

Post-Oppositional Queer Politics and
the Non-confrontational Negotiation of Queer Desires

in Contemporary China

by

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ABSTRACT

The meaning of sexuality is not only specific to particular time periods in history; it is also culturally specific. Informed by transnationalism, queer of color critique, postcolonial feminism, and public sphere theory, my dissertation investigates the complex dynamic between what I call "Chinese queer subjects" and their bio-genetic families in a time of queer globalization. By centering the life experiences of Chinese queer subjects through interviewing and rhetorical analysis, this project intervenes in the teleological discourse of "coming out" that is circulated both in transnational LGBT movements and within academia. Through a materialist analysis of the "coming out" discourse in mainland China, I reveal why and how the discourse of "coming out" is prioritized in Chinese LGBT movements in order to foster a domestic queer market in mainland China. Of most significance to this project are the two non-confrontational strategies that some Chinese queer subjects employ to navigate the tension between family and sexuality: first, the reticent "coming with" strategy that engages the home space with queer desires, transforming the heteronormative family institution from within, toward a more livable queer life; second, the *xinghun* strategy, a marriage arrangement that many Chinese gay men and lesbian women partake in as a means of being gay or lesbian without exiting the family kinship system. The practices of reticent "coming with" and *xinghun* challenge the binary between family and sexuality, suggesting that queerness can emerge and thrive without exiting the (heterosexual) family; they give us some concrete examples of what AnaLouise Keating calls "post-oppositional politics" among some Chinese queer subjects.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Beginning from the time I passed my thirtieth birthday, phone calls to my family in China would include the same question almost every time: “When will you get married?” My mother, for the first time since I had memory, expressed her worry about me. She was worried that I would not be able to find my happiness “as a woman”; that they (my parents) would not be happy until I found my “happiness.” Even my eldest brother who was suffering from an unhappy marriage has started to urge me to enter into marriage before “it is too late.”

My parents and my brother repeatedly advise me that one day I would realize that I need someone, a significant other, to take care of me for the rest of my life. On many occasions in conversations like these, I would be about to tell them that I was in relationship with a woman, and that I was happy. But I always end up in silence instead. I cannot find it in myself to tell them about my secret life on the other side of the ocean. So I keep running away, thousands of miles away from home.

As a critical scholar who is committed to gender and sexual justice, I find myself in an awkward position in relation to the publicity of my sexuality. I want to share my relationship with my family; this is a significant part of my life. I want to show my family that I am able to be happy. But deep inside my heart, I know that the word “homosexual,” “lesbian,” or “*lala*” would only push my family away from me. I want to “come out.” Yet, I also want to “come home.” I feel that my same-sex desire is in antagonism with my Chinese family. I cannot abandon either of them. So I end up in silence.

But I am not alone. I have heard and/or seen hundreds of similar stories from my friends and from posts in all kinds of online forums. I have also been the protagonist in some version of these stories. For example, there was the time when I made a phone call to a friend's mother, pretending to be the girlfriend of her gay son. My friend's mother had cancer. She did not know that her son was gay. Or perhaps she knew, but they had never talked about it and she never said anything about it either. The day that I called my friend's mother, pretending to be her son's girlfriend, she sounded so happy on the phone. It was a precious moment because she was happy to speak with me even though we spoke in different dialects; she was very happy even though we hardly understood each other. As a queer scholar, I did not want to perform heterosexuality. But I also did not know how to turn down a desperate son who was so helpless to see his mother tortured by the pain of cancer. What does one do when your friend tells you that his mother is with cancer and that all she ever wanted was to see him "have his own family?" I know what I once did when faced with this question. I once chose to pretend to be a girlfriend for a gay friend's mother. Then, there were those times when I was invited by some of my gay friends to participate in *xinghun*. This is a new form of marriage arrangement that many Chinese gays and lesbians partake in, as a solution to maintain same-sex relationship without exiting the family kinship system. When met with these invitations, I would politely laugh them away.

Experiences like these raise a critical question for me: What does it mean to be queer¹ in contemporary China? More specifically, what does it mean to be queer in a culture that is so heavily family-oriented? Thomas Lindlof and Bryan Taylor (2002) note that “research ideas frequently arise from quests for self-understanding. Indeed, the interpretive approach appeals to many who want to study their own social worlds” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 77). In this sense, my dissertation project is also a journey of self-understanding, a process of making sense of my life and of the lives of others who share similar struggles with me. Started from this interpretivist impulse, my project investigates the discursive construction and material conditions of queer desires in mainland China from a critical perspective.

Situating this study in contemporary historical moment when visible homosexual identity and communities emerge in mainland China (since the 1990s), I investigate the complex dynamic between what I call “Chinese queer subjects” (I will fully explain what I mean by “Chinese queer subjects” in Chapter 2) and their bio-genetic families. Questions that I ask in the process of this investigation include: How does the transnational discourse of sexual identity affect the family dynamic and marriage arrangements among Chinese queer subjects? Against the backdrop of transnational LGBT movements, how do Chinese queer subjects negotiate the tension between their own same-sex desires and the familial expectation for them to get married and to procreate? My specific interest here is in examining the non-confrontational politics of Chinese queer subjects in a largely family-oriented society. That is, how do Chinese

¹ I realize that queerness is much more than same-sex desires. However, for the purpose of this study, I will focus on homosexuality, while discussing other queerness as a context of my project.

queer subjects communicate their queer desires without risking their familial membership? In addition, how do Chinese queer subjects deal with marriage pressures without negating their familial obligation and without neglecting their relationship with their same-sex partners?

In the following sections, I introduce contextual information that is important for understanding my dissertation project. First, I discuss the discursive conditions of homosexuality in both Euro-American and Chinese contexts, including notes on the colonizing effect of identity-based homosexuality through the circulation of transnational queer flows. This is followed by a discussion of the materiality of queer life in China. I end the chapter with a preview into materials that I will be discussing in the coming chapters, such as the types of non-confrontational negotiation strategies used by Chinese queer subjects, with the intention of showing the reader how I will be addressing the research questions that I discussed above.

Homosexuality in Discourse

Foundational to the questions that I explore in my dissertation is an understanding of the transnationalization of sexuality. With a growing realization of the effects of globalization, queer studies have witnessed an emerging scholarship that examines the transnationalization of sexuality (Altman, 1996, 2001; Manalansan, 2006; Liu & Rofel, 2010; Liu, 2010). Elisabeth A. Povinelli and George Chauncey (1999) term this the “‘the transnational turn’ in lesbian and gay studies” (p. 439).

In a general sense, globalization is a process of interaction and integration arising from the interchange of products, labor, capital, technology, ideas, and values around the world. There is no doubt that globalization has great influence on our everyday life.

However, works on globalization hold very different views on its effects: some celebrate globalization as a homogenizing influence that creates a borderless world while others see it as “a neocolonial movement of ideas and capital from West to non-West” (Grewal & Kaplan, 2001, p. 663). The question that is of greatest relevance to this dissertation is: What is the effect of globalization on sexual discourses in China?

One of the key concerns about the global movements of sexual discourses across national borders is that transnational queer flows would herald a homogenization of sexual mores and practices. The concern continues to exist even though transnational queer studies have shown that instead of a homogenizing of sexual mores and practices, hybrid forms of sexual discourses and performances have often been created in response to dominant Euro-American sexual ideologies (Patton, 2002; Manalansan, 2003; Rofel, 2007; Martin, 2009). Thus, from a critical intercultural communication perspective, it continues to be important and relevant to investigate how Euro-American discourses about sexuality circulate globally, what effects they have globally, and how they are taken up, revised, and/or rejected in “non-native” contexts.

I begin this discussion of the transnationalization of sexuality by detailing the various shifts in discourses on sexuality over time and across cultural contexts. In the following pages, I first discuss homosexuality as discourse in Western (i.e., Euro-American) history and culture. Following that, I will discuss homosexuality as discourse in Chinese history and culture. I then tie these two discussions together by discussing the colonizing effect of modern Euro-American “identity-based homosexuality” on sexual discourses in contemporary China.

Historicizing Sexuality in Western Contexts

Sexuality has never been a stable category in the history of Euro-American society. While sexual orientations are commonly seen today as determinants of personal identity, premodern Western societies did not perceive sexuality as a determining feature of identity (Sullivan, 2003). For instance, before the nineteenth century, Anglo-European people perceived sexuality as being determined by one's sexual acts, not one's sexual orientation (Halperin, 1990). Modern homosexuality emerged in Western culture during the latter part of the nineteenth century and was established in the twentieth century (Halperin, 1990, pp. 8-9). In the United States, the shifting meaning of sexuality was noted by Chauncey (1995) as such:

...earlier culture permitted men to engage in sexual relations with other men, often on a regular basis, without requiring them to regard themselves or be regarded by others as gay. ...Many men...neither understood nor organized their sexual practices along a hetero-homosexual axis (p. 65).

In *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, David Halperin (1990) argues that homosexuality and heterosexuality are modern, Western, bourgeois productions. He notes that before the Victorian era, Anglo-European people did not perceive of homosexuality as a distinct identity. As stated earlier, sexuality in those days was understood in terms of individuals' sexual acts, not their sexual orientation. The conception of homosexuality as an identity is a contemporary construction (Chauncey, 1994; D' Emilio, 1983; Foucault, 1978; Halperin, 1989; Katz, 1983; Prosser, 2006; Sedgwick, 1990), a process that Eve Sedgwick (1990) calls "sexual specification" or "species formation" (p. 9).

Michael Sullivan (2003) noted that the term “homosexual” was coined in 1869. Before the nineteenth century, homosexuality was not thought of as a separate orientation. In fact, Dennis Altman (2001) points out that the development of homosexuality as an identity did not emerge until the nineteenth century in Europe (p. 103). It was only at the end of the 1960s that the large-scale construction of a lesbian/gay identity as a “master identity” was developed in the Western world (Altman, 2001, p. 105). In short, same-sex desires and same-sex activities have always existed, but gay men and lesbians have not always existed; they are the product of a specific cultural context and historical period. That being said, homosexuality as an identity is still, in important ways, a useful myth. The modern invention of identity-based homosexuality is a politicized notion. It creates new “ways of relating, types of existence” and “types of exchanges between individuals” (as cited in Elliot, 2007, p. 98).

Recent historicizing studies suggest that there may be “no continuous, defining essence of ‘homosexuality’” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 44). This is because the differences between modern homosexuality (as an identity) and previous arrangements of same-sex relations are so profound and so integrally rooted in other social categories (p. 44). In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978) states that the modern category of sexuality, or what we call “homosexuality” today, dates from 1870. In this book, Foucault describes homosexuality as:

Characterized...less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of internal androgyny, a

hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species (p. 43).

This description shows a shifting understanding of homosexuality: from sexual practices into non-normative gender identification, both of which are different from today's conception of homosexuality as a stable, sexual orientation.

In addition to being a product of a specific cultural and historical time period, identity-based homosexuality is also a product of the complex intertwining of sexuality, gender, and class. Halperin (1990) notes that homosexuality became considered a criminal offense in many Euro-American societies during the Victorian era. It was in this historical context that the idea of a deviant gay lifestyle arose. With the idea of a deviant gay lifestyle came the emergence of a sexual orientation that was independent of one's gender identity and, one that was related to but distinct from individuals' sexual practices (Halperin, 1990, pp. 8-9). Modern homosexuality as we know it today was born and sexuality became differentiated and isolated from gender.

This differentiation and isolation of sexuality from gender, Chauncey (1995) believes, is also a class issue. Before the emergence of modern identity homosexuality, same-sex desires were usually associated with "a status of a woman or even a prostitute" (p. 100). Same-sex desires were also associated with social outcasts, in general. As a class response, middle class gay men in America began to argue that their homosexuality "revealed nothing abnormal in their gender persona" (p. 100). In order to disassociate themselves from male prostitutes, lower-class gay men and social outcasts, they forged a new kind of homosexual identity. This partly explains why the dominant homosexual culture in Euro-American societies today is predominately a middle-class phenomenon.

With the ascent to power of the middle class in the United States, homosexual identity “become[s] the regulator of working-class racial, gender, and sexual differences” (William Wilson, 1987, cited in Ferguson, 2004, p. 147).

From the above discussion, we can see that homosexuality as an identity is a modern construction. The meanings of homosexuality have changed over time in Western society. In addition, categories like gender, social class, and sexuality are profoundly intertwined with and not separable from each other; what was called “homosexual” or “gay” in the past may signify something different from modern identity-based homosexuality.

Culturalizing Sexuality in China

As discussed in the previous section, the meaning of sexuality is not only specific to particular time periods in history; sexuality is also culturally specific. Different cultures have different ways of conceptualizing what we understand today as “homosexuality.” According to Sullivan (2003), multiple early accounts of homosexuality indicate that a permissive attitude with same-sex relationships existed in many cultures, such as in early Greek and Roman societies (p. 4). In Native American culture, the *berdache* (people who are involved in same-sex intimacy)² were categorized as a third sex with double spirits (Driskill, 2010; Sullivan, 2003), indicating that same sex desires were understood more as a gender issue than as an issue of sexuality.³ In yet other

² *Berdache* was once used to name such people, but because that word is Persian and thus exogenous to Native American cultures, some Native Americans who wish to reclaim this tradition call for us to use the language of Two Spirit.

³ In *Passions of the Cut Sleeve*, Bret Hinsch (1990) notes that homosexuality in ancient China is theorized as “transgenderal homosexuality,” in which one partner acts or even dresses as a woman, thereby allowing the relationship to be structured according to masculine/feminine roles.

cultures, the “active” (insertive) partner in a same-sex relationship is not thought of as a homosexual, but the “passive” (receptive) effeminate partner is (Sullivan, 2003). These cultural variations demonstrate that the dominant Euro-American framework of homosexuality-as-identity is ill-suited and insufficient to explain sexual practices in other cultural contexts. Sexuality is differently practiced and differently understood in each cultural group. Sexuality should thus be understood and investigated by listening to each cultural group *on its own terms*, in relation to their specific histories and their specific cultural systems and values.

I begin this section on culturalizing sexuality in China by tracing the meanings of homosexuality starting from the premodern times. In doing so, it is not my intention to subscribe to a precolonial past of the “Chinese sexual culture” in this project. As Cindy Patton (2002) points out, “the tendency to view ‘native’ sexualities as unproblematic until colonial regimes try to control them” is just as problematic as “the belief that ‘native’ sexualities are unarticulatable and oppressed until liberationists arrive to help them speak” (p. 207). The former presumes a “cultural specificity” and “cultural purity” of Chinese sexuality, which may be complicit with the colonial discourse it aims to dismantle (Liu & Ding, 2006). That being said, a discussion of the precolonial history and practice of homosexuality in China is significant to this project because Chinese queers are subjects conditioned by history: understanding such a history will help us to make sense of the strategies they employ. Narrating the precolonial past is also an important step toward demystifying current dominant sexual discourse in China. It is an important step towards “orientating our postcolonial presents and futures” (Aiello et al.,

2013, p. 102). It is for these reasons and with these understandings that I delineate a brief history of same-sex desires in China in the following pages.

John D' Emilio (1983) reminds us that homosexual behavior is different from homosexual identity (p. 104). Local knowledge systems in China have long framed homosexuality as a sexual practice, a behavior rather than an identity. Premodern Chinese literatures primarily record homosexual behavior between men. There is a well-established body of Chinese literature from premodern times that demonstrates a rich tradition of male homosexual behavior in ancient China. In these literatures, homosexuality is mainly constructed as sexual practice, rather than as an identity (Chou, 2000; Kong, 2011).

It is salient to note here that premodern Chinese literatures on homosexuality are mainly about same-sex desires between men. There is very little record of same-sex affection and sexual interactions between women in these literatures. In Tze-Ian Sang's book, *The Emerging Lesbian* (2003), Sang points out that in comparison to the rich literature about male homosexuality in Chinese history, there was surprisingly a complete absence of records on female-female eroticism and affect in traditional Chinese moral and legal codes (p. 21). It was not until the 1910s and 1920s that female same-sex desire gained increased visibility in public discussions (p. 7). This period coincided with upper- and middle-class women's entrance into wage labor. This historical time period also saw women's unprecedented participation in public life, and their relative independence from the patriarchal family. The growing visibility of female same-sex desire in public discussion in this period was thus a result of Chinese women's rising economic, social and political status in society. It was during this period, in the 1910s and 1920s, that a

new taxonomy of female same-sex love (女同性爱, *nv tong xing ai*) was introduced to China, thereby creating a hypothetical symmetry between female and male homosexualities (Sang, 2003, p. 17).

Just as there is a distinct history of documenting same-sex desires in premodern Chinese literature, the ways in which same-sex desires were understood in premodern Chinese society were also distinct. According to Wah-shan Chou (2000), same-sex activities in China were historically portrayed in predominantly social rather than sexual terms (pp. 22-23). That is, during premodern times, same-sex activities were understood as social roles, social relations, and/or as a matter of style. Premodern Chinese culture recognized the differences between same-sex and different-sex eroticism. But sexual desire in and of itself “neither signals a master category of identity nor is it the constitutive principle of the self” (Chou, 2000, p. 22). Homosexuality was seen not as an essential condition monopolized by a particular group, but as a social practice that individuals could experience as specific social relations (Chou, 2000, p. 22). Therefore it is in this sense that it may be said that in the premodern Chinese cultural ontology, there were no homosexual people, only homosexual practices.

It should be clear by now that in premodern Chinese society, there was not such a clear boundary between homosexuality and heterosexuality as identity-based orientations. Same-sex desires and sexual practices were not the monopolized domain of “gay people”; homosexual activities could be partaken in by anyone with the means to do so. In particular, it is salient to note that same-sex activities were primarily a lifestyle or a hobby of the upper class in premodern Chinese society. In this sense, homosexuality was

understood as a social role and a manner of social relations. Homosexuality was hence also a matter of style, a way of being in the world.

Given this particular understanding of sexuality in premodern China, it is thus sensible that engaging in homosexual behavior does not make one sexually “abnormal.” Instead, “normal” sexuality is understood as a continuum of acts and experiences. Homosexual and heterosexual interactions are both situated within this continuum of “normal” sexual acts and experiences. Through the lens of this particular perspective, same-sex desire is seen as common human experience at best and behavioral perversion at worst (Kong, 2011; Chou, 2000). Such an understanding of homosexuality is reflected in today’s language where homosexuality (同性恋 *tongxinglian*) is often associated with “playing with” (玩同性恋 *wan tongxinglian*) in mainland China. This once again demonstrates the Chinese understanding that same-sex interaction is something people do, rather than any essential factor that determines who people are.

It becomes pertinent to ask at this point-- if homosexuality is understood as “normal” sexual behavior in the Chinese cultural context, then what is considered sexual deviance? In conventional Chinese culture, one’s sexual normativity is less defined by one’s sexual preference than by one’s willingness and ability to fulfill one’s filial duties, in particular, the reproductive duty (Chou, 2000, pp. 24-25). In other words, one’s sexual deviance is not determined by the sex of one’s sexual partner(s) but by the (lack of) adherence to the ascribed filial duty of bearing children. Put in a different way, according to the Confucian logic in Chinese society, having same-sex desires does not absolve one from the responsibility of engaging in heterosexual activities that ensure the carrying-on of the family bloodline.

The above-mentioned connotations of sexuality began to shift after the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Specifically, the Maoist era (1949-1978) witnessed a dramatic change in the way that sexuality was understood in Chinese society. This was a period where political tensions were high. Against the international backdrop of the cold war, homosexuality was reconstructed as a moral aberration and corruption from the West. Kong (2011) describes the meaning of sexuality during this particular historical period in the following manner:

Homosexuality...was increasingly seen as deviance and crime. Homosexuality had increasingly been categorized as a type of “hooliganism” (*liumang zui*, 流氓罪), an umbrella term that referred to a wide range of social misbehaviors. The homosexual as social outcast, characterized as a “hooligan” (*liumang*, 流氓), has thereby been a dominant, socially stigmatized image (p. 154).

The effect of this new discursive construction of sexuality was not only that it invited social control on individuals who engaged in same-sex activities; it also directed the responsibility of disciplining individuals who engaged in such activities to the parental figures of each family unit. Specifically, the Confucian family ethic was applied to parents of individuals who engaged in same-sex activities. These parents were thought of as having “failed in their duty/job” of being a parent (失职, *shizhi*). Thus, although it was once understood as a class issue, a matter of personal appetite and social relations, homosexuality gradually became an ideological and moral issue, one that required constant self-discipline and family intervention.

Scholars (see Chiang, 2010; Eng, 2010; Kong, 2011) continue to observe major changes in Chinese attitudes towards same-sex desire and practices after the Maoist era, in the course of modernization of the Republic of China. For example, Lucetta Yip Lo Kam (2012) notes the following moments that signaled a change of Chinese attitudes towards same-sex desires in the official sphere: In 1995, male homosexuality was recognized for the first time in a health manual (*Handbook of Health Education*) as “agents of HIV” (p. 46). This was interpreted as marking the end of the official denial of homosexuality, and the beginning of the medicalization of homosexuality in contemporary China. In 1997, the charge of “hooliganism” that was applied to male same-sex activities since the Maoist era became exempted from legal prosecution. More recently, in 2001, homosexuality was officially removed from the list of mental illness by the Chinese Psychiatry Association.

During this time, the conception of identity-based homosexuality started to gain popularity in Chinese societies. Starting sometime in the 1990s, visible homosexual identity and communities began to slowly emerge in Chinese societies across the world (Kong, 2011; Martin, 2009; Rofel, 2007). For example, in Hong Kong, people with same-sex desires “became gay” in the 1970s. Many of them later “became” queer, bisexual, or lesbian in the 1980s and most of them have become *tongzhi* (同志)⁴ since the 1990s (Chou, 2000, pp. 59-60). In mainland China today, the discourse of identity-based homosexuality is also ascending within Chinese LGBT communities. The ascent in the

⁴ *Tongzhi* literally means “common will.” This is the Chinese word for “comrade” which was famously used among the communists in China. Now many gay, lesbian, and sometimes bisexual people in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan use *tongzhi* or *nvtongzhi* (means female *tongzhi*) to refer to themselves. However, it is important to note that *tongzhi* is more often used for/by gay men, while “*lala*” (拉拉) is preferred by more and more lesbians in China.

discourse of identity-based homosexuality in China comes as part of the country's modernization project, a response to the global queer flows of capital, bodies, ideas, and images.

That being said, it is important to note that transnational sexual discourse is far from being totally accepted and celebrated in Chinese societies. Recent transnational sexualities studies (e.g., Engebretsen, 2009; Kam, 2012; Manalansan, 2003) show that the Western model of queer politics is resisted by queer subjects in many parts of the world. The hegemonic discourse of Euro-American identity-based homosexuality has also invoked a backlash among some queer subjects in contemporary mainland China, partly because of the colonialist effect of transnational identity discourse in queer life. In the following section, I discuss the mechanics of how the discourse of identity-based homosexuality functions as a colonizing device in contemporary China.

The Colonializing Effect of Identity-based Homosexuality and Transnational Queer Discourse

The discourse of identity-based homosexuality has gained dominant status in Western societies today. As discussed before, it was not always the case that sexuality is considered a fundamental aspect of one's identity. From the discussion above, we see how the notion of "homosexuality" meant different things in different historical periods and in different cultural contexts. Identity-based homosexuality is a modern phenomenon in Euro-American societies as well as in China. In both cases, sexuality was at one time perceived as something that people do. Sexuality was not always a master identity. Sexuality as identity is a new thing. In the words of Sedgwick (1990), modern Western culture has placed sexuality in a privileged relation to our constructs of individual

identity (p. 3). This new development in sexual lives, Sedgwick (1990) argues, leaves no space in a culture to be exempt from the homo/heterosexual dichotomy:

What was *new* from the turn of the century was the world-mapping by which every given person, just as he or she was necessarily assignable to a male or a female gender, was now considered necessarily assignable as well to a homo- or hetero-sexuality, a binarized identity that was full of implication, however confusing, for even the ostensibly least sexual aspects of personal existence (p. 2).

Fuss (1989) points out that this homo/heterosexual binary also reinforces the social imperative of Othering: between “norm and pathology, inclusion and exclusion, identity and otherness” (p. 133). In contemporary China, privileging the homo/heterosexual binary in the construction of individual identity is one of the effects of epistemic colonialization.

Howard Chiang (2010) argues that the question of sexual identity did not appear in Chinese thinking until recently as there was no such thing as sexual identity outside of epistemic modernity in China. After the Maoist era (1949-1976), the cultural constitution of “desire” began to play a central role in the construction of a transnational subject in mainland China, part of its contemporary search for a novel cosmopolitan humanity. This cultural constitution of desire became “a powerful site for the production of citizen-subjects” (Eng, 2010, p. 466).

The changes in sexual discourse in mainland China are unavoidably intertwined with the project of modernization (Eng, 2010; Kong, 2011; Liu & Rofel, 2010; Rofel, 2007). Being gay in a Western sense served as a “trope through which many in China hope to move beyond the belatedness that socialism represents in the post-cold war era”

(Rofel, 2007, p. 95). Western identity-based homosexuality became invoked in mainland China as a response to the belated desire of “universalism”:

Constituted in a perpetual spatial and temporal lag to conventional standards of Western modernity, the Chinese remain subjects in waiting: waiting for the development of their economy as well as the development of proper subjectivity, agency, and desire under the (neo) liberal banner of privacy and property, rights and markets, individualism and choice. In such a formulation, it is crucial to emphasize how contemporary discourses of homosexuality become a central category for measuring China’s social and, equally important, economic and political advancement (Eng, 2010, p. 477).

In the developmentalist discourse, it thus appears as if identity-based homosexuality is something that Chinese people “must learn as well as learn to embrace” (Eng, 2010, p. 466) if they wish to be modern subjects. The discourse of sexuality is thus an important part of the process of the nation’s modernization project. It can in fact be said that the process of modernization is the same process of sexual becoming.

