanied Yanzi to a shopping mall near the train station.

Unlike fancy brand name retailing stores in upscale shopping centers of the city, this

indoor shopping mall is packed with small stores that stood side by side with each

other, sometimes overlapping a bit with dresses that stretched out of the grid display

panels where they were hung. Yanzi seemed very familiar with the place, meandering through the maze-like space with great ease. When we walked up a few steps to a corner store, the male shopkeeper told Yanzi that there was new stuff upstairs. I wondered whether he was an old acquaintance of Yanzi or he simply understood what she was looking for at first sight. I followed Yanzi through the narrow passageway along small stores, when she spotted a shiny sleeveless gold sequin dress decorated with a brightly yellow feather at its low-cut front. Thinking it as definitely a sure-win at dance halls with its shiny golden sequins and low-cut front, Yanzi wanted to bring down the price from 160 *yuan* (a bit more than US$25) to 80 *yuan* (a bit more than US$13). After going back and forth with a male shopkeeper from the next store (the owner of the store was not there), when the price was finally brought down to 100 *yuan* (a bit more than US$ 16), two female shopkeepers from close-by stores came over and, intriguingly, raised the price back to 120 *yuan* (about US$ 20). Yanzi dragged me out of the store after the last straw, when the two women flatly refused her request for a try on because "It is a tightly fit dress that touches directly the body (*tieshen*). No try on."

Before we found a better substitute, we were thrilled to see a golden dress that looked exactly the same in a smaller store. This time, Yanzi was quickly granted a try on at a corner temporarily enclosed by a cloth curtain. After a few failed attempts at pulling the dress up through her black underwear, Yanzi was given a shiny silver dress of bigger size. Not satisfied with the silver dress, Yanzi went back to the golden one, this time pulling down the dress from top and she made it. She looked happily at

herself in the mirror while complaining that the dress was not low enough for her

breasts to be touched, making plan to get it modified somewhere. After haggling,

Yanzi and I managed to get 10 *yuan* off the original price of 80 *yuan*. Perhaps excited

by the triumph, Yanzi immediately spotted another form-fitting short-skirted dress

with leopard print. Ignoring a few astonishing looks from customers that just stopped

by the store, Yanzi joyously tried on the dress while murmuring to me excitingly, "Oh

I love this dress. Love it so much!" Without even asking the woman shopkeeper about

the price, Yanzi threw out her offer at 50 *yuan*, bringing the deal of the two dresses at

120 *yuan* in the blink of an eye.

> You don't need to buy expensive dress for 'dancing.' You only need to
>
> have a foreign flavor (yangqi, fashionable and cosmopolitan) …Before I used
>
> to come here with us sisters every two or three days to buy dresses. We all
>
> dressed up and went to Kundu[150] very often. Men were so attracted to us!
>
> But we're not doing that any more now… (February 27, 2013)

Yanzi's shopping experience was representative of the interlocking relation

between desire and labor. For one thing, her shopping trip exemplified the specific

market demands of her work as a "female" streetwalker so that the shopping activity

itself was an integral part of her labor. Thus and second, her imagination and

embodiment of cosmopolitanism was indicative of the co-constitution of market

fantasies and her gendered expression. Third, her excitement in getting hold of a

desirable dress (specifically the one with leopard print!) conveyed the pleasures of

---

[150] Kundu refers to a plaza in the city center where upscale bars and clubs were
clustered.

consuming as well as her gendered expression that went way beyond a simple

attribution to material needs. That was perhaps specifically true in the good old days

that she recalled. That is to suggest, although most transgendered sex workers

prioritized economic profitability in explaining their engagement in commercial sex,

material needs did not wipe out erotic desires, which could even be constitutive in

their decision to start transgendered sex work. BZ, for instance, told me that she did

not think of making money when she first tried cross-dressing and streetwalking

several years ago.

> I have seen sex workers walking around in my neighborhood since I was
>
> in high school and I always had the impression that sex workers were
>
> pathetic and desperate women who were extremely poor. Therefore, I started
>
> cross-dressing mostly for fun and wanted to feel like a woman. It did not
>
> even occur to me that I could make money from that. (January 21, 2013)

BZ stayed in the business since then. Similarly, Chin expressed her desire to be a

woman when she explained how she started her involvement in the sex business.

> Most of the sisters I know only do make-up to make money, about 90%.
>
> But I, I do this partly to earn an income, partly because I want to do/be a
>
> woman.[151] I once went out with Hilton to sell (sex). We both were in female
>
> dress of course. Hilton needed to use the restroom (*jieshou*). She then walked
>
> to a dark corner, stood there and started to pee. I felt very uneasy. We were in
>
> women's dress after all, shouldn't have been that careless… (December 16,

---

[151] The Chinese term Chin used is zuo, literally meaning "do, perform", as compared to shi, meaning "be".

2012)

Chin's concern with proper femininity was most explicitly represented in her refusal to perform active the sexual role with customers who found out her male-bodied. Making comparison between the gay circle and her engagement in heterosexual sex work, Autumn expressed another advantage when transgendered sex work is concerned.

> I wasn't able to find handsome men before [in the gay circle]. But now it's easy to find good-looking guys [because of sex work]. But I don't care about that so long as they pay me money. (September 15, 2012)

This combination of money making and sexual encounters with straight men of one's type are not uncommon among transgendered sisters I met. While it is true that transgendered individuals' embodied practices of certain aspects of cosmopolitan femininity are inseparable from the marketable fantasies of potential customers, many of them are simultaneously expressing their desires to be desired by men, straight men, describing it as "a sense of accomplishment" (*chengjiugan*), including transgendered performers who might not necessarily claim an affiliation to sex work.

> If you are gay, you can 'do' (have sex) with any men. But straight men, they only get excited and want to 'do' when they like you. Therefore, being with straight men gives you a sense of accomplishment. (December 16, 2012)

One might detect a weird sense of playfulness from this collection of remarks. By no means am I implicating a rosy prospect of sex work that is pleasant and carefree.

Researches on transgendered commercial sex work of across cultures demonstrated

the marginalized conditions transgendered sex workers were pushed into in various

manners that include limited accessibility to health service, as well as economic

deprivation, and social exclusion (e.g. Abdullah *et al*. 2012). As a matter of fact, I

heard stories about transgendered sex workers being battered or even killed when

customers found out their trick and were too infuriated to let go. There were also

stories told by transgendered informants about customers paying less money than was

agreed upon, asking for free service, or even stealing money from them. BZ's

selection of customers helps illustrate the dangers of urban sexual commerce.

I don't mind doing with men who are not good-looking. But I would avoid

those who look difficult to get away with." (October 18, 2012)

However, amidst these stories of battered or stolen sex workers, I do hope to point out

one factor, among others, that specifically distinguishes transgendered sex works in

Kunming from sex workers that appeared in Padilla's (2007) and Hyde's (2007)

ethnographies—their target customers[152]. For both the cases in the Dominican

Republic and in Sipsongpanna of Yunnan Province, exotic bodies were advertised for

the consumption of sex tourists who occupy a comparatively more elevated social,

economic, and geographical positions—be it gay tourists from the West or Han

Chinese business men from coastal cities of China—than local sex workers. Quite the

---

[152] As was pointed out by Lisa Rofel (1999b: 451), "[t]he influx of foreign-born residents has brought not so much gay tourism, which barely exists in China (in contrast to Thailand), as gay men who come to stay." Although I still did not notice the emergence of global gay tourism in China during my field work from 2011 to 2013, male same-sex sex work has no doubt become a well developed underground business in many Chinese cities.

contrary, in most of the red-light areas where I did outreach and made acquaintance

with transgendered informants, potential customers loitering around were mostly

migrant workers or men with limited economic resources.[153] This of course has to do

with the specific spatial allocation of these red-light areas. As was indicated in

Jeffrey's review of prostitution in China, "[i]n China, blue-collar workers are

associated in stereotypical fashion with the purchase of quick, cheap sex from poor

migrant workers in the streets or in low-grade venues, such as foot-washing salons,

massage parlors and barber shops, in order to satisfy natural biological urges or to

compensate for emotional stresses" (Lin Chunqing et al. 2010: 8; cited in Jeffreys

2012: 5). That is to suggest, the spatial hierarchy is closely connected to one's

expectation of similarly differentiated sociality. Yet my ethnographic encounters in

Kunming demonstrated explicit and flexible articulations and enactments of sexual

desires among marginalized population of the urban space.

　　Thus in the case of urban low-end red-light areas of Kunming, within a different

power dynamic between transgendered sex workers and their migrant worker

customers, more subtle, fluid and contingent relationships unfolded that went beyond

a single narrative of power domination and economic exigency. As much as

transgendered sex workers fashioned themselves in accordance with erotic images of

cosmopolitan women favored by their migrant male customers, they were also

enthusiastically partaking in the shaping of the sexual market of cosmopolitan

---

[153] This of course had to do with the fact that I only went to low-end red-light areas
of the city to do outreach. But I should admit that my observation was based upon
their dress and behavior.

femininity with their selective articulations, which in turn was often deployed to mark themselves off from "real women". Therefore, if as Eileen Otis suggests, consumption as a public domain of interaction is undergirded by gender and class inequalities performed in part through the creation of a consistently young and deferent service class of migrant women vis-à-vis China's new affluent urban consumers (Otis 2012: 5-6), then what I witnessed in the consumption interaction between transgendered sex workers and their male customers demonstrates a less rigid and less hierarchical pattern between service providers and consumers. BZ, for instance, related to me an anecdote of hers when she was faking sex with a customer who happened to be her type. In the case of faking, transgendered sex workers usually kept their pants on and faked vaginal sex with skillful collaboration of hands and thighs.

> At that time, I was too 'high' to care about that at all. I pulled down my
>
> pants and started masturbating while faking sex with him. He soon found out
>
> who I was and started throwing up…

Notwithstanding her effort at entertaining me as a friend, BZ's story bespeaks the fulfillment of erotic desires articulated by transgendered sex workers. She had more than once expressed to me her wish to continue this business for as long as she could.

> My dream is to travel around the country, or even around the world to sell
>
> sex. I want to see the world, the cultures, and the people in it…I enjoy selling
>
> sex and I wish I could do it as long as possible.

Likewise, Chin felt a strong attachment to her job out of concerns beyond survival strategies to encompass the fun ethic.

I don't want to change my job. This job is great fun. I'm earning money

and having fun. This is enjoyment. If the customer is not good looking, I

would just play fast and loose. My body wouldn't feel anything. That was

actually good. But if he is good-looking, I would enjoy it but at the same

time be more alert. I'd need to 'tighten up' (so as not to show any sign of

erection) (July 17, 2013).

In her multi-sited ethnographic studies of postindustrial sexual commerce,

Elizabeth Bernstein (2007) brings under scrutiny the flat depiction of women's

experiences as sex workers promoted by both "pro-sex" and "antiprostitution"

feminists. One significant component of her argument is that shifting social

ethic—from pre-modern emphasis on procreation to modern attachment to romance

and postindustrial valorization of the "fun ethic", in which "being a sex worker was

about taking pleasure in sex" (2007: 80)—facilitated the recreational mode of

sexuality embodied by emerging white, well-educated middle-class female sex

workers. To a certain extent, transgendered sex workers in Kunming shared a sense of

pleasure-taking in their exploration of low-end heterosexual market, although it

should be noted that the ethic of pleasure taking articulated by transgendered sex

workers is derived from the fact that they are male-bodied. Compared to their female

co-workers, transgendered sex workers were much less constricted by gender-based

sexual domination and were thus in possession of more room of manipulation.

Furthermore, as was mentioned in Chapter Two, the articulation of same-sex sexual

satisfaction among some transgendered sex workers should be read alongside what

Lisa Rofel (2007) illustrated as the neoliberal embrace of desires in postsocialist

China, where articulations and enactments of individual desires are becoming more

and more the norm.

While this might echo the entrepreneurial flexibility that is increasingly moving

beyond a survival strategy and a means of living to a life*style* and way of being

(Freeman 2014: 24), it is important to point out that not many transgendered

individuals I encountered expressed the wish to maintain a transgendered way of

living. Nor did they think of stable heterogender relationship with a man as attainable

or ideal (see Chapter Five). Out of concern of her son's possible visits and her

on-going connection with her divorced wife, Chin expressed her preference for

remaining single and kept a distance from men. Alternatively, Autumn planned her

future life as a married man who might occasionally get out of the house to "play"

(hang out with gay friends and cross-dress). A sense of fickleness—and perhaps a

readiness to change—seeped into every corner of their daily life.

Conclusion

In Chapter One I suggested that international HIV/AIDS intervention programs

initiated the pre-defined community of men who have sex with men (MSM) that

superseded, at least partly, an on-going construction of *tongzhi* community in China.

In Chapter Two I presented an even more diffused and contingent global assemblage

of LGBT identity discourses that seemed to bear limited relation to the everyday

struggles of gay and transgendered people in Kunming. This chapter further disrupts

the confidence of gender and sexual identity through illustrations of ways in which economic considerations amidst post-reform China played into the gendered and sexual performance of transgendered sex workers.

Sweeping economic transformations have been taking place in China since the end of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s—what made China a paradigmatic participant in the neoliberal turn of the world (Harvey 2005; Hoffman, DeHart and Collier 2006). From the slanted policy in the 1980s that favored certain sectors and regions—"letting some people get rich first" (*xianfu lun*)—to the emphasis on "common prosperity" (*gongtongfuyu*) during Hu Jintao-Wen Jiabao administration (2002 to 2012) that aimed to address climbing inequalities (Fan 2006; Naughton 2005), Chinese society in general has been witnessing the significant emergence of urban nouveau riche along with shifting patterns of economic growth, of which consumer revolution is an integral part. While this might echo Harvey's critique of neoliberalism as a class project, anthropological researches of neoliberalism have revealed variegated manners in which neoliberal elements are diffused and reconfigured in conjunction with historically and culturally specific contexts (Hoffman, DeHart and Collier 2006). In line with this problematization of the correspondence between the hegemony of neoliberalism and its techniques, James Ferguson (2009) problematized neoliberalism as a pre-determined evil against the poor through looking at the integration of neoliberal elements in pro-poor and pro-welfare political arguments of South Africa; Li Zhang (2012) proposed the concept of "flexible postsocialism" to exemplify the selective incorporation of

neoliberal strategies in China and Vietnam; Nguyen-Vo (2008) pointed out ways in

which state-led liberalization of economy in Vietnam facilitated "hooking economy,"

i.e. hooking up economic operators in state enterprises through commercial sex to get

access to market information and related resources. Lisa Hoffman (2006)

demonstrated the combination of neoliberal techniques of governing—such as

marketization of labor and fostering of a self-enterprising ethos—and Maoist era

norms and values of serving the country in the newly initiated job markets of China;

Lisa Rofel (1999b, 2007) pointed to notion of human quality (*suzhi*)—related to

education and cultural belonging—involved in legitimizing neoliberal expression of

sexual desires among Chinese gay men.

In the case of low-end transgendered sex workers in Kunming, I have

demonstrated ways in which heterosexual commercial sex intertwined with

fulfillment of material desires amidst national endorsement of consumption,

expressions of erotic desires, and perhaps less explicitly aspirations to a better future.

In Chapter Two, I juxtaposed the globally circulated rainbow flag with the dark

corners of gay cruising area in Kunming to illustrate the drastic gap between on the

one hand the discursive valorization of membership of the international LGBT

community, and on the other hand everyday struggles of gay people in a third-tier city

of China. This chapter zooms in to explore the particularities of lived experiences of

transgendered sex workers, part of the target population of local HIV/AIDS

intervention projects. I suggest that although economic considerations figured

predominantly in their engagement in the sex industry, the decision to dabble in the

business resulted more from a calculated exercise of choice than a single narrative of economic exigency—not disregarding the socialist ethos of hard working (as could be seen from Yanzi's comparison between gossiping gay men, those waiting at tables, and her own engagement in sex work). In line with Hoffman's (2006) Foucaultian concept of job choice as a mechanism of governing and subjectification rather than true agency outside of power's grip, I interpret this calculation as involving the mutual implication and reification between material desires as a consumer, immaterial labor of gender and sexual performance and improvisations, and erotic desires as a sexual subject. It is in this sense that I make as my argument in this chapter the non-centrality of identity in understanding their transgendered practices. Rather than an expression of gendered identity, I look at transgendered practices in this case as the conjuncture of subject formation facilitated by the diverse flows of neoliberal elements that include (but are not limited to) flexibility, entrepreneurial spirit of self making, self reliance, autonomy, and responsibility.

In the next chapter, I will take a closer look at the historical process of individualization along with the emergence of the neoliberal turn in China's political economy since the late 1970s. I hope it complements with what has been discussed in this chapter, specifically in grappling the sense of indifference towards one's identity.

Chapter Four: The Political Is Personal

I was riding a bus with BZ after a day of an intensive workshop on NGO management and *Robert's Rules of Order*. BZ was one of my key transgendered informants in the field. She was also one of the few who would discuss with me in serious and detailed way issues related to gender and sexual practices. In the workshop, we just practiced how rules of orders could be implemented in an NGO setting, specifically how it could be actualized in regular meetings and decision making process. As we stumbled along every technical detail that aimed to ensure participatory decision making, many of us were also frustrated by the lengthy back-and-forth procedure designed to induce thorough discussion and democratic participation. On board the bus, BZ initiated the conversation with me, as was often the case, about whether Western democracy as represented by *Robert's Rules of Order* is better than China's legal procedure. For BZ, in spite of the lack of so-called democratic participation, China's legal system is more efficient through "quietly" passing laws and regulations and thus saving a lot of time from complicated social debates. I defended the democratic model, as was also often the case, arguing that legalization in the absence of wide-range social debates would yield poor social recognition and lead to low degree of implementation. I cited the depathologization of homosexuality in 2001 as an example. Although homosexuality was removed from the category of mental illness in as early as 2001, not many people were informed of that and many still thought of homosexuality as abnormality that should be treated. I

thus concluded that even if gay marriage was legalized in China, so long as our socio-cultural landscape remained the same—thinking of homosexuality as an illness, amoral, and unfilial, the number of beneficiaries would be very limited. That was not the first time that BZ and I debated on these kinds of topics, although neither of us seemed able to convince the other.

I remember myself bringing this conversation to another friend of mine, who then labeled our debate as one between people's democratic dictatorship (*renmin mizhu zhuanzheng*) and Western democracy. While the former justifies dictatorship with the leadership of the working class based on "the alliance of workers and peasants"—"proletariat dictatorship"[154], the latter bases its claim on individual liberty[155]. It seems odd that in the context of emerging LGBT movements in mainland China, people's democratic dictatorship should co-exist with liberal democracy typically rooted in Western civilization. Although the trope of collectivism vs. individualism seems too trite to merit further explanation, what lies underneath both ideological shells remains bewildering. It gets even more confusing along with the global emergence of neoliberal techniques and the dominant *political rationality* of *economic* development (Brown 2003, 2015).

My ethnographic analysis in Chapter Three focuses mainly on the ways in which neoliberal desires of consumption—material and erotic, the desires to consume and the consumption of desires—variously drive the machine of production while at the

---

[154] Constitution of People's Republic of China, adopted December 4, 1982, http://en.people.cn/constitution/constitution.html.

[155] I use individual liberty in a very loose sense that could encompass both the more "conservative" and the more "liberal" tilt of political liberalism. See Wendy Brown (2003) for an insightful delineation of liberal democracy.

same time feed the expressions of desires. In line with Pun Ngai's critique of the

subsumption of exploitative production under the glorifying regime of consumption

(2003), I argue for the non-centrality of gender or sexual identity in understanding

transgendered practices in Kunming, specifically among transgendered sex workers

and performers. That is, if Pun attributes the "lack" of working class consciousness

among factory girls in Shenzhen to the structural void produced by an on-going

"unfathomable rural-urban divide", and to the rationalization of exploitation through

the dual social imaginary of the modernized Chinese subjects as both a "producer"

and a "consumer" (2003: 482), a similar process seems to be happening with regard to

the identity politics of transgenderism. I argue in this chapter that in addition to the

unfathomable divide between the rich and the poor, the socio-political process of

individualization from high socialism to neoliberal market reform has facilitated an

unbalanced development of the individual characterized simultaneously by an

embrace of individual consumption choice and suppression of "self-culture politics"

(Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001), both endorsed by the party-state.

Again, this is not to deny the subtle sentiments of gendered and/or sexual

identification many of my transgendered informants expressed and/or embodied. I do

hope, however, to point out the thin line between these individual sentiments and a

community-based sense of shared experiences and consciousness constitutive of

identity politics. I regard this thin line as indispensable in interpreting the difficulty I

encountered to locate a transgender community. More significantly, I was led to this

line of exploration by an insightful comment made by a friend over my frustration.

The fact that notions of identity and community have never been popular or welcome

by the Chinese party-state is directly related to ways in which the individual (*geti,*

geren)—transgendered individuals included—has been understood and embodied in

relation to the state.

This chapter is going to step back and look into the disconnection—or the

assumed connection—between individual practices of transgenderism and an identity

politics of transgender as a gendered category. That is, how should we understand the

indifference of transgendered individuals towards the kind of gendered category that

has been enthusiastically embraced by their "counterparts" across the globe. I aim to

put transgendered practices and the notion of identity back against the broader

socio-cultural background of individualization in mainland China. I argue that the

specific process of individualization in China and the trajectory of state-individual

relationship thus developed proffers limited space for the development of identity

politics rooted in Western liberal polity. Following the on-going scholarly interest in

the relationship between liberal politics, neoliberal economics, and the formation of

new subjectivities (Rofel 2007), I aim to tackle the seeming contradiction between on

the one hand the proliferation of lesbian and gay identity-oriented activism (Chapter

Two) in China and on the other hand a general lack of engaged concern among many

of its supposed constituents. In line with anthropologist Yan Yunxiang (2009), I

suggest that the subject formation embedded within the party-state in post-socialist

China does not include the kind of individualistic consciousness prepared by Western

political liberalism, and enhanced along with the New Social Movements since the

1960s. I want to immediately point out that I have no intention to essentialize the connection between identity politics and Western liberal individualism. Nor do I want to present identity politics as the ultimate goal for transgendered individuals in China. I am indeed skeptical of identity politics and tend to think of it as in alignment with the series of knowledge-based institutionalization of differences (sexual difference for example) critiqued by many poststructuralist scholars. What I hope to present in this chapter then is the formation of a specific articulation of the self in the general historical transformation of post-socialist and neoliberal China. That is, the focus of this chapter is the conditions of possibility out of which specific conceptualization and embodiment of the self in contemporary China is to be understood, including but not limited to the transgendered self.

Neoliberal vs. Liberal Individual

Shortly after I entered the PhD program in cultural anthropology at Emory, I was asked by a professor in the department about my thought on China's being recognized as one of the representatives of neoliberalism. I had no idea what neoliberalism meant then, neither did I know of China's connection with it. Later in a conversation with an elderly American friend, when I briefly mentioned China's association with neoliberalism, he obviously scorned at my unashamed attempt at modifying China with anything "liberal". This points to an apparent contradiction between scholarly discussion of China's leading role in the global neoliberal economic order and popular image of China as a totalitarian party-state. More significantly, it speaks to the

possible disconnection—or slippery connection—between liberal democracy and the contemporary neoliberal regime, key to the bewildering mismatch between diverse emergence of non-normative practices and a "lack" of general social and political support.

I argue that the frustration I encountered in locating a transgender community lies in a misconception of the Chinese individual that arises in the neoliberal era and their compatibility with the globalization of liberal rights-based identity politics. The general indifference towards rights-based LGBT activism, specifically among transgendered individuals, signals the very gap that has been largely glossed over by proliferating lesbian and gay organizations in China, between neoliberal embodiment of individualism and liberal democratic politics based upon individual uniqueness and subcultural identities. Following feminist political theorist Wendy Brown's (2003; 2015) critique of the neoliberal rationalization of governance and the demise of liberal democracy, I make a distinction between liberal polity and neoliberal regime through the following: First, while the economic thought of liberalism stresses the retreat of state intervention so that the market can be maximally liberated, its political strand emphasizes state involvement to guarantee equal access and redistribution of resources. Second, following the first point, neoliberalism—with its signature embrace of privatization and self responsibility—aligns with the economic functioning of the liberal regime while shedding its political/ideological substance. Third, what further sets neoliberalism apart from the liberal polity is the suffusion of the neoliberal economic mechanism across aspects of social life beyond the economic

domain—the main thrust of Brown's critique.

Compared with classical liberalism's (ideal) separation between the economic,
the political, and the moral, neoliberalism "erases the discrepancy between economic
and moral behavior by configuring morality entirely as a matter of rational
deliberation about costs, benefits, and consequences" (Brown 2003: 42).[156] In fact, in
his elaboration of the history of neoliberalism, David Harvey (2005) hints at the reign
of market rationality:

> In so far as neoliberalism values market exchange as 'an ethic in itself,
> capable of acting as a guide to all human action, and substituting for all
> previously held ethical beliefs'…It holds that the social good will be
> maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions,
> and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market.
>
> (David Harvey 2005: 3)

Further, while the worth of the individual within society in classical liberalism is an
end in itself (see Benjamin Schwartz 1964), the neoliberal rationality seems to have
reduced the value of the individual to economic terms. More intriguingly, when the
liberal ideological claim to human/LGBT rights and individual freedom is grafted to

---

[156] In "Birth of the Biopolitics", Michel Foucault (1997) understands liberalism as a
practice, a "way of doing things". "Liberalism is to be analyzed…as a principle and a
method of rationalizing the exercise of government, a rationalization that obeys…the
internal rule of maximum economy" (1997: 74). Liberal thoughts as "start[ing] not
from the existence of the state, seeing in the government the means for attaining that
end it would be for itself, but rather from society, which is in a complex relation of
exteriority and interiority with respect to the state…Instead of making the distinction
between state and civil society into a historical universal that allows us to examine all
the concrete systems, we can try to see it as a form of schematization characteristic of
a particular technology of government…[Liberalism] is not a dream that comes up
against a reality…It constitutes…a tool for criticizing the reality" (1997: 75).

the neoliberal embrace of consumer revolution with Chinese characteristics, one of which being the subsumption of the individual under the interests of the nation-state, the concept of the individual becomes a murkiest terrain filled with contradictions. I will thus begin my analysis with a delineation of the process of individualization in China that spans Maoist socialism and the post-Mao era. I regard this as essential in understanding the kind of embodied individuality typical in contemporary neoliberal China.

The "Uncivil" Individual

One of the major discussions in the anthropological research on China is the study of the rising individual in post-socialist era characterized by, among others, radical decollectivization and the "consumer revolution". Although it is generally agreed that the initiation of market economy since the late 1970s and China's further integration into the world neoliberal regime since the 1990s facilitate the rise of the individual disembedded from either the rural collective or the urban work unit, to what extent the rising individual spells political autonomy remains debated. While a full-scale historical review of the notions of self, individual, and identity in China is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I would like to draw upon some of the current discussions on individualization in China, specifically since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. I suggest that the state-initiated process of individualization, first through detaching the individual from kin-based social organization, then through decollectivization in response to market reform, has

facilitated a specific articulation of individuality that is simultaneously centered

around neoliberal economic mechanisms and constrained by postsocialist state

politics.

Collectivism has long been stereotypically associated with Chinese culture,

denoting the priority of the collective good over individual interests. Although notions

such as individual perfectibility and individualism were raised among scholars of

classical Chinese philosophical thought, specifically Neo-Confucianism during the

Ming dynasty (e.g. De Bary 1970; Thomas Metzger 1977; Monro 1977), some

scholars maintain that the objective of individual moral advancement does not

necessarily entail an appreciation of liberty and individual rights, essential

components of the Western interpretation of individualism (Schwartz 1985; Munro

1977). Rather, individual perfection has been deemed as constitutive to better

conformity to socio-cultural norms rather than to claims of individual uniqueness (Pye

1996: 19). This echoes the concept of Western individualism translated and introduced

to China in the late nineteenth century by Yen Fu. According to Benjamin Schwartz

(1964), Yen Fu's interpretation of Western individualism, an adaptation of John Stuart

Mill's *On Liberty* and the Spencerian social evolution, understood the individual as a

means/tool to the advancement of the welfare of society as a whole, which was made

almost equivalent to the interests of the state (Schwartz 1964; see also Luo Xu

2002).[157] Similarly, Chinese Confucian scholar Tu Wei-Ming (1991), echoing the

---

[157] Benjamin Schwartz also points out that John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* was more
concerned with defending the individual against "the growing claims of society and
the subtle pressures of democratic 'conformism'," including individuals that would be
deemed as "parasitic" or "unfit" in Adam Smith's and Herbert Spencer's framework

Chinese contemporary scholar of philosophy Li Zehou, talks about the subsumption

of the Enlightenment ideas of liberty and individual rights under the rubric of

patriotism among Chinese intellectuals of May Fourth (1919) in their concern with

national survival and China's wealth and power.

> It was in the political arena, dictated by the orienting question of how
>
> to make China wealthy and strong, that the drama of the praxis of the
>
> Chinese intellectuals since May Fourth unfolded. Specifically, the
>
> Enlightenment symbolized to modern Chinese intellectuals not liberty and
>
> human rights as ends in themselves but the 'Faustian spirit' unleashed by
>
> the social Darwinian quest for superiority." (Tu Wei-Ming 1991: 105)

The competing ideal between an aspiration to be the heir to the French Enlightenment

and a filial son of the "dragon seeds" (*longzhong*) remains palpable. Furthermore,

Chinese intellectuals' selective incorporation of liberalism into the service of state

power—that is, the strengthening of state power as the ultimate objective of

individual development—has made them much less committed to the liberal

commitment to individualism (Luo Xu 2002).

> This concept of liberalism as a means to the end of state power became
>
> an intrinsic problem of Chinese liberal movements, Schwartz stated (and
>
> Chinese scholars echoed in recent years), because it was 'mortally
>
> vulnerable to the demonstration of seemingly shorter and more effective
>
> ways to the end.' Therefore China's liberals of this variety all too easily

---

(1964: 133-134). While for Yen Fu, it is the freedom of thought and expression that
weigh most heavily in promoting individual liberty (136).

accepted other paths to wealth and power after the May Fourth

movement." (Luo Xu 2002: 8)

The Confucian ideal of the perfection of the individual in service of the nation-state

seems to have remained dominant during the socialist collective era, in spite of its

harsh critique of the rotten tradition of Confucianism.[158] Although the individual was

said to have been liberated from the feudalist family, the distinction lay not so much

in whether or not the individual enjoyed liberty and autonomy than in the shift of

loyalty from the feudalist family to the socialist party-state (Pye 1996; Yan 2003,

2009).

   Nonetheless, as anthropologist Yan Yunxiang (2003) observed from his decade

long (1989-1999) fieldwork in the northeastern village of Xiajia, the breakdown of

family power—what Yan called the "demystification of parenthood and filial

piety"[159]—sowed the seeds of individualization *within* the familial domain. Several

points merit further discussion. First, when private property ownership was wiped out

during radical Maoist socialism (Meisner 1986; Whyte and Parish 1984; Solinger

1999; Yan 2003)—with the conviction that private property was conducive to

exploitation, also collapsing was the institutional bases for patriarch such as imperial

---

[158] According to Luo Xu (2002), the cultural discourse and value system of the
Communist Party under Mao Zedong—the "new democratic culture"—carried the
legacy of Confucian moralism in addition to a Sinicized Marxism and Communism
that stressed political stance and class consciousness (2002: 14-15).
[159] In Yan's elaboration, the breakdown of family power was due largely to the
radical shift of property ownership and wealth from kin-based inheritance to
accumulation of wealth through individual labor. Central to this shift is the socialist
work point system and also later the accessibility to migrant work. As Thomas Gold
indicates, "Under the work point system, family members were income-generating
labor power; under the ARS (Agricultural Responsibility System), they have become
fully commoditized" (1985: 664).

law, public opinion, patrilineal kinship organizations, and the religious/ritual system

(specifically ancestral worship rituals) (Yan 2003: 189). This shift of individual

attachment from kin-based social organization to the party-state collective facilitated

rising awareness of individual rights and entitlement within the family. One obvious

example is the rise of youth autonomy and conjugality in place of

intergenerational/parent-son relationship.

 Second, if collectivization during Maoist socialism prepared individualization

through demystification of patriarchal power—and perhaps also through denunciation

of authority specifically during the Cultural Revolution and its encouragement of

public criticism[160], then decollectivization since the early 1980s during reform and

opening-up signified the withdrawal of the state and the privatization and

nuclearization of the family (Yan 2003, 2009). That is to suggest, after dethroning

kin-based social organization and the installation of state patriarchy where the

individual lodged her/himself within, there came the withdrawal of the state from

social life, the responsibilities thereof shifted to the individual and the emerging

nuclear family.

 Third, significantly different from the collective period, the postcollective era

announced China's integration into the neoliberal regime (Harvey 2005) and its

embrace of global consumerism. Central to the series of structural shifts and

individualization process is the increasing prominence of individual desires, emotions

and agencies in family life (Yan 2003, 2009). As was pointed out by Deborah Davis,

---

[160] One most explicit example of the challenge to authority is the writing of big-character posters (*dazi bao*) to criticize and denounce, see Joel Andreas (2007).

while "[t]he political regime remained intact, but relationships between agents of the state and ordinary citizens had changed" (Davis 2000: 1). Individual autonomy was further translated into an ever-broadening range of consumption choices amidst the ostentatious trend of neoliberal privatization—an individual autonomy largely upheld and boosted by what some termed as the consumer revolution (Davis 2000; Pun 2003). As Li Zhang argues in her ethnographic research on the spatialization of class in Kunming, postsocialist transformations are not simply about macro process of economic liberalization, but also a simultaneous reconfiguration of personhood, specifically the making of the Chinese new middle class through the production and consumption of urban space (2010a: 13). In line with these scholars, I suggest that this consumption-based process of individualization constitutes a sharp contrast with rights-based individualism that arose along with the development of western capitalism.

Fourth, central to this increasing awareness of individual autonomy was its domesticity. According to Yan's observation, the process of individualization manifests itself largely within the privatized domain of the family. As Yan stated, "no longer willing to sacrifice for the collective interests and for the perpetuation of the extended family, the individual in modern society seeks her or his interest and happiness through the working of the family" (2009: xxiv). Yan maintains that while the development of individuality constitutes the essence of China's transformation of private life since 1949, this largely top-down process of individualization—initiated by the party-state in the form of diverse ideological campaigns and policy

implementation spanning across Maoist collectivization through postcollective

era—is characterized by an unbalanced development between rights and obligations.

Yan thus describes it as "uncivil individual" and "ultra-utilitarian individualism,"

where the "pursuit of individual rights in the **domestic sphere** was not always

accompanied by an equal effort to gain autonomy and independence in the **public**

sphere" (2003: 232-233, emphasis mine)[161]. That might explain why, in his research

into interpersonal relations in the 1980s, Thomas Gold decried the "deplorable state of

public morality and civic consciousness in China" (1985: 665).

   Fifth, in addition to the restricted domain of individualization within the family,

also related to this "uncivil" individual, borrowing Yan's (2003) term, is perhaps

Pun's observation of the fragmentary class consciousness when migrant workers are

concerned. According to Pun (2003: 482), although clearly aware of their exploitation

within the capitalist production machine, *dagongmei* (female migrant workers) were

eager to be integrated into the urban workforce so as to join the consumer revolution.

It is the structural void enabled by "an unfathomable rural-urban divide" that has

facilitated the top priority of consumption and the frail possibility of class

consciousness. Perhaps it is right when Robert Kuhn (2010) said the following: "If

instability would ever again visit its chaotic opprobrium on China it would come at

the hands of those who desire better standards of living, not of those who seek

---

[161] See Deborah Davis and Stevan Harrell (*Chinese Families in Post-Mao Era*, 1993)
for more discussions on transformations of Chinese families and their relations to
state policies. Although in this edited volume, "creeping individualism", meaning the
continual growth in youth autonomy, was not readily evident, as was pointed out in
Marty Whyte's study on the wedding behavior and family strategies in the
southwestern city of Chengdu (Whyte 1993: 200).

Western-style democracy" (2010: 15). What is most alarming in Kuhn's observation is

that a better life is not necessarily equivalent to a democratic life.

Sixth, and key to understanding the individualization process in China, vis-à-vis

the domesticity of individual autonomy is the party-state as the creator of a series of

family changes and of the growth of individuality. That is, be it socialist

collectivization that detached the individual from kin-based social organization, or

post-Mao economic reforms that separated the individual from the radical socialist

collective (i.e. the urban *danwei* or the rural commune), it was the party-state that had

initiated the changes. As Yan has stressed,

> The role of the party-state in shaping the individual remained strong
>
> and consistent across the dividing year of 1978, albeit in different forms
>
> and in different directions before and after the post-Mao reforms. The
>
> individual arose by responding to these institutional changes rather than
>
> pursuing her or his inalienable rights through a bottom-up approach"—
>
> "managed individualization. (Yan 2009: xxxi)

What is remarkable here is the juxtaposition of the freedom of individual

choice—largely articulated in the market—and the political boundaries drawn by the

party-state that largely determine the possible domain of exercise of freedom.

Significantly, it is against this background of managed individuality that the

emergence and expansion of LGBT movements is to be understood (see also Chapter

Two).

Identity-Based Liberal Politics and the Neoliberal Regime

Before an integrated discussion of China's adaptation of rights-based LGBT politics, a brief delineation of the modern lesbian and gay movement in the U.S. is useful. The purpose of seemingly roundabout review of the literature is to explore how the individual is generally imagined and embodied in the U.S. lesbian and gay movement and how it is distinct from the Chinese counterpart that arose since the late 1990s.

I have mentioned in Chapter Two the puzzle I had toward the juxtaposition of excitement and indifference towards the global celebration of LGBT-related news. That is, the immediately spread and shared celebration of the global LGBT community (a most recent one being the much anticipated legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States) stands side by side with a sense of indifference equally felt among those who are considered members of the imagined community. Here in this chapter, I suggest that this simultaneity of the immediacy and the remoteness of time and space inherent in this juxtaposition of excitement and indifference be explained through situating liberal identity politics against the social and historical background of neoliberal China.

The emergence of lesbian and gay politics in the United States is said to approximate the time of the Second World War and the ensuing Cold War period, when growing concerns with the domestic politics of human rights in the U.S.—largely due to the paradox of the country's racist practices and its rise as a world superpower that boasted a national image of freedom and

democracy—coincided with increasing state regulation and surveillance of homosexuality (Smith 2008). According to D'Emilio ([1983]1998) and Smith (2008), increasingly systematic security campaigns against and surveillance of homosexuals were also connected to the anti-communism of the era as "communism and homosexuality were defined as politically and socially deviant" (Smith 2008: 32). It was against this socio-historical background that earliest lesbian and gay organizations in the U.S. were established in the 1950s to push for social acceptance of homosexuality.

The critical transformation of lesbian and gay movements from "homophile" movement to gay liberation movement occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s amidst a context of social movement ferment, including the anti-war movement, the student movement, and the women's movement. Following the landmark event of the Stonewall riots in Greenwich Village on June 27-28, 1969—widely recognized as the beginning of the modern lesbian and gay movement in the United States, a number of gay liberation organizations were established across the country, many of which sought alliance with other political activism and human/civil rights campaigns[162]. It is thus fair to say that from its very beginning, the lesbian and gay movement in the United States has been embedded within the larger picture of the American civil rights movement, which has set the template and model of "strategy, tactics and discursive arguments over citizenship and equality" for subsequent social movements (Smith

---

[162] It should be noted that from as early as the homophile movement, activists of these lesbian and gay organizations were simultaneously engaged in other social and political activism of the time (Smith 2008: 33).

2008: 51). According to Lisa Duggan, the coalition of the diverse strands of the social movements from the 1960s to the early 1970s was representative of a general political culture of "downward redistribution"—redistribution of "money, political power, cultural capital, pleasure, and freedom" (Duggan 2003: XVII)—that demanded on the one hand a democratically accountable public state that guaranteed equal access and distribution of resources, and on the other hand individual autonomy—particularly a right to sexual and domestic privacy—from state interference (Duggan 2003: 8).

The late 1970s and 1980s saw the rise of the religious Right and pro-business activism. Along the way, more single-issue organizations appeared and the mode of social movement shifted from popular mobilization to access to government support through mostly lobbying and litigation. In place of the downward redistribution of earlier social coalition is a culture of upward distribution and an increasing prominence of "market culture", culminating in the 1990s what we now term as neoliberalism, where lesbian and gay identity politics has gradually morphed into a mainstreaming effort and an aspiration to pre-political multiculturalism that aligns privacy with personal moral responsibility (Duggan 2003). That is, transformative challenge to gender and sexual institutions is largely substituted by demands for legal protection of an expanding private life, the boundary of which is cordoned off by individual moral responsibility. By then, lesbian and gay—and increasingly transgender—have become more or less stable and distinct categories, legally diverse and normal.

At least two points are worthy of further consideration. First, from the earlier

coalition struggle for "downward redistribution" to the neoliberal project of multiculturalism, lesbian and gay politics in the U.S. experienced a gradual but dramatic shrinkage of the "scope of equality and democratic public life" (Duggan 2003: 13). While more and more is allocated to the private domain free from state intervention—a vast zone of "private" life, simultaneous with this expanding private domain is a process of depoliticization in the name of personal responsibility. The personal is less and less political, if at all. What seems to survive the series of critical changes is the centrality of the notion of individual sovereignty, an essential normative constituent of liberalism. That is to suggest, it is in the name of, among others, individual autonomy and freedom that lesbian and gay movements have spanned across its liberal and neoliberal divide. It should be noted that this foundational conceptualization of individual sovereignty vis-à-vis the state underlying the U.S. lesbian and gay identity politics is largely absent from its Chinese counterpart. And this "absence" is due largely to the specific process of individualization in China, where individual autonomy has been achieved relative to the privatized family but not vis-à-vis the Party-State.

In their sociological categorization of individualization, Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim distinguish Chinese modernity and individualization from its European counterpart with an emphasis on individual-state relationship: the presence/absence of "a domain of inviolable individual basic rights in the relation between individual and state" (2010: xvii)[163].

---

[163] See also Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's theorization of institutionalized individualization (2001). According to them, central institutions of modern society,

If…the individual is also acquiring increased importance in China, this

is not occurring, as in Europe, within an institutionally secured framework

and based on the civil, political and social basic rights which were won

through political struggles in Europe during the first modernity. (Beck and

Beck-Gersheim 2010: xvii)

I suggest that it is the shared normative claim of individual sovereignty and basic

rights independent of state regulation that has glossed over the fundamental

distinction between liberal and neoliberal identity politics in the U.S., i.e. the

economic rationality of every aspect of social life (Brown 2003, 2015). I would

further suggest that it is this ambiguously conceptualized notion of individual rights

that has made plausible the emergence and ever-present surveillance of lesbian and

gay activism in mainland China. That is, the conflation between economically

rationalized choice making and political rights has rendered possible the

translatability of neoliberal LGBT rights-based movements in the U.S. into the

Chinese soil.

Second, it should be noted that the emergence of Western lesbian and gay

identity politics in China since the late 1990s coincided with the mainstreaming of

neoliberal multiculturalism in the U.S. The neoliberal brand of identity/equality

politics exhibits a rhetorical commitment to "a narrow, formal, nonredistributive form

of 'equality' politics" (Duggan 2003: 44). That might explain why anthropologists of

---

including "basic civil, political and social rights, but also paid employment and the
training and mobility necessary for it—are geared to the individual and not to the
group" (2001: xxi-xxii). Thus, "'individualization' means disembedding without
reembedding," and "the individual is becoming the basic unit of social reproduction
for the first time in history" (2001: xxii).

lesbian and gay communities in China (Rofel 1999, 2007; Ho 2009; Yip 2013;

Engebretsen 2014) witnessed the variously articulated formative processes of

tongzhi/lala middle-class subjectivities in urban China that are definitively different

from the MSM communities initiated through health intervention projects in the early

1990s. The emergence of identity politics-informed *tongzhi* organizations and

activism in mainland China illustrated in Chapter Two seems to lend further support

to the compatibility between the neoliberal identity project and tactics employed in

China's urban lesbian and gay activism in recent years. I suggest that the overlapping

neoliberal mechanism (valorization of efficiency and market values) of identity

politics, plus a general distrust of and disbelief in a progressive-left politics, which

collapsed first during the Cultural Revolution, then during the democratic movement

in 1989, contribute to the kind of indifference I encountered in my search for the

transgender community in Kunming.

In Search of the Individual

During regular meetings of the Yunnan provincial network of MSM workgroups,

representatives from the five operating agencies of USAID would usually participate

in certain sessions to either listen to updates from different workgroups or organize

workshops for professional development. In one of the workshops I attended,

representatives from PSI Kunming presented qualitative methods in doing research

among marginalized population. Debates erupted during the Q & A section as to the

representativeness of qualitative data. That is, to what extent could qualitative data

collected from methods such as individual interviews represent the whole of the target

population. For many of the participants of the debate, statistics speak much louder

than individual voices. This echoes what I heard from a local health practitioner as to

why there had not been an intervention program for transgender people—the number

of this sub-population was not significant enough to merit a separate category of

intervention.

The obsession with numbers was made clear in anthropologist Sandra Hyde's

research into the cultural politics of AIDS in Yunnan Province. Hyde (2007) points

out that specifically at the initial stage of the AIDS epidemic, the assemblage of

hybrid nongovernmentality, international survey techniques, and global standards of

scientific discourse contributes to the "aesthetics of statistics" representative of the

governing techniques of the late-socialist Chinese state. "Nation-states have a fetish

for numbers" (2007: 38).

>   Statistics take on a life of their own; they become part of a public
>
>   health aesthetic that relies heavily on the production of numbers and on
>
>   the surveillance, both literal and figurative, of bodies. (Hyde 2007: 37-38)

Intriguingly, the anecdote I narrated at the beginning of the section revealed not just

the nation-state's fetish for numbers, but that of the people working in MSM

workgroups, representatives from the target populations. Their dissatisfaction with the

lack of scientific authority of qualitative methods indexes the degree to which

surveillance techniques and the scientism of statistics have been internalized to the

extent that individual voices are rendered insignificant. A narrowly defined segment

of behavior has been taken from a person, been accorded statistical significance, and then override the voices of the people from whom these behaviors have been derived (see Michael Jackson's critique of language and the politics of difference, here the politics of statistics is replacing that of language).

I was reminded of a conversation I had with a researcher from PSI about their follow-up qualitative research on MSM communities in both Yunnan and Guangxi Provinces (right next to Yunnan to the east). With data collected from a large-scale routine behavior tracking (RBT) survey among 1035 members of the target population, they were then considering the necessity of carrying out in-depth interviews to solicit more nuanced responses regarding condom use and HIV testing among MSM.[164] Even before an actual design of the research was discussed and produced, the local researcher told me that he could almost anticipate the result. Much later towards the end of my field research, I was fortunate enough to have been granted access to the qualitative data they collected as I was commissioned to write a report. I was intrigued by the similarity of interview questions with those listed in the previous quantitative survey. That might explain why it was possible to anticipate the results. Little new information could be yielded if individual voice has already been framed in a most predictable way, including the questions they are expected to respond to, the vocabulary they use, and the way they have been guided to phrase it. In this respect, qualitative methods are not as distinct from quantitative ones, as the

---

[164] For more detail about this research finding, see:
http://ns2.ph.mahidol.ac.th/phklb/knowledgefiles/1730_1900_OR12_1_Kai_Wang_Compatibility_Mode.pdf

individual remains a set of pre-defined and categorizable behaviors.

This invisibility of the individual in public health intervention constitutes a sharp contrast with the growing attention paid to individual entitlements to consumption and property rights (see also Chapter Three). As has been observed by Yan Yunxiang, "[t]he Chinese individual began to link the self with a set of rights or entitlements, thus expanding the traditional definition of the individual as merely partly of a social group" (Yan 2010a: 500).

> The individual has gained more weight in society and has emerged as an important and independent social category for both policy making and cultural reasoning, which in turn has led to the emergence of identity politics…the rights movement in China still bears the heavy influence of state power and the traditional notion that an individual's identity and rights are dependent on, instead of independent from, the state. (Yan 2010a: 501)

At least two points are worthy of further consideration. The first has to do with the emergence of rights movement and rights-based identity politics. One most clear example is the environmental protests sprouted in several cities across China in recent years.

Close to the end of my field research, news came out that China National Petroleum Corporation planned to build a chemical plant in Anning, 17 miles southwest to the city center of Kunming. On the morning of May 4, 2013, I joined several friends from Parallel in a protest. As the number of participants—called upon

mostly through messages tweeted on Wechat—grew in the plaza of one commercial center at downtown Kunming, we were finally rounded up by uniformed police in a circle where re-entry was no longer allowed. Separated by a big circle of uniformed police, many of the protesters within the circle explained to onlookers outside why we were there and what we demanded. Some of the onlookers listened attentively, some frowned, while some dismissed our efforts as futile. A young woman with her little son came up to me and asked me to write on the back of her son's shirt a big "PX" (paraxylene) crossed by a big cross. As I was working on my writing amidst the little boy's fidgeting complaints, the young mother tried to calm him down by explaining how their new home and their new life was going to be affected by the chemical plant. I looked up at the crowd—with various expressions on their faces, curious, ironic, bewildered, indifferent, and perhaps more. Between us on both sides of the circle, one of the young police officers repeated his sincere warning to me against blocking transportation if I ever planned to join the second protest scheduled in front of the municipal government building a few days away. Following an onlooker's inside story from her family member, the police officer told me the project had actually been confirmed three years ago and none of us could do anything about that.

Two weeks later on May 17, volunteers and friends from Parallel gathered in the same plaza to celebrate the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT). Designated group leaders had recruited volunteers among friends and acquaintance—gay and straight—to set off from three different spots leading to the plaza—the same place with the anti-PX protest less than a month ago. Tailor-made

rainbow umbrellas held in hand, we moved along the street as we tried to engage

passers-by in conversation about what IDAHOT was and why May 17, which

happened to also be the National Telecommunication Day. Although security was

escalated due to previous PX protests, our celebration went quite smoothly.[165] Some

security guards watching over us ended up explaining to onlookers what we were

celebrating as we made our umbrella parade formation into the numbers of five, one,

and seven (517).

The PX protests did not result in cancellation of the refinery plant, although the

government did produce along streets posters that gave general information about the

harmlessness of the chemical plant. Neither did our parade yield any direct change in

social attitudes. What I did witness was the increasing willingness of the individual to

stand out and test, or even confront, the boundaries. Nonetheless, this readiness to

stand out is juxtaposed with an obvious sense of ephemerality. Although the second

round of protest did happen according to plan, much more stringent control was

implemented to suppress the third demonstration, which had been plan to coincide

with the China-South Asia Expo at Kunming in June. Despite online news coverage of

IDAHOT celebration events in several different places across China, I read an article

by a researcher from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences calling for

homosexuals to remain low-profile (*didiao*). Business seems to go on as usual.

Therefore, the second point I want to single out from Yan's observation is the

---

[165] In order for our event to succeed as planned, we approached the officers of the Urban Administrative and Law Enforcement Bureau (*chengguan*) as innocent college students, and told them that we were graduating from college and this was our graduation project. They ended up only keeping a close watch over us without further intervention.

party-state's heavy imprint in (dis)allowing individual's claims to identities and rights.
The presence of the Party-state is not only reflected in its manipulation of the process
of individualization as a development strategy of and response to market economy,
but also in its authority in granting differentiated scope and extent of articulation
specific civil demands. Without recognition and endorsement of the party-state,
individual identities and claims to rights suffer from ephemerality and lack of
legitimacy. The alignment of "small self" (*xiaowo*) with the the "larger self"
(*dawo*)—the social whole—still has significant ideological currency in the official
discourse of contemporary China (Luo 2002: 10).

This is also to suggest that alongside the burgeoning desire to express and protect
personal interests, there is a generally short-lived attention paid to social issues that
advocate individual rights and hold the Party-state accountable. The ephemerality of
social attention might be best reflected in the cyberspace of Weibo, a popular
microblogging site in mainland China that resembles Twitter. When Weibo still
aspired to function as a quasi civil society in the cyberspace, tweets on social unrests
erupted one after another, followed by numerous comments and retweets. While new
issues came up, old ones retreated into oblivion. The quick turnover of heated issues
has been accompanied by equally quick forgetfulness, "thanks" to internet
crackdowns that deleted tweets deemed inappropriate.[166] There seemed to be little
room to build or sustain a momentum that could lead to further action unless it is

---

[166] In this sense, the Party-state appears less as an arbitrator that denies everything the
people demand than an ultimate patriarch that determines and manipulates what is
appropriate to demand and what not.

endorsed by the party-state. Life usually goes on in a space almost parallel with the cyberspace.

    Furthermore, in the official discourse, the political representativeness claimed by the party-state of the people has largely precluded constructive discussions of the individual, as individuals make up the people, who are then supposedly represented by the party-state—people's democratic dictatorship.