To recap the above sections, I have thus far traced homosexuality in discourse through both Euro-American and Chinese societies across time. I have discussed the historicization of sexuality in Western contexts. I have discussed the culturalizing of sexuality in China. And I have discussed the colonializing effect of identity-based homosexuality in contemporary China. These discussions form the backdrop against which I ask the questions in my dissertation project to investigate the complex dynamic between Chinese queer subjects and their bio-genetic families. It is with these contextual discussions in mind that I ask the questions: How does the transnational discourse of

sexual identity affect the family dynamic and marriage arrangements among Chinese queer subjects? How do Chinese queer subjects negotiate the tension between their own same-sex desires and the familial expectation for them to get married and procreate against the backdrop of transnational LGBT movements? I ask these questions as informed by queer theory, especially with a postcolonial perspective in mind.

Queer theory challenges the model of identity-based homosexuality, which some critics (e.g. Duggan, 2003; Stryker, 2008) decry as “homonormative.” Queerness, Judith Butler (1993) notes, does not take the stability of (homo)sexuality for granted; instead, queerness affirms the contingency of the term “queer” by examining the historical formation of homosexuality. Gayatri Gopinath (2005) argues that queerness is a range of dissent as well as non-heteronormative practices and desires, which may “be incommensurate with the identity categories of ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’”(p. 11). “To perform queerness,” José Esteban Muñoz (1999) writes, “is to constantly disidentify, to constantly find oneself thriving on sites where meaning does not properly ‘line up’” (p.78). In other words, queerness is about disturbing the order of things and sustaining the significance of deviation (Ahmed, 2006).

That being said, queer discourse could be a new colonizing device if applied without a postcolonial perspective. Queer discourse, which is rooted in Euro-American culture, becomes regulatory in non-Western (such as Chinese) cultural contexts. In other words, once considered as a transgressive force in social transformation, queerness is becoming regulatory and a process of racial colonialization (Puar, 2007). Manalansan (1995), for instance, criticizes the colonialist tendency to place all same-sex phenomena “within a developmental and teleological matrix that ends with Western ‘gay’ sexuality”

(p. 428) and judge them by how well they fit into that measurement. Within this developmentalist discourse, queer lives that fall outside of hegemonic Euro-American model are doomed to be lagging in queer time. For instance, the local practice of *xinghun* is sometimes described as pre-modern, although it is in fact a modern invention that emerged in 1990s in mainland China. Given the prevalence of developmentalist discourse in China, the discourse of identity-based homosexuality has become a technique of subjectivity management: in order to be an “authentic” and modern subject, Chinese queers need to publicly and constantly display their homosexuality, which stresses gay consciousness and public avowal of one’s homosexuality. Those who “fail” to recognize, display and maintain their homosexuality are considered as “trapped” in developmental time and “deferred” in the process of becoming modern subjects.

Moreover, such a colonialist assumption in transnational queer discourse also invokes a tension between a homosexual identity and “Chinese culture” among Chinese queer subjects. While transnational queer discourse could be empowering as a discursive resource “to imagine and pursue a life that can realize same-sex desires” (Kam, 2012, p. 60), it also prescribes a “solution” that is bound to conflict with their cultural belonging for Chinese queer subjects. Specifically, dominant identity-based sexual discourse often explicitly endorses communication and other behavioral choices in which queers move away from the constraints of the “traditional” family model toward homosexual “nuclear” coupledness in order to properly express their “free” modern sexuality (Blackwood, 2012).

This antagonism between sexuality and family imposed by this discourse is especially problematic for Chinese queers: Given the repeated appeals to harmony and family in Chinese culture (Rofel, 2007, p. 100), transnational queer discourse has created

a dilemma between homosexuality and Chineseness. Under this framework, it appears as if queer Chinese subjects can be either universal (queer) or Chinese, but never both (Rofel, 2007). Such antagonism is not neutral. Instead, it is “elaborated through an Orientalist or colonialist theoretical lens that is predicated on the sexual (re)colonizing of non-Western people” (Hames-García, 2006, p. 90), where the “West” is always “an indispensable and normative point of comparison” (Liu, 2010, p. 314). Under such an antagonist construction, Chinese queer subjects are always already exiled from being “Chinese” or “queer” (see Gopinath, 2005). They do not fully belong as “Chinese” in a system where cultural citizenship is established through the heterosexual family structure that negates of their queerness. They are not fully “queer” either. Rather, they are the deferred subjects waiting to be liberated in colonial time. In a word, they are not able to fully belong to either category, nor are they able to totally separate from either of them.

Any discussion of Chinese queer subjects would be insufficient without understanding the “dual inability ever to fully separate or fully belong” (Phelan, 1997, p. 66), which Anzaldúa (1987) delineates in her discussion of *Mestiza*. Therefore, we must critically examine transnational queer discourse that is “embedded in a long colonial history of racialized governmentality, [and that] constitutes past as well as present framings of China as a (semi)colonial, socialist, and neoliberal object to be studied, known, and ultimately judged” (Eng, 2010, p. 471). With these intentions in mind, I focus on investigating the non-confrontational politics of Chinese queers in my dissertation project. Specifically, I ask questions such as: How do Chinese queer subjects communicate their queer desires without risking their familial membership? How do Chinese queer subjects deal with the marriage pressure without negating their familial

obligation and without neglecting their same-sex relationship? These questions are important for a postcolonial understanding of queer lives in China.

Non-confrontational Negotiation: “Coming with” and *Xinghun*

It is almost impossible to make any generalizations about Chinese culture. There is no doubt, however, that family (which, from a critical perspective, is as much a discursive and ideological production as it is a network of biological affinity) is an indispensable site in Chinese culture. Responding to the tension between family and sexuality, some Chinese queers seek to negotiate among sexuality, kinship, and social relations in their everyday lives.

Grounded in these everyday struggles of Chinese queer subjects, my study focuses on the experiences of “coming out” and marriage with regards to family dynamics, which is usually associated with Chinese culture. In my study, I focus on two kinds of these local efforts/struggles: the “coming with” strategy and the *xinghun* (形婚) strategy. These two strategies are common practices used by Chinese queers to negotiate the tension between the heteronormative family and their own same-sex desires. In this dissertation, I argue that these two strategies complicate the dominant understanding of both communication process and queer subjectivity. While the “coming with” strategy and the *xinghun* strategy are both non-confrontational and are often criticized as “closeted,” they are important survival strategies for Chinese queers in a predominantly heteronormative society.

For many Chinese queer subjects, the bio-genetic family (especially one’s parents) is not a relationship where they have the flexible option of choosing whether to leave or to stay with in different phases of their lives; rather, it is always an integrated

part of their imagined future. While “coming out” has become a dominant discourse in transnational LGBT movements as well as in the Chinese queer communities, my study shows that many Chinese queer subjects prefer a reticent “coming with” strategy rather than confronting or even turning away from their bio-genetic family, as suggested by the “coming out” discourse. The “coming with” strategy is used as a way to integrate both familial belonging and sexual identification. For queer subjects who do not want to give up on their family or same-sex desires, the only way is to engage the home space with queer desires, transforming the heteronormative family institution from within toward a more livable queer life. In such a strategy, family is both the object and the location of potential transformation for Chinese queer subjects (I will fully discuss the “coming with” strategy in Chapter 4).

A key element in the “coming with” strategy is reticence and silence. The communication of sexuality between Chinese queer subjects and their families often relies on reticence/silence, leaving the issue of sexuality unspoken and thus unfronted. This observation is significant to the discipline of communication studies. Communication studies often focus on the process of voicing as a privileged subject of study (Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985; Tracy & Rivera, 2010; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2005). Some scholars, such as Min-Sun Kim (2002), have criticized this Western bias, arguing that it is important to explore how communication happens without verbalizing. For instance, Gemma Fiumara (1990) suggests that silence is rich, and it is only in Western philosophies which privilege expressive language that silence is reduced to a void. Like talk, reticence/silence is another resource that serves particular communication functions (Kim, 2002). Aimee Rowe and Sheena Malhotra (2013) also challenge the “common

sense” equation between silence and powerlessness within Western culture. They argue for a shift from “breaking silence” to “listening silence” in our scholarship: “While we affirm the importance of breaking silence, we also want to underscore an alternative path: that those in positions of privilege learn to read and respect the silences of marginalized people” (p. 14). Informed by the above, my study seeks to contribute to intercultural communication by exploring and theorizing reticence/silence as a communicative phenomenon among Chinese queer subjects.

Marriage is another site of struggle that many Chinese queer subjects face in their everyday life (Chen, 2009; Engebretsen, 2009; Kam, 2012; Rofel, 2007; Wang, 2014). My study shows that the ideology of heterosexual marriage affects Chinese queer subjects exactly through one’s bio-genetic family. In other words, the discourse of heterosexual marriage presents itself as another form of (and maybe the most salient form of) family pressure in contemporary China.

While a heterosexual marriage is still a common “solution” among Chinese queer subjects who face marital pressure, a new form of marriage arrangement — *xinghun* — has become increasingly popular among Chinese queer subjects (Chen, 2009; Engebretsen, 2009; Fu & Zhang, 2013; Moreno-Tabarez et al., 2014; Wang, 2014). The words *xinghun* (形婚) literally translate to mean “formality marriage.” *Xinghun* is a marriage arrangement that many Chinese gay men and lesbian women partake in as a means of being gay or lesbian without exiting the family kinship system.⁵ The first *xinghun* in public sight could be traced back to the late 1990s, when identity-based

⁵ Although *xinghun* seems to be a way of covering one’s homosexuality by engaging a heterosexual marriage, many families actually know when a family member is in a *xinghun* marriage.

homosexuality was becoming the dominant discourse in mainland China.⁶ According to Liqing Yang (2009), Mr. Jin, a gay man who had lived in the West for years, wrote to a famous queer magazine *Pengyou Tongxin* (Friend Communication) in search for a lesbian who was willing to form a *xinghun* with him. This became the first public record of *xinghun* in China. Later, *xinghun* became pervasive among queer Chinese.

Chinagayles.com is the earliest and biggest website committed to *xinghun* in China. Chinagayles.com published a *Xinghun Guide* (形婚指南) that gave a vivid description of *xinghun* :

The more common way is that a [*xinghun*] “couple” maintains friendship without living together most of time. They show up only on special occasions such as holiday gatherings or special family events that require them to be “on camera” together. Some of them live like normal couples, living under the same roof, where bringing their respective partner(s) home is allowed. (比较常见的是“夫妻”双方保持朋友关系，平时不在一起生活，只是在逢年过节或家中有事等需要同时“出镜”的情况下，双方才一起出现。也有像正常夫妻一样，住在同一个屋檐下的，但是可以带各自的伴侣回家。有的人想要孩子，“夫妻”双方会事先约定用人工授精的方式生育后代。) [author’s translation]

At this point, it may occur to some that participating in a heterosexual marriage while active in homosexual communities is a type of contradiction, or maybe even a lie. It is thus important to note here that Chinese queers rarely exhibit discomfort in claiming

⁶ In the context of contemporary China, what it meant to be queer in the 1990s was nothing if not about crossing cultural and national borders (Kong, 2011; Rofel, 2007): “In the mid-1990s, Chinese metropolises witnessed a veritable explosion of people who call themselves gay... This emergent gay scene is decidedly transnational” (Rofel, 2007, p. 86).

participation in both a heterosexual marriage and homosexual communities (Jones, 2007). In fact, it is salient to note here that it is only in the homo-hetero dichotomy that this would be regarded as a contradiction. That is, this “contradiction” is only imaginable when one presumes a Western model of identity-based homosexuality. *Xinghun*, my study shows, offers a way for Chinese queer subjects to navigate between the seemingly contradictory discourses of family and sexuality.

One commonality between the “coming with” strategy and the *xinghun* strategy is that they are non-confrontational efforts that see family as an indispensable network in queer lives. While hegemonic transnational discourses of “coming out” and “same-sex” marriage indicate an oppositional resistance *against* the constraints of family toward individual sexual freedom, the strategies of “coming with” and *xinghun* suggest an alternative queer politics that goes beyond oppositionality. These non-confrontational strategies, as I will show in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, are culturally specific resistances that transform the home space and the marriage institution into a livable space, if not a purely queer space; they are the survival strategies of Chinese queer subjects to maximize their life chances in a heteronormative environment. One cannot understand queer potentials of such strategies without critically examining the material conditions and the embodied experiences of Chinese queer subjects in a time of queer globalization.

The Materiality of Queer Life in Contemporary China

In the previous sections, I have delineated the discursive conditions of homosexuality in both Western and Chinese cultural contexts, and the shifts in the meanings of homosexuality over time. In addition, I have provided a discussion of the colonizing effect of identity-based homosexuality through the circulation of transnational

queer flows. It is through these discourses that Chinese queer subjects are conditioned and shaped. That being said, discourse is just a part of the picture. Homosexuality is both discursive and material. By “material,” I refer to the nonrepresentational/asignifying elements of the social world, including things and human bodies, that constitute the conditions of living. Specifically, I approach “material” from a Marxist perspective, attending to the economic conditions of the everyday life. I argue that the subjectivity of Chinese queers cannot be fully understood without an exploration of the material conditions of queer life in contemporary China. While I provide a more in-depth discussion on materiality in the next chapter, here I wish to mention some key points.

As mentioned earlier, family and marriage are reported as the major causes of stress in the everyday life of Chinese queer subjects (Brainer, in press; Chen, 2009; Engebretsen, 2009; Fu & Zhang, 2013; Kam, 2012; Moreno-Tabarez et al., 2014; Rofel, 2007; Wang, 2014). We will not truly understand the family pressure on queer subjects if we just look at the discourses surrounding sexuality and family, such as the discourse of patrilineal continuity (传宗接代, *chuan zong jie dai*). Rather, we need to also recognize and pay attention to the embodied and material conditions of queer life, especially to those who are marginalized and less visible.

In her ethnographic study of Taiwanese lesbians, Amy Brainer (in press) describes the myth that lesbians are exempt from family pressure. In a society where patrilineal continuity is central in family life, she explains, lesbians are often seen as having an easier time with their families. However, this narrative about lesbians overlooks the embodied and material sides of family pressure, such as women’s unpaid family work, family resource distribution, and housing insecurity (Brainer, in press).

Despite the distinctive quality of Taiwanese society, Brainer's study reminds us of the importance of materiality in studying Chinese queer subjects. Informed by queer of color critique and critical rhetoric, I ground my study in the material conditions of queer discourses and the embodied experience—the two dimensions of materiality—of Chinese queer subjects.

To investigate the complex dynamic between Chinese queer subjects and their bio-genetic families, I conducted interviews with thirteen Chinese queer subjects to understand their experiences of coming out and/or *xinghun* from their perspectives. In addition, I analyzed online discourses about coming out and about *xinghun* on two websites: Chinagayles.com and the microblog, A-Qiang Tongzhi (<http://bit.ly/1KgLc8v>). Further, I also analyzed publicly available advertisements targeting queer audiences in mainland China during the 2015 Valentine's Day campaign. These advertisement texts, transcripts produced from interviewing and selected online texts were therefore the data/texts for rhetorical analysis in this study. I will provide a full discussion on the methods of data collection/analysis in Chapter 2, with a discussion on the theoretical resources—transnationalism, queer of color critique, postcolonial feminism, and public sphere theory— that I draw on in this study.

In Chapter 3, I delineate the economic operation behind the emerging queer communities in mainland China. I investigate the economic operation behind the *quanzi* discourse, as well as the material implications of the biopolitics of marriage over Chinese queer subjects. I also discuss how queerness becomes an increasingly popular marketing strategy in the cultural industry in China. Most importantly, this chapter explores how pink advertising or campaigns translate into an affective identification for Chinese queer

consumers. Through a materialist analysis of the “coming out” discourse in mainland China, I unravel the economy and materiality of “coming out” in contemporary China, revealing why and how the discourse of “coming out” is prioritized in Chinese LGBT movements in order to foster a domestic queer market in mainland China. I argue that the affective economy creates affective surplus value, and translates the affective identification of Chinese queer subjects into business and/or funding opportunities in contemporary China; it is the economic drive behind the “coming out” and “same-sex marriage” advocacy in Chinese LGBT movements.

Then, in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, I focus on two strategies that some Chinese queer subjects employ to navigate the tension between family and sexuality. These two chapters bring to fore the complications about coming out for Chinese queer subjects, challenging the teleological discourse of “coming out” that is circulated both in transnational LGBT movements and within academia. I begin Chapter 4 with a discussion on the communication processes of coming out in contemporary China and its complications. After a discussion of the “coming home” strategy as a decolonial response to the hegemony of coming out in the studies of Chinese sexualities, I conceptualize a third path: the *coming with* strategy among some Chinese queer subjects. Throughout this chapter, I highlight the primacy of family in the struggles over sexuality for Chinese queer subjects, calling out the epistemic violence upon queer subjects while cautioning against the imperialist effect in queer studies. In Chapter 5, I investigate the impulses for *xinghun* and explore why same-sex marriage is not considered a “good” solution for many Chinese queer subjects. To do so, I first outline the reasons why *xinghun* is preferred by some Chinese queer subjects and how Chinese queer subjects perform the

“realness” of heteronormativity in a queer marriage. I then reveal the critical potentials of *xinghun* for allowing same-sex romance in a hetero-marital relationship through actively engaging the marriage institution. By doing so, I argue that the teleological discourse of “coming out” fails to address the material risks of Chinese queers subjects in a family-oriented society where losing the familial support means losing the most important part of one’s social resources.

The two strategies that I outline in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 show the critical role of materiality in understanding the experiences of Chinese queer subjects. I explore how marriage is embodied and performed by some Chinese queer subjects who face the tension between the heteronormative expectations of their family and their desire to maintain a same-sex relationship. Without taking the material conditions and embodied experiences into consideration, any discussion on Chinese queer subjects will be insufficient at best, and misleading at worst. Moreover, through an investigation of silence/reticence, a nonrepresentational/asignifying rhetoric that communicates through the presence of human subjects, I draw our attention to the embodied communication of sexuality in Chinese society, which is often neglected in mainstream communication studies of sexuality. Through affirming the value of reticence and relationality in the communication of sexuality, I expand our imagination of the complex process of communicating sexualities, revealing the epistemic colonialization in dominant queer discourse.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

In this chapter, I will discuss the methods I use in this project as well as the theoretical frameworks that inform my study on sexualities in contemporary China. In the following pages, I will define my research population—Chinese queer subjects, giving a clarification on what I mean by “Chinese” and “queer” in this project. I then outline how I collected and analyzed my data/texts, with a discussion on why interviews and rhetorical criticism were employed in my study. In the last section, I move to a discussion of the theoretical resources—transnationalism, queer of color critique, postcolonial feminism, and public sphere theory— that I draw on in my study, delineating their main arguments and how they raise questions to prompt my inquiry.

Before I discuss my methods, I need to talk about my methodology, which is about my understanding of knowledge production. This, in turn, shapes the methods of my study.

Methodology

Scholars of different paradigms have different understandings of the relationship between experience, discourse, and reality. In my view, reality is both discursive and material, and the discursive and material work in a recursive relationship. In the following pages, I will first discuss the discursivity of reality. Later, I will attend more directly to materiality and the relationship between materiality and discursivity.

Poststructuralists and postmodernists have eloquently demonstrated that social realities are mediated and constructed by discourse. In a pithy statement, it is said that “all that can be known is the language through which reality is discursively constituted”

(Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002, p. 132). If so, it follows that experience is also inevitably a discursive construction. “[E]xperience is not the raw material knowledge seeks to understand” (Fuss, 1989, p. 118); it is the interpretations made of experience that can be grasped by the researcher, rather than the experience itself (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002, p. 125). In this rendering, experience is fundamentally rhetorical (Ott, 2015), mediated by symbols. Experience is intelligible only through representational processing. This understanding shifts the foundation of knowledge from experience to discourse/rhetoric, which is productive in constituting a knowing subject.

Although experience is not a pure category outside of discourse, it is something we cannot bypass in order to get access to the social world. Caroloine Ramazanoğlu and Janet Holland (2002) emphasize the actual conditions of existence— people live in real bodies, in real social relationships, in a real world. Whilst discursively constructed, these realities, they point out, cannot be simply reduced to discourse in which they are expressed, or discourse through which they are constituted (p. 134). Paula Moya (2001) provides a powerful argument on the “realness” of the social world:

While humans’ (better or worse) understandings of their world may provide their only access to “reality,” their conceptual or linguistic constructions of the world do not constitute the totality of what can be considered “real.” Clearly, then, when realists say that something is “real,” they do not mean that it is not socially constructed; rather, their point is that it is not only socially constructed. (p. 444)

A pure discursive approach, Moya (2001) argues, reduces an embodied person to a disembodied “subject-in-process”; it answers the question of “how” but fails to answer the question of “why,” and thus cannot “explain the persistent correlation between certain

kinds of bodies and certain kinds of identities” (p. 456). Following these arguments, I believe ordinary people are entitled to claim, at least partially, “competence and authority as knowers” (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002, p. 134) because of their embodied lived experience. After all, it is one thing to say that “experience does not directly connect ideas and reality” (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002, p. 128), and another thing to infer that “experience cannot tell us anything” (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002, p. 128).

As researchers, we should not be paralyzed by the difficulties of justifying the connections between experience and material reality (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002); rather, we should strive to fight and resist oppressing discourses, and to rearrange and produce new discourses that lead to new circumstances. That is, critical scholars need to “assume responsibility for a future” (Butler, 2004, p. 39). To assume responsibility for a future, Butler (2004) notes, “is not to know its direction fully in advance” (p. 39). It simply means “that a certain agonism and contestation over the course of direction will and must be in play” (p. 39).

It is precisely this “political necessity of confronting actual power relations” that pulls critical scholars back to the problematic grounding of knowledge in people’s experience (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002), especially the experiences of those who are silenced in existing knowledge systems: the imperative is to approach marginalized people as sites of knowledge (Ferguson, 2004), rather than as objects of knowledge production. In a word, the choice of one method over another is not just epistemological, but also political and moral. Research as an important way of knowledge production, as I understand it, should seek to “draw on the most appropriate tools to facilitate its efforts to resist domestication, give voice to marginalized communities, and affirm subordinated

subjectivities” (Middleton, Senda-Cook & Endres, 2011, p. 403). It is on these epistemological and moral/political grounds that I decide to utilize both interview and rhetorical methods for collecting and analyzing my data/texts: through interviews, Chinese queer subjects are now the speaking subjects and become one of the sources of knowledge in my project. Rhetorical analysis, on the other hand, can serve as a useful tool to reveals the power dynamic under which some experiences are negated and not heard. That is, a rhetorcial analysis is important to get access to the silences of my research subjects. I will offer a more in-depth discussion of interview and rhetorcial analysis later in this chapter.

In my dissertation, I explore the communication processes of coming out in Chinese families and the affective economy of the “coming out” discourse in contemporary China. I also investigate the impulses for *xinghun* and explore why same-sex marriage is not considered a “good” solution for many Chinese queer subjects. In data collection and analysis, I asked: How is knowledge of sexuality communicated in Chinese families that value reticence and harmony? For those who engage in *xinghun* practices, what possibilities do they open up?

Methods: Data Collection

To investigate the discourse of coming out (*chugui* 出柜) among Chinese queer subjects and the practices of *xinghun* (形婚) among some of them, I conducted interviews with Chinese queer subjects. Specifically, I conducted interviews with thirteen Chinese queer subjects to understand their experiences of coming out and/or *xinghun* from their perspectives. In addition, I analyzed online discourses about “coming out” and *xinghun* on two websites: Chinagayles.com and the microblog, A-Qiang Tongzhi

(<http://bit.ly/1KgLc8v>). Further, I also analyzed publicly available advertisements targeting queer audiences in mainland China during the 2015 Valentine's Day campaign. In the following sections, I first discuss my data collection methods in the interview phase, followed by a discussion of the data from the various web sources.

Who Are Chinese Queer Subjects?

Before I elaborate on how I collect my texts/ data and what I do to those texts/data, it is worth spending some time on clarifying the research population in my study: Chinese queer subjects. There are two keywords here: "Chinese" and "queer." There is more than one way to understand the signifier of "China," and one common way to think about it is that it refers to the nation-state of the People's Republic of China.

I am aware that the nation-state or geographical borders should not be the final determinant of what defines China or Chinese. That being said, I refer to "China" as the nation-state of mainland China because all of the texts/data in this study are collected from mainland China: Chinagayles.com is mainland-based website; A-Qiang is a mainland-based activist and microblog (Sina Weibo) is a social media mainly used by people in mainland China. Furthermore, all of my thirteen interviewees grew up in mainland China. Therefore, the texts/data I collected reflect the experiences of queer subjects in mainland China, which are distinctive from the experiences of queer Chinese diaspora or queer subjects from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau, regions that are often associated with the signifiers "China" or "Chinese."

Despite the linguistic, geographical and cultural affinities between mainland China and Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau, there are significant differences with regards to their political and economic histories. These differences have significant influences in

shaping queer lives and subjectivities. Therefore, in my study, I refer to “China” as the nation-state of mainland China to recognize the particular, collective cultural experience as reflected in my texts/data, although I also realize that queer subjects may have very different experiences even if they grow up in the same nation-state.

Having discussed the notion of China/Chinese, I now define what I mean by “queer” in this project. I am aware of the discursive violence that a researcher may impose on the research population, since “defining the research population is an act of category construction with profound intellectual and moral implications” (Halse & Honey, 2005, p. 2145). I am aware that terminologies such as “homosexuality,” “queer,” “lesbian,” and “gay” have both local and global meanings when they travel. As Katie King (2002) points out, using these terminologies “as global terms is political,” and “[r]efusing them as global terms is also a political act” (p. 34). Therefore, in this project, I use the words “*tongzhi*” (同志), “*lala*” (拉拉), and sometimes “*tongxinglian*” (同性恋), labels that are most commonly used among men and women with same-sex desires in China, to refer to local subjects with dual emphasis on same-sex desires and cultural consciousness. I argue that these terms are not the same as “gay,” “lesbian,” or “queer” in English speaking societies, as such indigenous queer languages indicate the “ownership of queerness” (Aiello et al., 2013, p. 104), revising what it means to be “queer.”

That being said, the labels that people use to describe themselves have to do with the discourses they are exposed to. Different people have different discursive resources. These self-labels, as well as the discourses that condition what kinds of labels are made available, are not exempted from critical examination. Therefore, I also use phrases like queer, homosexual(ity), and same-sex (affect/ desire /relationship, etc.) to refer to non-

normative sexualities in my inquiry. Recognizing that these terminologies are imperfect (Sang, 2003), tentative, and regulatory, I try to avoid using any one fixed phrase so as to signify the fluid and constantly contested meanings of homosexuality in China.

In particular, I use the term “queer” to describe my subjects and my approach to signify “a range of dissent and non-heteronormative practices and desires that may very well be incommensurate with the identity categories of ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’” (Gopinath, 2005, p. 11). In this study, I emphasize that queerness is marked by language and flesh (Aiello et al., 2013, p. 114). I associate “queer” with some cultural practices and desires in Chinese queer communities that are often not understood to be progressive or radical. Such practices and desires are queer because they complicate and challenge the notions of “coming out,” “marriage,” or even “queerness” itself, revealing the power relations behind them and offering possibilities of alternative ways of thinking and living. Although such association between “queer” and these cultural practices and desires may be optimistic or even utopianist, I echo Muñoz (1999) that we need to hold on to utopianism if we are to make a queer world (p. 25).

Interviews

One important source of my texts/data is my interviews with Chinese queer subjects. Generally speaking, interviewing is about collecting descriptive data, people’s own words, and people’s behavior in order to understand the process of social meanings (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). There are some epistemological limitations of interview data, including deception and self-deception (consciously or unconsciously) in talking, as well as the heavy reliance on language as the modality of meanings. Despite these epistemological limitations of interview data, interviewing as a data collection method

has several advantages: First of all, people are living archives. They are valuable sites for data gathering. Outside of traditional documents and archives, people's experiences and their narratives are important resources for communication studies. Interviewing provides a unique avenue toward understanding the lived experiences from the perspective of respondents. Narratives gathered from interviews convey personal truth and situate people in their specific histories. Given that sexuality is an issue often off-limits or unavailable for observation or lack of documentation because of its "private" and taboo status, personal narratives will be an important avenue for my study on Chinese queer subjects.

Second, interviewing is helpful to understand "how people live out imagined invocations of culture" (Rofel, 2007) and what it means for them. Although discourse conditions what people can think and speak about sexuality, discourse is never fixed or wholly adopted by individuals. Rather, people partially appropriate grand narratives, interpret them, and use them through their unique practice. Through interviewing, researchers can get access to stories and narratives, which can inform us about how the world is framed, and what discourses are drawn. Narratives of lives are intertwined with normative discourses, revealing how people are pulled into normalizing practices (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002; Rofel, 2007). Interviews thus allow access to how people actually use language, with potential clarification and explanation.

In total, I interviewed 13 Chinese queers subjects (6 females and 7 males, between 19-year-old to 35-year-old), who self-identified as *lala/tongzhi/tongxinglian/gay/lesbian*, to talk about their experiences and understandings of their intimate relationships in mainland China. The focus of the interviews was

primarily on coming out and marriage. Among the queer subjects whom I spoke to, 7 interviewees (3 females and 4 males) self-identified as *xinghun* participants. These interviews took place between April 26 and August 17, 2015.

Given the acquaintance culture and the fact that coming out and/or *xinghun* are sensitive topics in contemporary mainland China, I decided that those more “private” avenues, such as friends-based or community-based social media, would be more effective ways of interviewee recruiting and trust building for my study. Therefore, I posted my recruitment letter on microblog and Wechat (微信, the most popular messaging app in China with mobile text and voice messaging communication service), the two most frequently used social media among Chinese queer population according to CMI survey in 2014. While I got a lot of retweeting and thus exposure of my recruitment letter on microblog, a semi-public social media, it was the private, friends-based Wechat platform that eventually led me to my interviewees.

In the meantime, as I was doing this, I also reached out to some resourceful queer subjects who connected me with my interviewees. During this process, the grassroots lesbian organization in Beijing, *Tongyu* (Common Language), where I have been volunteering during the last three years as a translator/editor on LGBT issues, played an important role in my sourcing for potential interviews. Some active members of *Tongyu* reposted my recruitment letter on other private queer platforms and connected me with interested participants. Three of my interviewees, Jane, Xiaoye, and Zien, introduced my study to their friends and helped me connect with three additional interviewees through Wechat.

It is important to note that the interviewees I recruited are a small group with very particular experiences (see Appendix 2 for a brief introduction of my interviewees). For example, in terms of ethnicity, my interviewees are predominantly *Han* Chinese, with only one exception Ada, who is *Chaoxian* (Korean) Chinese. In terms of social class, most of my interviewees have college education or above (except Yaqing and Macky) and are holding a white-collar job. In addition, most of my interviewees currently live in urban areas (except Zien), although several of them did grow up in rural areas or their parents live in rural China. In a word, the experiences of my interviewees reflect more of the urban, middle class experiences of the *Han* Chinese.

Whilst acknowledging this limitation of my interview data, it must be stressed that the goal of my interviews is not to find out “patterns” of queer experiences that are generalizable to all Chinese queer subjects, but rather to find out some rich fragments in the lives of Chinese queers, which can better inform our understanding of queer struggles and possibilities toward a “livable life” (Butler, 2004).

In terms of the structure of interviewing, my interviews were questions-guided (see Appendix 3 for sample questions). These questions were used to stimulate conversation rather than to dictate the conversation (Tracy, 2013). That is, during my conversations with interviewees, I modified some of the questions when conversations led me to other more interesting or more important aspects of the lives of my interviewees. In a word, interviews conducted in this project were planned but subject to change.

All interviews were conducted either through Wechat (3) and/or phone calls (10) and were audio recorded. While I recommended phone interviewing to my interviewees,

my interviewees made the final decisions on the communication media they felt more comfortable to use. All interviews were conducted in Chinese (12 in Mandarin and 1 in Cantonese), the mother language of both my participants and I, in order to co-create the richest linguistic and cultural experience. These interviews lasted about half an hour to one and a half hours, and were transcribed by me in Chinese. The resulting typed transcriptions came to 97 pages of one-inch margined, single-spaced Chinese text.

Texts for Analysis

There are two different sets of texts in my studies: transcripts produced by interviewing, and selected online texts, including *xinghun* advertisements posted on Chinagayles.com and postings on the microblog of A-Qiang Tongzhi. Since I have discussed my interview data, I will focus on the online texts in the following pages.

Cyberspace is the most active and probably the most influential discursive arena amongst the various different discursive arenas in contemporary China. Compared with other influential discursive avenues, which are usually “official” and thus controlled by the state, cyberspace provides a unique site to access vernacular discourses, especially queer discourse that is currently repressed in official discourse. Moreover, cyberspace often documents the textual interactions between participants, therefore offering an excellent avenue to access the communication traces that happen online.

Three online web sources were used for data collection. The first online site where I collected data was Chinagayles.com. Chinagayles.com is the earliest and biggest website committed to *xinghun* in China. On this website, members are required to post personal advertisements to introduce themselves and to specify what they wish for in prospective *xinghun* partners. By August 24th, 2015, Chinagayles.com had more than

387,000 registered members. According to the statistics provided by the website, more than 46,000 couples formed *xinghun* as a result of their participation on the website. For the purpose of my study, I narrowed my texts to the first 5 pages of personal ads on three different dates (April 20th, April 30th, and May 10th, 2015) using the website search engine.

The number of texts gathered from the Chinagayles.com website that were analyzed in this dissertation was 124 ads. The way that I selected these texts was to first sort the ads by those that were “logged in most recently” so that all the ads examined in this study were posted by active users. This resulted in 150 ads in total. Among them, 26 ads were invalid as they were replicated (8) or not posted by/for queer subjects (16), based on the description in the personal ads. When sexual orientations were not indicated, I gave the posters the benefit of the doubt and assumed those ads were posted by queer subjects; after all, Chinagayles.com is site dedicated to gay-lesbian *xinghun*.

Among the 124 ads I examined, there were 74 ads posted by gay men, 49 ads by lesbian woman, and one by a lesbian mother. Since most of the personal ads were short (usually two paragraphs in length—one paragraph for self-introduction and one for the expectations of the potential *xinghun* partner), 124 ads were a manageable size for analysis for this project.

The microblog of A-Qiang Tongzhi was the second site that I examined. A-Qiang is one of the most vocal activists to openly advocate for coming out and to criticize *xinghun*. He is the executive director of PFLAG (a U.S.-based family and ally organization for LGBTQ) China, an LGBT columnist, and a famous LGBT activist in China. A-Qiang launched his personal microblog in 2009 and by June 21, 2015, he had

posted 12, 931 microblogs with 42,158 followers. As one of the very rare sites where open discussions on homosexuality consistently happen, his personal microblog is a contesting site where Chinese queer subjects share their stories and/or express their ideas on issues that concerned LGBT communities in China. Among those issues, “coming out” and marriage are two frequently mentioned topics, while parents-queers relationship is often the focus of his posting and related commentary chains.

A-Qiang is very vocal on the issues of coming out and *xinghun*. By June 21st, 2015, he had made 351 posts about coming out (*chugui* 出柜) and 60 posts about *xinghun*, many of which elicited heated debates. For instance, in a long post which he wrote for online media (荷兰在线, <http://helanonline.cn/>) which was then posted on his microblog, he referred to *xinghun* as “poison pills” (毒药), drawing over 200 comments with almost 600 retweets. Among those posts (351+60) as well as the commentary chains under the original posts, I analyzed those that had elicited extensive interaction and debates (over 50 comments). This resulted in 6 postings on coming out and 10 postings on *xinghun*. These 16 postings and related commentary chains made up the other set of online texts that I analyzed.

Together, the two websites I examined provide a collection of arguments about coming out and/or *xinghun*. Chinagayles.com provided self-portraits of *xinghun* as personal practices; the A-Qiang microblog provided on discussions on coming out/*xinghun* as a community phenomenon. Through these two web sources, I was able to gather both “pro” and “con” arguments about coming out/*xinghun* from the perspectives of ordinary Chinese queer subjects.

My third data source was publicly available advertisements targeting queer audiences in mainland China during the 2015 Valentine's Day campaign. Specifically, I focused on the "We Do" marriage competition (official website: <http://bit.ly/1We9jqf>) organized by Chinese ecommerce giant Alibaba. The "We Do" marriage competition invites same-sex couples to record a short video to introduce their love stories on *Taobao*, an online marketplace owned by Alibaba. The public then voted on winners for a 7-day, all-expense paid wedding in California. The purpose of analyzing these commercial advertisements is to critically examine the economic drive of queerness, which has become an important force in shaping the landscape of queerness in contemporary China.

In summary, this study analyzes online personal advertisements of Chinese queer subjects looking for marriage partners, as well as commercial advertisements that target Chinese queer subjects and the microblog exchanges between mainland-based activist and some Chinese queer subjects, in order to achieve an understanding of the coming out practices and marriage practices and concerns of Chinese queer subjects.

I analyzed all my texts/data (including interview transcription) in Chinese, and I present their excerpts in my dissertation with accompanying English translations. I grew up in China, and I speak/write fluent Chinese and English. This allows me to translate my texts/data from Chinese to English. Therefore, all textual excerpts cited in this project are translated by me from Chinese to English.

I believe that the voices/experiences reflected in my texts/data are as valid as my knowledge as a researcher. That being said, to acknowledge the depth or "truth" of those life experiences does not mean to exempt them from critical examination; nor does it mean to naturalize them as outside discourses, "quarantined from critical consideration"

(Aizura, 2011, p. 157). As Joan Scott (1993) explains, experience “is at once always already an interpretation and something that needs to be interpreted” (p. 412). In other words, I seek out and value my texts/data as personal “truth,” but I remain skeptical of its ability to represent “truths” about individuals or cultures. To do so, a rhetorical analysis/criticism is deployed to examine texts/data in my study.

Methods: Analysis

Rhetorical Analysis/Criticism

Contemporary rhetorical criticism is not a specific method. It is a critical orientation toward texts. Specifically, it is a critical orientation that provides “a means of perception” (Jasinski, 2001, p. 251) which is not bound by the rigidity and detachment of a formal method (Zdenek, 2009). Notably, a critical orientation goes beyond the immediate text in question by explaining the structural origin of belief and commitment in the public sphere which, in turn, creates space for social activism and potentially for change.

Why Rhetorical Analysis/Criticism

Rhetorical criticism is a useful and relevant tool employed to examine the texts/data I collected. While rhetoric could be used to legitimize domination and oppression, it is also a terrain of contestation and transformation where “we live and imagine the good life” (McGuigan, 2005, p. 435). Critical rhetoric reveals the conditions of knowledge by articulating the missing premises of “the texts” (McGee, 1990), thereby bringing “the ‘undiscussed’ or concealed to the forefront” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 105). This is especially relevant in investigating the discourses of coming out and *xinghun* from

the perspectives of ordinary Chinese queer subjects, since homosexuality is still a taboo in most public avenues.

Philip Wander (1983) wrote, “criticism takes an ideological turn when it recognizes the existence of powerful vested interests benefiting from and consistently urging policies and technology that threaten life on this planet, when it realizes that we search for alternatives” (p. 18). Critical rhetoric sees “texts” as sites of ideological contestation, and its goal is to expose ideological tensions toward social transformation.

A critical rhetorical analysis is necessary to further examine both the interview data I gathered and other texts of my study, because texts are not “thing-in-itself” (Crowley, 1992, p. 457), but rather are rhetorical productions that needs critical disclosure. Ono and Sloop (1995) have argued that the discourse “is neither accessible in its entirety, nor is it discoverable, except through texts” (p. 20). Although I am skeptical to this statement that “texts” are our only access to discourse, which seems to underestimate the importance of materiality in rhetoric studies, it reveals the “textualization” (Paulesc, 2014) of data we collect in qualitative and rhetorical research. That is, my “data” are not “innocent”; they are mediated by my own textual creation, and therefore are subject to critical examination.

The Materiality of Rhetoric

It is salient to note that questions regarding the materiality of rhetoric in relation to power relations have informed the ideological turn (Wander, 1983; McGee, 1984; Crowley, 1992) and the shift from “rhetorical criticism” to “critical rhetoric” (McKerrow, 1989). In this project, I define rhetoric as forms of symbolic and embodied communication, a “thing-symbol” (Ott, 2015) complex that moves human subjects on the

sensory and cognitive levels. Rhetoric studies are interested in persuasion. Persuasion, or rhetorical effect, does not happen only on the discursive level. Instead, it is often enacted materially on bodies and practices (Hesford, 2011) and moves us affectively. Therefore, the materiality of rhetoric, Wendy Hesford (2011) points out, “cannot be separated from the symbolic meanings that are vested in it” (p. 12).

Rhetorical scholars who are interested in the materiality of rhetoric, however, have different understandings of how to explore materiality in rhetoric studies. Drawing upon Carole Blair’s study, Brian Ott (2015) distinguishes two approaches-- materialist rhetoric and rhetoric’s materiality -- in rhetoric studies. Materialist rhetoric, according to Ott, is rooted in Marxist materialism, attending to the material conditions of discourse, while rhetoric’s materiality is derived from posthumanism, focusing on the agency of matter itself (p. 6).

Ott further notes that there are two types of rhetorical effects: presence and meaning (p. 20). Meaning effect comes from the signifying/representational practices of rhetoric, while presence effect is the embodied experience of human subjects. Scholars interested in meaning effect, which “makes the world and its objects intelligible (or unintelligible)” (Ott, 2015, p. 16), emphasize the primacy of discourse in rhetorical acts. Scholars devoted to rhetoric’s materiality, on the other hand, focus on the nonrepresentational/asignifying elements of rhetoric, which elicit affect and move human subjects through embodied forms of knowing (Ott, 2015, p. 6).

In my dissertation, I explore both the meaning effect and the presence effect of rhetoric in my study of Chinese queer subjects. Discourse and sensation are dialectical; they mediate one another, and together shape the ways we how experience the world.

One important mission of the rhetorical critic, Rebecca Dingo and Blake Scott (2012) point out, is to demystify discourse, revealing the contesting nature of discourses and how and why discourses are not linear “but circulate continually across time and space” (p. 5). In Chapter 1, I have shown how the discourses of homosexuality shift historically and culturally; in the following chapters, I explore how transnational queer discourses circulate globally and locally, as well as how they shape the subjectivities of Chinese queer subjects.

In addition to these, I also attend to the material conditions of queer discourses circulated within Chinese queer communities, as emphasized in queer of color critique, to unravel how queer discourses are shaped by material struggles between different groups of human subjects based on class, gender, and nationality. As such, my study intends to reveal the mutually constituted relationships, or what Hesford calls “intertextuality” of queer discourses and the material conditions of queer lives on both local and global levels (I will return to the notion of intertextuality in next section).

Recognizing the constitutive power of queer discourses, as well as their material conditions, this project echoes Ott’s (2015) call to investigate the presence effect of rhetoric, attending to the nonrepresentational/asignifying elements of rhetoric, which move Chinese queer subjects through embodied experiences on the corporeal level. I explore, for example, the affective economy of “coming out” and “same-sex marriage” in contemporary China (Chapter 3), the rhetorical effect of silence/reticence, a nonrepresentational/asignifying rhetoric that communicates through the presence of human subjects, among some Chinese queer subjects when facing a tension between kinship and sexuality (Chapter 4), and the embodied experiences of performing *xinghun*

(Chapter 5). While delineating the constructive power of transnational queer discourses in different aspects of the lives of Chinese queer subjects, this study intends to address both the material conditions and the embodied experiences of Chinese queer subjects. As such, my dissertation wishes to unravel the complex intertextuality of queer discourses, material conditions, and embodied queer experiences in contemporary China.

Theoretical Frameworks

In this section, I will discuss the theoretical frameworks that inform my study. Each of the theoretical frameworks addressed in the following pages—*transnationalism*, *queer of color critique*, *postcolonial feminism*, and *public sphere theory*—provides rich heuristic tools and raises important questions to prompt my inquiry. They offer places from which to start thinking, and serve largely as what are called “sensitizing concepts” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Transnationalism

My dissertation employs a transnational approach. A transnational perspective is an analytic that focuses on relationships rather than places. In intercultural communication and globalization studies, transnationality is often conceptualized in two ways.

The first is to celebrate the “global village” (McLuhan, 1967) which transgresses the national/cultural boundaries to create a borderless world (see Grewal & Kaplan, 2001; Liu & Rofel, 2010; Shome, 2006). Nakayama and Halualani (2010) observe that intercultural communication is often seen as a privatized and neutral encounter/transaction between national group members (pp. 2-3). Such a perspective ignores the economic and cultural inequalities in transnational encounters. Ignoring

unequal power structure in transnationality, Raka Shome (2006) points out, “can only come about when one occupies globally privileged subject positions” (p. 255). Even worse, some intercultural/globalization studies serve as a vehicle of colonization, reifying and deepening existing inequalities and hierarchies. Drawing on Tani E. Barlow’s argument, Grewal and Kaplan (2001) notes that international area studies, for instance, are “implicated in the production of Cold War cultural and political knowledges about other cultures and nations” (p. 668). Therefore, a transnational perspective needs to address transnational relations “in which power structures, asymmetries, and inequalities become the conditions of possibility of new subjects” (Grewal & Kaplan, 2001, p. 671).

Another common narrative in transnational studies is to tell a story about how the local resists against the global (Grewal & Kaplan, 2001). Such an approach, despite its power sensibility and decolonializing intention, fails to capture the complicated dynamic between the local and the global. That is, the global is not just an imperialist force that oppresses and constrains the local; the global can also open up new possibilities for and sustain new subjectivities in the process of transnational contact and communication. Therefore, rather than reifying the local and the global, transnationalism recognizes that the interaction between the local and the global could also be generative.

The prefix “trans,” as in the word *transformation*, suggests that transnational movements create something new. Transnationalism thus “denotes both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something” (Ong, 1999, p.4). As Dingo and Scott note (2012), transnationality is a “dialectical movement of deterritorialization and reterritorialization” (p. 7), a process of “glocalization,” which refers to “the blending and mutual conditioning of the global and local” (p. 7). Compared

with the prefix “inter,” as in *intercultural* and *international*, a transnational perspective goes beyond the nation-state paradigm and examines the communication processes and practices that move across and within multiple scales – local/national/global (see Dingo & Scott, 2012; Hesford & Schell, 2008).

In the field of intercultural communication, according to Moon (2008, 2010), “culture” is predominantly seen as synonymous with “nation-state” since around 1978. Such a “nation-state” approach is constraint to movements across nation-state borders, assuming that our national identity is first and foremost to us. A transnational perspective, in contrast, focuses on the movements and their effects across and within local, national, and global scales, attending to the co-implication of different scales.

Such a co-implication, or what Hesford (2006) calls intertextuality, challenges classic rhetorical understanding of “text” and “context” (Hesford & Schell, 2008). Critical rhetoric has problematized our conceptualization of “text” (Leff, 1992), drawing our attention to “context” in rhetorical studies. Transnational rhetorical studies further complicate the relationship between “text” and “context,” arguing that the local, national, and global are mutually constituted, and thus contexts of one another.

Context, Hesford (2011) notes, is not a prediscursive reality that is out there; rather, context itself is also a text that is conditioned by texts/discourses. Therefore, transnational rhetorical studies are interested in how texts and contexts are entangled and co-conditioned. Critical to transnational rhetorical studies is to reveal how contexts shape texts/discourses, as well as how texts/discourses generate new contexts (Hesford, 2011).

Particular to my study, a transnational approach is appropriate because of the critical role of transnationality in the formation of queer subjectivity in mainland China.

Rofel (2007) observes that the formation of a homosexual identity among Chinese queer subjects is shaped by transnational queer movements in 1990s China. In such a process, Chinese queer subjects are “transnationally formed” and “nonterritorially organized” (Liu, 2010, p. 314). Without addressing transnationality in our studies, we will not fully understand the formation of queer subjectivities in contemporary China. Therefore, a transnational perspective of studying Chinese queer subjects means, as Liu and Rofel (2010) notes, “to signal a historical moment in which activities, identities, theories, and cultural productions self-consciously position themselves both within and beyond the nation-state” (p. 282).

It is important to note that transnational queer flows do not mean queer discourses circulate from the West to China. Other regions, especially Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, have significant influences on the formation of queer subjectivities in mainland China. As I have mentioned in Chapter 1, the taxonomy of female same-sex love was first introduced to China under the influence of Japan against the backdrop of decolonial movements in China. Additionally, the representation of ambiguous male-male eroticism in mainstream popular culture, which I will discuss in Chapter 3, resulted from the wide popularity of Japanese manga culture among the younger generation in contemporary China.

In fact, Hong Kong and Taiwan, Lucetta Yip Lo Kam (2012) observes, are critical reference points for the local queer communities in mainland China. For instance, the identity label of *tongzhi* was first used in Hong Kong and adopted by queer communities in mainland China, and *lala* was developed from the word *lazi* (拉子), a term used in Taiwan to refer to women with same-sex desires. Hong Kong and Taiwan therefore serve

as important discursive and communal resources for the development of queer subjectivities in mainland China.

Queer of Color Critique

Queer of color critique is another theoretical source for my study. Queer of color critique is a critical response to racism in queer theory and to heteronormativity in ethnic studies. It interrogates the mechanism where gender and sexuality are racialized. As an effort to bridge queer critique with the legacy of women of color feminism's intersectional critique (Villarejo, 2005), queer of color critique lays its focus on social formation (Ferguson, 2004), imagining theories that center the experiences of queer people of color and the necessity of decolonization (Driskill, 2010). It emphasizes “the formative role that race, gender, and sexuality play in political and economic relations” (Ferguson, 2004, p. 3).

Queer of color critique discloses how homonormativity is complicit in racialization, habituating and reproducing heteronormative norms. In *Terrorist Assemblage*, Jasbir Puar (2007) notices a historical shift in queerness—queerness is becoming regulatory and a process of racialization. For instance, through the narrative of incommensurate subject positionings, such as “Islam versus homosexuality,” whiteness is assisted by “homosexual populations that participate in the same identitarian and economic hegemonies as those hetero subjects complicit with this ascendancy” (p. 31). This “technology of race,” as Ferguson (2004) points out, has historically ascribed heteronormativity/universality to certain subjects and nonheteronormativity/particularity to others (p. 14). In other words, “gender and sexual differences variegate racial formation” (Ferguson, 2004, p. 3), and the distinction between normative

heteropatriarchy and nonheteronormativity is historically realized through the very process of racialization (Ferguson, 2004, p. 6). Nonheteronormativity, through the lens of queer of color critique, is in fact “a symptom or sign of a relentless and pathologizing racial logic” (Villarejo, 2005, p. 72).

Additionally, one important characteristic of queer of color critique, according to Ferguson (2004), is that it is a form of historical materialist analysis that disidentifies (Muñoz, 1999) with Marxism. This brings a class-consciousness and a form of analysis that focuses on the material conditions of everyday life and the structuring of societies. Such a materialist emphasis echoes critical rhetoric’s interest in material conditions as they are both influenced by Marxist materialism. In doing so, queer of color critique grounds itself in the day-to-day struggles of queer subjects, making the “queer” in queer theory to prevail over the “theory” (see Halperin, 2004).

However, given that queer of color critique is a U.S.-centric approach, one might ask if it is feasible or even desirable to “export” queer of color critique to contemporary Chinese studies. Some might argue that using queer of color critique, in the context of contemporary China may reproduce the colonizing effects, where the West is perceived as producers of theoretical knowledge, while the mission of non-Western intellectuals become its consumers to do empirical research.