> It is important to note that even when the ideal of the 'civil society' is
>
> linked to that of 'rule by the people', conceptualization of 'the people' can
>
> still be carried out in a 'top-down' fashion (Whether this fashion is proper
>
> or not is a separate question.) (Thomas Metzger 2001: 211)

That is to suggest, if Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2001) understand self-politics and state politics as antithetic, as a tug of war between the spontaneity of the republican morality and the organized representative politics of state politicians, then China's constitutional emphasis on people's democratic dictatorship seems to have integrated the two. The paradoxical relation between self-active politics of and state politics/control found in Western democratic societies is rendered somewhat out of place in the postsocialist context. The presumed compatibility between the party-state and the interests of the people has rendered largely illegitimate ad hoc individual claims to rights. Therefore, the state-individual relationship is less of individuals critically confronting the state and challenging boundaries than one of individuals asking to be included/represented and taken care of by the state. Sinologist Thomas

Metzger terms this top-down framework as an "optimistic epistemology"[167], which

posits that "the objective public good can be fully known" (2001: 211). Consequently,

Metzger argues,

> …a good society is created more by making the individual and the
>
> government good, rather than…by protecting individuals, bad or good,
>
> from coercion inflicted by others. From this standpoint, free intellectual,
>
> economic, and political marketplaces may be allowed to a considerable
>
> extent, but the emphasis is on the enlightened elite working alongside or
>
> within the state, seeing to it that society is guided by a proper ethos, and
>
> putting parameters on these marketplaces. (2001: 211-212)

Talking about the then leadership (headed by Qiu He) in Yunnan Province, a

friend of mine from the Party School[168] at Kunming described to me that Qiu He's

leadership was predicated upon a "good emperor" mentality (though unfortunately,

Qiu was caught in March 2015 and has since been under investigation of corruption

by the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of the Communist Party of

China[169]). That is, so long as the leader/emperor is doing good, we the people should

---

[167] In contrast with the "optimistic epistemology" is the "pessimistic epistemology", which refers to a bottom-up standpoint that questions the validity of "moral-intellectual enlightenment" (Metzger 2001: 213). "In this epistemic situation, there is no way to fuse together knowledge, morality, political power, and individual freedom. The proper social order depends more on protecting the freedom of the three marketplaces against the intrusions of the state or of those claiming to have a better understanding of the public good than other citizens have" (ibid.).

[168] Party School, *dangxiao* in Chinese, is the higher education institution that specifically trains officials for the Communist Party of China. In addition to the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in Beijing (also the Central Party School), there are Party Schools at different administrative levels across the country.

[169]

just live our life contentedly. As to what counts as "good", the leader has his own

deliberation. To add just one more example that reveals the centrality of the collective

of the party-state and the individual as component, the catchphrases of "Harmonious

Society" and "China Dream" from Hu Jintao's (2002-2012) and Xi Jinping's (2012-)

administrations demonstrate the ways in which social stability and national

rejuvenation top priority of the party-state's agenda, with which individual interests

are presumed to be compatible, and to which individuals are expected to contribute

and comply. In his elaboration on laid-off workers amidst the high tides of

privatization in the mid-1990s, Yan Yunxiang points out explicitly the top-down

process of individualization as a developmental strategy of the party-state in its

embrace of market economy. Added to this state initiated individualization is

cut-throat competition where only the fittest survive.

> To a great extent, individualization became a developmental strategy
>
> adopted by the party-state and inevitably turned into a highly contested
>
> process since it created both losers and winners. (Yan 2010a: 499)

Therefore, even when the individual is gaining more importance and has been

increasingly figured into the consideration of policy changes, they are expected to

submit to the final arbitrator and patriarch, the party-state.

Self-Culture Politics

In their study of Chinese private business people and their creation of and

---

http://www.eastbysoutheast.com/qiu-he-top-yunnan-official-ousted-for-corrupt-land-deals/ accessed Sept. 27, 2015.

participation in sub-political communities, Delman and Yin (2010) point out that

although the new economy facilitates "room to exercise some measure of political

freedom," democracy is not to be assumed. The co-optation of private entrepreneurs

and interest groups by the state to "prevent the emergence of independent political

groups, movements, or parties" sets the boundaries of possible political engagement

(Delman and Yin 2010: 96). It is at this point that the self-culture of identity politics in

mainland China needs to be taken a closer look at. In their study of institutionalized

individualization, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001) characterize self-politics or

self-culture politics as the

> inversion whereby the non-political becomes political and the
>
> political non-political, in such a way that individuals feel themselves to be
>
> originators of political intervention and (perhaps quite illusorily) political
>
> subjects crossing boundaries and breaching the system. Insofar as the
>
> self-culture becomes conscious of itself politically, a new kind of
>
> competitive relationship thus arises between self-organized and
>
> representative forms of political action. (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001:
>
> 45).

To a certain extent, what I witnessed and experienced in Kunming, be it the anti-PX

demonstration or the IDAHOT celebration, seems to correspond to Beck and

Beck-Gernsheim's self-culture politics, or Anthony Giddens' notion of "life politics"

(1991)—a redefinition of the political with everyday issues that sit at the center of the

private. As was observed by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, "a directly political field of

decision making can suddenly arise in what appear to be purely private matters of everyday life" (2001: 44). They also seem to correspond to the new social movements that sprouted in the U.S. since the late 1960s, when life-styles and culture took the place of political economy in driving forward social movements.

Nonetheless, the state-individual relationship based upon liberal polity in the U.S. and the confrontational politics that assert individual rights vis-à-vis the state constitute a sharp contrast with the state orchestrated process of individualization and its selective embrace of individual rights. Thus, the very possibility of ad hoc self-culture politics and the "new kind of competitive relationship" it has engaged in with state politics is highly suspicious to the party-state of China. A most ostentatious example of the party-state's reaction to the increasing eruptions of self-politics is the dual strategy of Xi Jinping's administration (2012-) that cracks down on high-rank officials' corruption while at the same time tightening control over the development of the civil society. It is the state control over the "lifeworld" that Xi's administration aims to secure and strengthen. That is, to serve the people (*wei renmin fuwu*) is less about hearing what the people have to say than making sure that corrupted officials be replaced by good ones so that people will be well taken care of. Within this scenario, individuals remain dependent upon the party-state. And the on-going process of individualization remains largely predicated upon capricious politics of different administrations, including what kind of individual rights could be made a social issue, and to what extent could this specific articulation of individual rights be asserted.

This brings us back to the beginning of this section, where the obsession of AIDS

intervention programs with the scientism of statistics drowned the voices of transgendered individuals. To a certain extent, the contrast between public health intervention's demographic approach and the increasing pampering of individual needs by the neoliberal market exemplifies the unbalanced development of individualization in postsocialist China and the centrality of economy therein. The state sponsored boost of domestic consumption embraces the individual and their diversity in ways largely absent in public health intervention projects, in which individuals have been reduced to specific categorization of disease and infection, a social problem.

Individual, Family, Civil Society

> "Now, in freedom, they may and must decide for themselves; all the existing institutions have collapsed, all the old certainties are gone. The joy of freedom is at the same time a falling into a void…That everything's uncertain, precarious. Enjoy our lack of ties as freedom."
> Friedrich Schorlemmer, 1993
> (Cited in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001: 1)

On a chilly evening in early January, I went to the back garden in Dongfeng Square with Gina and BZ after dinner. I was casually chatting with some other gay guys in a loosely formed small circle, when Gina poked at me and introduced me to a new comer, Hu. Hu was a psychology major studying at Beijing and was visiting home then. Quiet and a bit down, he told me about the recent death of his mother and how life was not just about one's sexuality. Using his psychological theory, Hu understood transgender phenomena as striking a balance with the excess of patriarchy.

> I feel sympathetic toward transgender people… I think transgendering
>
> is a way to have one's relationship with men recognized as acceptable…
>
> Heterosexual relationship represents the positive side of the world, while
>
> gay and transgender occupy the shadow… (January 9, 2013)

His analogy of the hetero/homo dyad as that between light and shadow deeply struck me. Although he did not go into detail as to how transgenderism represents an excess of patriarchy, his view of transgenderism as gaining recognition suggested that transgender was less about an articulation of gender than an adherence to the hetero-gender norm in same-sex relationships. Not long after I started my conversation with Hu, a married man joined our group with a painful reflection of his discovery of his same-sex sexuality after marriage and his deteriorating relationship with his wife. While some of us suggested that he be honest with his wife, others firmly rejected the idea of coming out. Commenting on this man's predicament, Hu said to me the following:

> I would not come out, nor would I get married. Coming out is just to
>
> make yourself feel relieved while making the whole family suffer. I do not
>
> recommend coming out at all. Life is more than your sexual identity or
>
> your relationship with your wife. What makes him feel so painful now
>
> would be nothing compared to other life experience he has to go through.
>
> He should just reorient his life and make himself think in more positive
>
> way. It was just one of those temporary pains (*zhentong*). (January 9,
>
> 2013)

Although I was surprised by the disconnection between Hu's young age and education

on the one hand and his somewhat conservative attitude towards homosexuality, his

view is shared by many (in retrospect, Hu's view sounds very existentialist). For at

least some of my gay and transgendered friends, especially elder ones, gender and

sexuality represented only a portion of their life. It seems meaningless to come out, let

alone advocating for sexual rights. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, even when one

comes out, it does not necessarily mean the closet is no more. Quite the contrary, it

could mean the whole family is moved into the closet so that better orchestrated

cover-up needs to be performed.

It is intriguing to look at this heavy imprint of the family in individual's life

vis-à-vis what was discussed previously about growing individual autonomy within

the family. It seems that while aspirations to individual desires have given rise to

further disembedding of the individual from the family, not every articulation of

desire is qualified to be given free reign. Echoing Lisa Rofel's (1999b, 2007)

problematization of an originary story of a global gay identity and her approach of

transcultural practices in understanding the mutually imbricated relation between

transnational gayness and Chinese cultural citizenship, Elizabeth Engebretsen (2009)

demonstrates ways in which *lalas* in Beijing strategically negotiate same-sex intimate

relationships with marital norms and family ties. Through troubling the

incompatibility between non-normative sexuality and normal social ties, Engebretsen

suggests that it is the "marital terrain"—what she defines as "an intensely politicized

heteronormative site for claiming rights and societal inclusion that assigns status,

inclusion, and equality based on legitimate relationships and the gendered sexuality

realized through marriage"—that shapes in fundamental ways the contours of lived

experience of both men and women, straight and gay (2009: 4-5). As a matter of fact,

Rofel (1999b) thinks of family as metonymic of Chinese culture. Family—be it filial

piety or the desire for at least a façade of stability made possible by family—is thus

integral to an understanding and aspiration to cultural belonging.

It might appear odd that after fierce attacks on family and kin-based sociality

during High Socialism and the top-down manipulation of individual loyalty from kin

to the party-led collectives, family remains central in individuals' life. During my

field research in Kunming, parents and family consistently appeared in our

conversations among gay men, lesbians, and transgendered individuals. Among my

transgendered informants, Yanzi went home regularly in men's clothes with her long

hair tied at the back. Chin maintained, though hesitantly, connection via phone calls

with her ex-wife and teenage son. Autumn brought money back home regularly and

came back with skin tanned from tending the family farmland. Xiaoyi's mother

accompanied her to each performance and event she participated in. Apple, an elder

transgendered performer at SpringRain, talked about how her wife and daughter

visited the drop-in center and watched her show. Gina's parents have long before

known about her work in transgender activism and HIV/AIDS intervention. Guizhen

was learning to work at her brother's cosmetic hospital while trying to skip training

occasionally to do sex work. Hilton lived with her adopted daughter and sneaked out

to do sex work at midnight. She warned me never to call her feminine nickname in

public. Xiaowu, one of the major transgendered performer at SpringRain, complied with an arranged marriage demanded by her parents. Peacock told me about her lack of "feeling" (*ganjue*, sexual feeling) for women except for her wife, who bore her a daughter. Topping the list were the several speed "dating" events that aimed to facilitate contract marriage between gay men and lesbians. I was even approached by a gay friend—whose parents had known of his sexuality—and asked if I could accompany him home as his girlfriend so that family relatives could stop bothering him about marriage.

The paradoxical coexistence of on the one hand individual expression of gendered and sexual desires and on the other hand the constraining power of the family speaks to the confounding contradiction between claims of LGBT identity and a lack of sustainable interest in social activism and the development of civil society. It echoes Yan Yunxiang's (2003) concept of the "uncivil individual" I quoted earlier in this chapter. According to Yan, the process of individualization in China has given rise to "ultra-utilitarian individualism" that is characterized by an unbalanced development between individuals' avid pursuit of rights in the domestic sphere and their lack of enthusiasm in gaining autonomy in the public sphere (2003: 232-233). To tackle this confounding relationship between the "uncivil" individual, the family, and the concept of civil society in Chinese context, I suggest the following three perspectives.

One possible explanation of the centrality of family might be the massive wave of decollectivization and privatization, specifically the privatization of education,

medical care, and housing during the 1990s (Yan 2010a), that made the nuclear

family—privatized from public authority—more indispensable for individuals to

survive, economically, socially, and emotionally, in a "risky" world. In Western

societies, "[m]ost of the rights and entitlements to support by the welfare state are

designed for individuals rather than for families" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001: 3).

It is the individual instead of the family that constitutes the basic unit of society. That

is to say, individuals are more encouraged to be on their own in society instead of a

member of the family unit.[170] In postsocialist Chinese context however, massive

structural changes in employment, medical care, housing, and education have led to

the disintegration of the safety net of Communism, the void of which has not been

filled by compatible provision of social services. The family thus functions

increasingly as both an emotional haven for the individual, and an indispensable

support in an increasingly insecure world. Despite more open challenge and

confrontation against parental authority, individual autonomy seldom spells absolute

independence and separation from family.

Also contributive to the rise of youth autonomy in the family and their

simultaneous lack of enthusiasm in civic issues is perhaps the economic logic that has

dominated the process of individualization to the extent that changes in other aspects

of life and social attitudes remained lagging behind. Different from the

"institutionalized individualization" in Western societies as summarized by Beck and

---

[170] It is in this sense that Beck and Beck-Geinsheim (2001) think of individualization in Western societies as "a social condition which is not arrived at by a free decision of individuals" (2001: 4).

Beck-Geinsheim (2001), the top-down developmental strategy of individualization in

China is not endorsed by compatible institutional support. That is to suggest,

individual autonomy is mostly represented in the economic marketplace while not

necessarily in the intellectual and political ones. Furthermore, drawing upon Wendy

Brown's critique of the demise of liberal democracy along with the advent of the

economic rationalization of neoliberalism, I suggest that China's reform and entry into

global neoliberalism since the late 1970s, which accelerated specifically since the

1990s, help prioritize the discourse of economic development at the expense of moral

and political sensibilities. Deng Xiaoping's famous saying speaks to this

overwhelming presence of economic pragmatism: "It doesn't matter whether the cat is

black or white as long as it catches mice."

I was led to the third line of inquiry by Thomas Metzger's (2001) historical

analysis of the concept of civil society since the late imperial period in China.

Metzger distinguishes between a sociological-political definition of civil society and

its anthropological- philosophical counterpart. While the former bases its claim on the

bottom-up social coalescence, dependent upon "the unpredictable interplay of free,

fallible individuals competing in the open intellectual, economic, and political

marketplaces" (2001: 227) that are "free of state control and aiming to check state

abuses or even pursue democratization" (2001: 217); the latter stresses the concept of

civility, defined as "cordiality" or "fellowship" between "love for and instrumental

use of another person," and the indispensability of moral virtuosi—or

"super-citizens"—overseeing both the corrigible state and the fallible masses

(Metzger 2001: 217). Metzger argues that the bottom-up approach to civil society (*Gesellschaft*) has never been favored by mainstream Chinese intellectuals, who have found resonance and inspiration in Western democracy through fusing Confucianism with the Rousseau-Hegel-Marx tradition of civil society.

> In other words, the utopian, top-down view of progress as based on the moral dynamism of super-citizens able to influence a corrigible state was never replaced by an un-utopian, bottom-up view of progress as based on the efforts of ordinary free citizens fallibly pursuing their economic interests and organized in a practical way to monitor an incorrigible state…the Chinese intellectual mainstream has pictured democracy as realized by a moral-intellectual elite fusing together knowledge, morality, and political power and then seeing to it that everyone enjoyed what Sun [Yat-sen] called 'true freedom' and 'true equality.' (Metzger 2001: 224-227)

According to Metzger, mainstream Chinese intellectuals, including contemporary advocates of New Confucianism such as Hsu Fu-kuan (1902/1903-1982) and Yu Yingshi (1930-), regarded freedom as in alignment with the ultimate objective of *datong*, "the dissolution of distinct, clashing interests" and the freedom from selfishness rather than individual uniqueness and entitlement to rights (2001: 224). Within this top-down Rousseauistic framework of civil society, where democracy is conceptualized as "control of the government by a rational, morally enlightened citizenry expressing 'the general will'" (Metzger 2001: 227), it is civility rather than individual mundane interests that should be promoted. In other words, the personal is

NOT political.

Civil Society vs. Political Society

Perhaps not by sheer coincidence, when discussing civil society as "*the* idea of the late twentieth century"[171], political scientist Sunil Khilnani (2001) points out the lack of development of individualism in non-liberal societies of the South. For Khilnani, the individual within the liberal ideal of civil society is "constituted and guided by 'civilized self-interest'—a conception which values restraint" (2001: 28). A combination of both Yan's notion of the "uncivil individual" and Khilnani's conceptions points to the paradoxical coexistence of the development of individualism and the necessity of civil constraints enabled through "discursive persuasion and deliberation" (ibid.). Significantly, this "corrigible self" echoes Beck & Beck-Gernsheim's prescription for a self-culture politics:

> A self-culture presupposes what it also demands: preparedness for
>
> conflict, capacity for compromise, civil courage, curiosity, tolerance of
>
> ambiguity and so on, even in relation to the uglier aspects of the
>
> self-culture. (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001: 44)

Similarly, many scholars interested in the notion of civil society are also concerned with certain political culture or personality traits constitutive to a modern democratic state (see Thomas Metzger 2001: 207, n. 9). It is this emphasis on civil preparedness for self political advocacy that seems to be "missing", or largely suppressed in

---

[171] National Humanities Center, *The Idea of a Civil Society* (Humanities Research Center, Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, 1992), p.1, cited in Sunil Khilnani (2001: 11).

postsocialist China, where economic rationality of governance reigns.

Not long after I was introduced to Yanzi, a transgendered sex worker and one of my key informants, she invited me to her apartment for dinner. We met at the bus stop closest to her home and walked together amidst summer heat. Yanzi tied her long hair into a pony tail and was wearing a cap. With no makeup on the face nor tight-fitting dress on the body, she looked a bit ambiguous in broad day light. I was then introduced to her *laogong* (husband), who did most of the talking while she was preparing meal in the kitchen. While I felt grateful for his willingness to talk with me, I was also a bit embarrassed and puzzled by his detailed questioning of my financial situation, including the amount of money I was paying for my rent, where did my money come from, and how much my family was contributing to my daily expense. I was even more surprised when he expressed his rejection to hang out with "those homosexuals", his pride at not looking like gay, and his contempt at the idea of continuing a family life with Yanzi. But he was far from the only one who brought up the issue of money in my field work. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, several of my transgendered informants enjoyed bragging to me about the amount of money they had earned the previous night, or sometimes complained about the sluggish business. Some of them would also recall to me the glorious days back several years ago when performance and sex business had been easy and lucrative. But very few of them were ready to stand out and claim their rights of sexuality and gender expression, however friendly they were to me as a researcher on the identity of transgender (see also Chapter Two).

In one of the street interventions in which I participated with Parallel, four of our volunteers performed gay/lesbian couples and kissed in public. While the kissing was going on, the rest of the participating volunteers were responsible for explaining to onlookers (we did manage to draw a lot of attention) the "normality" of gay and lesbian love. BZ was standing amidst the curious mass and watching us during the whole process. She later told me how some onlookers called us *biantai* (pervert) and apologized to me for not having been able to even help educate the audience.

The translatability of civil society in non-Western soil has remained one focal topics of discussion. According to Khilnani (2001), the concept of civil society was recovered specifically since the late 1970s and 1980s along with the disintegration of both liberal and Marxist conceptions of social change and development. Civil society has become both an aspiration with promise of democracy and prosperity and a highly contentious concept.[172] Khilnani delineates three preconditions or prerequisites relevant to the development of civil society.

> First, civil society presupposes a concept of '**politics**': a conception
>
> which both specifies the territorial and constitutional scope of politics,
>
> and recognizes an arena or set of practices which is subject to regular and

---

[172] In Sunil Khilani's (2001) analysis, the sources of civil society vary in three major ways in accordance with different political stance. For a liberal position, civil society basically resides in "the economy, in property rights and markets where such rights may be freely exchanged" (2001: 13). For a radical position, civil society should be in "a 'society' independent of the economic domain and the state, where ideas are publicly exchanged, associations freely formed, and interests discovered" (13-14). For a conservative position, civil society resides in "a set of cultural acquisitions, in historically inherited manners of civility which moderate relations between groups and individuals" (14). The designation of these different domains—economy, society, and culture—is closely related to how the state and its role are delegitimized in these areas while legitimized in others.

punctual publicity, which provides a terrain upon which competing claims

may be advanced and justified…A second precondition that a civil society

appears to require is the presence of a particular type of **self**: one that is

mutable, able to conceive of interests as transient, and able to change and

to choose political loyalties and public affiliations. Such a self must

possess the capacity of being open to discursive persuasion and

deliberation, and be able to see his or her interests not as pre-given and

pre-defined…A third, equally problematic, precondition is an

institutionalized dispersal of **social power**…since in order to achieve such

a dispersal of power, a strong and effective **state** is also needed: one that

has precisely the capacity neutrally to enforce law and to regulate social

interaction. (Khilnani 2001: 26-30, bold type mine)

If we compare the three preconditions of civil society with ad hoc popular

movements going on in mainland China, discrepancies stand out. In the series of

anti-PX demonstrations in Kunming, although information was spread through the

social media of WeChat (*weixin*), the third/final round demonstration—the one that

aimed to coincide with the China-South Asia Expo in June—was doomed due to the

multiple strategies the local government had taken, including banning sales of white

shirts and masks (it was suggested that participants should all wear white shirt for the

third demonstration), street posters and media reports that dismissed ungrounded

worries about the chemical plant, and threats of possible arrests. As further publicity

of related news was blocked through online censorship, and probably because I was

not following closely enough, at the end of my field research in mid-July of the same year, little was said about the dissatisfaction with the PX project. The scope of "politics", the arena of practices subject to publicity remains largely under the control of the state. This manifestation of the unbalanced power relationship between the individual and the state speak to the "lack" of "institutionalized dispersal of social power".

This analysis might also bring us back to the anecdote at the beginning of this chapter about BZ's belief in the efficiency of the government's direct passage of laws and regulations without sufficient publicity and public debates. BZ's lack of confidence in the efficacy of public discussion indexes, albeit indirectly, the lack of civil preparedness on the part of the individual, as was discussed earlier in this chapter. Nonetheless, the standard of civility derived from the Western context should not necessarily be taken for granted.

As early as in the Subaltern Studies initiated by a group of South Asian scholars in the 1980s, provincializing Europe as the origin and center of modernity has been consistent and concerted efforts shared by scholars across the globe. One notable challenge to the Western notion of civil society is Partha Chatterjee's (2001) concept of "political society". Rather than adhering to a traditional/modern dichotomy and throwing away altogether the notion of civil society as Western/modern, Chatterjee recognizes the emergence of civil-social institutions in non-Western countries such as India. Nonetheless, he also points out the "hiatus" between on the one hand, the extensive reach of state apparatus to all of the population, and on the other, the limited

accessibility to civil social institutions of only "a fairly small section of 'citizens'," comprised of mostly nationalist elites (nationalist cultural politics) since the era of colonial modernity (2001: 172). Political society thus serves as "a domain of mediating institutions between civil society and the state" (2001: 171). For Chatterjee, the principles that govern political society differs from that of civil society in the "forms and methods of mobilization and participation" (2001: 176).

In characterizing political society, Chatterjee (2001: 177-178) lists four features. (1) The demands of many mobilizations in political society are founded on a violation of law by a collective of population groups who are not "proper citizens". (2) In spite of violation of the law, the rhetoric of "rights" in their demand of governmental welfare is clear due partly to the globalization of the language of democratization. (3) These entitlements to rights are claimed on a collective base rather than that of an individual. As Chatterjee states, "collective rights can mean something when an older ethic of subsistence is married to a new rhetoric of democratization" (2001: 177). (4) When dealing with the state bureaucracy and non-governmental organizations, these people are not regarded as individual citizens "belonging to a **lawfully constituted** civil society", but as "population groups deserving welfare" (ibid. emphasis mine). This also speaks to the emerging opposition between the demand of *modernity* by civil society and that of *democracy* by political society. At least four questions merit further consideration.

One question has to do with the ontologized distinction between citizens within the legal framework of the state and those who are deemed as violators, as one could

be doing both simultaneously across different domains of life experience; and as legal

framework and socio-political attitudes towards appropriateness shift. A most recent

and alarming example is the emergence of the paranoid culture (culture of fear) and

the "punitive turn" of neoliberalism palpable in both the West and the East (Lancaster

2011; Peletz 2015).

Second, the contrast between lawful *individual citizens* constituting a civil society

and *population groups* deserving welfare also raises the question of civil preparedness.

It is reminiscent of Thomas Metzger's distinction between the Rousseauistic

top-down utopian approach and the Millsian bottom-up pessimistic approach to civil

society. While in the latter, on-going pursuit of knowledge among the general public

is desired for, the former thinks of human fallibility as pre-determined and the very

reason for the need of enlightened intellectuals.

Third, Chatterjee's conceptualization of political society and its signature demand

of *democracy* as compared to civil society's aspiration to *modernity* also reminds me

of Lisa Duggan's (2003) observation of the general political culture of "downward

redistribution" in the 1960s and 1970s of the United States. While it is beyond the

scope of this dissertation to discuss to what extent civil society, democracy, and

downward redistribution of resources (political, economic, and cultural) converge or

depart, it is noteworthy that contemporary Chinese society in mainland China seems

to have demonstrated a "graduated" tolerance of elements representative of both civil

society and political society in Chatterjee's framework. As Gary Sigley's notion of

"liberal despotism" suggests, "authoritarian and illiberal measures are constitutive of

the way in which a liberal arts of government operates," depending on the segment of the population being targeted (2004: 563, cited in Hoffman 2006: 555).

That is, while Metzger's illustration of a good society and its stress on the collaboration between enlightened elite and the corrigible state bears resemblance to Partha Chatterjee's conceptualization of civil society, even within this framework of good society, the extent of freedom granted to intellectual, economic, and political marketplaces has been fragile and dependent upon the attitudes of both local and central leadership (such as the PX protests). That is, if civil society in Chatterjee's framework is at least accessible to a small section of "citizens", this might not necessarily be taken for granted in China, specifically in terms of the intellectual and political marketplaces.[173] Furthermore, this restricted development of social institutions to economic concerns raises the question of whether there is a political society that mediates between the state and the elitist civil society in China, as social life seems largely subsumed under the party-state's deliberation and top-down propaganda. The scope of possible negotiation and the degree of negotiability are most of the time determined by the leadership, which seems to have integrated and subsumed both the enlightened moral virtuosi and the corrigible state.

People's Society

On January 3rd, 2013, breaking news circulated online about an unprecedented

---

[173] Along with the strong will to crack down upon corruption at all levels, Xi Jinping's administration has been simultaneously tightening control over civil society. Examples include crackdown on the Internet and arrests of legal activists. (http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2014/04/29/assessing-xi-jinping's-anti-corruption-campaign, accessed on Sept. 26, 2015)

direct interference of the propaganda leaders in Guangdong Province into the "New

Year's Greeting" editorial of *Southern Weekly* (*Nanfang Zhoumo*). The original

greeting letter, written by Dai Zhiyong, was called "China's Dream, the Dream of

Constitutionalism." Through invoking President Xi Jinping's popular phrase "China

Dream," Dai called for the dream of constitutionalism in China so that individual civil

rights can be protected.[174] The revised version, rumored to have been done

single-handedly by the provincial propaganda chief, retitled the letter into "We Are

Now Closer to Our Dream Than Ever Before," and shifted wording significantly from

the liberal aspiration of the Constitution to cut its teeth and guarantee freedom and

(civil) rights to an "entirely toothless" paean to the Party in line with the official

editorial of *People's Daily* published a few days earlier.