I argue that queer of color critique, although crafted in U.S. contexts, is transferable for Chinese queer subjects— it achieves transferability not through universalizing the experiences of U.S. queers of color, but through resonance with Chinese queer subjects who experience similar struggles. In my study, I use queer of color critique as an analytic sensibility and a heuristic. Queer of color critique is utilized

as a way of thinking about and conducting analyses, rather than as “being situated in a familiar genealogy” (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013, p. 795) or “drawing on lists of standard citations” (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013, p. 795).

Informed by queer of color critique, my dissertation is devoted to “transnationalize” queer theory, putting queer theory in relationship with a complex understanding of culture. My study aims to challenge the assumption of universal/global queerness in some queer theories, which are interested in abstraction and “radical” politics, rather than the everyday struggles of the less privileged queer subjects. In contrast, I am interested in the diverse ways of being queer in different cultures, which have been marginalized in current sexuality studies since queerness has been associated with the Western culture and the West “promotes itself as being the sole champion of queer rights” (Aiello et al., 2013, p. 102).

Postcolonial Feminism

Postcolonial feminism shares with queer of color critique the goal of reconfiguring the structures of knowledges and histories, while bringing geopolitics to the center of our analyses. As Alarcón, Kaplan, and Moallem (2007) note, “the discourses of ‘international’ or ‘global’ feminism rely on political and economic as well as cultural concepts of discrete nations who can be placed into comparative or relational status, always maintaining the West as the center” (p. 12). Postcolonial feminism “provides a historical and international depth to the understanding of cultural power. It studies issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality, that are of concern to contemporary critical scholarship by situating these phenomena within geopolitical arrangements, and relations of nations and their inter/national histories” (Shome & Hegde, 2002, p. 252).

Postcolonial feminism further challenged anthropologists' practice of "speaking for Others" (Alcoff, 2008). Linda Alcoff (2008) points out that we are morally responsible for the unheard Others, because we are interdependent and "[i]t is an illusion that I can separate from others to such an extent that I can avoid affecting them" (pp. 490-491). Through the lens of postcolonial feminism, speaking with Chinese queers means reversing the Western anthropologists' gaze: the margins now turn to examine the center, questioning the researcher's right to speak about a subaltern Other from a privileged position.

Postcolonial feminism converges with queer of color critique on the racializing and/or colonizing effect of homonationalism. Puar (2007) examines homonationalism as a new technology of race, "a reintensification of racialization through queerness" (p. xii). The whiteness of dominant queer discourse, Puar argues, is manifested in its teleological investments in homonormative narratives, which have privileged white, middle class, urban, and queer liberal subjects through "the contemporary politics of securitization, Orientalism, terrorism, torture, and the articulation of Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian sexualities" (Puar, 2007, p. xiii).

For example, the predominant narrative "coming out" is built on a particular kind of queer experience and geography, which is usually from the standpoint of white, middle class, urban and of U. S. citizenship (Chávez, 2013). In this rendering, my study offers a critique of homonormativity in mainstream queer theory, in order to trouble "the teleological investments in the 'closeting' and 'coming out' narratives that have long been critiqued by poststructuralist theorist for the privileged (white) gay, lesbian, and queer liberal subjects they inscribe and validate" (Puar, 2007, p. 2).

Specifically, I see the process of homonormalization as a vehicle of racialization. With the global circulation of homonormative discourse, cultural difference is increasingly identical to racial hierarchy, which is most evident in the developmentalist discourse implicated in transnational queer discourse. Under the effect of homonormativity, all queer phenomena are “placed within a developmental and teleological matrix that ends with Western ‘gay’ sexuality” (Manalansan, 1995, p. 428). This reflects a variation of “European” identities, which claim white gayness (often presented as “gay rights” and “gay pride”) as indicators of their superior “modernity” and “civilization” (Haritaworn, Tauquir & Erdem, 2008). As a result, the process of racialization is advanced by homonormative discourse, which positions “Third World” sexualities (framed as sexual cultures) as “anterior, premodern, and in need of Western political development” (Gopinath, 2005, p. 12). This colonial construction, I agree, is “less a reflection of progressive gender relations than of regressive race relations” (Haritaworn, Tauquir & Erdem, 2008, p. 10).

While postcolonial feminism calls out the imperialist effect in hegemonic queerness, it also cautions us against another tendency in the discursive construction of sexualities, which narrates an innocent pre-colonial past. Cindy Patton (2002) notes that there are two effects of different registers of sexual globalization: “the tendency to view ‘native’ sexualities as unproblematic until colonial regimes try to control them, and the belief that ‘native’ sexualities are unarticulatable and oppressed until liberationists arrive to help them speak” (p. 207). The “innocent” narrative about native sexualities is as problematic as the other narrative because it reinscribes and reifies the dichotomy of East-West sexuality, which itself is a colonial construction. This “innocent” narrative of

native sexualities is exemplified in the field of sexuality studies in China. Scholarship in Chinese sexualities often evokes the notion of “Chinese” as something different from the West, resisting Euro-American style sexual politics (Liu & Ding, 2005). Petrus Liu (2010) further argues that in most narratives about Chinese queerness, China’s role in queer theory is merely that of “the paradigmatic Other” (p. 300). China is relevant only as the producer of differences from Western queer theory; it is included in discussion only when it manages to produce differences that can “expand a liberal-pluralist collection of anthropological specimens” (p. 314).

In such a binary between Western gayness and indigenous queerness, Chinese queer subjects can be either universal (read: Western) or Chinese (read: nationalist), but not both (Rofel, 2010). Instead of forcing Chinese queer subjects to fit into such dichotomy, I see Chinese queer subjects as “neither exemplar of a global gay identity nor mere local particularity” (Rofel, 2010, p. 89). My study recognizes that the notion of “Chinese sexuality” is in a state of constant flux and change, just as the notion of queerness is “constantly expanded, supplemented, and revised by what is “Chinese” (Liu, 2010, p. 297). Rather than assuming the fixity of “Chinese sexuality,” I am more interested in tracing the paths of circulation (Hesford, 2006) to explore the power relations in such circulation, as well as the critical potentials that open up through its interaction with transnational queer discourses.

Public Sphere Theory

“The public” is a significant site for the production and circulation of discourses about sexualities. Even though there are many silences about sexualities in China, there are, in fact, publicly available expressions of “alternative” sexual discourses. While

rhetoric is traditionally understood as a practice and discipline oriented to “public” life and discourse, contemporary rhetorical criticism has been orientated toward not just public discourses but also an examination of the conditions of publicity and privacy. For instance, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (1995) suggest that the relation between the public and the private is what is at issue in sexuality studies, because much of what passes for public culture is actually riddled with heteronormativity (p. 349).

In his discussion about public and private, Warner (2002) argues that any organized attempt to transform gender or sexuality is a problem of redefining the public and the private. Transnational discursive flow opens up spaces for local engagement and public intervention, facilitating a discursive arena for Chinese queer subjects. The public sphere is a significant arena for social negotiation of sexuality. As Warner demonstrates in *Public and Counterpublics* (2002), publicness is created through gender and sexuality. As such, the public sphere is a principle instance of the forms of embodiment and social relations that are themselves at issue.

However, not all sexualities are public or private in the same way; being in public could be a privilege when it allows a sense of unity between the public selves or roles and private ones, which are usually required to be filtered or repressed for others (Warner, 2002, p. 24)⁷. Therefore, in my study, I will examine a series of “public” texts about Chinese sexualities, including commercial advertisements, personal ads on a public website, and online debates about “coming out” and *xinghun*.

⁷ Of course, staying in private (being anonymous) could be also a privilege in other situations.

Queerness is constructed by different discourses through an ongoing negotiation of the boundaries between public and private. Contemporary women's movements and gay liberation in the United States, Warner points out, both imagine a politics that interrogates the boundaries between public and private, giving public relevance to the most "private" matters (p. 31). The meaning of queerness, which is publicly constructed yet "feels" private (Warner, 2002), is constantly shaped across the range of social relations.

Given the co-constitutive relationship between public and private, queer subjects do not have any private sexualities without secure publicness. Warner (2002) has reminded us that "the feeling of protection is one of the hallmarks of modern privacy" (p. 52). In the liberal tradition, according to Warner (2002), private persons have become the proper site of humanity, claiming that rights are vested on the basis of private humanity (p. 39). As such, freedom is defined as "negative liberty, inherent in private persons" and political life is viewed as "the restraint of power by a critical public" (p. 40), in which "particularized views and the gendered body would always seem matter out of place" (p. 41). As a result, sexuality is under the "protection" of the private, which is exempt from public intervention. As such, social reluctance to address sexuality in fact has contributed to the perpetuation of existing violence against sexual minorities.

Warner's account of publicity and privacy in relation to gender and sexuality is a decidedly Western account, and one would be right to question the transferability of his insights to a Chinese context. When the expansion of Western (neo) liberalism encounters Chinese authoritarian politics, the issue of sexuality becomes even more complicated:

...in the current moment in China, there is no way for activists to demand rights from the state. China currently has the formal rule of law, but only those involved with property, commerce, and consumption can claim something called “rights.” While rights associated with consumerism, commercial progress, and intellectual property seem to be developing rapidly, other kinds of rights are marginalized (Rofel, 2007, pp. 189-190).

Although “we can conceive of public spheres emerging in the absence of [institutional] guarantees” (Hauser, 2001, p. 36), it could never completely serve as a substitution of the institutional guaranteed modality for opinion formation and decision making on public issues.

That being said, the family, a seemingly private sphere, plays a unique role in the Chinese public life. By Chinese convention, the unit of the “private” is constituted by the family instead of the individual. Within Chinese culture, selfhood is often defined by responsibilities and obligations, and more importantly, obligations as a family member to maintain the family bloodline. Rofel (2007) observes that Chinese culture hinges on repeated appeals to family, which is an indispensable site for establishing one’s humanness as well as one’s social subjectivity. As a result, identity-based homosexuality is often seen to interfere with the ability to perform one’s role in the family, and thus becomes a family issue (Cho, 2009, p. 402).

Chou (2000) observes that the main concern of Chinese parents is “not so much the child’s intimate relationship with people of the same sex, but that she or he becomes ‘lesbian’ or ‘gay’, a sexed category that privileges sexuality at the expense of his or her position in the family kinship system, thus making the child a nonbeing in Chinese

culture” (p. 96). Being Chinese, especially a Chinese man, is normatively accorded to marriage and procreation in order to maintain the family bloodline (Lia et al., 2010, p. 412). In their study about gay men in China, Haochu Lia et al. (2010) write:

...to become a true adult is to be connected to others and to take up ones obligations, in particular familial obligations, and failure to do so is to be less than human. Homosexuality, therefore, regarded as meaningless, abnormal, wrong, inharmonious and unnecessary (pp. 401-402).

Within this culture, individuals will not be considered as full human being until they are involved in a hetero-sexual marriage; one is seen as lacking until they meet the cultural expectation of being within a hetero-family with children. Otherwise, they will be excluded from some access to economic resources, with their ability to participate in social and political activities constrained. Therefore, within the context of Chinese culture, family as a private sphere is in fact the primary site of sexuality negotiation, a site that Chinese queer subjects seek to work on and against from within (Muñoz, 1999).

Limitation

As a preliminary study of the non-confrontational/post-oppositional queer politics in contemporary mainland China, there are some limitations to my data. For example, all the interviews in my study were conducted through *Wechat* and/or phone calls. Although technology gives me access to interviewees who will be otherwise difficult to reach, it is not the same as face-to-face interaction. Some meanings are embodied and personally experienced, but not necessarily translatable into language; they can only be sensed but are usually difficult to be phrased. Without being bodily present with my interviewees, I could only record their verbal responses (and their silences). I recognize the importance

of bodily presence and non-verbal communication in qualitative research; however, I was not able to make my trip to mainland China due to the financial limitations of being a graduate student.

In addition to the above, I am also aware that the interview data as well as the online texts that I have collected represent the experiences of a very narrow group. As I have discussed earlier, my interviewees are predominantly *Han* Chinese who are currently members of an urban population with college or above education. Moreover, I used snowball sampling to get access to potential interviewees because sexuality is still a risky topic in contemporary China. Such a recruiting method may aggravate existing bias in my interview data, since people tend to recommend those who shared similar backgrounds or opinions with them for interview. In a word, the experiences of my interviewees reflect more of the urban, middle class experiences of the *Han* Chinese. Future studies need to focus on the life experiences of queer subjects who are from rural areas, from the working class, and/or belong to ethnic minority groups in China.

In a similar vein, the online texts I gathered for rhetorical analysis represent the voices of those who have access to the internet with proper skills for online participation, producing a decidedly incomplete and non-representative sample. Those who do not have access to virtual discussion or are not apt to the use of online advertisement are thus excluded from my examination. I am aware that my choice of texts was not innocent but a trade-off between what I could achieve and what I would miss through such a choice: Through examining two web sources—Chinagayles.com and the A-Qiang microblog, I was able to gather both “pro” and “con” arguments about coming out/*xinghun* from the perspectives of ordinary Chinese queer subjects. At the same time, the experiences of

many other Chinese queer subjects who were not invited to such cyber participation were negated and lost in my analysis. Ironically, my study on silent negotiation ended up relying on the “voices” online and failed to account for the silences of many Chinese in the cyberspace.

Another limitation of this project is the lack of discussion about the fluidity and slippage of sexuality among Chinese queer subjects. In my dissertation, I only focus on the experiences of self-identified *lala/tongzhi/tongxinglian/gay/lesbian*. However, sexuality is fluid, and one’s sexual identity may not be stable throughout her/his/their life. I am aware that the fluidity of sexuality has important implications on the queer life in contemporary China. For instance, the fluidity or slippage of sexuality in marriage will complicate our understanding of the performativity of *xinghun*. Unfortunately, I was not able to discuss such a rich phenomenon in my dissertation. Future research interested in (queer) marriage should go beyond the homo/hetero-sexual boundary and investigate the diverse sexual experiences of human life.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discuss the methods I used for this study, the theoretical frameworks—*transnationalism*, *queer of color critique*, *postcolonial feminism*, and *public sphere theory*—employed to examine the texts/data I collected through interviews and online sources, as well as the limitation of this project. In the following chapters, I will be discussing the discursive and material conditions of queerness in contemporary China. Specifically, I will investigate the affective economy of the “coming out” discourse. Through revealing the economic drives of queer discourse, I will show how

the discourse of “coming out” is prioritized in Chinese LGBT movements in order to foster a domestic queer market in contemporary China.

CHAPTER 3

CONTEXTUALIZING QUEER DESIRES IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA

In this chapter, I will investigate the discursive and material conditions of queerness in contemporary China, examining the “missing premises” (McGee, 1990, p. 281) of understanding Chinese queerness. Through an examination of these missing premises, the objective of this chapter is to contextualize queerness in mainland China at current historical moment, so that we can achieve a better understanding of the choices and practices of some Chinese queer subjects with regards to coming out and marriage, which I will investigate in the next two chapters. It is through the critical articulation and disclosure of queer discourse circulating in China, which occurs in an indirect, tacit, and coded way (McKerrow, 1989), that we can gain better understanding of the formation of Chinese queer subjects.

This chapter outlines the discourses that condition the formation of Chinese queer subjectivity on four levels: community, state/social, media/cultural, and economic levels. I first discuss the discourse of *quanzi* (圈子) that set the boundaries of Chinese queer communities and thus define the collective identity/ies of Chinese queer subjects. Next, I discuss how family and marriage, two of the greatest concerns among Chinese queer subjects, are regulated by the state to produce a desired cultural citizenship in neoliberal China. Following that, I move to the media/cultural aspect to discuss *danmei* (耽美) and *maifu* (卖腐) --representations of homosexuality in Chinese popular culture and their implications for Chinese queer subjects. Finally, I discuss the affective economy of the “coming out” discourse in contemporary China. In doing so, I reveal the economic drives and materiality of queer discourse as emphasized in queer of color critique. Focusing on

the emerging “pink economy” (or “rainbow economy”) that often appeals to queer affect, I will show how the discourse of “coming out” is prioritized in Chinese LGBT movements in order to foster a domestic queer market and/or draw transnational queer funding in contemporary China.

***Quanzi*: The Queer Circle**

In this section, I employ a rhetorical analysis to the *quanzi* discourse as shown in the personal ads and microblog posts I examined to first show how a silhouette of the queer circle emerges from the advertisement discourses. I then address more directly the “content” of this circle, or who constitutes the imagined queer community in mainland China.

Quanzi (圈子, which literally means a circle) is a term that I came across when doing textual analysis of the blog and Chinese websites on *xinghun*. This term, *quanzi*, is frequently used as shorthand to speak of a Chinese queer community as a Chinese queer “circle.” In general, a *quanzi* refers to a group of people who share the same interest or hobby. While the term *quanzi* clearly indicates a sense of community, it is different from an identity-based group, the boundaries of which are often imagined as stable and closed. Rather, *quanzi* suggests a more fluid and permeable collective, the members of which come and go with time. Specifically in the personal ads on Chinagayles.com, the term *quanzi* is, however, often invoked in negative ways. When *quanzi* is mentioned, it is almost always paired with word *bu* (不 no/not/non), which signifies negation. In addition, deeper reading of the personal ad descriptions reveals that what the *quanzi* can do to queer subjects and/or the ways that queer subjects relate to the *quanzi*, usually carry negative connotations. In short, there is hardly anything positive to be said when the term

quanzi is used when discussing one's affiliation with and participation in the Chinese queer circle/circuit in the personal ads I examined on Chinagayles.com.

This is most evident in the self-introductions section of personal ads on the website. Phrases such as “I do not screw around in the circle” (本人不混圈), “I do not soak in the circle” (本人不泡圈), and “I do not have a ‘so-called’ circle” (没有所谓的圈子) are three common statements offered in self-introductions, especially among gay men. Given the advertising nature of these self-introductions, the fact that gay men are disclaiming their participation in and/or identification with the *quanzi* suggests that association with the queer communities is not considered as desirable; it is as if being part of a *quanzi* is a stigma that queer subjects need to prove themselves be free of. In this vein, the *quanzi* discourse suggests a clear sense of a queer community “out there,” or a clear sense of concretizations of queer subjects; it is against this perception of a queer community that some Chinese queer subjects craft their sense of self. Within such a construction, being in a queer community includes both a political self-identification and a degree of public visibility, as indicated in dominant LGBT movements; it also suggests a disavowal of the bio-genetic family as the primary reference point for the self, a gesture that many Chinese queer subjects find difficult to embrace.

This disassociation is clear when queer subjects comment on their expectations for prospective partners. Among the ad texts I analyze, “not screwing around within the circle” (不混圈子) is one of the most common criteria/expectations. Other queer subjects are less rigid on this, setting a threshold on what is an acceptable contact with the *quanzi*. For example, a gay man wrote: “I hope you... not screw with the circle frequently, with

an eye-agreeable face” (阿拉斯: “希望你…不要频繁混圈, 长相顺眼就好”). In this case, not only is the *quanzi* a “thing” that one interacts with—to screw with—but the relationship with the *quanzi* is quantifiable. In other words, a queer subject is constituted every time (s)he engages in the *quanzi*; the boundary of the *quanzi* is well-defined but porous: one can be in and out the *quanzi* through her/his life. The more (s)he enacts this relationship with the imagined LGBT community, the more “gay” (s)he is, and thus the less acceptable (s)he is. In other words, the contact or engagement with the *quanzi* is perceived as cumulative-- a potentially dangerous queer identity is constituted and/or fortified with each interaction with the circle. There are some others who are more cautious of the influence of the *quanzi*. For example, a gay man announced in his self-introduction: “My expectation for friend: low-profile, closeted, and without any good friends from the *quanzi*” (安徽合肥1988: “我的觅友期望: 低调, 不出柜, 没有圈子好友”).

In short, when the idea of a circle is invoked in the *quanzi* discourse, one is perceived as being either inside or outside of “the Chinese queer community.” In other words, the circle is a boundary that distinguishes insiders from outsiders, differentiating between “us” and “others.” The above examples demonstrate how for some queer subjects, insiders of the LGBT community are perceived as dangerous individuals who they need to guard themselves against, to the extent that it is not acceptable that one’s *xinghun* partner takes a part in or even simply has friends from the queer community. Queer communities, as suggested in the statement above, threaten to “erode” the “normal” life of “good” Chinese queer subjects.

An important question that is raised by the *quanzi* discourse is: Who constitutes this imagined circle/community? We can gain some insight from the discussion of *xinghun* on the *A-Qiang Tongzhi* microblog. While the attitudes toward *xinghun* were divided among respondents on his microblog, discourses about “the queer community” were quite consistent: the cultural Other in the Chinese society. In the series discussion of *xinghun*, for example, some of the participants associated the *quanzi* with “pure gay” (纯 gay), suggesting that the *quanzi* is an enclave that is isolated from other social belongings.

For example, a blog commenter with the username我是小七吖 wrote: “After all, not all gays are pure gays; besides interacting with the *quanzi*, they have other personal needs such as family feelings” (“毕竟不是所有gay都是纯gay的，他们除了和圈子接触也有自己的一些诸如家庭感觉等需求的。”). The English word “gay” in the Chinese sentence here indicates something foreign, coming from the outside rather than stemming from Chinese queer subjects themselves. A community consisting of “pure gay” is therefore located as having originated from an “elsewhere” where Chinese queer subjects don’t belong, and outside of their everyday experience.

Figure One⁸ (below) shows how social relations are organized in Chinese societies. As shown in Figure 1, social relations in Chinese societies may be depicted as being primarily organized as different social circles. The family occupies the central location and social relations are bonded through affective connection (at least people are

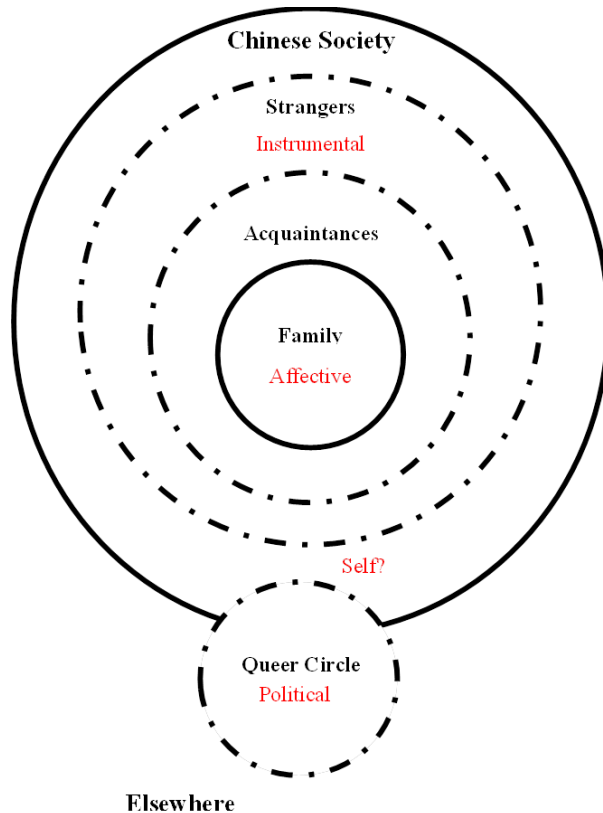
⁸ This model is developed on Fei (2008)’s theory about the organizational principles of Chinese society. First published in 1947, Fei’s work shows how these principles reflect and are reflected in the moral and ethical characters of people. Fei’s theory argues that Chinese social relations work through different circles of social networks, with the self at the center and decreasing closeness as one moves out.

encouraged to see it as such). From a Mencian (a major tradition in Confucianism) perspective, the affective connection with non-familial others is no more than an extension of the affective investment in one's family (Radice, 2006). While the boundary of the family circle is relatively fixed and stable, the circles of acquaintances and strangers are permeable, and people are bonded through instrumental investment (in the strangers circle) or a mix of affective and instrumental interaction (in the acquaintance circle). These three circles, together, constitute the "normal" network of social relations in Chinese society, and the cultivation of "moral self" is located within such a network. The queer circle, on the other hand, is perceived as an external element/idea brought in from the outside: there is a perceived boundary between the "Chinese society" and "elsewhere," where the notion of Western culture/society is often invoked to maintain such a boundary. While some have brought the queer circle into Chinese society and have cultivated it locally, the queer circle is still perceived as non-native and therefore a distortion of the "normal" social network. Such segregation and tension between the "normal" social network and the queer circle has raised a question for Chinese queer subjects: which network do Chinese queer subjects belong to? Within this framework, one belongs to either the "normal" network, which is arranged around the family circle, or the queer circle, but not both.

Another important question is: How does the world of "pure gay" look like? Using the English word "gay," instead of local identity labels such as *tongzhi* (同志), *tongxinglian* (同性恋), or not even the Chinese translation of "gay" *Ji* (基) in the statement, indicates that being "gay" is a Western way of living-- being "out and proud." It points to Euro-American identity politics that emphasize public visibility and formal

equality. This Euro-American queer discourse has gained a dominant position in Chinese LGBT movements; as a result, it is often perceived that Chinese queer circles consist of those who come out and publicly announce their queer sexuality, despite the fact that very few of Chinese queers do so.

Figure 3.1 Queer Circle and Subjectivity Imagined in Chinese Society



It is important to note here that the use of language is not neutral or purely descriptive, but political. The embrace of “gay” means that one’s sexual desire has become a master category of identity (Chou, 2000) and “pure gay” are those who prioritize their sexual identity over other social belongings. While same-sex desires are not framed as something foreign among some Chinese queer subjects, this “gay” identity which is constituted through the negation of “the closet” and “silence” is perceived as

Western and thus from outside of everyday experience of Chinese queer subjects (Jolly, 2000).

One cannot ignore the historical context in this case. Howard Chiang (2010) argues that the question of sexual identity did not even appear in Chinese thinking, since there is no such thing as homosexuality outside epistemic modernity in China. As I have mentioned in Chapter 1, it is not until the 1990s that visible homosexual identity and communities slowly emerged in Chinese society (Kong, 2011; Martin, 2009; Rofel, 2007) as a response to the global queer flows. The process of modernization is the same process of sexual becoming: in Hong Kong, people with same-sex desires became “gay” or *Ji* (the local translation of the English word “gay”) in 1970s, and many of them have become *tongzhi* (同志) since 1990s (Chou, 2000, pp.59-60), which indicates a rise of cultural consciousness in the struggle of sexual identity.