In addition to some staff members' "strike" and popular protests both online and

offline, the "New Year's Greeting" incident has triggered intellectual debates as to the

ideological nature of the constitutional government. According to political scientist

Joseph Fewsmith (2013), two major camps emerged, one (the New Left) denigrating

the constitutional government as "Western stuff" that is out of tune with the "people's

democratic system under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party"; while the

other (the Liberal) viewing constitutionalism and democratic politics as the progress

of mankind's political civilization (Fewsmith 2013). On top of these intellectual

debates were an increasingly obvious official stance against constitutional

government, as indicated in series of editorials published in several major official

---

[174] http://cmp.hku.hk/2013/01/03/30247/, accessed on October 3, 2015.

newspapers.

Amidst the cacophony and the increasingly stringent internet censorship, Chinese economist Hu Angang proposed the notion of "people's society" as compared to civil society in the Overseas edition of *People's Daily* on July 20, 2013. For Hu, "people's society" follows the "mass line" (*qunzhong luxian*) and "accepted the Chinese Communist Party as its leader": "in a people's society, the government and the masses are unified" (cited in Fewsmith 2013: 6-7). As was pointed out by Fewsmith, people's society aligns the masses with the Party-state, which is distinctively different from the oppositional stance of civil society vis-à-vis the state in liberal polity (and in the John Mill's classical sense of civil society). Significantly, this alignment is achieved again from top-down approach through the leadership of the Party-state. Fewsmith viewed this as indexical to the decline of constitutionalism and rule of law in China, in the place of which is the government's renewed efforts to maintain stability via "grand mediation", a substitution of the legal with the political (see Carl Minzner 2011). Within this framework of the people's society, individuals are again subsumed within the undistinguishable "masses" under the enlightened leadership of the Party-state. The masses need to be educated and mobilized so as to self-consciously comply with the beneficial policies stipulated by the Party-state. The distrust and infantilization of the un-enlightened masses has been obvious.

Along with the surge of petitions and protests and the leadership's growing concern over stability, the extent to which political levers are taking the place of formal legal institutions remains unclear. More complicated still, the political levers

are intertwined simultaneously with the neoliberal economic regime, which happens to be one indispensable strategy of the ruling party to survive its legitimacy crisis (Rofel 2007). As was pointed out by Gary Sigley (2004), "the conceptual framework of 'the market' as a mechanism of government was…officially acknowledged [at] the Fourteenth Party Congress of 1992" (2004: 568). In the example of family planning, state approach to this policy shifted from "bad authoritarianism" to "good authoritarianism" that governs through evoking desires of economic development (Sigley 2004). When economic calculation drowns out alternative voices, that is, when economic prosperity represents social well-being across different domains, it is hard to imagine how sexual and gender identity claims, at both individual and community levels, can be made beyond their current foothold in the consumer market and the pink economy.

Conclusion

In June 2012, Yunnan Parallel was preparing a street intervention in commemoration of the Stonewall Riots. Before our scheduled event, several strangers showed up in our office asking for details of our activity and requested our ID cards. They told us that public activities with more than ten participants would need to be reported in advance to the Public Security Bureau. We had no idea how they found out our plan and what made it particularly sensitive. But other than refusing to provide our personal IDs, we complied with the limit to participants and tried our best to explain the "innocent" nature of the street intervention. We did end up finishing the

activity as scheduled, albeit under their close watch from a nearby mobile public security booth. Almost one year later, soon after the boisterous demonstrations against the PX chemical plant near Kunming, we implemented a big celebration of IDAHOT on May 17th in the disguise of a college graduation project. Still under close watch of several *chengguan*, we managed to attract a lot of attention from numerous passersby. Two of the officers watching us closely ended up helping to explain to curious onlookers what we were doing.

I juxtapose these two events not to demonstrate a turn to a more pluralistic socio-cultural attitude toward LGBT. In fact, about the same time with our successful celebration of IDAHOT in 2013, several participants and one of the main organizers of a gay pride parade in another city were caught and detained because of exactly the same regulation we were confronted with in 2012. This speaks on the one hand to the caprice in implementation of policy and regulation. On the other hand, it also reveals ways in which creative negotiations are possible. In the case of our IDAHOT celebration, we faked innocence and perhaps simultaneously claimed superiority over the middle-aged *chengguan* officers under the camouflage of college students. The dual position as innocent students seeking official permission—fitting well into James Scott's now classical notion of "weapons of the weak"—and as educated youth doing a college project enabled us to take advantage of the ambiguity of regulations and their arbitrary implementation highly dependent upon its executors. Although ironically, this lack of clarity in terms of both legal support and implementation guidelines renders our celebration much less political and protected.

In 2014, almost one year since I left the field, Yunnan Parallel celebrated another year of IDAHOT with a street intervention that included engaging passersby in conversation about lesbians and gay men, hugging and kissing each other. Two days later on May 19, People's Net posted an article[175] that called for anti-homophobic activities to be "low-profile". According to this opinion editorial, which cited Parallel's street intervention at the very beginning, despite individual freedom to express their (sexual) orientation, homosexuality undoubtedly violates Chinese traditional morality and the fundamental law of human development (*renlei fazhande jiben guilv*). Because of its anti-mainstream thrust, high-profile propaganda will only harm the tolerance society has toward homosexuality at the moral level and hurt mainstream authority (*zhuliu quanwei*). Given the moral and legal tolerance granted to homosexuality, it is better to have it remain in the private sphere.

These events and comments sum up the conundrum that has been covered in this chapter of the state-individual relationship in post-socialist neoliberal China. On the one hand, individuals seem to be granted increasing autonomy in self expression, including that of non-normative sexual and gender desires. On the other hand, individual autonomy and entitlement to rights have been put under constant and capriciously uneven surveillance that ensures the top priority of the Party-state, which claims to represent the interests of *the* people. Freedom and democracy in this sense entail more a modified Confucian ideal of *datong* (Great Unity, Great

---

[175] Dai Qingfeng, "You can promote homosexuality, but please be a bit more low-profile" (*ni keyi xuanchuan tongxinglian, danqing didiao yixie*). http://gs.people.com.cn/n/2014/0519/c183343-21239365.html, accessed October 18, 2015.

Community)—individuals self-consciously embracing and aspiring to the common

prosperity of the nation-state. The pre-determined goal of the nation-state's prosperity

and the market rationality that has dictated its achievement outlined by the Party-state

has made available very limited space, if any, for self-culture politics, including a

sustainable development of lesbian and gay communities and politics rooted in

liberalism. Consequently, LGBT politics in mainland China tend either to adapt itself

to the nationalist discourse that valorizes LGBT rights as indicative of China's stride

towards modernity and its status as an advanced member of the global community, or

to refrain from political advocacy and work (comparatively) safely on state-sponsored

projects such as HIV/AIDS intervention and health education. Unfortunately, neither

of these modernity-nationalist and reductive public-health approaches seem to work

well with the disparate desires (see Chapter Three) embodied by transgendered

individuals, specifically transgendered sex workers I encountered in Kunming.

Recent years do witness increasingly outspoken advocacy activities that demand

the state's attention to individual rights through both social activism and legal

movement by lawyers and legal practitioners. For one thing, these liberal practices, if

I may borrow Foucault's understanding of liberalism as a practice rather than a

pre-defined ideology, index attempts to carve out a social space distinct from the

Party-state and its neoliberal itinerary. Nonetheless and second, the extent to which

this represents a new bottom-up approach to politics that recognizes the values of

individual self-interests, or yet another elite-led, albeit their peripherality, endeavor to

work with the corrigible state to take better care of the masses remains unclear.

Chapter Five: Queering the Quotidian

"We cannot think of sexual subjects as purely oppositional or resistant to dominant institutions that produce heteronormativity…universalized models of resistance with idealized tropes or politics of identity obscure rather than elucidate the terrain of subjectivity."
(Grewal and Kaplan 2001: 670)

It was almost two in the morning on the first day of 2012. The show at SpringRain in celebration of the New Year just ended. I was exhausted after a short trip in the nearby city of Dali and a crazy rush back to make the show right afterwards. Just when I was walking drowsily out of the drop-in center of SpringRain, Gina asked me to join them to Pandora, a local "slow roll" bar (*manyao ba*) very popular among younger gay men. "We're going there with our make-up on!" I was told.

Although not advertised as a gay bar, Pandora was one of the favorite public places patronized by many of the younger gay male friends I know. Located at the center of the city right next to the landmark and scenic spot of *Jinmabiji Fang* (Golden Horse and Jade Rooster Archways), it boasted a large funky space with raised platforms of different shapes and sizes scattered around for both professional performances and self-indulgent dances of individual patrons. It was on one of those smaller round platforms that Gina and Peacock made their grandiose appearance at Pandora. They had undoubtedly driven away the groggy midnight atmosphere and took everyone else's breath away. The sight of Gina's Japanese *geisha* wig and Peacock's gyrating dance in her tight navy blue dress had thrown the whole bar in a rapture of amazement. The DJ on duty shouted frantically at the microphone and urged everyone to take out their smartphones to take pictures and upload them on *Weibo*, a Chinese version of twitter. Exciting cheers were coming from different corners of the bar. I saw young men attaching themselves to the platform gazing

upward at Peacock in admiration while the latter stared back downward with titillating glances. I remember wondering to myself how many people had recognized Peacock's identity.

Yet if Peacock confused the audience with her near-perfect performance of metropolitan femininity that was sexily modern, Gina claimed attention with a more obvious touch of drag performance. Along with the *geisha* wig she had for an earlier performance at SpringRain, Gina dressed in her Thai outfit that included a long strap of pink ruffle fabric that surrounded her upper body across one side of her shoulder, and a long shiny sarong in golden and red patterns. Small groups of men went up to Gina and asked for picture together. Some even ventured to kiss her belly and had pictures taken by friends.

We left Pandora at about four in the morning. As I was walking up the slope that led to my apartment building, my mind was still occupied by the glamorous excitement of the bar scene, where transgendered individuals extended their performance off stage and onto the raised platforms of the modern discotheque, and where their performances and the alternative sociality that ensued disrupted the assumed dichotomy of gender and sexuality. If in the drop-in center, their performance was more of a proper display of another healthy aspect of *tongzhi* culture—that of *fanchuan*, as was phrased by the director of SpringRain, how should their free-style dance and the polymorphous erotic sentiments engendered at Pandora be interpreted? What does this shift in space and performance tell us about transgendered practices as represented in Kunming?

The previous four chapters problematize the analytic validity of identity from different perspectives, namely HIV/AIDS intervention, the emerging LGBT identity politics, desires and consumption that are integral to transgendered sex work, and the

state-individual trajectory that has discouraged the building of community based upon individual uniqueness. It is worth repeating that the problematization of identity as an analytic perspective does not intend to denigrate the sentiments and understandings—however diverse they have been—individuals have towards their gendered and sexual practices. I argue however, that a collective gender or/and sexual identity does not constitute an essential understanding of the self among many of the transgendered individuals I encountered in Kunming. One most prominent demonstration is their nonchalance about the identity label they wear, as was presented in the Introduction. That is to suggest, distinct from a liberal identity-based politics that celebrates the power of difference and is predicated upon collective action, transgendered individuals in Kunming demonstrated an alternative relationship with the present that is more diffused, malleable, and capricious. I would like to further suggest here the temporality of the present as never fully owned or defined, as a switch point that responds to and witnesses both historical reflections and future imaginings (Butler 1993, "critically queer"). It is with this understanding of the present as a switch point that is neither determined by a pre-formulated teleology nor predicative of a future pathway that I have presented in the previous chapters a diverse array of social processes that constitute the (un)becoming of transgender as an identity-based community in Southwest China. I would thus like to bring in a queer perspective that moves beyond identity formation to capture the fragmented way of living and possibly an alternative possibility of the political. Specifically, my use of a queer perspective problematizes the dichotomy of heteronormativity and antinormativity that has characterized a majority of queer scholarship (Wiegman and Wilson 2015). That is, instead of crafting out another alternative space of queerness with Chinese characteristics, I aim to queer—reveal the queerness of—the everyday

life *from within* heteronormativity.

I will begin with an analysis of the emergence of the queer scholarship since the early 1990s in the United States and its analytic and political commitment to antinormativity. A delineation of my use of queer will follow first through a discussion of norms, then through ethnographic details that concern space and identity. At the end of the chapter, I will share some of my preliminary thoughts, again based on my ethnographic observation and interactions, on how a Foucaultian concept of ethics might point to a possible opening of alternative politics beyond a pre-defined trajectory of liberal democracy and an antinormative commitment in queer studies

Queer Alternative

> "What objects of study, analytic perspectives, and understanding of politics
> might emerge if we suspend antinormativity's axiomatic centrality?"
> (Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth Wilson 2015: 10)

Born out of a dissatisfaction with a unitary construction of gay identity claimed by both the mainstreaming of liberal assimilationist approach and the militant nationalism of "outing", the designation of "queer", as has been expounded by scholars such as Lisa Duggan, stretches the notion of community to a broadly "shared dissent from the dominant organization of sex and gender" (1991/2006: 157). This "queer community" is thus characterized by its confrontational inclusivity. It is confrontational in its claim of the critical dissent from the hegemonic order of things surrounding sexuality and gender, echoing Judith Halberstam's definition of "queer" as "nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time" (2005: 6). It is inclusive in its critical openness to a non-pre-defined range of marginalities based on sexuality. In this sense, queerness aims to, at least it seems to me, capture the paradoxical dynamic between a

desire for belonging based on alterity and the contingent experience of sameness, resulting in a radical alterity that remains open to any un-identified constituents.

One most explicit claim to radical alterity is found in Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's "Sex in Public" (1998). According to Berlant and Warner, "queer culture" is a "world-making project" distinct from community or group because it "necessarily includes more people than can be identified, more spaces than can be mapped beyond a few reference points, modes of feeling that can be learned rather than experienced as a birthright. The queer world is a space of entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance…by definition *unrealizable* as community or identity" (558). Echoing this notion of "queer culture/world" is their concept of a counterpublic. Largely in line with Nancy Fraser's dissatisfaction with Habermas' public sphere to theorize "actually existing democracy" and her conceptualization of a "subaltern counterpublic", Warner (2002) explains "counter" in counterpublic as "to the extent that they try to supply different ways of imagining stranger-sociability and its reflexivity" (2002: 87-88). That is to suggest, if Habermas' formulation of the public sphere is predicated upon the imagination of stranger-sociability that is based on the rational-critical faculties of the private person, a counterpublic (such as queer counterpublic) problematizes this hidden premise with an alternative stranger-sociability constituted through anything other than "the official publics of opinion culture and the state" (Berlant and Warner 1998: 558).

While I find it extremely insightful to challenge liberal political reason and its necessary connection to rationality and confrontation with the state, the formulation of a radical alterity (based on body, intimacy, affect, and sexuality) at the same time seems to have reaffirmed the centrality of the rational bourgeois public. My hesitation to embrace the radical alterity of queer studies is further confirmed by the emerging

use of queer as a new identity label, albeit much more inclusive and contingent. The inclination to recruit more constituents under the umbrella of "queer" *as opposed to* straight seems to lurk behind many critical efforts to break away from the mainstreaming of LGBT identity politics and homonormativity. As Wigman and Wilson have insightfully pointed out, antinormativity has become a guiding tenet of queer studies "as central to its self-definition as the anti-identitarianism that enabled the famed departure of *queer* from the rubrics of *lesbian* and *gay*" (2015: 3). More significantly still, it (antinormativity) has become "a privileged rhetorical formulation and analytic destination that frames the critical and political innovation regularly claimed for the field" (Wigman and Wilson 2015: 10). This commitment to antinormativity, however, passes too quickly over the norm it purports to problematize, thus leaving it (the norm) unquestioned, or perhaps even worse, contributing to the *effect* of its dominance.

I thus distinguish my queer approach in my attention to the "constant failure" of heteronormativity rather than an alternative space outside of it. I believe the meaning of queer studies goes beyond an exclusive claim to antinormativity. Annamarie Jagose's (2010) study of fake orgasm and Eve Sedgewick's (1993) reversal of the Oedipus complex in her literary analysis are two wonderful examples of how this should be the case. In Jagose's research, she challenged the taken-for-granted attribution of transformative political potential to non-normative sexual practices such as fist-fucking among gay men. She argued that fake orgasm, rather than "a figure for feminism's failure", served as a sexual practice with political agency. Also, in her psychoanalytic approach to Henry James' novel *The Wings of the Dove*, Sedgwick queers rather than overthrows Freudian Oedipality by inserting homosexuality into the Oedipal scenario not as a possible outcome—as in traditional understanding of

homosexuality as a result of deviation from heterosexual origin, but as the "origin"—the father as homosexual.

To make sense of my use of "queer", I would like to reintroduce Judith Butler's conceptualization of performativity through her critical deployment of Derrida's logic of supplementarity in communication. As I will demonstrate in the following section, it is the logic of complementarity, instead of radical alterity, that reveals the arbitrary dichotomy between heterosexuality and non-normative sexuality, and probably between normativity and antinormativity. Based upon this problematization of antinormativity, I will then discuss the shifting constitution of norms, its role in the modern techniques of power, and its implications on queer studies. I regard the revelation of queerness in everyday practices a meaningful exploration in queer studies.

Logic of Supplementarity

Traditional philosophy is mainly concerned with the truth value of statements. Statements that fall outside of the binary of true or false would be marginalized as secondary. In contrast to this exclusive emphasis on truth value, linguist and philosopher John Austin distinguished between constative statements and performative ones. While the former are concerned with describing and stating "facts", the latter are able to enact the action to which it refers and thus generate effects. More importantly, in order for the performative utterance to take effect, context must be taken into consideration. The introduction of context into the understanding of communication has problematized the unified and transparent conceptualization of meaning, which is assumed to be easily transmitted from a sender to a receiver. Austin thus argues that understanding an utterance requires a mastery of the totality of

context. Moreover, although Austin clearly points out the vulnerability of all performatives to infelicities, he excludes infelicities and other "'unhappy' features of the doing of actions" from his major concern and relegated the possibility of infelicities as "abnormal" and "parasitic" (Austin, cited in Derrida, 1988: 16). According to Austin, the intelligibility of non-serious[176] performative such as stage performance is parasitic upon normal and conventional use—an act of citation. It is mainly against this exhaustibility of context and the exclusion of citation as derivative in language use that Derrida formulated his notions of iteration and citationality as central to the "success" of performative utterance—the logic of supplementarity that is essential to the structure of language.

According to Derrida, in order for writing to function as a means of communication, it must be readable, repeatable, iterable "in the absolute absence of the receiver or of any empirically determinable collectivity of receivers"—death of the reader (1988: 7). A text should live on— "continue to 'act' and to be readable" after its author is gone—death of the author (1988: 8). This is what Derrida termed as the "essential drift" inherent in the "iterative structure" of writing, "cut off from all absolute responsibility, from consciousness as the ultimate authority, orphaned and separated at birth from the assistance of its father" (ibid.). This "essential drift" of a written text does not only cut writing from its author and reader, but also constitutes the essential breaking force of writing from its context, "the collectivity of presences organizing the moment of its inscription" (1988: 9). That is to say, the structure of iteration inherent in writing necessitates the detachability of writing from its context

---

[176] It is non-serious in the sense that it does not generate effects in the world. For example, the stage performance of a clergy man saying "I now pronounce you man and wife" does not effect changes in reality. But the recognition of this phrase and its performative role in real life makes it intelligible on stage. The stage performance is thus, in Austin's sense, a citation of conventional use and is parasitic upon the latter.

so that there is always the possibility of miscommunication and "missing"—the general law of the "mis". In fact, it is this very graftability and iterability— "the perpetual possibility of an alternative context"—of a written sign that makes it intelligible and communicable (Deutscher 2005: 60). In other words, it is iterability, not intentionality or a totality of context, that makes communication possible, although it simultaneously facilitates miscommunication, the "constitutive instability".

Therefore, contrary to Austin's attempt to marginalize citation as "abnormal" and secondary to "proper" performative, Derrida puts citation and iteration at the heart of language use. The parasitic character of "non-serious performatives" such as stage performance turns out to reveal the very mechanism of citationality essential to "proper" performatives. Therefore, parasitic performatives do not reside outside of the proper domain of performatives. Rather, both parasitic and "proper" performatives exist *within* the general structure of iterability and an ontological demarcation between a pure performative and a parasitic one is dissolved.

Building upon Derrida's logic of supplementarity that brings the peripheral and derivative back into the formulation of the central and thus corrupting the latter's ontological boundary, Judith Butler expounds her account of gender performativity through a discussion of drag. Rather than an imitation of the original, dragging serves to reflect "the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes the heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality" (1993: 125). That is to suggest, both dragging and what we assume to be gender norms should be regarded as part of the general structure of iteration and citationality, where there is always the possibility of "mis" in every repetition. If queer studies have so far largely focused their discussion on crafting an alternative or counter space for the parasitic

and the peripheral, however broadly inclusive that has been, then my theoretical and

political intervention here starts with the problematization of the taken-for-granted

opposition between normativity and antinormativity. I will now move on to a

discussion of norms to locate a new critical value of queer studies that does not

necessarily take antinormativity as its theoretical and political destination.[177]

Norms

In his analysis of Foucault's notion of norms, Pierre Macherey points out that the

norm works not in advance or independent of the consequences of its actions. Instead,

"…the norm has to be considered such as it acts precisely in its effects—in such a way,

not so as to limit the reality by means of simple conditioning, but in order to confer

upon it the maximum amount of reality of which it is capable" (1992: 186). That is to

say, the norm does not operate as an exterior imposition upon reality, its field of

application. Rather, it produces both its field of application and itself in it—the

immanence of the norm. Norm does not exist in advance of its effects. There is no

autonomous sexual subject upon which norm imposes its powerful prescription.

Norms constitute a field of possible experiences, a domain of subjectivity, where to be

a subject is to be subjected to, normalized, and constituted by the action of norms.

Therefore, in Foucault's formulation, norms do not serve as external imposition

that excludes those who do not conform. Rather, everyone, as a subject, is "integrated

---

[177] I intended this discussion of Derrida's and Butler's theorizations as laying the foundation for an analytic of norms and queer studies that does not take the dichotomy between norm and antinormativity as its point of departure. But in retrospect, if according to Annamarie Jagose (2015), Butler and Foucault differ in fundamental way in their conceptualizations of the norm and subsequently in their formulations of the political, then this section seems to have introduced confusion into the picture. Specifically, Butler's notions of resignification and "escape" (or "mis") seem at odd with Foucault's stress on the norm as immanent. I will leave it as is but alert readers to the possible epistemological inconsistence here.

into a global system of evaluation," where they constantly measure themselves against the norm (Macherey 1992: 180). Thus, "social norms are the necessary ground through which the subject is realized and comes to enact her agency" (Mahmood 2005: 19). This active engagement with norms—instead of being "bullied" by norms—through constant measurement suggests at least three related points. First, the interdependence and co-constitution between subjects and the norm suggests that no one is outside the action of the norm, whether gay or straight. The norm is like the standard deviation of the group—it is produced through the group and the mechanism of iteration, so that everyone measures themselves against the entire group rather than an external standard. Second, both one's position within the field of application of the norm and the operation of the norm keep shifting, so that there is no once-and-for-all fixed relation between subject and the norm. That is, subjects are not subjectivated once and for all. They exist in constantly shifting network of relationships. Third, if the stability of the norm relies on its iterability, this very iterability also gives rise to the possibility of failure, reappropriation, or resignification "for purposes other than the consolidation of norms" (Mahmood 2005: 19). While the immanence of the norm points to the futility of transcendent and exterior alterity, it agrees with Irigaray's and Foucault's concern with an ethics of alterity that both acknowledges systems of normative values ("code-based moralities" in Foucault's elaboration on morality) and "opens possibilities for transformative desubjectivations from within" (Huffer 2011: 532).

I am specifically interested in the notion of ethics and its stress on the relationships with others. While an ethics of alterity does not seem to differ significantly from a radical alterity that counters the stranger-sociability based on bourgeois rationality—I would prefer to think of them as the same, it is the

"transformative desubjectivations from within" that I am more drawn to. I want to look into that through close attention to the queer everyday life, not so much as "constant failure" than manifestations of the shifting relations between the subject and the norm.

Debris and Desire

One evening in July 2013, towards the end of my dissertation field research, I was walking with Chin, one of my male-to-female transgendered informants in Kunming, to the place where she had been working as "female" streetwalker. It was amid the debris of a torn down urban village in Kunming, walled off from the street and its recessive night-time traffic with a line of concrete wall. Determinedly different from other red-light areas I had been to, the debris was simply piles of broken bricks and tiles from demolition. Within view from the outside, there was only one small hair salon that stood amidst the debris. Chin went into the secluded area through one of the openings and waved me goodbye. I then saw her slowly walking towards the top of the debris, quietly waiting for potential customers to kick off another night of business. I could not rid myself off that scenario and kept thinking how one could reconcile a living out of piles of broken bricks and tiles, a space that was demolished and defined as abandoned.

The following discussion was born out of that very scenario and my ongoing search for the interconnectivity of transgendered practices, urban spaces, and identity formation. In her research of the emerging new middle classes in Kunming that mark their distinction through "spatialization of class," anthropologist Li Zhang (2010) problematizes the structural position of class and points to ways in which consumption of new residential spaces contribute to formation of a new *jieceng*

(strata)[178]. In line with Henri Lefebvre's (1991) elaboration on the mutual constitution

between space and new social formations, and David Harvey's emphasis on spatial

form in determining "the future development of social process" (1973: 27, cited in

Zhang 2010: 15), Zhang suggests that production and consumption of commodity

housing, gated communities and private living provide "the physical and social

ground on which the making of the new middle classes becomes possible" (2010: 3).

While recognizing the *constitutive* effect of space in subject formation, I am

more drawn to the other side of the story—the constant *disruption* of identity

formation of both the place and subjectivity, induced by synergistic moments of

becoming. That is, if what we see in Zhang's "spatialization of class" is a tendency

and aspiration towards institutionalization of certain social status and identity through

creation of specific spaces, I hope to demonstrate a reverse tendency, where the

identity of places could be always in flux, motivated by and also in turn motivating

individuals' on-going experimentation and performance of gendered and sexual

identities. I aim to look into how neoliberal flexibility embodied by transgendered sex

workers' gender and sexual performances was played out in the informal time and

space of urban villages in Kunming.