It is therefore important to note that for queer subjects in mainland China, the terminologies of *gay*, *ji*, *tongxinglian*, and *tongzhi* (or *lala*, the Chinese translation of the word “lesbian,” first popularized in Taiwan) are all “foreign” to some extent, and one does not replace another. Rather, they coexist in contemporary mainland China, signifying different ways in which people understand their own sexual experiences and feelings (see Altman, 1996).

This brings us to the economic aspect of the discourse of *quanzi*. The “foreignness” of the *quanzi*, or Chinese queer communities, has to do with the reliance of Chinese LGBT movements on Western resources. Chinese LGBT activism receives funding mainly from Western countries (see Common Language, 2015). Cui Zi’en, for example, points out that the economic and political center of independent Chinese queer

films is actually located in the West. Independent Chinese queer films, he argues, rely heavily on international resources including funding, releasing avenues, and discursive support (Zhang, 2014). In fact, the entire LGBT movement in China has constantly turned to the West for financial, political, and theoretical support. Even the root of LGBT activism in China is usually narrated as originated by Western influence and located in the home of Western activists in China (Luoming & Dana, 2013): In the common narrative of the beginning of LGBT activism in China, it is traced back to “cosmopolitan gay Chinese, Western academics, and social activists from China who had studied abroad [and] started gathering” (Moreno-Tabarez et al., 2014, p. 113) in early 1990s.

Such a Western origin story of Chinese LGBT activism and the continuing reliance on Western resources in Chinese LGBT movements have painted “the Chinese queer community” with a Western color. While Western organizations control the major funding of LGBT organizations in China, they also set the agendas for Chinese LGBT movements; the Western audience, rather than local queer subjects in China, becomes the intended audience of many LGBT activism in China. As a result, not only are same-sex desires assigned as Western, as I have discussed in Chapter 1, but also Chinese LGBT movements and Chinese queer community as whole are deeply influenced by Western queer discourse and are felt as “foreign” by many Chinese queer subjects.

Family and Marriage in Neoliberal China

Queer film maker Xiaopei He shared an interesting story she encountered during her making of the documentary on *xinghun* (形婚), the marital union between a lesbian women and a gay man to cope with the marriage pressure: A heterosexual woman joined an online community for *xinghun*, pretending to be a lesbian in order to seek a gay man

for a *xinghun*. The gay man she found tried to introduce his single lesbian friends to her because she did not have a partner. This straight woman, who was not interested in women at all, ended up being busy with finding all kinds of excuses to reject the “good intention” of the gay man, her *xinghun* husband. “This is so difficult,” she explained: “It is more difficult to be a heterosexual, single woman than to be a homosexual woman (who is married)” (Sophia, 2015).

Such a story reveals the ideological power of marriage in contemporary China. The discursive power of marriage is, however, always entangled with another social institution—family—in Chinese society. Lisa Rofel (2007) notes “[f]amily is the metonym for belonging, not simply to the nation-state but to Chinese culture writ-large” (p. 100). Chinese culture is often described as family oriented, and the practice of heterosexual marriage is crucial to consolidate existing family value in Chinese society. Moreover, the family discourse is so powerful that it has become a significant factor that defines queer subjects in China. Rofel (2007) points out that the “ongoing discursive productions of family are indispensable sites for establishing one’s humanness as well as one’s social subjectivity” (p. 100). The subjectivity of queer subjects is defined by responsibilities and obligations, especially obligations as a family member to maintain the family bloodline. Queer subjects who fail to meet the expectation of procreation within a heterosexual marriage will be considered as fundamentally irresponsible (Kam, 2012). That is, within conventional Chinese culture, an individual will not be considered as a full human being until (s)he is involved in a hetero-marital relationship; one is seen as lacking until (s)he meets the cultural expectation of reproduction.

Privatization and Family

The role of family and marriage has become central (again) in neoliberal China after decades of disruption from the socialist government to take control in the intimate lives of its citizens. During the reform era (1978-present), China has been turning into a neoliberal society embracing privatization in all kinds of areas. Neoliberalism valorizes the notions of privatization and personal responsibility (Duggan, 2003), placing economic responsibility on the individual citizen and making individuals responsible for their own social conditions (Wingard, 2013, p. 7) through the employment of cultural values as a moral agent (Ferguson, 2004) to join its economic goal.

In the context of contemporary China, the discourses of aging population and pension crisis become more and more prominent as socialist China turns into a neoliberal society. The neoliberal state declares that the elderly belong to their children; supporting and caring for elderly is framed as a familial obligation rather than the responsibility of the state. Such privatization also means the patriarchal family institution is replacing the state “as the chief monitor of people’s private lives” and “an effective agent of social control over non-heterosexual subjects” (Kam, 2012, p. 90).

That being said, privatization does not mean the state ceases to intervene in the intimate life of ordinary Chinese people; marriage is still a crucial site where the state utilizes governing techniques to produce the desired citizenship to facilitate the neoliberal privatization. For example, according to Chinese law, children born out of wedlock cannot obtain a household registration permit (*hukou*, 户口), which would deprive them of basic social services and educational opportunities. Such a wedlock policy, although not targeting queer subjects in particular, becomes an effective social control over

Chinese queer subjects and “drives people into heterosexual families” (D' Emilio, 1983, p. 109). Indeed, three of my interviewees told me that they pursued a marriage out of the consideration of obtaining a household registration permit for their prospective children. In fact, one does not have reproductive rights until (s)he is in a hetero-marital relationship recognized by the state (see Wang, 2013); “there is a hierarchy of social recognition concerning one’s marital status in China” (Kam, 2012, p. 67) supported by the economic and legal policies of the neoliberal state.

The Biopolitics of Marriage

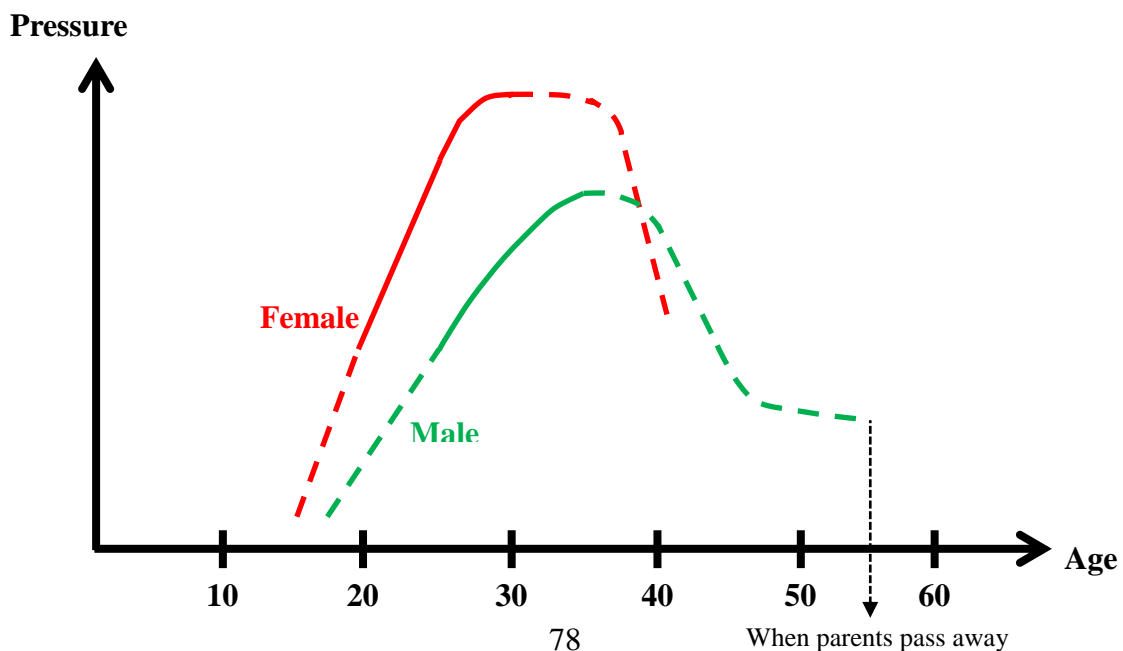
While family occupies a fundamental place in Chinese society, it is the heterosexual marriage system that guarantees the reproduction of kin family across generations. Engebretsen (2009) observes that there is a strong value for kin and lineage in Chinese history. The institution of heterosexual marriage, she argues, remains the central vehicle for normative kin relationships to ensure stable families and “proper” cultural citizenship (Engebretsen, 2009, p. 6).

Due to the critical role of marriage in producing “proper” cultural citizenship in Chinese society, heterosexual (monogamous) marriage has become “the state-enforced model of intimate union since the introduction of the country’s first Marriage Law in 1950” (Kam, 2012, p. 60); any intimate relationships fall out of such a model are either condemned as abnormal and immoral, such as same-sex relationships, or described as “premodern” (often referred as “primitive” or “living fossil”), such as the alternative sexual union and family system among some Moso people that are not recognized by current marriage law and are seen as waiting to be “civilized” by modern marriage system (Shih, 2010). The marriage institution is such an important regulatory force in

Chinese society that participating in a marital union becomes a cultural obligation for everyone. Given that a heterosexual monogamous union is the only marital form recognized in contemporary mainland China, a hetero-marital relationship becomes the cultural expectation for all Chinese subjects, regardless of their sexual orientations.

The discourse of marriage is so pervasive that marriage becomes a major source of pressure in the everyday life of Chinese queer subjects (Chen, 2009; Kam, 2012; Engebretsen, 2009); the intensity of marital pressure changes throughout the lives of Chinese queer subjects, enacted differently on female and male queer subjects (see Figure 3.1): while female queer subjects often experience marital pressure at an earlier age with *higher intensity* because womanhood is still significantly defined by domestic life, male queer subjects often experienced *more enduring* marital pressure because they are less likely to be considered as “too old to get married” than women. The marital pressure of latter sometimes persists until their parents pass away if they refuse to participate in a hetero-marital relationship toward procreation.

Figure 3.2 Pressure of Marriage



Although it is difficult to make a sweeping generalization about the social status of married, single, and divorced individuals, it is clear that there is a category of “abnormal” individuals in China. Taking women as an example, sexually abnormal women include “unmarried women, impotent women, sexually promiscuous women, asexual women, homosexual women, and sexually dominating women” (Kam, 2012, p. 65). Being a homosexual woman, if not married, faces double or multiple stigmas with regard with her sexuality. In this rendering, Chinese queer subjects who do not conform to the hetero-marital norm risk being excluded from multiple forms of access to social resources, with his/her ability to participate in social and political activities constrained.

For instance, a single lesbian woman may receive less economic and other forms of material rewards than her married colleague (Guo, 2015; Kam, 2012). She will, for example, get a 50,000 RMB housing subsidy from her employer when she is “single,” compared with 200,000 RMB as a “married woman” (Guo, 2015). According to the law, she does not have any reproduction rights, meaning that she could not use the sperm bank, deliver a child in any hospitals, or adopt a child without engaging a hetero-marital relationship recognized by the state. In some cities like Shanghai, she could not purchase her own house legally (even if she can afford one) without marital status. In a word, the state plays an active part in producing hetero-marital citizens.

As shown above, marriage is a site of individual discipline and population regulation (Foucault, 1978), an event which is both private and public. In other words, marriage is the site of biopolitics, a vehicle of producing “proper” queer subjects at the cultural and societal levels. To a great extent, the availability of resources depends on whether or not queer subjects conform to the heteronormative marriage system.

Therefore, many Chinese gay men and lesbian women enter heterosexual marriages; others seek for *xinghun* as way to meet the social expectation of engaging in a hetero-marital relationship while carefully crafting a private space for queer desires within their *xinghun* families.

***Danmei* and *Maifu*: Representations of Homosexuality in Popular Culture**

Having discussed the prominent *quanzi* discourse that shape the collective identity/ies of Chinese queer subjects, and the biopolitics in the family and marriage domains which affect Chinese queer subjects to consider in participating in *xinghun*, I now move on to discuss a different aspect that shapes the subjectivity of Chinese queers—that of media representations of homosexuality in the forms of *danmei* and *maifu*.

Among all kinds of symbolic actions in contemporary society, popular culture is one of the most contested terrains that constantly reflect and actively participate to shape the landscape of public opinions. Given the very limited discursive space of queer discourses in contemporary China, it is important to examine the media representation of queer desires, as well as its implications for Chinese queer subjects.

As I have previously discussed in Chapter 1, homosexuality is often constructed as a moral aberration and corruption from the West against the international backdrop of the cold war. As a result, representation of same-sex desires disappeared in public discourse since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, which Wei Wei (2010) calls the “symbolic extinction” of homosexuality. The 1990s, however, witnessed a significant shift of representation of homosexuality in the film industry. Movies about same-sex desires in China, such as *Farewell My Concubine* (1995), gained international

attention and recognition in some international movie festivals. However, under the censorship of The State Administration of Radio Film and Television (SARFT) of China, these movies were denied distribution at local theaters within mainland China. Official censorship, however, did not stop the movies from being circulated through pirated DVDs as well as the internet.

On March 3, 2008, media representations of homosexuality, pornography and violence were categorized as “plots that should be deleted or modified” by SARFT and thus officially banned on screen in China. This law was repealed by SARFT in 2010. However, censorship on queer representation continues in practice, keeping queer images out of mainstream films and preventing their showing in public cinemas (Collett, 2010), although without the auspices of an explicit law this time.

Despite all of the above, homosexuality does not totally disappear in mainstream discourse. Instead, male-male eroticism became a subtle device, usually hinted at rather than explicated overtly onscreen. It is, in fact, not uncommon in current Chinese popular culture to see multiple manifestations of this. Specifically, *maifu* and *danmei* are two prominent ways in which male-male eroticism is subtly represented on-screen in the Chinese media landscape.

Maifu (卖腐, loosely translated as “selling homosexuality”) is marketing strategy in Chinese cultural industry which employs ambiguous representations of male homosexuality in the industries of television and film. Examples of *maifu* can be seen in the popular drama serials such as *Weizhuang Zhe* (伪装者 Distinguishers) and *Langya Bang* (琅琊榜 Navana in Fire). It is important to highlight that *maifu* is not a new cultural phenomenon on Chinese screens; it is, in fact, a manifestation of the *danmei* (耽美)

subculture in mainstream popular culture in China. For example, *Langya Bang*, one of the most popular drama serials in 2015, is in fact adopted from a *danmei* fiction that features multiple same-sex intimacies among its male characters. Although the TV drama plays within the ambiguity between homosociality and homosexuality-- painting homosexuality in the original story as homosociality-- in order to circumvent the Chinese censorship on homosexuality, it attracts a lot of queer-sensitive audience with a queer reading of the “friendship” between its male characters. Therefore, to understand *maifu*, one must first discuss *danmei*.

Danmei (or *yaoi* in Japan) is a prevalent subculture among Chinese female fans, featuring beautiful males engaged in same-sex romantic and/or sexual relationships. Its counterpart in the West is known as *slash* fiction. *Danmei* female fans are called *funv* (腐女), a Japanese term that literally means “rotten girl” or “fallen women.” It is believed that *funv* was initially used by mass media as a derogatory term in Japan, but was later reclaimed by Chinese female fans to celebrate their queer sensitivity.

Compared to the relatively narrow circulation of its counterpart *slash* in Western societies, *danmei* enjoys a phenomenal popularity in East Asia, and it has become an increasingly element in Chinese popular culture. In fact, *danmei* is arguably the most prevalent representation of same-sex desires in China. Hence, while on-screen representation of homosexuality is still taboo in the official discourse in mainland China, *danmei* becomes a significant site where homosexuality is expressed and contested.

There are multiple viewpoints on the significance of *danmei* for understanding contemporary Chinese queer culture and community. On the one hand are scholars and critics who have argued that *danmei* is actually not about homosexuality. Welker (2011),

for example, observes that mainstream *danmei/yaoi* scholarship tends to consider *danmei* as nothing but a fantastic misunderstanding of the “real” lives of male homosexuals. That is, they argue that *danmei* does not “tell us about the empirical realities of homosexuals in China” (Berry, 2001, p. 212), but only “romanticized or fetishized” (Welker, 2006, p. 857) imagination of homosexuality.

On the opposite end are scholars such as Anne M. Kustritz (2007) who argue that the political value of *danmei* lies in its mere existence in public discourse. The lack of cultural representation of homosexuality through official media channels in China means that *danmei* is the main site for a public imagination of homosexuality in China. Given the widespread popularity of *danmei*, the circulation of *danmei* among its readers, and more importantly, among its readers and the wider public suggests that creation of precious cultural space for the expression of same-sex desires in China. This precious cultural space would otherwise be unimaginable without *danmei*, despite all of its insufficiencies and misrepresentations. In a word, *danmei* disrupts the dominant cultural representations that render alternative sexualities invisible and unintelligible.

Hence, regardless of whether one is of the opinion that *danmei* is a fantastic misunderstanding, an appropriation of homosexuality, or a “real” and authentic representation of Chinese sexual culture, there is no doubt that homosexuality in *danmei* helps the queer-sensitive audience to understand and/or validate their own same-sex desires in a heteronormative society (Welker, 2011, p. 212). In fact, it may be argued that given the increasing popularity of *danmei* and the lack of cultural representation of homosexuality, *danmei* is a valuable site for sexual minorities in contemporary China. Through the space that *danmei* offers and its penetration into mainstream public

discourse, homosexuality is rendered intelligible in a situation where it will otherwise be largely silenced from public discourse.

In addition, it may also be argued that the popularity of *danmei*, as well as its counterpart in mainstream popular culture—*maifu*—indicates that there is a large population in mainland China that is very comfortable with queerness. This population is mostly female, and many of them are heterosexual. Some studies on *danmei* fandom in China suggest that Chinese female fans embrace homosexuality in the fictional world rather than in their everyday lives. For example, Yunnan Li (2009) argues that Chinese female fans' investment in *danmei* has no direct relation to their attitudes towards homosexuality in everyday life (pp. 61-62). Instead, they tend to differentiate their own life from their fantasies in *danmei* fandom (p. 20). Others, however, believe that these queer-sensitive audiences demonstrate an acceptance of queerness (see e.g., Moreno-Tabarez et al., 2014, p. 11). Those who are of this persuasion argue that the practices of *danmei* fandom could be read as a gesture of embracing queer sexualities, a commentary of dominant heteronormative culture which may contribute to a more queer-friendly environment.

The potential of *danmei* discourse is also affirmed by an overall welcoming attitude in the Chinese gay community towards *danmei* and *funv*. In fact, some Chinese gay men even actively seek out a *funv* for *xinghun*. This suggests that *funv* are perceived as being empathetic and supportive of the gay community. In this rendering, the increasingly popularity of *danmei* culture outside queer communities may contribute to a more queer friendly discursive environment in contemporary China.

That being said, the effect of *danmei* discourse, as well as *maifu* marketing in some popular culture productions, is not always positive for Chinese queer subjects. In *danmei* discourse, the representations of queer desires are very limited or even distorted. *Danmei* culture emphasizes sensational beauty-- *dan* (耽) means indulging in or being fascinated with, and *mei* (美) literally means beauty. While queer desires are celebrated as beauty in *danmei* culture, such beauty is carefully restricted to the same-sex romance between two young men, who are often from middle or upper classes. The homonormative “beauty” of *danmei* is sexed, classed, and exclusive to the male bodies. Moreover, such normative queer desires are addressed and only addressed as a marketing element, targeting queer-sensitive audiences who are imagined as being heterosexual and interested in the representation of queer romance. In this case, heterosexual subjects are both the producers and the intended audience of queer representations, while queer subjects continue to be marginalized in the production and consumption of homosexuality.

The Economy of Queer Discourse

In the previous sections, I investigated the economic operation behind the *quanzi* discourse, as well as the material implications of the biopolitics of marriage over Chinese queer subjects; I also discussed how queerness become an increasingly popular marketing strategy in the cultural industry in China. I now turn specifically to the pink market and the affective economy of queerness in contemporary China. Sara Ahmed’s (2004) notion of emotion as an economy lays the context for my arguments on the economy of queer discourse.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed (2004) discusses the sociality of emotion and how symbols gain affective values through circulation: “the more signs circulate, the more affective they become” (p. 45). According to Ahmed, emotions surface through the contingent contact with respondents, and gain (or lose) intensity in circulation, producing affective surplus value in such a process. In other words, symbols and images become more affectively intensive through “the abstraction and exchange of the emotion as it moves between people, places, and objects” (Wingard, 2013, p. 10). Although Ahmed uses the term “emotion,” her study explores the affective economy of the indeterminate intensity (not yet actualized emotion), or what I term as affect in this chapter.

The Pink Market in Contemporary China

While homosexuality is still a taboo in the political domain, it is quite the opposite in the economic domain. Queer images are increasingly visible: *maifu* targets the female queer-sensitive audiences (*funv*), who are believed to be mainly heterosexual; the pink market, on the other hand, targets Chinese queer communities directly. It is another growing force that explores the market potential of translating queer desires into business.

The year 2014 is a turning point for the pink market in mainland China. In the past few years, China has witnessed a growth of the pink market. While LGBT non-profit organizations are struggling to secure funding due to the intensive censorship from the state, business platforms are experiencing enormous growth (see e.g., Bielinski, 2014; Peng & Jiang, 2015). In response, there is an emerging industry that targets Chinese LGBT population, specializing in everything from social get-togethers to international

travel, immigration to surrogacy. According to Steven Paul Bielinski (2015), the founder of Shanghai LGBT Professionals, some major Chinese firms including Taobao, Baidu, Didi Dache / Kuaidi Dache Taxi Apps, Spring Travel, DangDang, Changba, Haier, Qingting.fm, and MEIZU included queer images in their commercials. For example, during the 2015 Valentine's Day, a holiday with growing popularity among the younger generations in mainland China, images of same-sex couples can be found in the holiday advertising of several major Chinese companies to celebrate the power of love (Bielinski, 2015). Such a public celebration of same-sex romance is not imaginable several years ago in China.

Among those who show interest in Chinese pink market, there is a special group: social media corporations founded by current LGBT non-governmental organizations (NGOs). As I mentioned earlier, many LGBT NGOs in China have experienced difficulties in securing funding for everyday operation. While most of LGBT NGOs in China rely on transnational funding from Western countries, the increasingly intense censorship from Chinese government on Western funding has resulted in financial crisis for the survival of many LGBT NGOs in China in the last few years. Gay non-profit organizations, among many other NGOs, are influenced the most by such censorship because they are the major recipients of transnational funding in China (see Moreno-Tabarez, et al., 2014; Common Language, 2015). Witnessing the rise of a pink market in China, many queer platforms, established by Chinese LGBT NGOs, try to translate their social influence into capital. For instance, the location-based gay dating app *Blued* received tens of million investments in two rounds of financing in 2014 (Peng & Jiang, 2015; Wang, 2015). *Blued*, which claimed to have 15 million users (Peng & Jiang,

2015), is developed by the famous Chinese gay website *danlan* (淡蓝 light blue, <http://www.danlan.org/>) (Donald, 2014). Other LGBT social media, such as Zank, G Friends (G 友), LesDo, and LesPark, also received significant financing in 2014 (Wang, 2015). As platforms for Chinese queer subjects, these social media are expected to gather the currently discrete LGBT population and make those “closeted” queer subjects quantifiable as registered users.

Chinese companies are not the only entities that reach out to Chinese LGBT communities. Transnational companies show their interest in targeting Chinese LGBT markets as well. Driven by the commercial interest in Chinese LGBT population, China witnessed the first nationwide LGBT community survey in 2014, and over 8000 self-identified LGBT participated in it. The survey was conducted by San Francisco-based Community Marketing & Insights (CMI), with the assistance of about twenty LGBT organizations based in mainland China. President of Weber Shandwick China Darren Burns said Chinese LGBT communities mean huge business potential: “[T]his is an opportunity to reach 40 or 50 million people, and that’s bigger than most countries” (Donald, 2014). The CMI report suggests that compared with heterosexual folks, the Chinese LGBT population is more willing to invest in “quality life” (生活品质)—such as in entertainment, body management, tourism, and clothing; Chinese queer subjects are less burdened by the need of family, and thus have more money to spend on themselves (CMI, 2015). Such a conclusion, although is itself problematic, drew a lot of attention in the commercial world. To entertain the emerging interest in Chinese LGBT communities, in August 2014 the Shanghai LGBT Professionals organized China's first conference on the pink market, and over 100 people attended the event (Donald, 2014).

The relatively low visibility of Chinese LGBT population, however, makes it difficult to target Chinese queer subjects as potential consumers. According to the CMI survey, only 3% of gay men and 5% of lesbian are totally out, while 30% of gay men and 9% of the lesbians surveyed were never out to anyone (CMI, 2015). The relatively low rate of coming out among Chinese queer subjects, Bielinski (2014) points out, is the mayor obstacle of the Chinese pink market (see also Peng & Jiang, 2015). Darren Burns, a panelist of the conference, observes that the “coming out” of Chinese queer subjects is a major concern of the marketers: “[I]f you're not out, it's hard to quantify you as a market or a voice” (Donald, 2014). From this perspective, the commercial desire of turning Chinese queer communities into a quantifiable market becomes the economic force that urges Chinese queer subjects to come out and be an “out and proud” gay or lesbian consumer. In a news report about the Chinese pink market, the report even makes an equation between coming out (*chugui*, 出柜) and market (see Peng & Jiang, 2015), which reveals the economy of coming out in Chinese LGBT movements.

For companies that want to take a place in the emerging pink market, appealing to affect has become the primary marketing strategy to reach Chinese queer communities who are longing for social recognition. The 2014 CMI survey affirms the critical role of affect in getting the loyalty of Chinese LGBT consumers: among the over 8000 LGBT respondents, showing support for LGBT communities is reported as the major factor that influences their purchasing decisions. Responding to the concern of blowback of some marketers, Bielinski argues that the “support” that companies show could be as little as simply as put a rainbow flag in an ad: mainstream heterosexual Chinese consumers would not even know what it means, but the LGBT communities would (Donald, 2014).

The so called “support,” in this rendering, is not even expected to be recognized by “mainstream Chinese consumers.” Without challenging existing heterosexual norms in the business world, such “support” is no more than lip service in return for business opportunities from Chinese LGBT communities. It suggests that LGBT communities are and only are a targeted market behind those “supportive” advertising.

Affective Advertising: Coming Out and Same-sex Marriage

“Coming out” and marriage are two hot buttons that often draw a lot of emotional responses from Chinese queer subjects. With the circulation of the discourse of identity-based homosexuality, which centers a queer politics of “coming out” and the international influence of U.S. LGBT movements that prioritizes same-sex marriage, the notions of “coming out” and “marriage” have become two topics loaded with value judgments and emotions. Recognizing the affective power of these two notions, some companies invested in these themes in their advertisements to target Chinese queer subjects. In the following pages, I will analysis a campaign during the Valentine’s Day in 2015 to investigate how queer affects are invoked toward business opportunities. In the following pages, I will first delineate the economic drives behind the notions of “coming out” and “marriage” in the emerging Chinese pink market; in the next section, I will discuss the rhetorical mechanism manifested in the advertising process, one that appeals to queer affect and works through the process of what Wendy Hesford (2005) calls affective identification.

During the Valentine’s Day campaign in 2015, Chinese ecommerce giant Alibaba, which is listed on the New York Stock Exchange, introduced an exciting marriage competition “We Do” to the public (official website: <http://bit.ly/1We9jqf>). In this

campaign, Alibaba invited same-sex couples to submit a short video, featuring their love stories on Taobao, an online marketplace owned by Alibaba. The public then voted on winners for a 7-day, all-expense paid wedding in California. This public voting also means that participants have to come out to the public as a same-sex couple, which is still a risky decision for many Chinese queer subjects. According to the BBC, more than 2,000 couples applied to the contest, and 10 couples (9 gay couples & 1 lesbian couple) were selected. Of the ten selected couples, seven of the couples went to Los Angeles to get married in the mass wedding. Three of the selected couples were unable to make the trip because of visa problems (Morris, 2015).

Same-sex marriage is often used as the ultimate measurement of “progress” in transnational LGBT movements. Countries that allow same-sex marriage are read as being progressive, while nations that do not allow same-sex marriage are often criticized as being conservative or even primitive in neocolonial discourse. In the BBC report, for instance, the notion of “progress” is one of the key words of the mass wedding of the Chinese queer couples. Recognizing some of the “progress” that China had made, such as reporting the same-sex referendum voting in Ireland in the national media, the reports locates the ultimate progress of gay rights movements in the moment of a mass same-sex marriage in U.S. This is evident in the interview with Geng Le, CEO of the LGBT corporate giant Blued which partnered with Taobao for the “We Do” contest. When he explained the purpose of the event, he said: “These seven couples are also representatives of the entire Chinese LGBT community. Another reason we brought them to LA - we want to showcase to the community back in China what it can really be like” (Morris, 2015). Here, Geng suggests that a same-sex marriage, like the one those seven queer

couples enjoyed in U.S., is an ideal that Chinese queer communities should imagine for themselves and learn to approach. The location of the ceremony-- Los Angeles-- suggests that the United States (more specifically, California) is viewed as the site for cultivating queer imaginaries in mainland China. Because same-sex marriages are not recognized by Chinese government and thus have little material implication, such a ceremony is no more than a symbolic moment of “progress” in transnational LGBT discourse. For the campaign sponsor Alibaba, a Chinese corporate giant that just entered the U. S. market and is trying to participate in global business, such an event could be read as a gesture of its participating in the transnational movements of supporting marriage equality, and therefore be used to elevate its status in the global market (Morris, 2015).

One may ask what these seven couples really represent. As I mentioned earlier in this section, the “sharing” of love stories means that participating queer couples come out to the public during the contest; the public-voting selection of the contest makes queer intimate lives a public event under the scrutiny of the public on an ecommerce marketplace. Queer couples who get selected, to some extent, represent the desired queer subjectivity that is sanctioned by the voting public.

The wedding ceremony itself is a crucial site of constructing a particular queer subjectivity “to showcase to the community back in China,” to use Geng’s language. The location of the wedding is filled with implications. While same-sex marriage is not recognized in mainland China, holding a mass wedding outside of China can be a practical choice to avoid political intervention from the state. However, the decision to officiate the same-sex marriages in the United States and not any other countries is not a random choice: The United States is often referenced as the most progressive countries in

transnational LGBT movements, so locating the wedding in the United States is to locate queer subjectivity in the model of U.S. queerness, which is an important part of the fantasy to showcase to local queer communities in China.

Moreover, while overseas tourism is still a privilege for people from advantaged economic status, an overseas wedding in the United States symbolizes a cosmopolitan queerness that is free to and can afford to move across national boundaries. Such (upper) middle class queerness is reinforced through the ceremony. The wedding was organized by Charlie Gu from China Luxury Advisors, the job of which is to help luxury brands market to Chinese travelers and consumers. During the wedding, platinum Tiffany rings were sponsored for the couples. After the wedding, the seven couples went on shopping trips and various dinners out on the town in Los Angeles (Morris, 2015).

While the event claimed to be about [same-sex] love, such love is deeply embedded in luxury consumption. The seven queer couples, spectacles that showcase a fantasy wedding, reveal the “ideal” subjectivity Chinese pink market constructs: being “out and proud” queers so that they are quantifiable as a market and easy to target; being cosmopolitan, mobile, and middle class queers, who desire and can afford all kinds of luxury consumption. Geng, who is an organizer of the event, believes that tourism is a potential market emerging in Chinese queer communities: Chinese queer subjects “want to go where people are friendly and open-minded to them, for example, Amsterdam, San Francisco, Taiwan and Thailand” (Donald, 2014). In fact, the “We Do” contest was guided by the Gay app corporate Blued to crowd source the final 20 queer couples for public voting, and assisted by LGBT NGOs like PFLAG China.

Taobao's "We Do" contest reveals the intimate relationship between economic drive and Chinese LGBT movements. While same-sex marriage is not recognized in mainland China, the commercial opportunities in Chinese pink market has driven companies like Taobao to target Chinese LGBT population as a new market (Bielinski, 2015). The growing interest in same-sex marriage among Chinese queer subjects has been seen as new business opportunities for oversea travel and tourism. In fact, Taobao's marriage competition is part of its promotional campaign for its new travel platform, which targets LGBT marriage travel to Western countries that allow same-sex marriage, such as the United States, Canada, France, Holland, and New Zealand (Bielinski, 2015).

Taobao is not the only company that targets the tourism market in Chinese LGBT communities. Bielinski (2014) observes that China Star Travel, a mainstream travel agency in China today has a "rainbow travel" department, which donated 10,000 RMB to support for the annual convention of PFLAG China, an increasingly influential LGBT organization in mainland China for LGBT families.⁹

As I mentioned earlier, PFLAG China is another LGBT organization that assisted Taobao's marriage competition besides the LGBT corporate giant Blued. In fact, the CEO of Blued, Geng, is reported to be working with some skincare and clothing brands, including the Andrew Christian underwear line. The intimate cooperation between the pink market and some Chinese LGBT organizations reveals the economic drive of a queer politics that centers "coming out" and same-sex marriage that is advocated by LGBT organizations like PFLAG China and the gay website *danlan*.

⁹ According to Bielinski (2014), Seven Ages, a Broadway Theatre Group, took donations during their performances and gave all the funds to some Chinese LGBT non-profit groups like PFLAG China.

Affective Identification and Affective Surplus Value

There is no doubt that the growing pink market in China has become an important force in Chinese LGBT movements, shaping queer subjectivity in China. One interesting thing in Chinese pink market in the last few years is that advertisements and commercial campaigns that target Chinese LGBT population often appeal to queer affect to invite commercial loyalty from Chinese queer subjects. As I mentioned earlier, coming out to parents and marriage are the two hot button issues that often elicit strong emotional response from Chinese queer subjects. As a result, these two affect-loaded notions are often utilized in the emerging Chinese pink market in order to move queer subjects emotionally toward business opportunities.

The rhetorical effect of appealing to queer affect works through the process of affective identification. Before we discuss the affective identification manifested in Chinese pink market, it is necessary to clarify the relationship among affect, emotion, and discourse. Brian Massumi (2002) makes a distinction between affect and emotion: affect refers to the bodily intensity, the strength or duration of effect that one experiences; it is a potentiality that is asocial (not yet determined or qualified), but not presocial (isolated or exempted from social construction). Emotion, on the other hand, is a qualified intensity, which leads to certain functions and meanings; it is the actualization of affect. From a rhetorical perspective, the rhetorical effect of affect comes from the “sensory processing of a thing-symbol’s aesthetic qualities” (Ott, 2015, p. 12), which “privileges the body as a site of knowing” (p. 24) at a visceral level. Discourse, on the other hand, is the “historically-contingent systems of representation that govern meaning and knowledge and render a thing-symbol’s signifying practices intelligible” (Ott, 2015, p. 12). If we see

affect as a potentiality, a not-yet-determined rhetorical response on the body, then discourse offers the “cues” (to use Hesford’s term) to trigger a qualification and turns affect into a meaningful emotion (actualization), and thus move the subject emotionally.

Affective identification is the process of identification through the influence of affect. Instead of operating through logical reasoning, affective identification works on bodies to evoke a set of feelings that “resonates with histories, rhetorics, and images” (Wingard, 2013, p. 9). Through affective identification (or non-identification) with the histories, rhetorics, and images circulated in advertising in the pink market and advocacy in LGBT movements, Chinese queer subjects see the world and themselves within a particular perspective, and the in-group/out-group boundaries are formed according to the affective relationships in such a process. For instance, in their 2015 Valentine’s advertising, Qingting (蜻蜓, Dragonfly) FM, a radio phone app used in mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, put up a slogan to target its LGBT audience: “Dear, Forgive Me, I Can’t Take You Home” (亲爱的, 原谅我不能带你回家).

As I mentioned earlier, coming out to parents is a hot button among Chinese queer subjects that often evoke strong affective responses. Featuring a male same-sex couple on its poster, the advertisement recalls the (personal or collective) memories of coming out to parents by addressing the tension between same-sex desires and coming home. By using strong affective language such as “dear” and “forgive,” as well as the slogan at the bottom of the poster (under the brand name), which says “listen to the voice of your heart” (倾听心的声音), the advertisement invites Chinese queer subjects to resonate with the scene emotionally; through interacting with the advertisement, an

affective bonding between the brand and queer subjects is created, and commercial loyalty and business opportunities become possible.

Figure 3.3 Qingting's Valentine's Day Advertisement



Such affective identification can be found in many advertisements targeting Chinese LGBT population, including the Taobao marriage competition I discussed above. While more and more companies claim social support for Chinese queer subjects, queer scholars cannot neglect the economy behind those affective language and images that convey the message of “support.” Bielinski (2014) notes that social support for Chinese LGBT communities, or what he calls “pink responsibility,” is the most effective way to target Chinese LGBT consumers. Such an observation is also affirmed by the 2014 CMI survey I mentioned above.

One important question to ask is how pink advertising or campaigns translate into an affective identification for Chinese queer consumers. How do symbols and images gain affective value in the pink market? What are the social conditions that make such

identification possible and effective? A common marketing strategy manifested in the emerging Chinese pink market is what Jennifer Wingard (2013) calls branding.

Established on Ahmed's notion of affective economy, Wingard explores a special facet of advertising that focuses on affective value. Branding, Wingard (2013) points out, "is about developing an identity or 'lifestyle' into which groups of products then fit" (p. 12). In the example of Taobao's marriage competition, human bodies—queer couples featured in the mass wedding—are commodified and branded, creating a lifestyle associated with public visibility, mobility, and luxury consumption. Through identifying with the branded queer bodies, Chinese queer subjects are invited to desire and develop the same lifestyle and thus become the potential consumers for the products/services that Taobao provides.

However, such affective identification will not be effective without first creating the affective need among Chinese queer subjects. As I have discussed in Chapter 1, Chinese queer subjects often experienced a tension between the same-sex desires and family value. Such a tension is most intensive on the issues of coming out (as demanded in the discourse of identity homosexuality) and marriage, and thus creates an anxiety in some Chinese queer subjects. Moreover, Chinese queer subjects are denied sexual membership as full queer subjects because of their Chineseness, while denied cultural belonging within their Chinese families due to their queerness. Being denied from these two crucial identities, there is a strong desire for belonging in some Chinese queer subjects. Such a desire/need is exploited in the pink market and serves as catalysis of affective identification, which promises a stable cultural membership.

In a word, the anxiety of belonging creates the conditions wherein Chinese queer subjects become vulnerable in the affective economy. Such affective intensities "create

relationships between bodies before rhetorical situations and events present themselves” (Wingard, 2013, p. 22); it is the condition under which ideological “cues” (discourse) work to trigger and guide its targeted audience. The anxiety is so profound that many Chinese queer subjects become reactive and thus an easy target in the pink market.

Conclusion

There is an intimate relationship between queerness and discourse. On the one hand, queer subjects are conditioned by discourse. Discourse limits the “conditions of possibilities” (Foucault, 1995) and constrains our thinking and speaking about queerness. Chinese queer subjects are constructed by discourses that create social orders and social relations (McGee, 1990; McKerrow, 1989), onto which they “project possible forms of life” (Kam, 2012, p. 40). That being said, queer subjects “participate in actively creating and recreating meanings that are made available to them by competing ideologies” (Nakayama & Halualani, 2010, p. 6), rewriting existing discourse and opening up possibilities for the emergence of new queer subjectivity (Grewal & Kaplan, 2001).

In this chapter, I have examined the constitutive power of discourse upon queer subjects outlining the discourses that condition the formation of Chinese queer subjectivity on the community, state/social, media/cultural, and economic levels. Throughout this chapter, I try to reveal the economic drives and materiality of queer discourse as highlighted in queer of color critique. I argue that the affective economy creates affective surplus value, and translates the affective identification of Chinese queer subjects into business and/or funding opportunities in contemporary China; it is the economic drive behind the “coming out” and “same-sex marriage” advocacy in Chinese LGBT movements. In the following chapters (Chapter 4 and 5), I will turn to the day-to-

day practices of some Chinese queer subjects, and discuss the transformative potential of the practices of Chinese queer subjects.

CHAPTER 4

COMING OUT, COMING HOME, COMING WITH:

FAMILY, RETICENCE/SILENCE AND THE COMMUNICATION OF SEXUALITY

“At that time, I also felt a kind of peer pressure. Among my volunteer friends at Tongyu [a Beijing based lesbian NGO] there is a feeling that coming out was the only right thing to do. Tongyu was actually fine; at Aibai [a Beijing based gay NGO] it was even more obvious. Because Aibai was totally influenced by the US, it was yelling for coming out all the time.” (那个时候其实, 我感觉也有peer pressure, 在同语的志愿者以及周围的朋友之间, 会有那种出柜才是对的感觉。同语其实还好, 像爱白就更明显一些, 因为爱白整个受美国的影响, 整天喊着出柜。) -- Ada, a 26-year old self-identified *lala*, on her coming out experience in the second year of college.

Critical sexualities scholars have argued that the predominant narrative of “coming out” is built on a particular kind of queer experience and geography, which is usually from the standpoint of white, middle class, urban and of U. S. citizenship (e.g., Chávez, 2013). An analysis of the data in my dissertation shows that “coming out” is also an important narrative in being queer in contemporary China. It may thus be said that transnational queer discourse has reshaped what it means to be a queer in contemporary China.

That being said, whilst transnational queer discourse’s emphasis on a homosexual identity and the politics of visibility has become a new discursive resource that Chinese queer subjects can draw on in order to fight for their sexual freedom, it has also become a new hegemony that Chinese queer subjects must learn to embrace in transnational LGBT movements -- a form of peer pressure, to use the words of my interviewee, Ada, that Chinese queer subjects face. One, therefore, cannot neglect the influence of the

transnational queer discourse in the study of what it means to be queer in contemporary China.

I begin this chapter with a discussion on the communication processes of *coming out* in contemporary China—how to come out, what can be said, what is usually left unsaid, the roles of public sphere and family—and its complications. After a discussion of the coming home strategy as a decolonial response to the hegemony of coming out in the studies of Chinese sexualities, I conceptualize a third path: the *coming with* strategy among some Chinese queer subjects.

After discussing these three approaches to communicating sexuality, I discuss *reticence* and *silence*, the dominant aesthetic-ethical values that regulate the communication process of sexuality in Chinese society. I then distinguish two different kinds of reticence/silence: *authoritative silence*—silence of family institution and the state as a regulatory rhetoric, and *subaltern reticence/silence*, which is reticence/silence of queer subjects as a coping strategy. I argue that reticence and silence can be productive, and we need not reject wholesale reticence and silence as communication strategies with queer potential. In addition, throughout the chapter, I highlight the primacy of family in the struggles over sexuality for Chinese queer subjects. I also call out the epistemic violence upon queer subjects while caution against the imperialist effect in queer studies. Such dual critical commitments mean I work with tensions throughout this chapter. If queer studies continue to serve as a critical force, to echo Kimberlee Pérez, they should hold up tensions and contradictions (Aiello et al., 2013, p. 110).

Coming Out

With the influence of transnational queer discourse, coming out is not something external to Chinese queer communities. As I have discussed in previous chapters, the identitarian and visibility frames of queerness (Puar, 2007), which endorses a confrontational politics of “coming out,” has become the dominant discourse in Chinese LGBT movements due to the transnational circulation of Euro-American queer discourses. That being said, there is a relatively low rate of coming out among Chinese queer subjects. According to a nationwide survey amongst twenty LGBT organizations based in mainland China¹⁰ in 2014, only three percent of gay men and five percent of lesbian are totally out. In fact, 30% of gay men and 9% of the lesbians surveyed were never out to anyone (CMI, 2015).

The survey, conducted by San Francisco-based Community Marketing & Insights (CMI), found that family is the primary site of struggle among Chinese queer subjects. Eighty percent of the participants of the CMI survey reported that their major concern was family, much more than social recognition (54% gay males & 48% lesbian females) and legal protection (48% gay males and 56% lesbian females). Of those surveyed, only 22% of gay men and 32% lesbian women said that they had come out to “some family members.” The CMI survey clearly shows that family is still the primary source of reference—and, for many, distress—for queer subjects in China.

Results of the 2014 CMI survey echo the writings of Chinese queer scholarship (see Chou, 2000, 2001; Engebretsen, 2009; Kam, 2012; Liu & Ding, 2005; Moreno-

¹⁰ This was an online survey of gay and lesbian above 18-year old. Some 8,500 people answered questionnaires, among them, 65% self-identified as gay/bisexual males, 34% as lesbian/bisexual females, and 1% as transgender.

Tabarez et al., 2014; Rofel, 2007; Wong, 2007) that the family institution is the most difficult terrain to navigate. For example, Engebretsen (2008) writes:

I suggest that most women and men who were engaged in or desired same-sex intimacy would deal with their biogenetic families in far more consistent and lasting ways than what is commonly argued to be the case in a great deal of queer Euro-American scholarship (p. 42).

The most profound struggle that Chinese queer subjects face is hence not in the “public” sociopolitical domain; instead, it is located in the “private” lives, in the precarious, lasting negotiations with their intimate families, especially with one’s parents. Thus, while in a transnational queer discourse, coming out is imagined as primarily in reference to a general public and perhaps a political public as much as in reference to family, the strategies of “coming home” and “coming with” employed by Chinese queer subjects must be understood as primarily in relation to families with secondary or incidental reference to a general public or a political public. Before I discuss these two strategies, I will first outline how coming out to families (especially to parents) looks like in Chinese society in the following pages.

Coming Out: How and When

When they choose to communicate their sexualities with their biogenetic families, some Chinese queer subjects prefer a direct, verbal approach. Among my 13 interviewees, Ada and Jane, for instance, decided to share their sexualities with their parents when their parents still knew nothing about their same-sex desires. Two other interviewees, Yaqing and Gao, came out to their families as a reactional response to marital pressure. Jane and Yaqing told their family in person that they “loved girls.” Ada

shared her same-sex desire via the phone. Gao left his parents a “confession letter” to disclose his same-sex desire to them after a four-year struggle.

It is important to point out that in contrast to Gao, a 35-year old *tongzhi*, Ada, Jane, and Yaqing all had an intimate relationship with local lesbian organizations. They all have experience of volunteering for lesbian NGOs, which have been an important force of promoting a Euro-American style of coming out.

While some people employ an explicit, verbal style of coming out to their family, it is more common for queer subjects to communicate their sexuality with their family in a more subtle and indirect way. At the core of this indirect, subtle style of communication is what interviewees call a strategy of “not laying it bare” (没有揭穿 *meiyou jiechuan*). For example Zien, a 33-year-old *tongzhi* who lives with his parents in a rural town, told me how his father had known his same-sex desire without his declaring his sexual identity:

But my parents might have this awareness, knowing that I am this kind of person, because my boyfriend is with me, and we are business partners. Once, my father asked me: “Do you just want to be with him for your whole life?”... In fact, my *xinghun* partner, her family probably had known that she and her friend are like this, [they] just did not lay it bare. (但我父母也许有这种意识，知道我可能是这类人，因为我男朋友跟我在一起，我们俩一起做生意。我爸就曾经问过我：你是不是想就跟他这样过一辈子啊？...其实我形婚的对象，她家人可能也知道她跟她朋友有这样，只是没有揭穿而已。)

Other interviewees revealed that they, too, thought that their parents knew of their same sex desires even though they never intended to tell their parents about their

sexualities. For instance, another interviewee, Xiaoye, a 30-year-old *lala* who engaged in *xinghun* recently, believed that her father knew she was not in the “right direction.” She gave an example to illustrate this:

For example, my father got drunk twice. He would say something very...with a lot of insight when he was drunk. No matter what you responded, you would find him forgetting everything the next day. He asked me recently, if we were just fooling him. [I answered] something like “I am also working hard to present toward the direction you want me to go, but there is only so much I can do.” (比如我父亲曾经喝醉过两次，他喝醉酒的时候会讲一些特别、洞察很多东西的话。但是不管你回应什么，你发现第二天他就把所有东西都忘了。他最近一次问过我，是不是我们都在应付他。[我回答]类似于“我也是努力地往你们希望的方向去呈现，但也只能这样啦”。)

Chou Wah-shan (2000) argues that the strategy of “not laying it bare” (没有揭穿) that is observed in my data is a culturally specific phenomenon in the communication of sexuality in Chinese society. According to Chou (2000), Chinese queer subjects often “come out by bypassing the discussion of homosexuality” (p. 268). This bypassing, Chou suggests, is a culturally specific strategy to navigate between sexuality and kinship, which appears to be in an antagonistic relationship. Chou’s (2000) interpretation of the reason for bypassing is that even if and even when many Chinese parents reject identity labels such as *tongxinglian* (同性恋 same sex love), they would not reject their queer children the way they reject the concept of *tongxinglian* (Chou, 2000, p. 269).

Dian Million offers another argument that could be used to understand the strategy of “not laying it bare.” Million (2009) notes that feelings are culturally mediated knowledges, an important way of knowing about what is happening in our lives in many community-based societies. Although family members never talk about homosexuality directly, they know the same-sex desires of queer subjects through the embodied knowledge of feeling, or “felt knowledge” (Million, 2009).

Queer scholar Martin F. Malanansan is one of those who study how sexual identity is communicated without verbalization. In his study of Filipino gay men, Malanansan (1995) argues that issues of sexuality can be communicated through feelings, rather than verbalization of one’s sexual identity:

To quote one informant, “I know who I am and most people, including my family, know about me—without any declaration.” Filipino gay men argue that identities are not just proclaimed verbally, but are “felt” (*pakiramdaman*) or intuited as well. (p. 434)

Here, the communication of sexuality has gone beyond explicit verbal messages. In such communication transactions, the process of interpretation depends on one’s tacit knowledge and contextual sensibility. In other words, the register of “message” is not just verbal and symbolic language, but also the context where communication happens. Verbal and non-verbal languages are not just informational registers that function on the cognitive level but also emotional registers that communicate through the feeling of our bodies.

This communicative phenomenon among Chinese queer subjects complicates what it means to come out. Predominant epistemology privileges telling over feeling and

voice over silence. However, the communication between Chinese queers subjects and their parents challenges predominant understanding of “coming out.” If queer subjects never talk about their same-sex desires to their family, are they closeted? Do queer subjects have to proclaim their same sex desires in order to come out? What does it mean to come out when reticence or silence means more than actual words?

Some other queer scholars note that issues of sexuality are more often communicated through an overall comprehension of the context (see Chou, 2001; Liu & Ding, 2005; Kam, 2012). This communication style is what Liu Jen-peng and Ding Naifei (2005) calls “reticent poetic.” Focusing on the Taiwanese society, Liu and Ding (2005) argues that reticence (含蓄 *hanxu*) is the dominant aesthetic-ethical value that regulates the communication process of sexuality in a Chinese context:

According to Tsai Ying-chun (1998), the poetics of reticence as one of the aesthetic ideals of a Chinese literary tradition is a mode of writing wherein “the real message tends to go beyond the actual words of the text.” Reticence (*hanxu*) literally means both “holding back” (*han*) and “storing up” (*xu*), and has been variously translated as “conservation,” “reserve,” and “potentiality.” (p. 34)

The cultural specificity and poetics of reticence may be better understood by reviewing the words of an interviewee, Macky. Macky is a 34-year old *lala* who had been in *xinghun* with a gay man for more than five years. During my two interviews with her, she was divorcing her *xinghun* husband and planning to come out to her parents after that: “This divorce means coming out of the closet. It is good enough to give them some hints, [so there is] no need to say it so explicitly.” (离婚其实是抱着出柜的心态。暗示下也差不多了，不需要说得这样明白。)

Macky frames her communication process in terms of how she thought coming out in China was different from how one might come out in the United States:

Here [in China], you do not need to make it so explicit. My friends are in this circle, too, so there is no need to say it. For strangers, I do not need to reveal [my] identity. Sometimes when people asked me, I do not always admit that. China, after all, is different from United States. (这边呢，不需要讲得这么明白的。一般的朋友也是这个圈子里，也无需再讲；对于陌生人，我也不需要表明身份。有时候别人问到，也不一定会承认。中国毕竟跟美国不一样。)

In Macky's opinion, declaring one's sexual identity was something unnecessary, something that queer subjects did not do "here in China." The two different ways of coming out -- dropping hints versus verbalizing one's sexual identity-- were perceived as cultural differences between China and the United States. The principle of reticence may thus be seen as held to be especially true in the communication of sexuality amongst Chinese queer subjects. It is considered elegant and appropriate to be poetically reticent about one's sexuality; something that "decent people" should so in Chinese communication scripts.