I will begin with a brief introduction to the urban village renewal project in

Kunming and a brief depiction of the general morphologies of informality in urban

villages, including both spatial layout and informal economic activities. Presentation

and microanalysis of several ethnographic vignettes will follow that point to the

on-going interactions between a diverse range of emergent properties of places that

both facilitated flexible transgendered performances of heterosexuality and marked

---

[178] To avoid the politically charged notion of class reminiscent of the Maoist regime, Chinese scholars and people tend to use *jieceng* (strata) to refer to socioeconomic differentiation (Zhang 2010).

the fluidity of place identity. My analysis will integrate on the one hand a queer

reading strategy that disrupts the connection of gendered and sexual practices with

identity; and on the other hand, a Deleuzian assemblage thinking that takes place as a

"territorialized assemblage," "a dynamic ensemble of people and environment" that is

defined by connections (Dovey 2010, 2012; DeLanda 2006).

Here assemblage is used in the sense of a whole "whose properties emerge from

the interactions between parts" (DeLanda 2006: 5). The emphasis on "properties" of a

whole and "interactions between parts" represents a non-organic and contingent

conceptualization of place, which is not pre-determined or fixed, but is always in the

process of becoming through *connections* between constituents that range from

buildings, sidewalks, cars to people and goods (Dovey 2010). That is to say, the

notion of assemblage signifies the dynamic of placemaking instead of the stability of

place and its identity as a result of synergistic emergent effects of diverse properties.

This dynamic of placemaking echoes the very mechanism of différance—in Derrida's

term—in Judith Butler's theorization of gender performativity (1990). That is, the

understanding of gender—and I would add sexuality—as doing without the existence

of an *a priori* gendered subject, as an on-going process of citation, leaves open the

meaning of gender and gender identity.

I argue that although the debris of torn down urban village was regarded as zone

of abandonment awaiting removal, the diverse flows of elements constitutive of this

place assemblage—its dim lighting, its lack of accessibility, its proximity to main

street and so on—facilitated at the same time successful gendered and sexual

performances of transgendered sex workers, which in turn unsettled the pre-given

identity of the place as abandoned. Simultaneously, it is the plasticity of the

assemblage of the debris that encouraged transgendered individuals' further

experimentation with their performances and enactment of their desires beyond the time and space of the debris, unsettling pre-defined boundaries the non-normativity of transgenderism and heteronormativity, and between alternative space of non-normative practices and normative public space.

Informal Morphologies of Urban Villages in Kunming

Kunming has been experimenting with diverse economic and urban transformation projects at international, regional, and local levels with varying degrees of success/failure. These include the Kunming Project in collaboration with its partner city Zurich, Switzerland since the mid-1990s, the Kunming Initiative that aimed at sub-regional cooperation with bordering countries that included India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar that kicked off in 1999, and the urban village renewal plan that was initiated in 2008.

During my stay at Kunming from November 2011 to July 2013, Kunming was in the midst of its urban village transformation that started in 2008.[179] The objective was to accomplish transformation of more than 330 urban villages within five years, turning them from "squatters' settlements" into gated residential blocks and mixed-use "CBD" (central business district) developments. Although as the major government proponent of the project (the then mayor Qiu He) stepped down in 2011, uncertainty prevailed as to where the project would be heading. Rumors about the next demolition target remained a constant topic of casual conversation when I was doing outreach among female and transgendered sex workers in the different urban

---

[179] Demolition and relocation (*chaiqian*) in Kunming started much earlier. According to Li Zhang (2010), the preparation for the 1999 International Horticulture Expo led to the largest demolition of the old central city neighborhoods and the formation of the new geographic pattern. The 2008 kicked off a more ambitious and encompassing plan of urban village renewal during the municipal administration of Qiu He.

villages scattered across Kunming.

Urban villages, *chengzhongcun* (literally translated as "village within city") in Chinese, signify the uneven pace of development between urban and rural areas in China. Often characterized by dilapidated houses, informal economies, poverty and illegalities, urban villages have been regarded as "squatters' settlements" that scar the modern cities in China, constituting a sharp contrast to the rapidly emerging urban landscapes built upon their demise. Different from the implication of the Chinese term (*chengzhongcun*, "village within city") that suggests the primary status of the city while the incompatible spatial juxtaposition of villages, urban villages are rural areas that have been encroached on by the rapid outward expansion of cities in the accelerating process of urbanization. This disruption of the primary status of the city and its formality echoes my attempt to decentralize normative gender and sexual practices with transgendered sex workers' flexible and fluid performance of gender and sexuality. In line with arguments that stretch the concept of informality beyond economic activities and its necessary association with the problematic and the negative, arguments that challenge the dichotomy of formality and informality and the conception of informality as derivative (Ferguson 2009; Dovey 2011, 2012; Bunnell and Harris 2012), I hope to demonstrate ways in which urban informality—temporal, spatial, and social—is played out in the zones of abandonment, such as the debris of urban villages through embodied practices of transgendered sex work. But let us begin with a brief introduction to the multi-scalar assemblage of urban villages at the level of the buildings, alleys, residents and timetable.

According to chinaurbanvillage.org, up until March 2013, there are 330 urban villages in Kunming, Yunnan Province. More and more of these urban villages have been put under the threat of bulldozers in exchange for "logical urban layouts".

Unlike the seemingly neat and tidy high rise office buildings and gated/guarded

residential buildings just a few blocks away, urban villages are usually characterized

by low-level bungalows and buildings almost touching each other, narrow and

unpaved alleys that wind through the whole area in diverse directions either in dim

street lights or totally neglected by this modern luxury of fluorescence, and various

unlicensed barbecue stalls and street peddlers.

Although similar in their accommodating gestures toward low-income rural

migrant workers and their families, urban villages also differed in forms and the

actual facilities they proffered. For instance, one urban village at the edge of the city

is located right next to a parking lot for long-distance cargo trucks. When I went there

the first time with my outreach partner at Yunnan Parallel[180], I was struck by the

number of hostels and the close proximity they are in to each other. Also striking was

the fact that sex business there was exclusively, at least it seemed to me, carried out in

the form of organized business activities between Chinese patrons and young women

from Vietnam without legal papers to stay. In another urban village, one of the better

known low-end red-light districts in Kunming, sex workers lived in clusters formed

on the basis of home cities/provinces. Some worked under the protection of pimps,

whose responsibilities could include soliciting potential clients, provision of rented

room for sexual transaction, and protection against police harassment and crackdown.

Others worked as independent streetwalkers. There were also urban villages at

different stages of transformation, juxtaposing debris under bulldozers and dilapidated

buildings whose renters managed to put up with dirt, noise, loss of television signal,

and unpredictable date of move-out due to limited availability of low-rent housing in

the close-by urban area.

---

[180]   During my dissertation field research, I worked as volunteer in Yunnan Parallel,
one of the local community-based LGBT organizations in Kunming, China.

Urban village dwellers include both villagers who share the property rights of the village and renters who usually come from other regions of the country for better job opportunities. For villager-owners, urban village redevelopment projects might spell better integration into urban facilities and way of living. However, compensation and rehousing in the same or adjacent area promised to villager-owners are not part of the deal for renters, including transgendered sex workers. For many of the transgendered sex workers I had come to know, hopping from one place to another in search of better business was not uncommon. Proximity to the place where they wanted to work was often a primary concern in deciding where to live, as few buses—if any—ran late at night and taking cabs might tip over the balance between a night's earning and expenses[181]. But variations among individuals were sometimes too unpredictable to come up with a regular pattern. While some of them preferred to stay in one location for at least an extended period of time, others might travel to different locales even within one single evening based upon their estimation of the ebb and flow of potential customers.

Similarly, shifting between day and night demonstrates another dynamic constitutive facet to the everyday rhythm of urban villages. Dusky nightfall announces the gradual transformation of space through dynamic movements of its various constituents. Peddlers' unfolded their portable stalls onto the street; barbecue stalls moved from the back alley onto the street with well arranged circles of stools; increased acoustic volume of boom boxes was advertising albums for sale; meat and vegetable kebabs roasted over flames gave out both inviting smell and heavy smoke from different collectives of barbecue stalls; street lights turned on automatically,

---

[181] A lot more other unexpected factors could figure in their decision as to where to live or work. For example, a transgendered friend I met earlier in my field research quit going to her usual place due to rumors about her financial situation.

covering some areas with dim lighting while leaving others devoured and abandoned in darkness.

Informal Practices Embodied by Transgendered Sex Workers

My outreach work among sex workers often meant exploring and going into these very abandoned areas to find potential members of the target population. In fact, I met most of my transgendered informants amid these zones of abandonment, to the extent that if no further contact or interview could be arranged, I was not able to recognize them in broad daylight. As one transgendered friend self-mockingly called herself a "ghost" that only made her (feminine) appearance at night, many of the transgendered sex workers I encountered in Kunming only cross dressed at night, sometimes even late at night. During daytime, they either stayed at home sleeping and watching TV, or simply dissolve themselves among residents of the neighborhood in men's clothing. Autumn's story offered an example of how transformation performed by transgendered sex workers was facilitated by the shadowy back alleys.

I went out with Autumn for lunch one early afternoon. As soon as we stepped out of the bungalow where she rented her room into the alley situated between two rows of similar bungalows, Autumn caught sight of a man walking towards us. She lowered her head and combed her hair with fingers in a shy and embarrassed way, murmuring to me that that was a client she met one night, wishing that he would not find her out. He did not. He did not even seem to have paid any attention to Autumn, who was then wearing loosely fit men's long-sleeve shirt, short pants, and flip flops—she switched back to the casual masculine outfit. This anecdote of Autumn's is indicative of the temporal and spatial boundaries of gender and sexuality enacted between the normative and the non-normative. It points to the strict demarcation line between the

norm and its deviation that is safeguarded by the specificity of time, space, and sociality thus yielded. Yet at the same time, it also demonstrates the porousness and permeability therein, as the shift in time and space do not cut off connections. Rather, it facilitates alternative relatedness that is always in flux. I will use Chin's story to illustrate the simultaneity of the boundaries and permeability.

Spatio-Temporality of Transgendered Practices

As I have just mentioned, most of the transgendered sex workers I came to know only cross dressed at night, when nightly protection helped enhance the effectiveness of their gender and sexual performance through blurring the different shades of incommensurability between their male bodies and the sexually attractive femininity they typically aimed to perform. My observation of Chin's transformation from an ordinary middle-aged man to a mature, elegant woman in preparation for her work night might be helpful here. I aim to cite this ethnographic vignette as an example to sort out the connections between temporal-spatiality and transgendered performances.

In the tiny and packed single room that Chin rented in one urban village close to a university campus, I was sitting on a short stool watching her put on make-up. Chin generously granted me permission to ask questions, although she refused to be audio-recorded. It was after 7 pm. We had already gone out for a walk together after an early dinner she prepared in a makeshift kitchen right outside her rented room. Standing in front the long mirror that leaned against the wall beside her bed, Chin began her transformation with plucking her beard. One hand holding a small flashlight to better identify the spots that needed to be tended to, the other squeezing the tweezers quickly, Chin explained to me the difference between shaving and plucking and her preference for the latter. She cleansed her face after the plucking and

started puffing her face with makeup powder so that beard marks on her chin would not look too conspicuous.

After applying makeup base, Chin asked whether I minded if she changed her clothes in the room. I had no objection to that but decided to turn away my eyes occasionally out of embarrassment. She closed the door tight and began explaining to me the kind of clothing style that suited her while she was changing.

Unlike many of my transgendered informants who had an obvious preference for sexy dresses and often made sexually suggestive gestures to male passersby, Chin distinguished herself with a more reserved and mature performance of femininity. She sometimes struck me as an elementary school teacher with her naturally grown short hair that rounded comfortably around her face, black-rimmed glasses, short-sleeve jacket and short pencil skirt, and high-heels. For Chin, feminine attraction lies not simply in explicit sexiness. Compared to intentional exposure of the feminine body, Chin regarded the staccato clacking of high heels at night that announces the appearance of a woman more deadly an attraction to men.

Before changing into feminine clothing, Chin had already been wearing a shapewear that stretched almost to her knees in the hope of keeping her body in better shape. She began then pushing her breasts together with a bra, rounding her chest with wide elastic band made of cloth to better enhance cleavage. This was then covered by a tightly fit black tank top and white short-sleeve jacket. After pulling on a pair of nude nylon tights and a pair of nylon socks of similar color, Chin put on a short flared skirt in dark blue and of course a pair of high heels—not too youngish for her slightly plump body that hinted at middle-agedness, nor too conservative for her to attract men's attention. The whole outfit was then completed with a spray of perfume to both keep away mosquitoes and give off attractive feminine fragrance.

But again, all this needed to be carefully orchestrated and performed with the protection of the tender night, completed with a more or less shared tacit understanding of the space, as red-light areas or simply as zones of abandonment, where irregularities of many forms might be expected. The debris of a torn down urban village where Chin waited for potential customers is one example. It is within that specific space and time of informality that non-normative transgendered practices were able to converge into and be (mis)recognized as normative and heterosexually gendered practices. Nonetheless, it should be noted that while the debris and the faint light at the farthest reach of street lamps were constitutive of Chin's successful transgendered performance, her heterosexualized gender and sexual performance within this spatio-temporality was also productive of new meanings and desires that disrupted and even rejected the identity of the place as abandoned.

Debris, brick wall that hid the debris away from the sidewalk, one small hair salon that stood alone amid the debris, where Chin and her fellow workers could get in and take a rest from long-time standing; faint boundary between darkness and the edge of street light; discarded condoms on the ground; staccato clacking of Chin's high heels when she was walking towards the debris; sweet smell of perfume; swift eye contact between co-workers, loitering men passersby who threw a quick glance or two at whoever walked past, all these (and more) constituted a dynamic assemblage of the place. It is the on-going contingent interactions of these different constituents that make the place what it is *becoming*—rather than what it is. Moving away from its daytime desolation, it is becoming a place where specific expressions of desires could be enacted, and probably responded to. It is also the dynamic interconnectivity of placemaking that echoed, paralleled, and facilitated multifarious and creative transgendered practices and their flexible experimentation that unsettle a pre-defined

identity of transgender, homosexuality, or heterosexuality.

Inspired by Kim Dovey's Deleuzian assemblage theory (Dovey 2012; DeLanda 2006), I suggest that it is the assembled interconnectivity among these different parts of the place—the debris—that generates the most potent moments of analysis and transformation. It is potent not only in terms of the physical transformation of the place at night. More significantly, shifts in spatio-temporality complemented with gendered and sexual performances embodied by transgendered sex workers and their male clients, facilitating alternative sociality and erotic desires that disrupted the normative priority of heterosexuality, although admittedly, this disruption is predicated upon the very assumption of heteronormativity. Moments of disruption happened when the scented body succeeded in alluring a passerby, when eye contact was made between transgendered sex workers and potential clients, when bodies were felt and touched, and when transactions whereas consummated. In turn, these very exchanges and transactions "reterritorialize" the place assemblage of the debris, giving it new meanings and rendering fluid its identity.

I describe the emerging alternative sociality of the debris as queer/queering, not in the sense of its alterity from the normative as in the case where queer is used as an umbrella identity label that is distinct from normativity. Radical faeries in the United States could be one example of that (Povinelli 2006). My use of queer here tends to treat it as a verb that problematizes the confidence and certainty of heterosexuality *from within*. It is the problematization of heteronormativity that I aim to do. That is, on the one hand, it is within the presumption of heterosexuality that this specific socio-spatial assemblage was enacted in the debris; and it is upon conformity to heterosexualized norms of femininity that transgendered practices were predicated. On the other hand, the moments of disruption, and any other on-going flows of

elements within this socio-spatial cluster could also be indicative of the assembled uncertainties that encouraged the constant escape of gender and sexual practices from the defining and solidifying power of heteronormativity.

Consummation of sexual transactions between transgendered sex workers and their male clients is illustrative of the "escape" from the norm, revealing the constitutive instability of the norm. It is revealed when transgendered sex workers succeeded in attracting clients with their citation of feminine gender performative; it is also revealed when clients were attracted to transgendered sex workers' gender performance (more than that of their female co-workers') and were satisfied with their (supposedly heterosexual) sexual service. That is, all these were done within the assumption of heterosexuality while representing the very "missing"—miscommunication and misrecognition—of it (see Derrida 1988; Butler 1990; Deutscher 2005). Therefore, rather than categorize these acts of transgression as homosexuality, imitation of heterosexuality, or heterogender[182] relationship (Sinnott 2004; Peletz 2009), I hope the use of queer perspective will leave open the possibilities for diverse articulations of desires that do not take as point of departure the dichotomy of heterosexuality and homosexuality.

This, however, is not to deny possibility of clients' intentional hunting for the transgendered bodies. As a matter of fact, some clients were even willing to pay more for a longer stay and wider range of sexual experiment at a nearby hostel when they discovered (or perhaps made a correct guess at) the transgendered body; although admittedly there were also clients who threw up when they found out the trick. Chin

---

[182] In his historical review of gender diversity in Southeast Asia since early modern times, Michael Peletz (2009) suggests that "heterogender matrix", rather than heterosexuality, as "a central component of sex/gender systems throughout Southeast Asia" (2009: 182). Heterogender matrix signifies prominence of gender difference over sexual difference in the imagination and practice of same-sex relationships in Southeast Asia.

once told me about her refusal of clients' inappropriate demand.

> There are clients who wanted to be inserted when they discover who we are. I do not like it. I just push them to Autumn. She doesn't care. (July 17, 2013)

We see here multiple layers of erotic articulations that deny classification and definition. While Chin regarded penetrating male clients as non-feminine and refused to comply at the expense of a business opportunity, Autumn's acceptance might have pointed both to a more economically oriented consideration and to greater readiness for erotic experimentation that further disrupted the categorizations between heterosexuality, homosexuality, and even heterogender relationships.

Here, I am not interested in calculating acts of transgression and categorizing them into grid of intelligibility. What I hope to stress is the *emergence* of a series of moments and practices of uncertainty, disruption and defiance potentiated by the assemblage of constituents I mentioned above. These moments and practices might not lead directly to transformation, as daybreak would easily betray the transgendered face, and as debris would someday be removed and new apartment buildings erected. Nevertheless, their being encompassed as part of the hegemonic order of things (Ortner 1989-1990) while not completely so constitute fertile potential for modifications. This is especially true when successful performances within this spatio-temporality served not only to earn a decent sum of money, but also to encourage more flexible and innovative integration of transgendered practices into the everyday rhythm of life. In the next section, Chin will continue to be our protagonist, who will then be joined by another transgendered friend of mine, Yanzi.

Transgressive Integration

When Chin was almost done with her transformation, I heard an elder man calling her from outside the room. It was her landlord in his sixties, who knew about her cross-dressing and called her *Chin Gu'niang* ("*gu'niang*" is a Chinese term used to refer to young ladies).

"Chin Gu'niang, preparing for work?"

"Yes, I am."

"Oh you have a friend here!"

"Yes, she's here to visit…By the way, are they going to bulldoze our neighborhood in October?"

"I didn't hear about that. They should ask our opinion first…This urban village transformation is like a concentration camp of peasants. The government is working hand in glove with business people (*guanshang goujie*) …" (July 17, 2013)

Before I could make sense of this casual conversation, I was hurried out of the room to the next destination, the corner store where Chin was going to have her makeup perfected and finalized. We then went out together to the corner store, where beauty products were sold and make-up services provided. Obviously a bit surprised, if not shocked, by Chin's request for a make-up service, the store keeper remained seated and stared at Chin for quite a while before finally making her move out of the shop counter. I felt a bit nervous and was wondering whether she had found out Chin's "real" identity. But Chin retained her usual composure and the whole process was easily chatted away. Probably out of concern for future business or because I bought a bottle of make-up remover for Chin, the shop keeper became more talkative and ended up complimenting Chin's elegant demeanor in front of me while Chin went back home to pick up her phone: "She must have been very beautiful when she was

young." I smiled and nodded.

Reflecting on these ethnographic details, I start to make a better sense of the confusion I felt when all this was happening. It was the nonchalance of the everyday interactions between transgendered individuals and the people around them that disturbed my imagined incommensurability and compartmentalization between the extraordinariness of transgendered practices and the ordinary and mundane. It demonstrates the permeability of the seemingly bounded spatio-temporality of transgendered practices, such as those in the debris. Transgendered individuals are not an apparition that only made their appearance at night. They are not cut off from everyday life. Rather, they constitute the very malleable fabric of life for people within and outside their neighborhood. Thus, the seemingly bounded space and time I described in the previous section, serves as an indispensable experimental ground upon which transgendered individuals explored and extended their gendered and sexual expressions. Chin's revealing her nightly transgendered expression to her landlord and her composed interaction with the store-keeper around the corner of her neighborhood reveal ways in which she was navigating and integrating boundaries between non-normativity and the normal.

The fluidity between night-time informality within certain space and the habitual routines of ordinary people might be better shown when I accompanied Chin and Wang—Chin's female co-worker—to the place where they worked.

We walked out of the corner store and met Wang in front of a supermarket just a few steps away. Wang changed from her loosely fit shirt and pants into a nice chiffon dress and flat shoes. Her face wore a quiet and more youthful look with light make-up. We then started heading towards the place where they worked, which I had never been to before. We walked through the winding alleys of the urban village in dim light until

we stepped into the better illuminated main street. Pedestrians were few, but buses and cars came by quite regularly. Chin was doing most of the talking while I was carefully watching my steps lest I would fall on the uneven pavement. It was here that Chin elaborated on her theory of women's high heels and lectured Wang about the continual harassment of a man who wanted free sex with Wang.

Out of concern with increasingly frequent police patrols, Wang changed into flats so that she could run faster to avoid any possible confrontation. Chin on the other hand remained attached to high heels.

I don't always run when there are police. You run that means you're guilty…And if you want to run you can always take off your shoes…I like wearing high heels. You just imagine late at night, when you hear high heels resounding along the street. It means a woman is coming and that's stimulating for men...

…

That man is really irritating…But men are like that. Once you satisfy him and let him do what he wants, he would stop bothering you. Why should that matter to you… (July 17, 2013)

To help Wang out, Chin said that she even tried luring the man into sex with her. But the man did not seem to want to give up on Wang. In front of a zebra crossing where we were going to cross the street, Wang finally decided to go back home and bid us goodbye. A little disappointed perhaps, Chin then led me cross the road. It was not until then that I realized the place Chin had been doing her business. So determinedly different from all the other red-light areas I had been to, the place was helplessly dilapidated, with only a line of brick wall that separated it from the main street and the hustle and bustle therein. Chin waved me goodbye. I was a bit

overwhelmed by the sentiments of my departure from my field site in a few days and kept looking back, until my sight was blocked by the concrete wall. I went across the street and waited at the bus stop that was intriguingly positioned in the middle of the road. Standing at the bus stop amid a few more commuters, I heard my named called out by Chin. She was waving at me and walking toward the mid-road railing that separated opposing traffic flows. I ran over to her happily. She asked me to give her a few condoms, which she had refused to take when I offered them to her when we were walking on the main street.

I regard the distance we covered all along the way and the constant transgression that Chin made across the boundaries between her male body and her transgendered performance, between her private abode and public areas, and between tacit sex business in the debris and the bus stop on the main street, as indicative of what I call "transgressive integration". It revealed the co-existence of seemingly incommensurate practices and ways of living. One might also suggest that the walking we did could be understood as a liminal space that helped prepared Chin for her transformation and performance. It could be, although I do not think of the boundaries listed above as solid. Nor do I necessarily consider the distance between Chin's rented room and the debris as bridging two different worlds of existence, as these spaces had also been constantly crisscrossed by acts of disruption, such as Chin's lecturing her female co-worker Wang on how to deal with male client's harassment. Again what I want to stress here is the on-going interaction, integration, and innovation through which Chin and others had made commensurate a diverse array of practices and experiences. It is the constitutive banality of transgendered practices that I hope to point out.

Before going into more detailed analytic discussion of my notion of constitutive banality, I would add one more ethnographic vignette to help illustrate this on-going

practice of transgressive integration and its relation to the resilient mechanism of assemblage thinking.

I went to have dinner with Yanzi and her husband one afternoon upon their kind invitation. Yanzi had been cross-dressing for almost ten years. She lived almost twenty-four hours as the feminine gender, except when she went back to her hometown once in a few months. She grew her hair long, which was further lengthened with synthetic hair extensions. After dinner and a brief and efficient make-up, Yanzi was ready to head out with me when the night was not completely dark outside. Yanzi led me through the maze-like alleys of the urban village where she and her husband rented their apartment until we reached the bus stop right outside the neighborhood. We stood side by side at the edge of the waiting commuters. Yanzi was then talking to me in her hoarsely feminized voice about the low salary one could get from waiting tables in restaurants. I did notice some fleeting glances thrown in our direction from when we walked out of Yanzi's apartment building to the bus ride, where lighting was unexpectedly harsh and bright. But the glances did not stay long.

I look very natural.

I was a bit surprised that Yanzi brought this up before I even attempted to ask. She uttered this shortly after we got off the bus, comparing herself with those who did not dare to go out during the day for fear that others might point fingers at them.

The key is to be natural. Don't be bothered by what other people say or think…I take the bus every day. (May 9, 2012)

Again, what Yanzi's case demonstrates here is not a radically distinct queer space that counters the formality and normativity of the public space. Her daily commute and her look of "naturalness" are signs of the banality that was part of her life and that of any other that she encountered in various ways. They might or might not have

noticed the out-of-the-extraordinary part of her. Even if they did, they might have simply been too bored to care.

Of course there did exist moments of eruption, when shared taciturn was broken and swiftly turned into skirmish. Qin told me an anecdote of a transgendered co-worker of hers while they were riding a bus together in their transgendered outfits. According to Qin, her friend noticed that someone stared at her and called her "*renyao*" (literally translated as human-monster, which has a prominent connection with Thai *ladyboy*) in a low voice. She immediately fought back by calling the woman "flat glass" (*pingban boli*, used as sarcastic comment on the woman's breasts).

I have no idea how that skirmish ended. But this scenario adds weight to the fact that transgendered practices were not invisible. Neither did they necessarily occupy an alternative space distinct from the normative. One might claim this to be a counter argument against the banal integration of transgenderism into everyday life I suggested earlier. It could be. Nonetheless, I argue that this very public visibility of transgenderism as had been recognized in the anecdote above also speaks to the very on-going process of negotiation, where transgendered individuals navigate the public space, constituting part of the assemblage. Furthermore, the fact that transgendered individuals did actually merge their transgressive practices into the banal rhythm of everyday life rather than claiming a separate space of their own echoes the "resilience" of a place assemblage as termed by Kim Dovey in his theorization of "complex adaptive system" (2012). According to Dovey, resilience refers to the capacity of the assemblage system to "adapt to change without slipping into a new 'regime' or 'identity'" (2012: 355). That is, confrontations such as the erupted skirmish I mentioned above, or the shift from night-time subversive space into day-time zone of abandonment in the debris, did not necessarily bring about change.

As a matter of fact, they usually do not. Most of the time, they simply blur into each other's assumed domain, constituting a dynamic stability that remains always in flux.

More significantly, the resilience that facilitates transgressive integration could usually serve in turn as a testing ground upon which transgendered individuals experimented and extended their transgressive practices. As I have mentioned earlier, Chin's revealing her cross-dress practices to her landlord, her going out to the corner store to have make-up done, and Yanzi's daily commute on public transportation, all this point to the step-by-step navigation of public space by transgendered individuals through constantly adjusting and adapting their performances. As any other constituent of the resilient assemblage system, they are at the same time part of it while pushing its plastic boundary around.

By this ethnographic presentation and microanalysis of emergent properties that range from street lighting and high heels' clacking sound to transgressive rides on public transportation, I do not intend to gloss over macro institutional and political economic forces that have been at work simultaneously. In fact, design of street lighting across different sections of the urban area; incoherent urban restructuring processes that gave rise to the debris and on-going morphological shifts in urban villages; increasing rental prices in Kunming along with urban village renewal plan and its bulldozers; fluctuating work opportunities available to migrant workers; unpredictable regularity of police patrolling; larger socio-economic processes of "neoliberalization" that have encouraged diverse attempts of flexible innovation and risk-taking to make ends meet; the increasing normalization of "informal economy" and informal employment (Ferguson 2009); and shifting individualization process since the late 1970s along with neoliberalization that encouraged expressions and enactments of a growing array of desires (Rofel 2007; Yan 2010), all these are

multi-scale constituents of the assemblage that do not necessarily operate in top-down manner in everyday life. It is the synergistic, emergent effect of these diverse flows of elements that I hope to capture in the microanalysis of transgendered practices on a daily base.

Against the Romance of Counterhegemony

Urban village renewal projects have swept through China in recent years. One major objective of these projects is to wipe out urban irregularities and informality that have been regarded as unfit for the on-going modernization and globalization processes of Chinese cities. Yet as Saskia Sassen has demonstrated in her analysis of global cities, the informalization of the economy happens "in the context of economic restructuring" rather than representing an "inability to attain full modernization" (1998: 153-154). That is, informality is not derivative to formal economic activities. They complement each other in response to economic restructuring. This co-constitutiveness of informality and formality is further stretched when James Ferguson (2009) points out the increasing prominence of the informal sector and the hard-to-categorize urban improvisers as constitutive of "the social" rather than formal economy and able-bodied workers. The normalization of informality (at least in Ferguson's research) raises critical question as to how we should think of the assumed dichotomy between the formal and the informal, the central and the marginal. This echoes my on-going questioning of the boundary between normative gender and sexuality and its non-normative counterpart.

My interest in problematizing the ontological dichotomy between heteronormativity and homonormativity is derived partly from my reading of Judith Butler's theorization of gender performativity. Through broadening Derrida's (1988)

notion of performative utterance and structure of iteration to include all acts in general, Butler brings back peripheral and parasitic acts such as drag into the formulation of the central, i.e. gender, thus revealing the fictitious unity and compulsory heteronormative ordering of sex, gender, and erotic practices.

For Derrida, communication of meaning—or intelligibility—lies in the detachability of writing from its context, which in turn is made possible by its essential structure of iterability. That is, it is iterability and citability of every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written, that makes it intelligible and communicable (see also Deutscher 2005). Thus, through putting citation and iteration at the heart of language use, Derrida puts within the logic of supplementarity both normal use of performative utterance and non-serious performative such as stage performance. Similarly, Butler's (1999) notion of gender performativity conceives of performative acts such as drag not as in opposition to or outside of gender norms. Rather, dragging serves to reflect "the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality" (Butler 1993: 125). Like Derrida's notion of différance, in which the future of meaning remains open, the meaning of gender remains open. There are no essential attributes attached to gender identity, either men or women.

For me, gender performativity opens up opportunities not only to trouble the essential claims of gender identity, but also to tip over the internal certainty and unity of heteronormativity. That is, if iteration is the mechanism by which gender works its magic and through which the original and the imitative are revealed to be both participants within the endless cycle of citation, then the political power of gender performativity lies in the disruption and problematization of the norm *from within*. This is also what I perceive as the great potential of queer studies—to move away

from identity claims of lesbian and gay studies through problematizing the confidence of heteronormativity. In this paper, it is not radical alterity that I aim at such as represented in Michael Warner's (2002) counterpublics and embodied by the radical faeries in the U.S (Povinelli 2006). Rather, what I witnessed in my field research is transgendered individuals' integration of their non-normative gendered and sexual practices into the mundane rhythm of everyday life, as what we have seen in Chin, Yanzi, and their interactions with people around them. Furthermore, their gendered and sexual performative acts went beyond bodily practices to encompass and be encompassed by diverse elements in the space and time that they have traveled and lived with.

It is this diversity and the contingency therein that has drawn me to Deleuzian assemblage theories in urban studies (Dovey 2010, 2012). One central commonality between my ethnographic observation of transgendered sex workers' lived experiences, my use of a queer approach, and assemblage thinking is the problematization of identity, be it identity of a place based on formal social activities involved, or that of a category of people based upon a specific set of their practices. Thus, the identity of the debris as zone of abandonment was disrupted by transgendered sex workers, their female co-workers, and clients during night time; in turn, the dubious space and time of the debris facilitated transgendered sex workers' heterosexualized gendered and sexual performances, blurring the boundaries of both gender and sexuality, and that of heterosexuality and homosexuality. Furthermore, transgendered individuals did not contain their activities within the spatial boundary of the debris. Neither were they an apparition that appeared only at night. They navigated the public space through on-going flexible experimentation encouraged by successful gendered and sexual performances in the debris. And again, their

navigation and experimentation fell short of any intention to provoke or to claim

alterity. They constituted one of those "nonhegemonic elements"—rather than

"counterhegemony"—that are simply there, within the dynamic and resilient

assemblage system of the urban spaces in the neoliberal era (Ortner 1989-1990).

Conclusion: A Politics of Ethics

One might wonder how this everyday integration of transgendered practices, its

problematization of identity, and its lack of engagement with policy changes could

spell political potential. Part of the answer depends upon how we understand the

political. It is worth repeating what was put forward earlier in this chapter, where the

political is closely tied to the rise of the bourgeois civil society and its opposition to

the state. Although the proposition of counterpublics, as put forth by Nancy Fraser

and Berlant & Warner, points to an alternative political reason and stranger-sociability

based not on rational-critical faculties of private persons, their formulation of

alternative politics exhibits a lingering attachment to the key political opposition

between the State and civil society (and the counter/public). According to Barry,

Osborne and Rose's observation, the "death of State socialism" did not automatically

spell the triumph of liberal democracy, but witnessed a proliferation of contested

political programs "beyond the State," defined as "a politics of life, of ethics, which

emphasizes the crucial political value of the mobilization and shaping of individual

capacities and conduct" (1996: 1). What exactly does a politics of ethics beyond the

State look like?

For Foucault, ethics refers not to a code that tells us how to act, but to "the

relationship you have to yourself when you act" (1997e: 131). It is important to also

notice that this relation one has to oneself is a "creative activity," and that "we have to

create ourselves as a work of art" (Foucault 1997d: 262). I suggest that, as presented in the previous discussion of this chapter, erotic moments such as sexual transaction between transgendered sex workers and clients ignorant of their gender identity, transgressive integration such as Chin's skillful interaction with people in her neighborhood, constitutive banality of transgenderism such as Yanzi's and Autumn's bus ride, speak to the possibility of a politics that is ethical, and that does not take as its point of departure or final goal an engagement with the State as a social collective. I will use Xiaoyi's example to further illustrate this possibility of a political.

When I first met Xiaoyi during my pilot study in the summer of 2010, I had a hard time figuring out whether she was a young woman or another transgendered performer. She was then working at the drop-in center of SpringRain as a regular employee. Hair bound into a pony tail high at the back, she impressed me with her slim girlish figure, sweet smile, and soft feminine voice. In January 2012, Xiaoyi volunteered to be interviewed by me after learning about my project on transgender. We decided that the interview be conduced after their invited performance at one of the district CDC offices in celebration of the upcoming Chinese New Year. I sat next to Xiaoyi and watched closely how she did her make-up. She explained to me patiently as she had always done the different steps taken to do a good make-up for different occasions. As was always the case, Xiaoyi spent most of the time perfecting her eyes, including selection of color for different layers of eye shadow, drawing eyebrows, lining eyes, and applying fake eyelashes.

Like many other transgendered individuals I met, Xiaoyi used to think of herself as *tongzhi* when she first entered the *tongzhi* circle (*quanzi*). As one of the earliest volunteers in the local MSM community work, Xiaoyi joined SpringRain from the very beginning. She described her motivation as "very simple":

I was not thinking of doing HIV intervention; nor did I want to work for [HIV-related] projects. I was just going to work as a waitress, to sing and dance…But as I worked on, I realized that things were not as simple, including the changes that happened in myself. I used to think of myself as *tongzhi*, then I gradually found out the kind of boyfriend that I really need and like. I realized that I am *kuaxingbie* (transgender). (January 11, 2012)

But mind you, this self-recognition as transgender was not once and for all. Just a moment away, when I asked when she told her friend of her identity as…, she interjected in my hesitation and finished my question with "as homosexual?"

This wavering between transgender and homosexual is not to be read as false consciousness. It speaks to the very fragile and perhaps yet-to-be established categorical boundary between transgender and homosexuality, and between gender expression and sexuality. Although at the beginning of our interview, Xiaoyi identified herself as transgender, who hoped that her boyfriend would love her like a man does to a woman, her frequent reference to the *tongzhi* circle in our conversation revealed a much more contested and experimental range of practices irreducible to a simple "lack" of clear-cut identity categories. One example is her experience with her ex-boyfriend, a straight guy whom she met when she was in women's dress one night at a bar.

He liked me very much (when he first saw me). I told him that I was a man. He wouldn't believe me. I then asked him to come see me the next day, when I took off the wig and all the make-up. He did…yes, he preferred my feminine attire. I was then a very difficult person. When I was with him, he asked me to do make-up. I just refused and went out

with him as a man (although I should add that even in men's dress, Xiaoyi

looked androgynous). When he finally got used to my male attire, I started

doing make-up and wearing feminine dress everyday. I told him this was

me. Only when you could fully understand me, only when you could

accept me whatever I wear on whatever occasion, could you accept who I

am in the real sense. (January 11, 2012)

Xiaoyi's insistence on her boyfriend's recognition of both the feminine and masculine aspects of hers points to the aesthetic flexibility with which she has experimented with her gender performance. She explained this flexibility as a necessity in the Chinese context, where it is not possible to live as the other gender without being regarded as a weirdo. Thus, when dressed as a man, even though her body language might still be recognized as leaning towards the feminine side, Xiaoyi wanted to be recognized as a man who could do whatever other men are capable of doing. This was specifically the case after she left SpringRain and worked outside the *tongzhi* circle. But her interaction with her ex-boyfriend went far beyond an everyday necessity to conform to a recognized gender dichotomy. Her openness with her boyfriend of her gender identity, her defiance against his preference of her gendered expression, and her attempt to train him into a full recognition of her doubled identity, all this point to her creative work of herself through not only self fashioning, but also her relationship and experience with others. This ethical practice of hers, not an engagement with codes of conduct but an on-going contingent experience of the self that simultaneously involve experimental relations with others, is what I hope to demonstrate as one example of a possible politics beyond the State. I align it with the political due to its potential of transformation, including that of the self and that of stranger-sociability. I think of it as beyond the State because of its non-confrontational

relation with it—it does not target at the State as its necessary interlocutor. More significantly, I distinguish it from queer counterpublics in its constant disruption of borders between heterosexuality, homosexuality, and heterogender relations instead of redrawing boundaries. It is not a claim of radical alternative, but the constant refashioning of self and its relation to others that signify the political potential that is queer.

Furthermore, when dressed as a woman, Xiaoyi had an increasingly refined standard for how one should look like in women's clothes. During the same visit to Pandora I recorded at the beginning of this chapter, Xiaoyi sat next to her mother (who always accompanied her in whatever show or event she partook) and chatted occasionally with a female friend. Make-up removed, back in men's clothes, she explained to me why she tucked herself away from the thrills and clamor generated by her friends and co-workers on those raised platforms.

> …because I think the make-up I did that night was only for stage shows, not for daily use. Everyday make-up should be less dramatic. When you go out, everything including the way you dress should be exactly like that of a woman. (So that) when people see me, they wouldn't think of me as renyao (literally translated as human-monster, referring mostly to lady boys) …That (being recognized as *renyao*) would gross me out. I'd rather take off my make-up. (January 11, 2012)

Thus, it was the mismatch between her outfit and the occasion that refrained her from joining her co-performers. Xiaoyi's attention to perfect femininity lied not simply in feminine beauty. Rather, it was most prominently defined by a natural and confident expression of the charm as a *woman*, not a beautiful *lady boy*. As a matter of fact, Xiaoyi started doing make-up because of the very confidence it rendered her at

the beginning. The term "self-confidence" (*zixin*) was repeated several times in our conversation. Yet if confidence derived from feminine beauty after make-up was the initial incentive, Xiaoyi moved toward a more diverse appreciation of self confidence, specifically after she left SpringRain, cut her hair short, and worked outside the *tongzhi* circle. Although feeling regretful for her long hair, Xiaoyi appreciated the changes in life brought about by this transition into the outside world: "I think I should try a different way of living." That might also explain why Xiaoyi emphasized self confidence in her performance of both femininity and masculinity. Interestingly, this exploration of a different way of living that could commensurate her transgendered practices and her need to support her family (her mother and herself) happened when she started to distance herself from the *tongzhi* circle and the community she had been working in and for. That seems to suggest, in line with Foucault, that resistance—and possibility for changes— "always relies upon the situation against which it struggles" (1997b: 168). This is the "right relationship to the present—to things, to others, to oneself" (Rabinow 1997: XVIII). That is to suggest, the political lies not in following trajectories envisioned beforehand, but happens in an ethics of practice that is conducive to transformation.

In Xiaoyi's case, a personal story of struggle rather than collective social activism, it is the incommensurability of transgendered practices and the mundane demands of life that drew a boundary from which she felt both contained and encouraged to experiment with new forms of transcendence. She felt contained because once outside the familiar terrain of the *tongzhi* circle, where she had once been able to "just let loose, wear make-up whenever you want, and be coquettish whenever you want," she was a man and was supposed to take on responsibility, although she did admit feeling herself as a woman in her heart. At the same time, she was also motivated to imagine

and embody a different sense of the gendered and sexual self through perfecting both her feminine and masculine performative practices with a standard of self confidence, and perhaps also through making increasingly stringent requirements with regards to "proper" performance of femininity and masculinity.

One might attribute Xiaoyi's attempts as nonetheless conforming to socially recognized gender norms, just another example that speaks to the need for collective action so that transgender identity can be acknowledged and transgendered individuals' needs accommodated. This assumption of an internal need that should be externalized as agency and resistance is critically challenged by Saba Mahmood's ethnographic study of women's participation in the Islamic revival movement in Egypt. In *Politics of Piety*, Mahmood (2005) questions feminist "secular-left" political and analytic commitments that equate agency with resistance. Thus, rather than seeing agency as an externalized articulation of women's innate interests against the weight of custom and tradition, Mahmood contextualizes agency and demonstrate ways in which the self is crafted through bodily practices. That is, it is not inner desires and emotions of women that inform their actions, but bodily practices such as veiling that retrain ethical sensibilities and cultivate pious dispositions in women. The acquisition of interior virtues through exterior cultivation echoes Judith Butler's notion of performativity, specifically in its problematization of a pre-defined interiority such as transgender identity. In Xiaoyi's case, the everyday practices she experienced constitute her on-going understanding of her self that remains unfinished. This unfinished project of the self at the same time induces polymorphous relations that involve both one's relation to oneself and that to others. This is what I would regard as a politics of ethics beyond the State. Its political valence lies not in its direct confrontation against the State but in its potential conducive to transformation.

Conclusion

"He who fights with the monster might take care lest he thereby become a monster.
And when you gaze long into an abyss the abyss also gazes into you."
(Friedrich Nietzsche *Beyond Good and Evil*, 1886)

Grid of Intelligibility

Before leaving the field in July 2013, I had a conversation with a friend I met in Kunming. Though quite distinct in our conceptual approaches to the world, we managed to be a significant interlocutor to each other. While I again stressed the gap between analytic schemes and the everyday lived experience, he conceded but nonetheless insisted that one should after all have some basic categories to grapple with the world we are living in. That I could hardly deny.

If it is already a received knowledge that our lived experiences overflow analytic categories, how to work around recognized categories to make sense of the world remains contested. This dissertation aims in part to contribute to that conversation through the prism of transgendered practices in southwest China. Working around the formation of a Chinese transgender identity, I have brought in ethnographic encounters that traverse different domains of lived experience where transgendered practices emerged and submerged. I hope to look at transgendered practices from shifting vantage points outside of the currently available grid of intelligibility, outside of the cultural script that renders transgendered practices readable.

In his existentialist reflections upon his itinerant ethnographic encounters across the world, anthropologist Michael Jackson (2007) demonstrates the ways in which life

in all its confusing and contradictory detail overflows the language, categories, and

definitions that have been institutionalized to define and capture it—what he terms as

the "discursive strategies". Perhaps one of the recent attempts to confront the violence

of the discursive strategies of modern power is João Biehl's ethnography *Vita: Life in

a Zone of Social Abandonment* (2005/2013). In chasing Catarina's life history as she

had compiled it in her "dictionary", Biehl presented the ways in which her alleged

madness was constructed across private and public domains of life overdetermined by

the emergence of a biomedical logic of reasoning, coupled with the failing of

domestic economy, and the broken social relations that include the most intimate

relations of the nuclear family. In a most explicitly Foucaultian[183] sense (although

Biehl did not actually make that claim in his ethnography), *Vita* writes about a

disappearance, one that has been induced by the onslaught of a biopolitical

episteme—an "altered common sense"—that pushes outside the grid of intelligibility

Catarina's narrative of her own life and her control over her own body. Between the

biomedical diagnosis (and medication) of her madness and her own embodied

experience, the truth of her illness was made invisible and insignificant. Biehl's

ethnographic attempt of tracing Catarina's life history and the production of her social

---

[183] Here I am referring specifically to Foucault's *History of Madness* (2006) and his
alternative approach to history and the archive. What is striking in *Vita* is the ways in
which the constitution of Catarina's madness aligned with the experience of madness
elaborated by Foucault as moving along four forms of "excluded language": (1)
grammatical mistakes; (2) blasphemous words; (3) statements whose meaning is the
object of censorship; (4) "submitting speech that apparently conforms to the
recognized code to a different code, whose key is contained within that speech itself"
(Foucault 2006: 545). The final form of excluded language thus results in the
uncoupling of madness from reason, so that "there was no longer any common
language between madness and reason" (2006: 497). That is how Catarina was made
unintelligible and a non-entity in Vita.

death thus serves to capture this movement of disappearance in the hope to "speak of the 'evil' that is done and the 'good' one must do" (Biehl 2005/2013: 239). It is this space that witnesses the chance encounter between the subaltern and a power that "wished only to annihilate them" (Foucault 2000:163), on the verge of its own disappearance, that the subaltern can speak and be heard, "giv[ing] a way to the words…in all possible ways" (Biehl 2005/2013: 358).

Constitution (Centripetal) vs. Dispersion (Centrifugal)

Through a genealogical approach to Catarina's madness and the production of her social death, Biehl's ethnography documents a disappearance induced by the biomedicalization of life so as for the subaltern to be heard and for new possibilities to emerge. In a similar spirit—though at a much lower degree of sophistication—to capture the critical ontology of the present in all its immanence, my dissertation looks into the space of (un)becoming with regard to the constitution of a Chinese transgender identity and community from the perspective of a diverse array of social processes in mainland China, including international and national HIV/AIDS intervention projects, the emergence of transnational LGBT identity-based human rights movements, the neoliberal turn to cultural economy that embraces desires, and the trajectory that state-individual relationships have gone through. I argue that the indifference I discerned from many of my transgendered informants with regard to their gender/sexual identities is contingent upon an assemblage of social processes that have given rise to confusing and even contradictory conditions of life with which

transgendered individuals have struggled.

Therefore, rather than present the *constitution* of a transgender identity and community in China, my dissertation demonstrates the *dispersion* of it via ongoing ethnographic encounters that constantly sidestep, if not disregard, seemingly apparent practices of transgenderism. That is, the identity of transgender is not offered here as the final objective to be achieved, but as a point of departure through which to observe the incoherent and often contradictory reality of life wherein transgendered practices are submerged and diffuse.

In Chapter One, I presented ways in which international and national HIV/AIDS intervention programs have colonized regimes of gender and sexuality through "the diffusion of a particular language around sexuality and sexual identities" (Altman 2001: 74). One explicit example of this top-down approach to community identification is the initiation of MSM (men who have sex with men) workgroups in Kunming by health education institutes or CDCs at different administrative levels in conjunction with international funding agencies. From peer outreach education to HIV counseling and testing services and positive care, to large-scale surveys tracking sexual behaviors, sexual partners and sexual decision making, knowledge has been accumulated and consolidated to facilitate a taken-for-granted imagination of *the* community, occupied by a scientifically pre-determined group of people. The subsequently established MSM community is thus a community pre-defined by the public health framework, which then set out to recruit its members, who are in turn regarded as constitutive and representative of the community. It might thus be true to

say that it is not the community that is responding to the outbreak of the AIDS

epidemic, but it is HIV/AIDS that has built the community. The awkward position of

the community, and probably that of the workgroups that helped initiate and

consolidate its existence, speaks to the way in which the Chinese government has

been engaging with the paradox between an urgent need to keep under control the

epidemic and its reluctance to grant legitimacy to homosexuality as an identity. It is

within this murky prescription of life that transgendered practices have been

incorporated.

Chapter Two juxtaposed the population-based public health-initiated

establishment of the MSM community with the emerging transnational LGBT

rights-based identity politics in China. My analysis focused on the overlapping,

discrepancies, and incoherence between the proliferation of discursive communities

and the messy everyday life lived and struggled by people who are supposed to be

members of them. In pulling together these entangled strands, I hope to complicate

the already much problematized dichotomy of the local and the global in the studies

of gender and sexual diversity with the notion of "global assemblage" (Ong and

Collier 2005; Peletz 2013). The vantage point of global assemblage refreshes

understanding of the global circulation of services, discourses, practices, and values

through its stress on the non-hierarchical relationships among them, problematizing

the kind of teleological and causal relationships often sought after in more

conventional positivist researches. Furthermore, the synergistic effect of an

assemblage points to a much lower degree of predictability as to what might be

yielded from the contingent convergence (and eruption) of forces.

It is with in mind this assemblage of forces and lived experience that I presented transgendered practices in Chapter Three. Through a closer look at the diverse embodied practices of transgendered sex workers and cabaret performers in Kunming, I tackled the ways in which the neoliberal turn from production-centered political economy to consumption-based cultural economy has facilitated the articulations of desires, both the desire to consume and the consumption of desire. Yet as Pun Ngai (2003) has observed, the celebration of the "ideal consumer-citizen" is never attainable for all. Neither should the transition to cultural economy be regarded as complete. The low-end sexual markets where I encountered many of my transgendered informants demonstrated to me the diverse and contingent ways in which desire and labor engage with and motivate each other in constituting the "ideal consumer-citizen" in neoliberal China. I suggest that the neoliberal mantra of flexibility and self-making offers an accessible—accessible through economic rationalization—platform where the articulations of identities in flux are possible. Nonetheless, this economic logic of neoliberal self-making (and equality) generates its own pitfalls, specifically in the context of postsocialist China, where "neoliberal state capitalism" incorporates both the neoliberal economic utilitarianism and a still prominent top-down operation of state power.

This contrast between a seemingly liberal expression of self identity and neoliberal state capitalism in postsocialist China calls for more explanation. Chapter Four tackled with this contradiction through a discussion of the slippage between

liberalism and neoliberalism, a historical inquiry into the process of individualization

in China, and the troubled development of civil society in neoliberal China where

expressions of desires are both encouraged and constrained along the line of

"graduated citizenship" (Ong 2006). While this representation of state-individual

relationships suggests the slim possibility of a self-culture politics that confronts the

state—as identity politics in the US has exemplified, it facilitates creative negotiations

of the political that might open up new space of possibilities, however precarious that

space might be.

Following this questioning of the political as confrontational vis-à-vis the state,

Chapter Five steered away from an identity-based analytic approach and launched

onto a queer perspective that problematizes normativity. My use of a queer

perspective here offers an analytic and political reconsideration of how queerness

could be understood and deployed. Through integrating a Deleuzian assemblage

approach to urban space with a queer analysis of transgendered practices in urban

villages, I suggest a reconsideration of the analytic separation between the normative

and the non-normative that has been prominent in most studies on gender and sexual

diversity. I also suggest a reconsideration of the political tenet of antinormativity in

queer studies with the help of vigorous ethnographic details of lived experience.

Thus, analytically, this dissertation can be divided into two major parts. The first

part consists of Chapters One to Four, presenting the diverse social processes wherein

transgendered practices appear, submerge, and diffuse. Rather than regard transgender

identity as an objective, a final goal to be achieved through embodied practices, I take

it as a point of departure that needs to be challenged through the messiness of everyday lived experience. The arrangement of these chapters is also emblematic of my ethnographic search for a Chinese transgender identity and community that is elusive. The second part, i.e. Chapter Five, then employs a queer perspective that sees transgendered practices not as an alternative claim outside of heterosexual norms, but as constitutive elements readily woven into the fabric of everyday life that goes beyond an exclusive claim of gender or sexuality.

Assemblage and Emergence

In this dissertation, the Deleuzian concept of assemblage is used as a heuristic device through which to look at the juncture of the present. Assemblage is useful as a conceptual framework to capture the synergistic moment of the present "whose properties *emerge* from the *interactions* between parts" rather than following a teleological pattern of linear development (DeLanda 2006: 5, italics mine).

I am reminded of Foucault's notion of emergence (*Entstehung*) in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1971/1998). In his explanation of "effective history"—the understanding of history as effects rather than facts, Foucault warns us against the obsession with the "origin"—finding the historical root for the present. Instead, he calls our attention to the notion of emergence, which he defines as "the singular law of an apparition," the "entry of forces" and their eruption (1971/1998: 376). While DeLanda's Deleuzian concept of assemblage focuses on the intensity of the present, Foucault's use of "emergence" points to the "vertical temporality" that is not linear

but eruptive.

Here, I have attempted to integrate both notions of emergence with the help of my ethnographic encounters and my reflections upon them. While being swamped in the "everyday AIDS practices" as a volunteer in a local LGBT grassroots workgroup in Kunming (Hyde 2007), I also witnessed and experienced the spread of transnational LGBT rights-based politics, such as the training of emerging Chinese LGBT leadership in Los Angeles, US and the split between science-based gay activism and queer lesbianism. While my outreach activities among gay men and female and transgendered sex workers enabled me to see the often messy lived reality wherein transgendered practices emerged and were submerged, I also participated in funded activities that grouped transgendered sex workers together and that aimed to understand the health needs of this assumed community of transgender people. At the initial stage of my field work, I was puzzled by the indifference and ambivalence many of my gay and transgendered friends expressed towards a transgender identity, I was therefore led to a historical examination of the individualization process in China that undercut an identity-based politics that viewed the personal as political.