Coming Out is Classed and Gendered

While most of my interviewees expressed explicitly or implied tacitly that *coming out* was an desirable outcome for them, Yaqing, a 19-year old, self-identified *lala* who was working at the metro station in Nanjing, China, showed keen insight into class differences on the issue of coming out:

I remember when the CEO of Apple came out, everybody was talking about it. I remember how people responded to it: this is something of the rich. I think when

you are financially well off, people think that [being gay] is OK. If you are not, then play no tricks—get married and have children! (我记得当时苹果的CEO出柜的时候，大家都有提到。我记得当时大家的反应是，这是有钱人的事情。我觉得如果你经济条件比较好的话，大家就会觉得这没什么。感觉你如果没有钱的话，你就老老实实结婚生孩子。)

Yaqing's comments reveal the growing homonormative attitude in mainstream discourse, as well as the classed and gendered pressure that she faced with regards to her sexuality. As a working class *lala* without higher education, Yaqing felt the pressure of heterosexual marriage immediately after she dropped out from high school, which reveals severe surveillance on female subjects.

It is important to note that Yaqing comes from a non-typical family. She lived with a parent with a diagnosis of mental illness and a divorce. Her grandparents seldom intervened in her personal life because they were “too old.” The relatively weak familial intervention and control in her life, with one parent absent most of her life and the other parent not considered as a “proper” parent due to the mental condition, is very different from most of queer subjects in mainland China.

While the pressure from parents is constantly referred as the primary concern on the issue of coming out, Yaqing did not share the same experience; in this sense, she was almost like an orphan among Chinese queer subjects. The marital pressure she felt was more from the general “people” in the public discourse than from specific members of her family. In fact, she considered discrimination at the workplace, especially when she was working in a factory, more difficult to deal with than familial pressure. On the issue

of sexuality, while we should focus on families in China, Yaqing's experience reminds us that it's not just or only families. Rather, it is always entangled with the broader discursive contexts, as I have discussed in Chapter 3. Yaqing's experience reveals the unequal public/private pressures that queer subjects face in contemporary mainland China that is highly gendered and classed, which I will further discuss later in this chapter.

Not a Defining Moment but an Ongoing Process to Make Meaningful Difference

The Chinese term for *coming out* is 出柜 (*chugui*), which literally translates into "exiting the closet." If taken at face value, it may seem as if the Chinese definition of coming out is about the *moment* when one steps out of the metaphorical closet of hidden queer desire. In other words, the Chinese terminology for coming out appears to suggest that the Chinese are thinking about coming out as if it was a did-you-do-it or did-you-not-do-it dichotomous turning point, a defining moment in the experience of the Chinese queer subject. In terms of how coming out made sense to them, this could not be further from the way that my interviewees narrated their experience of coming out. The Western metaphor "closet" suggests both clear spatial divisions and a spectacular but singular temporality. But many Western queers soon learn that the spaces and timings are not so clean: there's experiential knowledge that coming out is an ongoing process. That understanding of temporality, too, is well understood by the Chinese queers in my study. Talking about their experiences of coming out, all of my interviewees seemed to understand coming out differently from what the phase *chugui*/exiting the closet suggests-- a closet/out dichotomy. This is despite the fact that everyone interviewed was comfortable with and used the term *chugui* to describe their queer experience.

When I asked interviewees to talk about their *chugui* experiences with their family, almost everyone narrated a *process*, usually lasting for years, rather than a specific moment or event that divided their lives into pre-coming out and post-coming out. “[My coming out] lasted for about five or six years” (前前后后大概有五六年了吧), said my interviewee Jane. At the age of 24, Jane brought her first girlfriend home and decided to share her same-sex relationship with her mother during a public holiday. “I did not think too much. I just told her.” Her mother, after the initial shock, did not say a word about it. Jane, too, did not continue to pursue the topic of her same-sex relationship.

The next day, Jane travelled to Beijing with her girlfriend as planned, as if the conversation never happened. In the next few years, Jane’s parents continued to try persuading Jane to find a man and get married while showing care and concern for her same-sex relationships at the same time. “Until I broke up with my third girlfriend, my coming out to my family had not finished yet, she [Jane’s mother] had not totally accepted me.” (直到我和第三个女朋友分手之后，我跟家里出柜的过程还没有结束，她还没有完全接纳我。)

The experience of another interviewee, Macky, and the response of her parents further complicate the meaning of coming out. The first time Macky was sure that her mother actually knew about her same-sex desire was when she was a teenager in a polytechnic college, although she had always suspected that her mother knew it because of her androgynous gender expression. Her girlfriend got pregnant and decided to marry a man. Her mother kept asking what happened after seeing that she had lost ten pounds in a few days. It was then that Macky told her mother everything, and then her mom said “I knew you were (*tongxinglian*), hanging out with her all the time! That girl is sensible,

getting married now.” (妈妈就说，看你也是的了，整天跟她在一起！人家懂事，要结婚了。)

However, the perception of her same-sex desire did not change anything: her mother simply ignored it and continued to plan a “straight” path for her. Sometimes her mother would confront her and say: “Will you die without women around” (你是不是身边没有女人就不行), and she would say “yes.” However, life always went back to “normal” after conversations like these, as if they never happened. Thus, for Macky and her mother, her same-sex desire seemed to become an “agreed-upon” secret within the family: it was not “sensible,” not able to be comprehended within the heteronormative family which was arranged around the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990).

After Macky married a gay man for *xinghun*, she continued to play the part of a heterosexual wife when she was in the presence of her mother, even though they both knew that it was just performance. One month before I interviewed her, Macky was confronted by her mother again about her divorce: “My mom asked me, what you are now? If you divorce, you need to find a partner, find a man! And I said, how do you know I do not have a partner?” (我妈妈问我，你现在算什么？你离婚的话，你就找一个伴啊，找个男人什么的。我就说，你怎么知道我没有伴？). Her mother responded with silence. Macky summed up her conversation with her mother in this way: “It had been very clear, [we had] just not said the word yet.” (讲得很明了，只不过没有讲破。)

Here, we see the poetics of reticence at play. In a mainstream Western viewpoint, Macky had come out to her mother multiple times, although she had never uttered the

words like “lesbian,” “*tongxinglian*” or “*lala*” to declare a homosexual identity.

However, Macky herself never considered herself as really “out” to her parents. She saw herself as “semi-out” (半出柜) at most, coming out being an ongoing process that is not yet finished or an ongoing process that is always “imperfect.”

Like Jane and Macky, the coming out stories of other interviewees did not end at the moments when they uttered statements such as “I am a *tongxinglian*” or “I like girls.” Instead, their coming out stories went on and on until their parents accepted or at least acknowledged their same sex desires. In other words, coming out was a continual communication process until they felt that their queer desires were intelligible within their families and that they were recognized as a *lala* or *tongzhi*, regardless whether or not their parents agreed with their life choices.

Jane’s story clearly illustrates this point. Jane considered that she really came out when her father told her he would accept her same-sex relationship if she stay with her girlfriend for at least three years. “Not until then I felt that I finally got the rights that belonged to me, although I had already broken up with my third girlfriend at that time.” (这个时候我才觉得，属于我自己的权利，我终于争取到了，虽然其实那时候我已经跟第三个女朋友分手了。) For Jane, coming out meant that her same-sex desire has been accepted and her same-sex relationship is now recognized by her parents as one possible path of her life—the “rights” (to use her own words) to be intelligible to her family. Although Jane did not maintain this particular relationship, she considered the process of coming out to be complete when her same-sex desire was included in the vision of her family rather than forever exiled from the family her parents imagined for

her. In other words, “coming out” is understood by my interviewees a process that is ongoing and not yet finished until it makes a meaningful difference in life.

Given the above examples, I thus argue that for Chinese queer subjects, “coming out” is not the action of proclaiming one’s sexual identity. It is not a mere communicative transition of me uttering the words “I am lesbian/gay” and you receiving my message. In a word, for some Chinese queer subjects, “coming out” is not just about verbalizing and knowing the “*truth*” of one’s sexual identity at the cognitive level. Rather, “coming out” is about the *effect* of such communication—one has not “come out” if the “truth” of sexual identity did not make any meaningful differences.

Coming Out or Coming Home?

Several days before the 2015 Chinese Lunar New Year, a video titled *Coming Home* (http://www.danlan.org/disparticle_49695.htm) became popular on Chinese social media. This video was released by PFLAG China, an organization that has been advocating for the U.S.-style of coming out among Chinese LGBT subjects. Their target audience was the parents of Chinese queer subjects. *Coming Home* received over 250 million page views despite the fact that the website hosting the video (i.e., qq.com) refused to feature the video on its homepage because of its gay-friendly content (Bachhuber, 2015). *Coming Home* was also featured on A-Qiang’s microblog (Feb 10, 2015).

Coming Home narrates the story of a middle-class gay man, Fangchao, who comes out to his parents on the phone. The video shows Fangchao’s father scolding him when he comes out. His father says, angrily: “Since you have already come/gone out, don’t come home again!” (既然你已经出去了，就不要再回这个家). With this pithy

statement, the scriptwriter makes conspicuous the opposing orientations of *coming out* vs. *coming home* for Chinese queer subjects.

There is a play on the words (出去) in the dialogue to mean both coming out (as a queer subject) and going out (as in, leaving the family). *Coming out* thus takes on the meaning of leaving the family in order to gain sexual freedom. *Coming home* (回家), on the other hand, brings to mind the idea of coming back to the family, getting close to the family, bringing your queer desires in. In this rendering, then, coming out is antithetical to coming home — if you come out, don't think about coming home again!

After coming out to his parents, Fangchao became an outcast of his own family. The video flash-forwards to a moment two years later when Fangchao receives a phone call from his mother. She tells Fangchao to visit the family during the Chinese New Year, a time when most Chinese people partake in reunion dinners with their family. “No matter who you are, you are still our son,” she says. The story ends with the parents accepting their gay son because of family love. The video ends with mothers who joined PFLG speaking out to encourage viewers to come out to their families, urging Chinese queer subjects to believe in the love of their parents.

The message of this video is clear: Chinese queers, come home and come out to your parents! This video craftily weaves together the simultaneous movements away from and towards the family--coming out (leaving the family in order to gain sexual freedom) and coming home (coming back to the family). While calling Chinese queer subjects to come home during the Chinese New Year, the political agenda is, in fact, to come out. This construction is not a coincidence: according to a news report, the Chinese New Year has become the peak period of Chinese queer subjects coming out to their

parents, due to the marriage pressure they face from their parents in this family-oriented holiday (Lin & Xu, 2013).

The notion of “home” is especially interesting in this short video. On the one hand, home is the boundary of belonging: you are either inside the family or outside of it. In the video, queer desires is at first constructed as outside of the home space -- Fangchao’s queer desires is condemned as something he becomes outside of the home space, and he is exiled from home for his queer desire in order to maintain the “purity” of home.

Fangchao’s father’s words—“Since you have already come/gone out, don’t come home again”—are interesting. Here, the status of being “out” has double meanings: outside of home space and outside of heterosexual order: One implies the other. This including/excluding action is symbolized in the coming home during Chinese New Year, a ritual during which one’s familial belonging is affirmed or rejected. Home, on the other hand, is not a physical place; it is where parents are.

In A-Qiang’s posting, he wrote: “Coming home, a warm word...it is the acceptance of parents.” (回家，一个温暖的词...它是父母的接纳). In this equation, parents are the center of home, and there is no home without parents’ acceptance. Moreover, home is also constructed as the private haven that is about warmth and happiness; it tolerates everything, including queer desires, and thus is the ultimate site of belonging for queer subjects. In fact, the invitation from the mother to ask Fangchao to come home suggests that (Chinese) familial love, eventually, is the resolution of everything, including the tension surrounding queer desires. In this way, the discourse of family also subsumes sexuality by shifting the tension of sexuality to the depth of familial

love. At the end of day, it is about whether you love your family enough. It offers an alternative answer to the tension between the heteronormative home space and queer desires, with an emphasis on home and family as the frame of negotiation. Through bringing queer desires into the home space, the political call of coming out and the cultural imperative of coming home finally converge.

Coming Home as Decolonial Response

The dominant Euro-American discourse of coming out suggests that queer subjects should move away from the constraints of the “traditional” family model towards becoming homosexual “nuclear” couples in order to properly express their “free” modern sexuality (Blackwood, 2012). This approach in transnational LGBT movements was questioned in the press release for the 1998 Chinese *Tongzhi* Conference in Hong Kong:

The les-bi-gay movement in many Western societies is largely built upon the notion of individualism, confrontational politics, and the discourse of individual rights. Certain characteristics of confrontational politics, such as coming out and mass protests and parades, may not be the best way of achieving *tongzhi* liberation in family-centered, community-oriented Chinese societies which stress the importance of social harmony (Chou, 2000, p. 278).

The “best” way of achieving *tongzhi* liberation, Chou (2000) argues, is the *coming home* strategy that considers family relations and social harmony as equally important as one’s sexuality, if not more important. Chou’s articulation of the coming home strategy has been summarized into the following three characteristics: (1) non-conflictual harmonious relationships; (2) non-declarative practical everyday acts; [and] (3) a healthy personality

that is not centered on sex(uality) (Liu & Ding, 2005, p. 30). In other words, *coming home* implies the cultural preference of introducing one's same-sex partner to family and friends as a "close friend," thereby leaving the issue of sexuality unconfrosted.

Chou's model of coming home among Chinese queer subjects can be read as a decolonial response to the hegemony of Euro-American queer discourse to go "beyond identitarian and visibility frames of queerness" (Puar, 2007, p. 35). The *coming home* approach affirms an alternative queerness that counters the hegemony of *coming out*, which is rooted in a historical and cultural context that is different from the social environment that most Chinese queer subjects face in their everyday life.

The discourse of *coming out* centers a queer subjectivity that is built on individualism and homosexual identity, rooted in Western, bourgeois, and often urban culture. In contrast, traditional Chinese culture, Chou (2000, 2001) argues, demonstrates tolerance and harmony toward same-sex desires. The underlying assumption of such an argument, Liu and Ding (2005) point out, is that homophobia is Western and therefore colonial (p. 31). Chou's endorsement of the "coming home" strategy, characterized as "nonconfrontational, not sex-centred, non-hetero-/homo-based and traditional Chinese value-oriented" (Kam, 2012, p. 91), can be understood as a postcolonial gesture in queer studies. Facing the hegemony of U.S.-centered queer politics in both transnational LGBT movements and queer scholarships, Chou's reading of a more tolerant Chinese sexual culture and more successful (not) coming out, Kam (2012) notes, should be read as "a form of cultural resistance and a redefinition exercised by the local society" (p. 93).

Coming With: When Coming Home is Not Enough

As discussed above, family is an important stressor for coming out amongst Chinese queer subjects, and it may be said that coming out is, in fact, really about coming home for many. Coming home has become a prominent desire among Chinese queer subjects. For many of them, parents are not an optional choice, a relationship that they can choose to leave or stay with in different phases of their lives; rather, they are always an integrated part, people who are always in the visions of their imagined future.

Jane, for instance, explained why she spent years negotiating with her parents about her queer desire, rather than simply ignoring her parents despite the fact that she had been living by herself and financially independent all those years:

Because we will live together at the end of the day: I wish to live with them and take care of them, rather than sending them away to a nursing home¹¹. I hope they can accept this from their hearts, rather than staying together reluctantly and feeling sad. So when I met my third girlfriend, I told my mom that I just met a girl, whom I felt like a nice person; I want to introduce her to you, so that you can keep an eye for me. (因为以后还是要生活在一起的：我是希望跟他们一起生活照顾他们的，不想把他们送去养老院。我是希望他们能够从心理上接受这件事情，而不是勉强地在一起，但是心里其实很难过。所以后来当我交第三个女朋友的时候，我就跟妈妈说，我认识了一个女孩子，觉得还不错，希望你能帮我把把关，认识一下。)

¹¹ In Chinese society, living in a nursing home is often interpreted as being “abandoned” by one’s children and thus considered as “miserable.” The general poor conditions of nursing homes in China also contribute to the stigma of nursing homes as places for the lower class.

For Jane, parents are given in her life, while her queer relationships are changeable and thus negotiable. As a result, the discourse of family becomes the framework that such negotiation happens.

That being said, it does not mean that queer subjects are necessarily “closeted” under the familial discourse, as suggested in the polarizing construction between Chinese family and sexual freedom (I will discuss this antagonism later in this chapter), nor does it mean that Chinese queer subjects agree with every connotation of the family institution. That is, queer desires are still possible to thrive within the family institution by *living with* rather than turning away from the family institution.

In light of the above, I argue that instead of merely coming out and confronting their parents, Chinese queer subjects like Jane employ what I call a *coming with* approach. In Jane’s case, she both introduced her same-sex partner to her family and invited her mother to participate in the decision making of her same-sex relationship. She also tried very hard to get involved in the everyday life of her second girlfriend’s mother, who at first was against their same-sex desires because of her Christian beliefs but later accepted Jane’s relationship with her daughter and as a close family friends. In doing so, she brought her queer desire to the heteronormative home space, and brought the heteronormative family to the queer terrain. When family becomes the inseparable element of life, because of historical, economical, and/or political reasons, critically engaging the family is a way (sometimes feels like the only way) toward transformation. As my interviewee Xiaoye says:

You [might] have done a lot of things fighting for the rights of *tongzhi*. However, no matter how much you have done, your family, your parents are still something

you have to face [by yourself]. You do not have to sacrifice your [pause for two seconds]...issue with your family for the whole community. It is not like I come out to break away from [my] family. I believe there are all kinds of people in this world, and I don't believe that many people would choose to break away from their parents. So we just need to find a way of resolution. (你做了很多跟同志公益有关的事情，但是不管你做了多少事情，你的家庭你的父母依然是需要你去面对的。你也没有必要为了整个社群牺牲跟家里面的这个。。。问题，而不是说我出柜是为了跟家里决裂。我相信这个世界有各种各样不同的人，我也不相信会有很多人选择直接跟父母决裂，就只能找一种解决的方式吧。)

In order to maintain her relationships with both her parents and her longtime girlfriend, Xiaoye chose to enter into *xinghun* (I will fully discuss *xinghun* in Chapter 5). Although she did not see *xinghun* as a perfect solution that solves all problems once and for all, Xiaoye was resolutely unapologetic for her “not so revolutionary” *xinghun* given the situation she had been facing.

The difficulty of the *coming with* approach lies in the double burden of queer subjects. On the one hand, Chinese queer subjects have to prepare themselves, both financially and emotionally, for any potential risks if their parents know their queer desires. On the other hand, they have to prepare their parents to deal with the social pressure as parents of queer subjects. The latter, in fact, is more prominent than the former in my data. On A-Qiang's microblog, many people expressed their concerns for parents with regards to coming out. Lucas小城之春 [microblog ID] was one of them. In a series of postings, he shared his experience of coming out to his father as a *tongzhi* from

a rural area. Although it had been over a decade since he first revealed his same-sex desire to his father, he was still concerned: “Coming out will significantly ease the pressure on us, and [we] are not lack of communication avenues with others. But *tongzhi* parents from remote, interior areas are not like parents from big cities: it is difficult for them to find any communication avenue to alleviate the pressure.” (出柜让咱们自身压力减轻许多, 平常也不乏途径跟人交流沟通, 可生活在偏远内陆地区的父母跟大城市同志家长不同, 他们在现实生活中很难有纾解压力跟人交流的渠道。) In his opinion, LGBT movements have provided Chinese queer subjects with different kinds of communal and/or discursive resources to cope with the pressure of heteronormativity. However, their parents, especially those from marginal areas in China, are not equipped with the same kinds of supports.

In a predominately heteronormative society, many Chinese queer subjects see harm as inevitable for both themselves and for their families once their queer desires were exposed. 无名域名58 [microblog ID] wrote: “[Someone] has to sacrifice, but I don’t wish it to be my parents” (总要有所牺牲, 但不希望是我父母). My interviewee Dee further elaborated on why she would rather compromise her own sexual freedom in order to minimize the harm her parents might face: “If I were not the child of somebody, when I am only me, I can face it.” (当我不是谁谁谁的孩子, 我只是我的时候, 我可以面对。) However, as a daughter, she also envisioned the emotional harm that she would bring to her parents if she came out to them. “This harm,” she explained, “is something that I cannot console (sic). I cannot do anything to make it an unhurt situation.” (但是这

种伤害是我没有办法劝解的，我觉得我没有办法做任何事情，让它变成一种不受伤害的状态。)

Struggling between coming out and caring for her parents, she finally chose the latter: “Just because I don’t wanna lie, I wanna face it, I leave this hard-to-digest issue with her? Leaving her there—digest it or not, I don’t care? I just cannot do something like this.” (我不能因为我不想说谎，我想面对这个事情了，我就把这个难以消化的事情交给她，任凭她，你能消化就消化，你不能消化就拉倒。我做不出来这样的事情。)

My interviewee Jane summed up her reflection on her journey of coming out in this way: “The most difficult part is [pause for a few seconds] when you see the helplessness of your parents.” (最困难的是。。。面对父母的那种无助吧。)

Another interviewee, Dave, used the metaphor of a ruin to describe the scene that he foresaw if he were to come out to his parents:

In my opinion, on coming out, I am ready and I can face any situation from them. But they themselves have not been ready. What I do not want to see is that I tell them when I come home, leaving a bomb behind, and going back [to work] one or two weeks later, leaving them to face this ruin by themselves, and nobody can help them to deal with the situation. It is not fair for them.... I think I can take the consequences, even if it will be painful. But I think, it is very difficult to take it for them. (我个人觉得，关于出柜的准备，我已经准备好了，我可以面对他们的情况了。可是他们自己本身没有准备好。我不想的情况是，我回去的时候跟他们讲了，放下一颗炸弹，但是我一两个星期之后回去，就留下他们自己独

自面对这个废墟，没有人能帮助他们，处理这个局面。这对他们是很不公平的。...我觉得我可以承受那个情况，即使也是很痛苦的；但是我觉得对他们来讲，是很难承受的。)

As seen above, on the issue of coming out, some Chinese queer subjects seem to be more concerned about the difficulties their parents might have to face than the financial and/or political challenges they have to deal with. From their perspective, coming out is not only a challenge for themselves as queer subjects but also a challenge for their parents. More importantly, they think that parents often have less resources or support to handle such challenges compared to their queer children. As a result, some of them would rather prioritize the needs of their parents over their own interest, leaving their queer desires unspeakable within the home space. For queer subjects who do not want to give up on their family or same-sex desires, it is more accurate to describe such a negation effort as a *coming with* strategy, which attempts to engage the home space with queer desires, transforming the heteronormative family institution from within and redefine the meaning of queerness.

Unspeakable and Unintelligible Queer Desires

To make sense of the desire of *coming home* and the experiences of my interviewees such as Jane and Macky, we need to ask the question: What needs to be accomplished in order to come out? Can Chinese queer subjects be understood as coming out when proclaiming or admitting their same sex-desires do not lead to any change in the heteronormative family institution?

For Macky, her queer desire might be described more accurately as “unspeakable” than “unspoken.” Some queer desires are unspeakable because of the “epistemic

violence” (Dotson, 2011) of the social system. Kristie Dotson (2011) defines epistemic violence as “a failure of an audience to communicatively reciprocate, either intentionally or unintentionally, in linguistic exchanges owing to pernicious ignorance” (p. 242).

So is the reticence/silence of some Chinese queer subjects a result of the epistemic violence? A simple answer will be yes. However, it is more important to investigate why such a violence happen and what it does upon Chinese queer subjects, rather than a simple “yes” or “no” judgement. I argue that the reticence/silence I delineated above is the effect of both the epistemic violence of the Chinese society and the epistemic violence of dominant Western queer discourse that render Chinese queerness unspeakable and unintelligible.

On the one hand, we need to acknowledge the violence that the Chinese society has done to Chinese queer subjects, which is most intense in the family terrain. In Dotson’s definition, epistemic violence is the result of communication failure among interlocutors. That happens when the audience is not willing to hear or not capable of hearing her conversational partner. This results in the self-silencing of her conversational partner. Although Dotson emphasizes the socio-epistemic circumstances of the silencing, epistemic violence is defined as the outcome of unsuccessful linguistic exchange at the interpersonal level. However, epistemic violence can happen even when the interlocutors are both willing to and capable of hearing each other. In the case of Macky for example, the issue is not failure of communicating messages of sexuality, even when her sexual identity was unspoken and seems to be silenced. In the Chinese context, the message of sexuality could be and often is sufficiently communicated by contexts, while reticence is more often perceived as cultural capacity or sensibility in Chinese culture. That being

said, it will be naïve to claim that reticence/silence regarding sexuality is a more desirable mode of communication among Chinese queer subjects. I argue, instead, that queer desires are unspeakable among many Chinese queers.

Rae Langton (1993) distinguishes two ways of being silent: making no noise and performing no speech act. The latter, which she calls “unspeakable acts,” happens when language “fail[s] to count as the actions they were intended to be” (p. 299) even when the appropriate words can be uttered. Queer desires are unspeakable among some Chinese queers as well as their families not because they could not utter the words (be it *lala*, *tongzhi*, *tongxinglian*, lesbian, or gay) or make a political statement on their sexual identity. Rather, they are unspeakable because they are communally unintelligible and/or make no meaningful transformation in their lives.