The contingency and simultaneity of these disorienting array of phenomena and experience made it almost impossible to come up with a pattern, something that cultural anthropologists are, explicitly or implicitly, looking for in field encounters. The immanent aspect inherent in the notion of emergence, be it Deleuze's "assemblage" and "becoming" (Biehl and Locke 2010) or Foucault's "vertical temporality" and "eruption" (Foucault 1971/1998), seems to be the most appropriate

conceptual frame that is able to thread together these disparate strands I have gathered here. Specifically, the notions of emergence (and perhaps also assemblage) are not equal to saying that no meaning or explanation could be garnered, or no pattern could ever be discerned. Quite the contrary, as I have hopefully shown in my dissertation, there is a discernible gathering of different momentum that might erupt into something. What I hope to have presented, through different moments of the present, is the contingent possibilities yielded along these on-going processes of eruption. That is, I have not given up the anthropological search for patterns and explanation. The question lies in, as Biehl and Locke have expressed insightfully, "what kinds of evidence we assemble and use—the voices to which we listen and the experiences we account for—and in how we craft our explanations: whether our analytics remain attuned to the intricacy, openness, and unpredictability of individual and collective lives" (2010: 318).

Identities in Flux vs. Neoliberal Flexibility

Through ethnographically presenting transgendered individuals' integration into the quotidian that is malleable and resilient, I have demonstrated the queerness of the norm from within. Meanwhile, I have also, perhaps implicitly and unwittingly, created an analytic gap between the aspirational and transformative ethical identities in flux (specifically in Chapter Five) vis-à-vis neoliberal flexibility (specifically in Chapter Three). Are there differences between them? Even if there are, should we even care about the distinction? At this moment when I am looking back at my own analysis, I

believe they are not one and the same. And I suggest that making a distinction is at least analytically helpful to think through a queer perspective that does not take antinormativity as the only political possibility.

For one thing, it seems to me that the space for the experiment with ethical self making—in the sense of Ancient Greek ethics that aimed to perfect one's life—is made available by the mismatch between neoliberal self-making and liberal self-culture politics. Second, it is perhaps this mismatch that has given rise to a space—the overlapping space between the two—where desire, labor, and affect flow in a manner much less encumbered by a necessity to take sides (liberal or neoliberal). Third, if I somehow sound too optimistic in imagining this space of ethical experimentation, I should immediately point out a more complicated relationship between them. That is, if it is true that neoliberal flexibility facilitates seemingly liberal articulations of desires and self identity, these very articulations are at the same time coopted by the economic rational logic of neoliberalism. Therefore, the space made for ethical experimentation seems more like one that is vacated (at least partly) while haunted by an illusion of liberal politics. Therefore, even when I am suggesting a new possibility of the political through everyday practices, it (the political) is by no means the same as the liberal progressive prescription of the term. Fourth, this conceptual imagination of a space, vacated by liberal identity politics and precariously occupied (partly) by what I have perceived as ethical self-making that spells possible transformation (desubjectivation, or not), bearing semblance to liberal claims of self identity while not exactly the same, speaks to the possibility of a queer politics that is

probably neither liberal progressive nor antinormative (Wiegman and Wilson 2015).
That is, its political possibility remains suspended.

This flawed space of ethical self-making is perhaps best exemplified by Yanzi's
reasoning of her transgendered sex work vis-à-vis people waiting tables at restaurants
and those "homosexuals" (Chapter Three). The possibility for her to juxtapose these
three together is not derived from a liberal identity claim of sexual identity—although
she has been recognized as a member of the (imagined) transgender community by
local lesbian and gay organizations; nor is it based on a dichotomy between straight
and non-straight—although she has been also undoubtedly recognized by as
belonging to the MSM community by HIV/AIDS intervention programs, but an
aspiration to make quick money through bitter travail. While this economic rationality
seems to announce the triumph of neoliberal flexibility, I suggest a more nuanced
understanding through juxtaposing Yanzi's relationship with her "husband" and their
home (her husband's) visits as a heterosexual couple. To what extent does this spell a
new possibility of the political or is it replicable? I have no idea. But I do think the
neoliberal strategy of flexible self-making provides a space where mobility between
some boundaries is practicable, or at least worthy of experimentation. The question
then remains, who is capable of capitalizing on this flexibility and thus granted greater
mobility and who is not?[184]

---

[184] I thank Dr. Heather Hindman for asking this important question in her comments on an AAA panel discussion where I presented part of my dissertation.

Anthropology, Normativity, and the Political

This deployment of a queer perspective that challenges normativity from within works well with anthropology's attention to the messiness of everyday life. Throughout the dissertation, I have allowed ethnography to constantly shift my conceptual frames and analysis. Many of the questions I ended up asking and answering in this dissertation were derived from the numerous puzzles I had when conducting my field research in China. Therefore, although the finished product of my dissertation might sometimes sound a bit too theoretical, I hope to have demonstrated how the series of theoretical discussions are driven by deeper ethnographic concerns. Theorizing through ethnography remains one major task I have undertaken throughout my dissertation research. I regard this as a legacy of feminist anthropology since the 1980s, when feminist practices and their analytic and political commitments to finding women's voices helped problematize previously dominant theoretical paradigms that paid limited attention to individual actors as active agents of their practices (Ortner 1984; Collier and Yanagisako 1989).

With in mind this agenda in feminist anthropology to give voice to the subaltern through their agentive practices, I am also intrigued by another important strand of thought sprouted on the soil of feminist studies—discourse, power, sexuality, and queer studies. This project is thus an effort to tie together these analytically different yet experientially intertwined concepts through detailed attention to the ethnographic observation of everyday practices. It is an anthropological attentiveness to the messiness of life experience as it is lived that has offered me an opportunity to think

through these concepts and theorizations in a slightly alternative way, i.e. to trouble the norm from within.

Specifically, the kind of ethnographic engagement and microanalysis that anthropology is good at enables me to look at the "immanent fields that people, in all their ambiguity, invent and live by" (Biehl and Locke 2010: 317). My problematization of the normative has derived significant strength from this engagement with people's everyday struggles and interpersonal dynamics. The intricacy, contradictions, and complexities of people's life have granted me a chance to look at the kind of normativity that queer studies have countered almost from its beginning. Instead of an alternative space outside of the normative, I have seen ways in which norms were lived in variously ambiguous, malleable, and resilient manners. While this observation might attest to the all-encompassing power of the norm, it is at the same time shaking the certainty of the norm and hopefully pointing to new directions of the political.

The imagination of the political that is already incorporated within the norm might sound unthinkable. In this dissertation, I suggest tentatively a political that does not necessarily take as its point of departure the confrontational relation between the state and society. If that liberal progressive definition of politics is to be understood as the Political, capital "P" and unmarked, then my queer approach here suggests a reconsideration of the political, small "p" and marked. I would like to include in this small imagining of the political what I understand as the ethical. It is the ethical in the Aristotelian tradition, and developed further by Foucault, in that it "conceives of

ethics not as an Idea, or as a set of regulatory norms, but as a set of practical activities

that are germane to a certain way of life" (Mahmood 2005: 27). More significantly, in

the context of my research, this "certain way of life" is further localized and rendered

mercurial depending upon "a specific set of procedures, techniques, and discourses

through which highly specific ethical-moral subjects come to be formed" (Mahmood

2005: 28). I see the diverse ethical practices as political not in the sense that they have

carved out a space outside of the norm. Quite the contrary, they are part and parcel of

the norm (in a Foucaultian sense). In Sherry Ortner's term, they represent neither the

"hegemonic" nor the counterhegemonic, but are "simply 'there,' 'other,' 'different,'

present because they are products of imagination that did not seem to threaten any

particular set of arrangements" (1989-1990: 45). Or to use Foucault's term in

Discipline and Punish, these ethical acts belong to the multiplicity of minor and

scattered processes, seemingly innocent and benign yet "profoundly suspicious"

arrangements and mechanisms—the "stone-cutting"—that might or might not bring

about mutations (1995: 138-139). They could be though, if transformation does

happen, retrospectively rationalized as the cause of that transformative effect.

Bibliography

Abbas, Ackbar. 1992/20121992. "Introduction: The last emporium: verse and cultural space." In *City at the End of Time*, ed. Leung Pink-kwan, 43-59. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Abbas, Ackbar and Erni, J. N. 2005. "Introduction." In *Internationalizing Cultural Studies: An Anthology*, eds. Ackbar Abbas and J. N. Erni, 1-12. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing.

Abdullah, Muhammad Ahmed *et al*. 2012. "Is social exclusion pushing the Pakistani Hijras (Transgenders) towards commercial sex work? A qualitative study." *BMC Int Health Human Rights* Nov. 19, DOI: 10.1186/1472-698X-12-32.

Adam, Barry. 1995. *The Rise of A Gay and Lesbian Movement, Revised Edition*. New York: Twayne Publishers.

Agamben, Giorgio. 1993. *The Coming Community*. Translated by Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Althusser, Louis. 2001. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Monthly Review Press.

Altman, Dennis. 2001. *Global Sex*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Anderson, Benedict. 1983/2000. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London and New York: Verso.

Andreas, Joel. 2007. "The Structure of Charismatic Mobilization: A Case Study of Rebellion During the Chinese Cultural Revolution." *American Sociological Review* June 72: 434-458.

Barry, Andrew, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose. 1996. "Introduction." In *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism and Rationalities of Government*, eds. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose, 1-17. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Baxstrom, Richard. 2008. *Houses in Motion: The Experience of Place and the Problem of Belief in Urban Malaysia*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

Beck, Ulrich and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim. 2010. "Foreword: Varieties of Individualization." In Mette Halskov Hansen and Rune Svarverud (eds.). *iChina: The Rise of the Individual in Modern Chinese Society*. Copenhagen: Nias Press.
----. 2001. *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences*. London: SAGE.

Benedicto, Bobby. 2008. "The Haunting of Gay Manila: Global Space-Time and the Specter of Kabaklaan." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* Vol. 14 (2-3): 317-338.
----. 2014. *Under Bright Lights: Gay Manila and the Global Scene*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Berlant, Lauren, and Michael Warner. 1995. "What Does Queer Theory Teach Us about X?" *PMLA* Vol. 110, No. 3: 343-349.
----. 1998. "Sex in Public." *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 24, No. 2, *Intimacy*, (Winter 1998), pp. 547-566.

Bernstein, Elizabeth. 2007. *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity, and the Commerce of Sex*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bernstein, Mary. 2005. "Identity Politics." *Annual Review of Sociology* Vol. 31: 47-74.

Bieh, João. 2005/2013. *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Biehl, Joao and Peter Locke. 2010. "Deleuze and the Anthropology of Becoming." *Current Anthropology* Vol. 51, No. 3 (June): 317-351.

Blackwood, Evelyn, ed. 1986. *The Many Faces of Homosexuality: Anthropological Approaches to Homosexual Behavior*. New York: Harrington Park Press.

Blackwood, Evelyn and Saskia Wieringa, eds. 1999. *Female Desires: Same-Sex Relations and Transgender Practices across Cultures*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Boellstorff, Tom. 2004. "'Authentic, Of Course!:' Gay Language in Indonesia and Cultures of Belonging." In *Speaking in Queer Tongues: Globalization and Gay Language*, eds. William Leap and Tom Boellstorff, 181-201. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

----. 2007a. *A Coincidence of Desires: Anthropology, Queer Studies, Indonesia*. Durham: Duke University Press.

----. 2007b. "Queer studies in the house of anthropology." Annual Review of Anthropology 36: 17-35.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of A Theory of Practice*. Richard Nice, trans. Cambridge University Press.

Brenner, Neil and Nik Theodore. 2002. "Cities and the Geographies of 'Actually Existing Neoliberalism'." *Antipode* Vol. 34 (3): 349-379.

Brook, Timothy. 1998. *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Brown, Wendy. 2003. "Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy." *Theory and Event* 37-59.

----. 2015. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. New York: Zone Books.

Brownell, Susan and Jeffrey Wasserstrom, eds. 2002. *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bunnell, Tim and Andrew Harris. 2012. "Re-viewing informality: perspectives from urban Asia." *International Development Planning Review* 34 (4): 339-347.

Butler, Judith. 1991. "Imitation and Gender Insubordination." In *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss, 13-31. New York: Routledge.

----. 1993. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge.

----. 1999. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Calhoun, Craig. 1993. "'New Social Movements' of the Early Nineteenth Century." *Social Science History* Vol. 17, No. 3, Autumn: 385-427.

----. 1994. *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Cao, Jin. 2009. "The Production of Alternative Media in Mainland China: A Case

Study of the Journal 'Friend Exchange'." Harvard-Yenching Institute Working Paper Series. http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/images/caojinhangzhoucongress.pdf. Access Dec. 4, 2013.

Chapman, J., Cai, Y., Hillier, S., and Estcourt, C. 2009. "Sex and sexuality in the Shenzhen *tongzhi* circle: HIV risk context and migrant men who have sex with men in China," *Culture, Health and Sexuality* 11, 7: 689-702.

Chatterjee, Partha. 2001. "On civil and political society in post-colonial democracies." In *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, eds. Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani, 165-178. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Chen, Baizhu. 2011. "Industry Insight: RMB, Wages and Inflation—Don't Flee Yet." *Insight*, July/August, American Chamber of Commerce Shanghai.

Cheung, Eleanor. 2010. "GID in Hong Kong: A Critical Overview of Medical Treatments for Transsexual Patients." In *As Normal As Possible: Negotiating Sexuality and Gender in Mainland China and Hong Kong*, ed. Yau Ching, 75-85. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Chiang, Howard (ed.). 2012. *Transgender China*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
----. 2014a. "Archiving Peripheral Taiwan: The Prodigy of the Human and Historical Narration." *Radical History Review* 120 (Fall): 204-225.
----. 2014b. "Queering China: A New Synthesis," *GLQ* 20 (3):

Chou, Wah-Shan. 2000. *Tongzhi: Politics of Same-Sex Eroticism in Chinese Societies*. New York: Routledge.

Clifford, James. 2000. "Taking Identity Politics Seriously: 'The Contradictory, Stony Ground…'." In *Without Guarantees: Essays in Honor of Stuart Hall*, eds. Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Grossberg, and Angela McRobbie, 94-112. London: Verso Press.

Cohen, A. P. 1982. *Belonging: Identity and Social Organization in British Rural Cultures*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
1985. *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. London: Tavistock.

Collier, Jane and Sylvia Yanagisako. 1989. "Theory in Anthropology since Feminist Practice." *Critique of Anthropology* Vol. 9, no. 2: 27-37.

Conor, Liz. 2002. "The City Girl: Appearing in the Modern Scene," *Lilith 11*: 53-72.
----. 2004. *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Cruz-Malave, Arnaldo and Martin Manalansan, eds. 2002. *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism*. New York: NYU Press.

Dave, Naisargi. 2012. *Queer Activism in India: A Story in the Anthropology of Ethics*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Davin, Delia. 1999. *Internal Migration in Contemporary China*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Davis, Deborah, ed. 2000. *The Consumer Revolution in Urban China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Davis, Deborah, and Sara Friedman, eds. 2014. *Wives, Husbands, and Lovers: Marriage and Sexuality in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Urban China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Davis, Deborah, and Stevan Harrell, eds. 1993. *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Davis, Deborah, and Wang Feng. 2009. *Creating Wealth and Poverty in Postsocialist China*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

De Bary, William Theodore. 1970. *Self and Society in Ming Thought*. New York: Columbia University Press.

DeLanda, M. 2006. *A New Philosophy of Society*. New York: Continuum.

Delman, Jorgen and Xiaoqing Yin. 2010. "Individualization and the Political Agency of Private Business People in China." In *iChina—The Rise of the Individual in Modern Chinese Society*, eds. Mette Hansen and Rune Svarverud, 94-131. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.

D'Emilio, John. 1983. *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

----. 1993. "Capitalism and Gay Identity." In *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, eds. Henry Abelove, Michele Barale, David Halperin, 467-476. London: Routledge.

Derrida, Jacque. 1988. *Limited Inc*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Deutscher, Penelop. 2005. *How to Read Derrida*. London: Granta Books.

D'Hooghe, Ingrid. 1994. "Regional economic integration in Yunnan." In *China Deconstructs: Politics, Trade and Regionalism*, eds. David Goodman and Gerald Segal, 286-321. London and New York: Routledge.

Dikötter, Frank. 1995. *Sex, Culture, and Modernity in China*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Donaldson, John. 2011. *Small Works: Poverty and Economic Development in Southwestern China*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Donham, Donald. 1998. "Freeing South Africa: The 'Modernization' of Male-Male Sexuality in Soweto." *Cultural Anthropology* February Vol. 13 (1): 3-21.

Dovey, Kim. 2010. *Becoming Places: Urbanism/Architecture/Identity/Power*. London, New York: Routledge.

----. 2011. "Uprooting critical urbanism," *City* Vol. 15, Nos. 3-4, June-August, 2011, pp. 347-354.

----. 2012. "Informal urbanism and complex adaptive assemblage," *International Development Planning Review* 34 (4): 349-367.

Duggan, Lisa. 1991/2006. "Making it Perfectly Queer." In *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture*, eds. Lisa Duggan and Nan Hunter, 149-164. New York: Routledge.

----. 2003. *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Beacon Press.

Easterly, William. 2006. *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good*. Penguin Books.

Eng, David, Judith Halberstam, Jose Esteban Munoz. 2005. "Introduction: What's Queer about Queer Studies?" *Social Text*: 1-17.

Emerton, Robyn. 2006. "Finding a Voice, fighting for rights: the emergence of the transgender movement in Hong Kong." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* Vol. 7 (2):

243- 269.

Engebretsen, Elisabeth Lund. 2009. "Intimate Practices, Conjugal Ideals: Affective Ties and Relationship Strategies among Lala (Lesbian) Women in Contemporary Beijing." *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 6 (3): 3-14.

----. 2014. *Queer Women in Urban China: An Ethnography*. New York: Routledge.

Evans, Harriet. 2000. "Marketing femininity: Images of the modern Chinese woman." In *China Beyond the Headlines*, eds. Timothy Weston and Lionel Jensen, 217-244. Lanham, MS: Rowman and Littlefield.

Fan, C. 2006. "China eleventh five-year plan (2006-2010): From 'Getting Rich First' to 'Common Prosperity.'" *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 47 (6): 708-723.

Farmer, Paul *et al* (eds.). 2013. *Reimagining Global Health: An Introduction*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Farquhar, Judith. 2002. *Appetites: Food and Sex in Post-Socialist China*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Farrer, James. 1999. "Disco 'Super-Culture': Consuming Foreign Sex in the Chinese Disco." Sexualities 2(2): 147-166.

----. 2000. "Dancing through the Market Transition: Disco and Dance Hall Sociability in Shanghai." In *The Consumer Revolution in Urban China*, ed. Deborah Davis, 226-249. Berkeley: University of California Press.

----. 2002. *Opening Up: Youth Sex Culture and Market Reform in Shanghai*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

----. 2006. "Sexual citizenship and the politics of sexual storytelling among Chinese youth." In *Sex and Sexuality in China*, ed. Elaine Jeffreys, 102-123. London and New York: Routledge.

Ferguson, James. 2009. "The Uses of Neoliberalism." *Antipode*, Vol. 41, No. S1, pp. 166-184.

Fewsmith, Joseph. 2013. "Debating Constitutional Government," *China Leadership Monitor* No. 42, October 7, Hoover Institution. http://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/CLM42JF.pdf, accessed on October 3, 2015.

Fingerhuth Carl and Ernst Joos, eds. 2002. *The Kunming Project: Urban Development in China—A Dialogue*. Basel: Birkhäuser.

Foucault, Michel. 1978. *History of Sexuality*. Volume I. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books.

----. 1995. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books.

----. 1997a. "The Birth of Biopolitics." In *Michel Foucault Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, 1954-1984*, Vol. 1, ed. Paul Rabinow, 73-79. New York: New Press.

----. 1997b. "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity." In *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, Vol. 1: 163-173. ed. Paul Rabinow, New York: New Press.

----. 1997c. "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom." In *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 1*, ed. Paul Rabinow, 281-301. New York: New Press.

----. 1997d. "On the Genealogy of Ethics." In *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 1*, ed. Paul Rabinow, 253-280. New York: New Press.

----. 1997e. "An Interview by Steven Riggins." In *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, 1, ed. Paul Rabinow, 121-133. New York: New Press.

----. 1971/1998. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." In *Michel Foucault: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James. Faubian, 369-391. New York: New Press.

----. 2000. "Lives of Infamous Men." In *Essential Works of Michel Foucault*. Vol. 3, *Power*, ed. James Faubian. New York: The New Press.

----. 2003. *Abnormal: Lectures at The Collège de France 1974-1975*. New York: Picador.

----. 2006. *History of Madness*. London and New York: Routledge.

Fraser, Nancy. 1990. "The Uses and Abuses of French Discourse Theories for Feminist Politics." *boundary 2* vol. 17: 82-101.

Freeman, Carla. 2001. "Is Local:Global as Feminine:Masculine? Rethinking the Gender Globalization." *Sign* Vol. 26, No. 4: 1007-1037.

----. 2014. *Entrepreneurial Selves: Neoliberal Respectability and the Making of a Caribbean Middle Class*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Fu Jianfeng. 2004. "Fayuan panjue: tongxingmaiyin zui chengli" [Court decision: the crime of same-sex prostitution exists], *Nanfang Dushi Bao*, 18 February.

Furth, Charlotte. 1988. "Androgynous Males and Deficient Females: Biology and Gender Boundaries in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century China." *Late Imperial China* Vol. 9 (2): 1-31.

Fu Xiaoxing. 2012. *Kongjian, Wenhua, Biaoyan: Dongbei A Shi Nan Tongxinglian Qunti de Renleixue Guancha* [Space, culture, and performance: An anthropological perspective on the male homosexual community in city A of Northeast]. Beijing: Guangming Ribao Chubanshe.

Gan Chunkai and Chen Zhilong. 2004. "Yunnan." In *Developing China's West: A Critical Path to Balanced National Development*, eds. Y. M. Yeung and Shen Jianfa. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.

Gao, Yanning, ed. 2006. *Health Intervention of Homosexuality* (*Tongxinglian Jiankang Ganyu*). Shanghai: Fudan University Press.

Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Giles, John, Albert Park and Fang Cai. 2006. "How Has Economic Restructuring Affected China's Urban Workers?" *The China Quarterly* No. 185, Mar.: 61-95.

Global Fund Observer. 2007. "China Changes Course on Using NGOs as Grant Implementers." Issue 77, September 30.

Gold, Thomas. 1985. "After Comradeship: Personal Relations in China since the Cultural Revolution." *The China Quarterly* No. 104: 657-675.

Goodman, David. 2004. "The Campaign to 'Open Up the West': National, Communal Interaction and National Integration." *China Quarterly* 178: 379-399.

Gray, Mary. 2009. *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America*. New York: NYU Press.

Grewal, Inderpal and Caren Kaplan. 2001. "Global Identities: Theorizing

Transnational Studies of Sexuality." *GLQ* 7 (4): 663-679.

Guo, Xiaofei. 2007. *Zhongguofa shiyexiade Tongxinlian* (Homosexuality in the Purview of Chinese Law). Beijing: Zhishi chanquan chubanshe.

----. 2012. "The Two Faces of Condom—Public Policy Promotion in the Shadow of HIV/AIDS." In *Sexualities and Gender Study No. 5*, ed. Fang Gang. Gaoxiong, Taiwan: Universal Press.

Guo Yujie. 2014. "*Zai Hongqishang Tuhua Caihong---Ji Zhongguo Tongzhi Yundong* (Drawing Rainbow on the Red Flag—China's Tongzhi Movement)." In *Zouxiang Xingfu* (Marching towards Sexual Happiness), eds. Pan Suiming and Huang Yingying.

Halberstam, Judith. 2003. "Reflections on Queer Studies and Queer Pedagogy." *Journal of Homosexuality* 45 (2): 361-364.

----. 1998. *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

----. 2005. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: New York University Press.

Halperin, David. 1997. *Saint Foucault: Towards A Gay Hagiography*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hanna, Bridget and Arthur Kleinman. 2013. "Unpacking Global Health: Theory and Critique." In *Reimagining Global Health: An Introduction*, eds. Paul Farmer *et al.*, 15-32. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Harvey, David. 2003. *The New Imperialism*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

----. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Herdt, Gilbert, ed. 1996. *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*. New York: Zone Books.

Hinsch, Bret. 1990. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Ho, Josephine. 2006. "Embodying gender: transgender body/subject formations in Taiwan." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* Vol. 7 (2): 228-242.

Ho, Loretta Wing Wah. 2009. *Gay and Lesbian Subculture in Urban China*. London and New York: Routledge.

Ho, P, Sik Ying and A. Kat Tat Tsang. 2000. "Beyond being gay: the proliferation of political identities in colonial Hong Kong." In *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change*, eds. David Howarth, Aletta Norval and Yannis Stavrakakis, 134-150. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Hoffman, Lisa. 2006. "Autonomous choices and patriotic professionalism: on governmentality in late-socialist China." *Economy and Society* Vol. 35, No. 4: 550-570.

Hoffman, Lisa, Monica DeHart and Stephen Collier. 2006. "Notes on the Anthropology of Neoliberalism. *Anthropology News* 47 (6): 9-10.

Holbig, Heike. 2004. "The emergence of the campaign to open up the West: Ideological formation, central decision making and the role of the provinces." In *China's Campaign to "Open Up the West": National, Provincial, and Local*

Perspectives, ed. David Goodman, 21-43. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Honig, Emily and Gail Hershatter. 1988. *Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980's*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Huang, Hans Tao-Ming. 2011. *Queer Politics and Sexual Modernity in Taiwan*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Hubbard, Paul, Samuel Hurley, and Dhruv Sharma. 2012. "The Familiar Pattern of Chinese Consumption Growth." *Economic Roundup Issue 4*, 2012, http://www.treasury.gov.au/PublicationsAndMedia/Publications/2012/Economic-Roundup-Issue-4/HTML/article3, accessed Feb. 25, 2015.

Huffer, Lynne. 2011. "Are the Lips a Grave?" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* Vol. 17, No. 4: 517-542.

Hyde, Sandra. 2007. *Eating Spring Rice: The Cultural Politics of AIDS in Southwest China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Jackson, Michael. 2007. *Excursions*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Jagose, Annimarie. 2010. "Counterfeit pleasure: fake orgasm and queer agency." *Textual Practice: An International Journal of Radical Literary Studies* 24 (3): 517-539.
----. 2015. "The Trouble with Antinormativity." *differences* Vol. 26 (1): 26-47.

Jankowiak, William. 2002. "Sex, Propriety and the Roles of Fathers." In *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities*, eds. Susan Brownell and Jeffrey Wasserstrom, 361-380. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Jeffreys, Elaine. 2006. *Sex and Sexuality in China*. London and New York: Routledge.
----. 2012. *Prostitution Scandals in China: Policing, Media and Society*. London and New York: Routledge

Johnson, Mark. 1997. *Beauty and Power: Transgendering and Cultural Transformation in the Southern Philippines*. Oxford, New York: Berg.

Joseph, Miranda. 2002. *Against the Romance of Community*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.

Kam, Lucetta. 2008. "Recognition through misrecognition: Masculine women in Hong Kong." In *AsiaPacifiQueer: Rethinking Gender and Sexuality in the Asia-Pacific*, eds. Fran Martin, Peter Jackson, Mark McLelland, Audrey Yue, 99-116. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
----. 2012. *Shanghai Lalas: Female Tongzhi Communities and Politics in Urban China*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Kang, Wenqing. 2009. *Obsession: Male Same-Sex Relations in China, 1900-1950*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
----. 2012. "The decriminalization and depathologization of homosexuality in China." In *China in and Beyond the Headlines*, eds. Timothy Weston and Lionel Jensen, 231-248. Lanham, MD.: Rowman & Littlefield.

Kaufman, Joan. 2009. "The role of NGOs in China's AIDS crisis: challenges and possibilities." In *State and Society Responses to Social Welfare Needs in China*, eds. Jonathan Schwartz and Shawn Shieh, 156-173. London and New York: Routledge.

----. 2010. "Turning Points of China's AIDS Response." *China: An International Journal* Vol. 08 (01), DOI: 10.1142/S0219747210000051.

Kaufman, Joan, Arthur Kleinman, and Tony Saich. 2006. "Introduction: Social Policy and HIV/AIDS in China." In *AIDS and Social Policy in China*, eds. Joan Kaufman, Arthur Kleinman, and Tony Saich, 3-14. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center.

Khilnani, Sunil. 2001. "The development of civil society." In *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, eds. Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani, 11-32. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Kipnis, Andrew. 2007. "Neoliberalism reified: sushi discourse and tropes of neoliberalism in the People's Republic of China." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* Vol. 13 (2): 383-400.

Kong, Travis. 2011. *Chinese Male Homosexualities: Memba, Tongzhi and Golden Boy*. London and New York: Routledge.

Kuhn, Robert. 2010. *How China's Leaders Think: The Inside Story of China's Reform and What This Means for the Future*. Singapore: John Wiley & Sons (Asia) Pte. Ltd.

Kuijs, Louis and Tao Wang. 2005. "China's Pattern of Growth: Moving to Sustainability and Reducing Inequality." World Bank, Washington, DC. © World Bank. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/8496 License: CC By 3.0 Unported.

Kulick, Don. 1997. "The Gender of Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes." *American Anthropologist*, 99 (3): 574-585.
----. 1998. *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe. 1985. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso.

Lancaster, Roger. 2011. *Sex Panic and the Punitive State*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Leung, Helen Hok-Sze. 2008. *Undercurrents: Queer Culture and Postcolonial Hong Kong*. Vancouver, Toronto: UBC Press.

Leznoff, Maurice and William Westley. 1956. "The Homosexual Community." *Social Problems* Vol. 3, No. 4: 257-263.

Liang Zai, Li Zhen and Ma Zhongdong. 2014. "Changing Patterns of the Floating Population in China, 2000-2010." *Population and Development Review* Volume 40, Issue 4, December: 695-716. Doi: 10.1111/j.1728-4457.2014.00007.x

Lieberthal, Kenneth. 1992. "Introduction: The 'Fragmented Authoritarianism' Model and Its Limitations," In *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China*, eds. K. Lieberthal and D. Lampton, 1-31. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lin Chunqing, Li Li, Wu Zunyou, Guan Jihui, Xu Yu, Wu Di, Leiber, E., Rotheram-Borus, M.J., and the NIMH Collaborative HIV/STD Prevention Trial Group. 2010. "Entertainment venue visiting and commercial sex in China," *International Journal of Sexual Health* 22, 1: 5-13.

Lin, Dennis C. 2006. "Sissies online: Taiwanese male queers performing sassiness in cyberspaces." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* Vol. 7 (2): 270-288.

Liu, Xin. 2002. *The Otherness of Self: A Genealogy of the Self in Contemporary China*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Louie, Kam. 2002. *Theorizing Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lu Fuming. 2004. "Zhongguo shouci gongbu nantongxinglian renshu ji ganran HIV bingdu qingkuang" [First public statistics on male homosexuality in China], *Xinhuanet*, 1 December. http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2004-12/01/content_2280169.htm, accessed January 24, 2015.

Lu Lin, Jia Manhong, Ma Yanling *et al*. 2008. "The Changing Face of HIV in China." *Nature* Vol. 455, Oct. 2.

Lu Lin, Jia Manhong, Zhang Xiaobo *et al*. 2004. "Analysis for epidemic trend of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome in Yunnan Province of China." *Chinese Journal of Preventive Medicine* September Vol. 38, No. 5.

Luo, Xu. 2002. *Searching for Life's Meaning: Changes and Tensions in the Worldview of Chinese Youth in the 1980s*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Macherey, Pierre. 1992. "Towards A Natural History of Norms." In *Michel Foucault/Philosopher*, ed. and trans. Timothy Armstrong, 176-191. New York: Routlege.

Mackie, Vera. 2012. "Shanghai dancers: gender, coloniality and the modern girl." In *Shadowlines: Women and Borders in Contemporary Asia*, ed. Devleena Ghosh, 80-95. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Mader, Mary. 2011. *Sleights of Reason: Norm, Bisexuality, Development*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Mahmood, Saba. 2005. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Manalansan, Martin. 2003. *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Martin, Biddy, and Chandra Mohanty. 1986. "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?" In *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Martin, Fran and Josephine Ho. 2006. "Editorial Introduction: Trans/Asia, Trans/Gender." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7 (2): 185-187.

McDonald, H. 2005. "Gay revolution puts red China in the pink," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 August.

McMahon, Keith. 1988. *Causality and Containment in Seventeen-Century Chinese Fiction*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.

----. 1995. *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction*. Durham: Duke University Press.

----. 2002. "Sublime Love and the Ethics of Equality in a Homoerotic Novel of the Nineteenth Century: Precious Mirror of Boy Actress." In *Nan Nü: Men,*

Women, and Gender in Early and Imperial China 4, no. 1: 70-109.

McMillan, Jo. 2006. "Selling sexual health: China's emerging sex shop industry." In *Sex and Sexuality in China*, ed. Elaine Jeffreys. London and New York: Routledge.

Messac, Luke and Krishna Probhu. 2013. "Redefining the Possible: The Global AIDS Response." In *Reimagining Global Health: An Introduction*, eds. Paul Farmer, Arthur Kleinman, Jim Kim, and Matthew Basilico. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Meisner, Maurice. 1986. *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic*. New York: Free Press.

Metzger, Thomas. 1977. *Escape from Predicament: Neo-Confucianism and China's Evolving Political Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press.
----. 2001. "The Western concept of civil society in the context of Chinese history." In *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, eds. Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.

Minzner, Carl. 2011. "China's Turn Against Law." *American Journal of Comparative Law* 59: 935-984, available at:http://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/faculty_scholarship/4

Munro, Donald. 1977. *The Concept of Man in Contemporary China*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Naisargi, Dave. 2012. *Queer Activism in India: A Story in the Anthropology of Ethics*. Duke University Press.

Najmabadi, Afsaneh. 2006. "Beyond the America: Are Gender and Sexuality Useful Categories of Analysis?" *Journal of Women's History* Vol. 18 (1), Spring: 11-21.

Namaste, Kim. 1996. "'Tragic Misreading': Queer Theory's Erasure of Transgender Subjectivity." In *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, & Transgender Anthology*, eds. Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason, 183-203. New York and London: New York University Press.

Nanda, Serena. 1990. *Neither Man Nor Woman: The Hijras of India*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publication.

Naughton, Barry. 2005. "The new common economic program: China's Eleventh Five-Year Plan and What It Means". *China Leadership Monitor* 16. http://media. hoover.org/sites/default/files/documents/clm16_bn.pdf accessed April 1, 2015.

Neves, Joshua. 2010. "Civic Beautification Panels in Olympic-Era Beijing." *Spectator* Vol. 30, No. 1, (Spring): 39-45.

Newton, Esther. 1972/1979. *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Nguyen-Vo, Thu-Huong. 2008. *The Ironies of Freedom: Sex, Culture, And Neoliberal Governance in Vietnam*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Oakes, Tim. 2007. "Welcome to paradise!" A Sino-U.S. joint-venture project." In *China's Transformations: The Stories Beyond the Headlines*, eds. Lionel Jensen and Timothy Weston. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Ong, Aihwa. 2006. *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Ong, Aihwa and Stephen Collier, eds. 2005. *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Ortner, Sherry. 1984. "Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 26, No. 1 (January): 126-166.

----. 1989-1990. "Gender Hegemonies." *Cultural Critique No. 14, The Construction of Gender and Modes of Social Division II* (Winter): 35-80.

----. 2006. *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Otis, Eileen. 2011. "Working in Walmart, Kunming: Technology, Outsourcing, and Retail Globalization." In *Walmart in China*, ed. Anita Chan. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

----. 2012. *Markets and Bodies: Women, Service Work, and the Making of Inequality in China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Padilla, Mark. 2007. *The Caribbean Pleasure Industry: Tourism, Sexuality, and AIDS in the Dominican Republic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pan, Suiming. 2006. "Transformations in the primary life cycle: the origins and nature of China's sexual revolution." In *Sex and Sexuality in China*, ed. Elaine Jeffreys. London and New York: Routledge.

----. 2014. "'Nanbannvzhuang maiyin' daigei women shenme qishi? [What do we learn from male-to-female transgendered prostitution?]" accessed on January 29, 2015 http://helanonline.cn/article/7521

Pan Suiming and Huang Yingying. 2013. *Xingzhibian: 21shiji zhongguorende xingshenghuo* (Changes of Sex: Chinese People's Sexual Life in the 21st Century). Beijing: China Renmin University Press.

Peletz, Michael. 2009. *Gender Pluralism: Southeast Asia since Early Modern Times*. New York: Routledge.

----. 2013. "Malaysia's Syariah Judiciary as a Global Assemblage: Islamization, Corporatization, and Other Transformations in Context." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 55, No. 3: 603-634.

----. 2015. "Neoliberalism and the Punitive Turn in Southeast Asia: Implications for Gender, Sexuality, and Graduated Pluralism" (in press)

People's Daily Online. "The History of AIDS in China." 16: 43, November 22, 2009. Retrieved from *People's Daily Online* on September 19, 2013.

Povinelli, Elizabeth. 2001. "Radical Worlds: The Anthropology of Incommensurability and Inconceivability." *Annual Review of Anthropology* Vol. 30: 319-334.

----. 2006. *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Povinelli, Elizabeth and George Chauncey. 1999. "Thinking Sexuality Transnationally." *GLQ* 5 no. 4: 439-49.

Pun, Ngai. 2003. "Subsumption or Consumption? The Phantom of Consumer Revolution in 'Globalizing' China." *Cultural Anthropology* 18 (4): 469-492.

Pye, Lucian. 1996. "The State and the Individual: An Overview Interpretation." In *The Individual and the State in China*, ed. Brian Hook. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Rabinow, Paul. 1997. "Introduction." In *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, 1: XI-XLII, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: New Press.

Ravishankar, Nirmala *et al*. 2009. "Financing of global health: tracking development

assistance for health from 1990 to 2007." *The Lancet* Vol. 373, No. 9681: 2113-2124.

Rawski, Thomas. 2002. "Recent Developments in China's Labor Economy," MS (Pittsburgh, January 24, 2002).

Reddy, Gayatri. 2005. *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Remick, Elizabeth. 2014. *Regulating Prostitution in China: Gender and Local Statebuilding 1900-1937*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Rofel, Lisa. 1999a. *Other Modernities: Gendered Yearnings in China after Socialism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

----1999b. "Qualities of Desire," *GLQ* Vol. 5 (4): 451-474.

----2002. "Modernity's Masculine Fantasies." In *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*, ed. Bruce Knauft. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

----2007. *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Rubin, Gayle. 1975. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex." In *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter, 157-210. New York: Monthly Review Press.

----. 1984. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality." In *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole Vance, 267-319. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Rui Xia. 2005. "Asphalt Net Covers China's West." *Asia Times Online*. http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China_Business/GI15Cb01.html (accessed January 1, 2015).

Saich, A. 2000. "Negotiating the State: The Development of Social Organizations in China," *China Quarterly* 161: 1-24.

Sang, Tze-Lan. 2003. *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

----. 2006. "The transgender body in Wang Dulu's Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon." In Fran Martin and Larissa Heinrich (eds.). *Embodied Modernities: Corporeality, Representation, and Chinese Culture*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Sassen, Saskia. 1998. *Globalization and Its Discontents: Essays on the New Mobility of People and Money*. New York: New Press.

Schein, Louisa. 1994. "The Consumption of Color and the Politics of White Skin in Post-Mao China." *Social Text* No. 41 (Winter): 141-164.

----. 2000. *Minority Rules: The Miao and the Feminine in China's Cultural Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.

----. 2002. "Gender and Internal Orientalism in China." In *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, eds. Susan Brownell and Jeffrey Wasserstrom. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Schwartz, Benjamin. 1964. *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West*.

----. 1985. *The World of Thought in Ancient China*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Schwartz, Jonathan. 2009. "The impact of crises on social service provision in China: the state and society respond to SARS." In *State and Society Responses to Social*

Welfare Needs in China, eds. Jonathan Schwartz and Shawn Shieh. London and New York: Routledge.

Schwartz, Jonathan, and Shawn Shieh, eds. 2009. *State and Society Responses to Social Welfare Needs in China*. London and New York: Routledge.

Scott, Joan. 1991. "The Evidence of Experience." *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 17, No. 4 (Summer).

Sedgwick, Eve. 1993. "Is the Rectum Straight?: Identification and Identity in The Wings of the Dove." In *Tendencies* (Series Q), 73-103. Durham: Duke University Press.

Seidman, Steven. 1993. "Identity and Politics in a 'Postmodern' Gay Culture." In *Fear of A Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Shieh, Shawn. 2009. "Beyond corporatism and civil society: three modes of state-NGO interaction in China." In *State and Society Responses to Social Welfare Needs in China*, eds. Jonathan Schwartz and Shawn Shieh. London and New York: Routledge.

Shieh, Shawn and Jonathan Schwartz. 2009. "State and society responses to China's social welfare needs: an introduction to the debate." In *State and Society Responses to Social Welfare Needs in China*, eds. Jonathan Schwartz and Shawn Shieh. London and New York: Routledge.

Sigley, Gary. 2004. "Liberal Despotism: Population planning, subjectivity, and government in contemporary China," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* Vol. 29, 5: 557-75.

Sigley, Gary and Elaine Jeffreys. 1999. "Interview: On 'Sex' and 'Sexuality' in China: A Conversation with Pan Suiming." *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* Vol. 31 (1): 50-58.

Singer, Merrill. 1989. "The Coming of Age of Critical Medical Anthropology." *Social Science and Medicine* Vol. 28, No. 11: 1193-1203.

Sinnott, Megan. 2004. *Toms and Dees: Transgender Identity and Female Same-Sex Relationships in Thailand*. Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press.

Smith, M. K. 2001. "Community" in *the encyclopedia of informal education*, http://www.infed.org/community/community.htm.

Smith, Miriam. 2008. *Political Institutions and Lesbian and Gay Rights in the United States and Canada*. New York: Routledge.

Solinger, Dorothy. 1999. "China's Floating Population: Implications for State and Society." In *The Paradox of China's Post-Mao Reforms*, eds. Roderick MacFarquhar and Merle Goldman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. ----. 2003. "Chinese Urban Jobs and the WTO." *The China Journal* No. 49, 61-87.

Stallybrass, Peter and Allon White. 1986. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Stout, Noell. 2014. *After Love: Queer Intimacy and Erotic Economies in Post-Soviet Cuba*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Stryker, Susan. 2008. *Transgender History*. Berkeley, CA: Seal Press.

Stryker, Susan, Currah, and Moore. 2008. "Introduction: Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?" *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* Vol. 36, Numbers 3&4, Fall/Winter: 11-22.

Stryker, Susan & Stephen Whittle. 2006. *The Transgender Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge.

Su, Yong and Chen Lanjian. 2014. *Modern Oriental Corporate Culture: A Case Collection*. DOI 10.1007/978-3-642-35214-0_4, Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg.

Sun, Jiangping, Liu, Hui, Li, Hui, et al. 2010. "Contributions of international cooperation projects to the HIV/AIDS response in China." *International Journal of Epidemiology* 39: ii14-ii20.

Sutherland, Dylan and Jennifer Hsu. 2012. *HIV/AIDS in China—The Economic and Social Determinants*. New York: Routledge.

Tan, See-Kam. 2000. "The Cross-Gender Performances of Yam Kim-Fei, or the Queer Factor in Postwar Hong Kong Cantonese Opera/Opera Films." Co-published simultaneously in *Journal of Homosexuality* Vol. 39, No.3/4: 201-211; and in *Queer Asian Cinema: Shadows in the Shade*, ed. Adnrew Grossman, 201-211.

Tapp, Nicholas. 2010. "Yunnan: Ethnicity and Economies—Markets and Mobility." *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, 11: 2, 97-110, DOI: 10.1080/14442211003730322.

Taube, Markus and Mehmet Ögütçü. 2002. "Main issues on foreign investment in China's regional development: Prospect and policy challenges." In *Foreign Direct Investment in China: Challenges and Prospects for Regional Development*. OECD.

Tong, Ge. 2008. "The Gay Community: The Background of its Formation and the Development of Various Forms of Activities." In *Ecological Report on the Chinese Homosexual Population (Part I)*, eds. Tong Ge, He Xiaopei, Guo Yaqi *et al*. Beijing: Beijing Gender Health Education Institute.

Tong, Ge, He Xiaopei, Guo Yaqi *et al*, eds. 2008. *Ecological Report on the Chinese Homosexual Population (Part I)*. Beijing: Beijing Gender Health Education Institute.

Tongyu (Common Language). 2011. *Oral History of Lesbian and Bisexual Women Community Development in Beijing* (*Beijing Lala Shequ Fazhan Koushushi*).

Tu Wei-Ming. 1991. "The Enlightenment Mentality and the Chinese Intellectual Dilemma." In *Perspectives on Modern China, Four Anniversaries*, eds. Kenneth Lieberthal *et al*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe.

Valentine, David. 2003. "'I went to bed with my own kind once': the erasure of desire in the name of identity," *Language and Communication* 23: 123-138.
----. 2007. *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Vance, Carol. 1991. "Anthropology Rediscovers Sexuality: A Theoretical Comment." *Social Science and Medicine* 33 (8): 875-884.

Van Gulik, Robert Hans. 1961/1974. *Sexual Life in Ancient China*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Varela, Maria, Dikita Dhawan, and Antk Engel, eds. 2011. *Hegemony and Heteronormativity: Revisiting "The Political" in Queer Politics*. Farnham: Ashgate Pub.

Vitiello, Giovanni. 1992. "The Dragon's Whim: Ming and Qing Homoerotic Tales from The Cut Sleeve." *T'oung pao* 78: 341-73.
----. 2011. *The Libertine's Friend: Homosexuality and Masculinity in Late Imperial China*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Volpp, Sophie. 1994. "The Discourse on Male Marriage: Li Yu's 'A Male Mencious's Mother.'" *positions* 2.1: 113-132.
----2001. "Classifying Lust: The Seventeenth-Century Vogue of Male Love." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* Vol. 61: 1 (June), 77-117.

Wang Shaoguang and Hu Angang. 1999. *The Political Economy of Uneven Development: The Case of China*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.

Warner, Michael. 2002. "Publics and Counterpublics." *Public Culture* Vol. 14 (1) Winter: 49-90.

Wei, Wei. 2007. "'Wandering men' No Longer Wander Around: The Production and Transformation of Local Homosexual Identities in Contemporary Chengdu, China." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 8 (4): 572-588.
----. 2012. *Gongkai: Dangdai Chengdu "Tongzhi" Kongjian de Xingcheng he Bianqian* [Going Public: The production and transformation of queer spaces in contemporary Chengdu, China]. Shanghai: Shanghai Sanlian Shudian.

Weigel, Jonathan, Matthew Basilico and Paul Farmer. 2013. "Taking Stock of Foreign Aid." In *Reimagining Global Health: An Introduction*, eds. Paul Farmer *et al*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wiegman, Robyn and Elizabeth Wilson. 2015. "Introduction: Antinormativity's Queer Conventions." *differences* Vol. 26 (1): 1-25.

Weinbaum, Alys *et al*, eds. 2008. *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Wekker, Gloria. 2006. *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Weston, Kath. 1993. "Lesbian/Gay Studies in the House of Anthropology." *Annual Review of Anthropology* Vol. 22: 339-367.
----. 1991/1997. *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Wexler, R., Ying, Y., and Young, N. 2006. "NGO Advocacy in China: A Special Report from China Development Brief," *China Development Brief*. Online, available at: www. Chinadevelopmentbrief.org.

White, Sydney. 2010. "The Political Economy of Ethnicity in Yunnan's Lijiang Basin." *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 11: 2, 142-158, DOI: 10.1080/14442211003727989.

Whyte, Martin and William Parish. 1984. *Urban Life in Contemporary China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

WHO/UNAIDS Working Group on Global HIV/AIDS and STI surveillance. 2000. *Guidelines for Second Generation HIV Surveillance*. Accessed on December 17, 2015 http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/surveillance/en/cds_edc_2000_5.pdf

Willmott, P. 1989. *Community Initiatives. Patterns and Prospects*. London: Policy Studies Institute.

Wilson, Ara. 2006. "Queering Asia." *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the*

Asian Context 14 (November), accessed on July 22, 2015: http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue14/wilson.html

Womack, Brantly and Guangzhi Zhao. 1994. "The many worlds of China's provinces: foreign trade and diversification." In *China Deconstructs: Politics, Trade and Regionalism*, ed. David Goodman. New York: Routledge.

Wong, Alvin Ka Hin. 2012. "Transgenderism as a Heuristic Device: On the Cross-historical and Transnational Adaptation of the Legend of the White Snake." In *Transgender China*, ed. Howard Chiang. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Wu, Cuncun. 2004. *Homoerotic Sensibilities in Late Imperial China*. New York: RoutledgeCurzon.

Wu, Zunyou, Sun Xinhua, Sheena Sullivan et al. 2006. "HIV Testing in China." *Science* Vol. 312, 9 June. http://www.old.biovip.com/topics/3/pdf/105.pdf. Access Dec. 2, 2013.

Wu, Zunyou, Sheena Sullivan, Yu Wang et al. 2007. "Evolution of China's response to HIV/AIDS." *The Lancet* Vol. 369, February 24: 679-90.

Wu, Zunyou, Wang Yu, Mao Yurong et al. 2011. "The integration of multiple HIV/AIDS projects into a coordinated national programme in China." *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*. 89: 227-233. http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/89/3/10-082552/en/. Access Dec. 3, 2013.

Xing, Jianmin and Zhang Konglai. 2008. "Public Health Issues Facing the Gay Population" (*Tongzhi Renqun de Gonggong Weisheng Wenti*). In Tong Ge et al. (eds.) *Ecological Report on the Chinese Homosexual Population (Part 1)*. Beijing: Beijing Gender Health Education Institute.

Yan Yunxiang. 2003. *Private Life under Socialism: Love, Intimacy, and Family Change in a Chinese Village, 1949-1999*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

----. 2009. *The Individualization of Chinese Society*. Oxford & New York: Berg.

----. 2000. "Of Hamburger and Social Space: Consuming McDonald's in Beijing." In *The Consumer Revolution in Urban China*, ed. Deborah Davis. Berkeley: University of California Press.

----. 2010a. "The Chinese path to individualization." *The British Journal of Sociology* Vol. 61, Issue 3: 489-512.

----. 2010b. "Introduction: Conflicting Images of the Individual and Contested Process of Individualization." In *iChina: The Rise of the Individual in Modern Chinese Society*, eds. Mette Halskov Hansen and Rune Svarverud. Copenhagen: Nias Press.

Yang, Mayfair Mei-Hui. 1999. "From Gender Erasure to Gender Difference: State Feminism, Consumer Sexuality, and Women's Public Sphere in China." In *Spaces of Their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China*, ed. Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Yang, Tianhua. 2008. "The Traditional Mass Media's Reporting on the Topic of 'Gay'." In *Ecological Report on the Chinese Homosexual Population (Part I)*, eds. Tong Ge *et al*. Beijing: Beijing Gender Health Education Institute.

Yang Wanli. 2010. "Gay couple tells of love and fears for Valentine's Day," *China Daily*, 12 February: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-02/12/content_9466988.htm, accessed January 24, 2015.

Yau, Ching. 2010. "Dreaming of Normal while Sleeping with Impossible: Introduction." In *As Normal as Possible: Negotiating Sexuality and Gender in Mainland China and Hong Kong*, ed. Yao Ching. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Zeitlin, Judith. 1993. *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale*. Stanford University Press.

Zhang, Beichuan and Chu Quansheng. 2005. "MSM and HIV/AIDS in China." *Cell Research* 15 (11-12) Nov-Dec: 858-864.

Zhang, Beichuan, Liu Dianchang, Li Xiufang and Hu Tiezhong. 2000. "A survey of men who have sex with men: mainland China", *American Journal of Public Health* 90, 12: 1949-50.

Zhang, Konglai. 2001. "Trends in Sexually Transmitted Diseases and HIV/AIDS." Paper presented at Health Care East and West: Moving into the 21st Century Conference, Boston, June 24-29.

Zhang, Li. 2006. "Contesting Spatial Modernity in Late-Socialist China." *Current Anthropology* Vol. 47, No. 3 (June): 461-484.
----. 2010a. *In Search of Paradise: Middle-Class Living in a Chinese Metropolis*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
----. 2010b. "Postsocialist Urban Dystopia?" In *Noir Urbanisms: Dystopic Images of the Modern City*, ed. Gyan Prakash. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
----. 2012. "Afterword: Flexible Postsocialist Assemblages from the Margin." *positions* 20, (2): 659-667.

Zhao, Suisheng. 1993. "Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour: Elite Politics in Post-Tiananmen China." *Asian Survey* Vol. 33, No. 8: 739-756.

Zheng Lu and Xiang Deng. 2011. "China's Western Development Strategy: Policies, Effects and Prospects." Munich Personal RePEc Archive Paper No. 35201, posted 5. December 2011 16:30 UTC. http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/35201/ accessed January 2, 2015.

Zheng, Siqi et al. "Urban Villages in China: A 2008 Survey of Migrant Settlements in Beijing." *Eurasian Geography and Economics* Vol. 50, No. 4: 425-446.

Zheng, Tiantian. 2009. *Red Lights: The Lives of Sex Workers in Postsocialist China*. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.

Zheng, Xiuman. 2001. "Industrialization of the Agro-Food Chain—An Effective Way to Enhance Agricultural Competitiveness under WTO." In *China's Agriculture in the International Trading System*, ed. OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). DOI: 10.1787/9789264193000-en

Zhou, Zuyan. 2012. "The Androgynous Ideal in Scholar-Beauty Romances: A Historical and Cultural View." In *Transgender China*, ed. Howard Chiang. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Zhu, Zhenming. 2008. "China's Opening-Up Strategy and Its Economic Relations with ASEAN Countries—A Case Study of Yunnan Province." Institute of

Developing Economies, Japan External Trade Organizations.

Zou, John. 2006. "Cross-dressed nation: Mei Lanfang and the clothing of modern Chinese men." In *Embodied Modernities: Corporeality, Representation, and Chinese Culture*, eds. Fran Martin and Larissa Heinrich. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.