The unintelligibility of queer desires within some Chinese families is evident in the coming out of my interviewee Yaqing. When Yaqing revealed her same-sex desire to her grandmother, she recalled that Yaqing had mentioned it before. “Why would this happen?” She asked. “There was a time when you were a ‘fake guy’ (colloquialism for tomboy). Are you that kind of person who looks like a woman but with male genes?” (是不是出生的时候搞错了。你有一段时间很假小子，你是不是那种看上去是女的，但基因是男的？)

For Yaqing’s grandmother, female same-sex desire is something she could not make sense of, something unthinkable in dominant heterosexual model. Yaqing’s queer desire for women was only understandable in a heterosexual framework: that Yaqing must be “in fact” (defined by the biological discourse) a man, because only men would be attracted to women. In other words, the discourse of heterosexuality is so profound that

when there was a dissonance between Yaqing's gender identity and her sexual orientation within the heterosexual framework, her grandmother had to modify her understanding of Yaqing's gender identity to make sense of the situation, while the heterosexual discourse was unchallenged. The hegemony of heterosexuality within Yaqing's family has subsumed her queer desire and made it unintelligible. For Yaqing, the difficulty of coming out is not so much about her family's acceptance of her queer sexuality-- her grandmother was not against her queer desire. Instead, the challenge is to make herself a queer subject that is thinkable in a heterosexual family.

In light of the above, I argue that the reticence/silence in communicating non-normative sexualities in some Chinese families, in fact, an epistemic violence that is done upon queer subjects. It is a refusal to engage in a conversation, an active withholding that hinders any transformative communication. Reticence/silence as a communication norm keeps queer desires an "agreed-upon" secret without acquiescing in its intended consequences.

Acknowledging the epistemic violence done upon Chinese queer subjects from the Chinese society, it is, however, dangerous to claim that the epistemic violence that Chinese queer subjects face is just from "within." Such a claim, I argue, risks being complicit in neo-colonialism. In her famous essay *Can The Subaltern Speak*, Gayatri Spivak (1988) cautions us against the imperialist process whereby measures the East with a first-world, privileged vocabulary that erases the cultural particularity of non-Western society and reinscribes the cultural domination of the West.

Therefore, I argue that subaltern cannot speak without reflecting on the epistemic violence in mainstream queer studies; Chinese queerness will continue to be unspeakable

if we classify and measure it with the same mode of “come out” developed in the Euro-American experience. Fran Martin argues that the concept of “closet” is a highly Eurocentric notion, and non-normative sexualities in Taiwan manifest a very different practice of “masking” and “disclosing” (as cited in Liu, 2010, p. 299). In dominant queer discourse, the “closet,” be it created by individuals or the larger sexual discourse, is like a mask that an individual can put on to perform a “fake” self, which is not one really is. Staying in the closet means a split between a fake self and a real self, a sense of disunity. However, as I discussed earlier in this chapter, the experiences of some Chinese queer subjects cannot be fully captured by such a framework. Instead, the communicative phenomenon among Chinese queer subjects suggest that non-normative sexualities are more often communicated through intuitions and feelings, rather than verbalization of one’s sexual identity. That is, if queerness is not heard/seen in such a communicative process, it is not because it does not exist, but because of the violence in predominant epistemology that privileges telling over feeling and voice over silence.

I have discussed the epistemic violence in the reticence/silence upon/of Chinese queer subjects. In the following pages, I will discuss the operation of reticence/silence within the familial domain and its effects on Chinese queer subjects.

Complicating Reticence and Silence

Despite its decolonial intention, Chou’s argument about coming home outlined earlier is dependent on the dichotomy of East-West sexuality, which itself is a colonial construction (see Liu, 2010; Liu & Ding, 2005; Patton, 2002). The hegemony of the U.S.-centered queer theory, Petrus Liu (2010) notes, “is rhetorically derived from the imagination of the East as a civilization sealed off from the rest of the world” (p. 300).

For instance, in Michael Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1978), which is frequently cited in queer theory, China is cited as an example of the "other" history of sexuality (the source of a robust *ars erotica*), which is different from the "*scientia sexualis*" in the West.

Therefore, some queer scholars (such as Liu & Ding, 2005; Engebretsen, 2009; Liu, 2010; Kam, 2012) are skeptical about the innocent "coming home" strategy proposed in Chou's works. Liu and Ding (2005), for example, see it as evidence of "self-orientalization" in the studies of Chinese sexuality. This cultural construction of Chinese culture as "a homophobic free site in some idealized pre-colonial past" (Liu & Ding, 2005, p. 32), as suggested in Chou's narrative of the tolerance and harmony oriented Chinese tradition, is too easily used as a regulatory rhetoric by the state and a disciplinary technique by the family institution on non-normative sexuality. The "silent tolerance" in Chinese sexuality that Chou proposes, Liu and Ding (2005) argue, is nothing but a cultural myth; it is a reticent homophobia that represses, disciplines, and keeps queer subjects in place:

This reticence is not (and perhaps never was) merely a poetics and a rhetoric, but constitutes ever-refigured socio-familial force and power. It circulates in everyday practices along pathways that maintain the "normal order" of persons and things as well as of actions and behavior (p. 33).

One consequence of the reticent culture on non-normative sexuality is the unintelligibility of queer subjects within the family space. My interviewee Dave, who had been preparing himself as well as his parents for "coming out" for years, told me about the frustration he experienced since same-sex desires seemed to be totally invisible and

unthinkable in his parents minds. After watching an explicitly homosexual themed movie like *Brokeback Mountain*, his parents' response was nothing but indifference:

If they were strongly against it—‘Oh, how can [they] like this?’ Or [say that]‘This is actually quite touching’...But none of these! It feels like they have never watched it, without any comments. When [we] just finished the movie, I asked them for opinions, and they said it was okay. That’s it. I was planning to use this as an opportunity: Even if they were to condemn it, I can still continue the conversation, like ask them why they condemn it and then carry on dialogue from there. But now, I do not have any way to unfold it. (如果他们强烈反对--哦，怎么能这样？或者说这个也蛮感人的...但是都没有！感觉就像他们没有看过，完全没有任何的comments。就刚看完那会，我问他们觉得怎样，他们就说还可以。就这样。我本以为以这个为契机:即使是他们反对的话，我都可以把这个对话继续下去，问你为什么反对，可以有跟进的对话。可是现在我完全没办法开展。)

In a Korean family drama that Dave introduced to his parents, his parents commented on the relationships of the main characters, except the same-sex romance of the eldest son, which was supposed to be a primary family tension in most of the episodes. In this case, the intentional not-seeing of queer desires is, in fact, a selective neglect, an active withholding that stalls any transformative conversation. This selective neglect, another interviewee Xiaoye pointed out, is the way that parents maintain the status quo and keep everybody in place.

As I mentioned earlier, Xiaoye's parents had been ambiguous on Xiaoye's same-sex desire. When they noticed (or chose not to notice) anything "weird" in Xiaoye's *xinghun*, they often just ignored it. "I don't know if they really want to know about your life, or if in fact, (they) don't wanna know about it." (我不知道他们到底想了解你的生活, 还是其实不想了解你的生活。) She concluded: "my parents are really those who live in their own world" (...我父母真的是生活在自己世界里的人). The world that Xiaoye's parents live and try to maintain is the heteronormative family. Knowing her queer desire or not, out or closeted, does not make any differences, because "they won't try to understand you after knowing your life" (他们也不会了解了你的生活之后, 尝试着了解你的事情。).

The unintelligibility of queer subjects within the family space, Liu and Ding (2005) point out, means the deprivation of "the resources for life or action" (p. 35). In her struggle with her parents for her marital freedom, Jane had made so many arguments trying to persuade her parents. After a successful defense for her relationship with a woman, her father could not find any another reason to keep her from engaging her same-sex relationship. Finally he said: "Even if we agree, can her parents accept you? How would they see you? *What are you in their family?* Say if you visit her family during New Year or festivals, what on earth are you?" (那我们同意了, 对方的家人能接受你们吗? 他们会怎样看待你们? 你到人家家里算什么? 比如过年过节你到人家家里, 算什么?) What he was really asking is the intelligibility as a queer subject in the home space: what kind of un/intelligible subject are you?

In this argument, the issue of recognition, and more importantly, the issue of intelligibility within the family space were raised by Jane's father and were used as validation of depriving Jane's agency in her intimate life. The interrogation of "*What are you in their family?*" is a statement of the unintelligible status of queer subjects within the heteronormative family space: queer desires and queer relationships are uncategorizable and thus unthinkable in the family institution where everything is structured and imagined around the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990); anything that falls outside of such a discursive system has no place within the familial space.

Queer subjects, therefore, are faced with a catch-22 situation with regards to the space they occupy in the Chinese society. On the one hand, the public sphere refuses to address queer desires and thus confines queer sexualities to the private domain, behind the doors of family (Liu & Ding, 2005; Kam, 2012). On the other hand, Chinese families continue to be predominantly heteronormative and not willing to provide the necessary space where queer subjects can be fully recognized.

That being said, the heteronormative family institution in the Chinese society does not simply expel queer desires and/or subjects and keep them outside of door of family. Rather, it keeps the queer subjects under familial surveillance, making sure they are in their proper place. It is in this sense that within the heteronormative family domain, there is little discursive space for the existence and subsistence of queer subjects. While queer desires are conveniently accused as originated elsewhere—somewhere outside the national borders or the home space, queer subjects are firmly confined to the heteronormative family domain with little discursive space. They exist, yet are unintelligible; their primary forms of identification and relationality are confined to the

private domain behind the door of family, but they are granted little space within the domestic.

The situation seems hopeless and impossible for the Chinese queer subject at this point. But I want to argue that this is not so. There is a way whereby invisibility and unintelligibility are productive for queer subjects. Butler (2004), for instance, notes that unintelligibility could be desirable for queer subjects:

...if I have no desire to be recognized within a certain set of norms, then it follows that my sense of survival depends upon escaping the clutch of those norms by which recognition is conferred. It may well be that my sense of social belonging is impaired by the distance I take, but surely that estrangement is preferable to gaining a sense of intelligibility by virtue of norms that will only do me in from another direction (p. 3).

She argues that the politics of recognition also means attributing to the force of norms, which are the exact source of the violence on queer subjects. In this rendering, the unintelligibility of queer subjects is way of undoing the heteronormative system.

For Chinese queer subjects, the unintelligibility of their queer desires can be read as a mode of resisting the policing and regulatory attempts on non-normative sexualities. Unintelligibility is often viewed as social death, a categorical condition that leads to an unsustainable and undesirable life (Gleisberg, 2015, p. 4). However, my study on Chinese queer subjects shows that unintelligibility also means fissures to evade the surveillance and control of the heteronormative system. In a society where institutionalized violence continues to police and contain non-normative sexualities, stripping off any queer resistance, the unintelligibility of Chinese queer subjects can be seen as an insurrection

from within. It operates in way that resists, although not always intentionally, the surveillance on and incorporation of queer desires; it refuses to be the target of the relentless, heteronormative violence, and it cannot and will not be contained.

Back to our discussion on reticence/silence of queer subjects in Chinese society, my study shows that reticence and silence does not necessarily exclude queer subjects from participating in social life that may lead to meaningful changes at the individual or even social level. While I truly agree with Liu and Ding's (2005) call for a new paradigm that enables and empowers "non-reticent acts and feelings, allowing non-reticent lives to articulate the challenging legitimacy of their spaces" (p. 49), I argue that reticence and silence can be productive as well. That is, we need not reject wholesale reticence and silence as communication strategies with queer potential. Reticence and silence can be and have been employed by queer subjects, especially those who are more marginalized, to maintain a sustainable life as well as participate in ongoing struggles with the heteronormative social system. I argue these points by beginning with a question raised by Day Wong (2007) about coming out in China -- "*come out as what?*" I argue these points by going back to the drawing board, beginning the understanding of Chinese queer subjects anew, this time by paying more attention to the ontology of Chinese queer subjects.

Suzhi and Pulu: Intersectional Coming Out

To answer the question of "come out as what," we need to address the material conditions of different queer subjects and the ontology of queer subjectivity. In the following pages, I will use two popular discourses -- the discourse of *suzhi* (素质 meaning "quality") and the discourse of *pulu* (铺路 meaning "path paving") -- in Chinese

queer communities to explore the gender and class factors that affect how and why Chinese queer subjects come out, focusing on the materiality that conditions queer subjectivity. The prevalence of the *suzhi*/quality discourse and *pulu*/path paving discourse, I argue, is evidence of the homonormativity within Chinese queer communities.

The discourse of *suzhi*/quality is essentially a class issue. As I discussed in Chapter 3, the force that behind the call for *coming out* is, to a great extent, the rainbow economy. Chinese queer subjects are interpellated into the consumerist position of being “out and proud.” The promotion of the *coming out* discourse intends to elicit a feeling of lack among queer subjects who are “not yet out”. Therefore, the discourse of *coming out* is intimately related to the need of capitalism to elicit or even create desires that lead to more consumptions. But not all queer subjects are “good consumers.” Economic difference predicts whether one is a good consumer and thus a “good queer” or not. In Lisa Rofel’s (2007) study of Chinese gay men, she uses money boys, a group whom many Chinese gay men try to disassociate themselves with, to show the class differences among Chinese queer subjects:

Gay men who have legal residency in Beijing assume that money boys come from the countryside and that they pollute city life with their transgressions of the social divisions between masculine wealth and masculine love, between urban propriety and rural excess, and between proper and improper expressions of gay identity (p. 104).

Here, class difference is constructed as urban/rural division, and only cosmopolitan queer bodies can be imagined as the proper location of gay identity. Moreover, gay identity is

also constructed as a middle class “culture” (文化 *wenhua*) that can be isolated from the material need of day-to-day life. Those who do not or cannot afford to do so, such as money boys in Rofel’s study, are condemned as lacking “culture,” or “low quality” (低素质 *di suzhi*), and thus not qualified as “good homosexual” (see Rofel, 2007, p. 104).

Homosexuality thus becomes exclusively for those of “high quality,” or “the rich,” to use the words from Yaqing’s interview earlier. To be recognized a proper queer subject, Kam (2012) points out, “one has to first become a model citizen before she can ask for ‘tolerance’ and ‘fair treatment’ from society and the authorities” (p. 98). Queer subjects like Yaqing, a working class queer woman without college education, are not considered “high quality” queer subjects and are often excluded from the imagination of queerness in mainland China.

As more and more Chinese queer subjects come out to the public, presenting themselves as “good *tongzhi*” (好同志), the price of such an increasing visibility, such as backlash from heteronormative groups and the homonormative pressure within Chinese queer communities, will be paid by those more marginalized queer subjects, whom are of “low quality” and thus cannot come out. “Tolerance” from the wider public becomes a privilege that only some queer bodies can enjoy, but not others.

For Chinese queer subjects who want to “come out,” *pulu*/path paving is a common metaphor they use to describe the process of preparing themselves and/or their parents, financially and/or discursively, for the moment they reveal their queer sexualities to parents. Norman, a business professor at a famous university in China, discusses the relationship between economic consideration, filial piety, and coming out. On the one

hand, he kept telling me that the only reason that had kept him from coming out was that he did not wish to break his parents' heart. On the other hand, he stressed extensively the financial precondition that one need to achieve, or *pulu*/path paving, before a queer subject comes out to any person:

...people who are not successful yet, or those who are not rich, are not qualified to talk about gay. For example, if two gays want to get a room, 419 [for one night], money is the premise. I have always believed [that] being rich, doing well in your career, and being successful--success as defined in universal terms-- are something a gay should do (sic). The more successful you are, however, the admiration of others, will become a pressure as well. Successful or not, I will not tell my parents about this [same-sex desire]. In fact, if I become successful, all the more I will not say a word. (...没有成功的人，或是没有钱的人，是没有资格谈gay的。举个例子，比如说两个gays要开房，419，你是要有钱的为前提的，我一直认为，有钱、把事业做好，成功——普世价值中的成功，是一个gay应该做的事情。但是你越是成功，别人的仰慕，也会造成一种压力。不管成不成功，我不会跟父母讲这种事情。还不要说我成功了，我更不会跟父母讲。)

In this example, we can see that Norman held an ambiguous or even contradictory narrative of coming out. He believed that only the rich and successful can be properly gay; at the same time, he admitted the more successful a queer subject becomes, the more (s)he was afraid to lose. Being "successful" or not, in Norman's theory, keeping silent on one's queer sexuality is the better way for queer individuals. In this rendering, material

and social resources are closely tied to heteronormativity—the more heteronormative one looks like, the more recourses may be available to her/him, and thus the more one risks losing if (s)he comes out as a queer subject. The material and cultural benefits of conforming to sexual norms thus silence some queer subjects, weakening or even erasing their queer potential.

Although not every queer subject makes their decision of (not) coming out based on benefit calculation like Norman, the discourses of *pulu*/path paving often indicate a homonormative assumption that are held by Chinese queer subjects. Like Norman, many queer subjects believe that one has to be financially well off (or at least independent) in order to “come out” to family successfully. They believe that the more “successful” you are, the more capital you have to negotiate with your family.

The economy of coming out, Kam (2012) notes, “it is a way not only to free themselves from familial control, but also to make up for their parents’ loss, for having deprived them of a ‘normal’ family life with grandchildren and sons-in-law surrounding them” (p. 69). The underlying assumption is that queer life is a disruption of the “happiness” of heterosexual family; the “loss” of such happiness can and only can be “compensated” by financial security, something that is highly regarded in most Chinese family. Therefore, the path in *pulu*/path paving becomes a path to middle class queer subjectivity; those who fail to achieve such an economic position cannot, and often considered as should not come out to family.

The *pulu*/path paving discourse suggests a “two-step model to coming out” (Kam, 2012, p. 99): first, to stand up as a “successful” member of society, leaving the issue of sexuality unaddressed; and then come out as an “outstanding” (优秀 *youxiu*)

daughter/son but sexually “less desirable” queer subject. Such a two-step model relies on the recognition of, rather than challenges the criteria of, the heteronormative society. “The recognition of queers,” Sara Ahmed points out, “can be narrated as the hope or promise of becoming acceptable, where in being acceptable you must become acceptable to a world that has already decided what is acceptable” (p. 106). The discourse of *pulu*/path paving, becomes a gift given from the “tolerant” heteronormative family, “which conceals queer labor and struggle” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 106).

Pulu, or the path paving process toward coming out, is also highly gendered. If *pulu*/path paving is a way, although a problematic way, to come out to family and hopefully be accepted, Chinese female queer subjects often face more obstacles to pave their way out of familial control. Several queer scholars, such as Yinhe Li and Xiaobo Wang, Fangfu Ruan, Beichuan Zhang and Lisa Rofel talk about the difficulty of finding lesbian women in their fieldwork (Kam, 2012, p. 5). They ask: “Where are the lesbians?” This difficulty, on the one hand, has to do with the identification of female queer subjects with the meaning loaded label “lesbian”; on the other hand, it is because female queer subjects in China seldom occupy any public space that is marked for queer bodies. Instead, queer women in mainland China, like most of Chinese women, are still confined to the familial space. Even professional women who work outside of the family are still under severe familial surveillance-- if not surveillance from parents, then from husbands.

In the Chinese society where disciplining the female body is considered as communal responsibility (人人有责 *renren youze*) within the private family, female queer subjects are often under more severe discipline and surveillance than male queer subjects. Many female queer subjects, if they are not married, are pressured to live with

their parents so that they are “taken care of.” In the personal ads on Chinalesgay.com, for example, a significant portion of female queer women mentioned that they were living with their parents currently, compared with most male queer subjects said that they had their own houses to live. Given that women are still generally economic disadvantaged in mainland China, the economic solution in the *pulu* discourse means it is more difficult for female queer subjects to pave their path out and be accepted by their family.

But queer desire requires physical space to thrive. The disadvantaged economic status that female queer subjects face means less queer space for the growth of female queer desires, rendering their queer relationships vulnerable to economic conditions (Kam, 2012, p. 80). In fact, many female queer subjects find it very difficult to come out to their parents even if they are financially independent and can technically live without their parents, as several of my female interviewees had told me. In some extreme cases, like the one A-Qiang posted on his microblog (March 8th, 2014) about a *lala* who asked for help, parents may physically abuse their queer daughter and/or dragged them home from their workplaces even when they had move away from family and worked in another city (and the society at large, including the corporate world, tacitly agreed that it was just “proper parenting”). In other words, the gendered discipline and surveillance female queer subjects face make the financial success in *pulu*/path paving a less promising solution for the liberation of female queer subjects.

Silences are Different

Building upon the intersectional understanding of the materiality of the Chinese queer subject, I argue that we need to distinguish two different kinds of reticence/silence: silence of family institution and the state as a regulatory rhetoric, which I am calling

authoritative silence, and reticence/silence of queer subjects as a coping strategy, or what I call *subaltern reticence/silence* in my study.

Authoritative silence on non-normative sexuality in contemporary China is often interpreted as “tolerance,” a “mild” version of homophobia compared with the West. On the macro level, the discourse of “Chinese tolerance” of non-normative sexualities, which is invoked as the opposite of the expressive and often physical homophobia in the West and thus a decolonial notion, Kam (2012) points out, “continues to circulate widely as a nationalistic narrative countering the Western imagination of a homophobic (and thus ‘backward’) China” (p. 89). It is on this ground that Kam (2012) calls the notion of “Chinese tolerance” of non-normative sexuality as being “essentialist” and “illusory” (p. 89).

On the meso level, authoritative silence refuses to recognize queer desires as parts of the home space, and thus a “silent, non-physical repression of non-normative sexuality enacted within the family” (Kam, 2012, p. 92) echoing the state’s silence on non-normative sexualities, which Engebretsen (2009) calls a Chinese version of “don’t tell, don’t ask.” Moreover, authoritative silence as a regulatory technique works on the emotional life of queer subjects to invoke feelings such as guilt, compunction, and shame exactly because of the silent “tolerance” of family.

My interviewee Gao, for example, felt very guilty when he realized that his same-sex desires deprived the “normal happiness” that his parents longed for. This feeling of guilt grew even stronger when he came out to his parents. His guilt was the strongest when his parents showed “tolerance” toward his queer desire (never blamed him overtly) but not acceptance. They still, however, tried to persuade him to marry a woman from

time to time. During my phone interviewee with Gao, he left his house and went to the street because his mother was in the house, too. “Although my mom knows I am [a *tongzhi*], it is not appropriate to talk about it [homosexuality] in front of her,” he said.

The feeling of guilt, another interviewee Zien said, was the reason that kept him staying with them: “I came back exactly for them [parents]. I watch for them, take care of them, which can be a kind of compensation. (我就是为了他们才回来呀。我照应他们, 照顾他们, 也算是一种弥补吧。) The silence of heteronormative family, which is interpreted as a tolerance, elicits feelings in queer subjects and keep them in place within the family space, rather than push them to the outside of the family.

The result of such a reticent/silent response is that queer desires are erased from sight and from the discursive universe. Authoritative silence as a communication norm that regulates the way how queer subjects can address their queer desires, Liu and Ding (2005) note, “gently and indirectly work its persuasive powers” (p. 34) by assigning queer desires in a unspeakable state. Kam (2012) concludes that such reticent tolerance is just a “silent sanction” (p. 93) and “harmony on the surface.” As a regulatory technique, “the only language permitted in order to keep everyone in place within the heterosexual order” (Kam, 2012, p. 94), authoritative silence will not challenge the heteronormative order. Tolerance, if it is tolerance at all, will only be granted when the hegemony of the heteronormative family system is not disrupted (Kam, 2012).

Subaltern reticence/silence, on the other hand, is a survival strategy and could be used critically toward better queer lives. The reticent strategies that many Chinese queer subjects employ, such as coming out tacitly and *xinghun*, have been criticized by mainstream LGBT movements and some queer scholars. PFLAG China, for instance, has

been a strong force in Chinese LGBT movements to promote a U.S. style “coming out” politics, and its director A-Qiang has a history of condemning “closeted” *tongzhi* (especially those who engage in *xinghun*), as “using parents as excuses,” “not brave enough,” and/or “having identification problem” on sexual identity/ies. These critiques were echoed by some mainland-based queer scholars. Weiwei (2010), for example, criticizes queer subjects who participate in *xinghun* as having internalized heteronormativity. Other queer scholars have shown concerns about the insufficiency (see Liu & Ding, 2005; Kam, 2012) and “fragility of tacit strategies” (Engebretsen, 2009, p. 13).

While I agree with the critique of cautioning against the conforming danger in subaltern reticence/silence, I argue that such a tacit strategy is not necessarily a less productive one for queer subjects. For example, the subaltern reticence/ silence of some female queer subjects, due to their marginalized status compared with male queer subjects, has contributed to the invisibility or even unintelligibility of female queer desires in Chinese society. Such an invisibility and unintelligibility, to some extent, offers an important opportunity for female queer subjects to circumvent the social surveillance on homosexuality; the relative visibility of male queer subjects, however, comes with the price of more intense social anxiety and thus more severe surveillance of male queer desires. In other words, the reticence/silence of the less privileged female subjects opens up an opportunity for the survival of their queer desires, while the privilege of the male bodies becomes a loss, a price they have to pay for their visibility.

Coming Out, Coming Home, Coming With

I agree that we need to acknowledge the changing discursive conditions within the Chinese queer communities where we witnessed a “rapid development of an identity-based *tongzhi* community and its increasingly articulate efforts in obtaining an exclusive same-sex lifestyle that is not secondary to a visible normative heterosexual relationship” (Kam, 2012, p. 93). I agree that we should affirm other non-reticent or non-tacit strategies (see Liu & Ding, 2005). That being said, I argue that we should affirm the transformative potential in the subaltern reticence/silence employed by those less advantaged queer subjects; we should be cautious against the assumptions often associated with “insufficiency”—being lacking, less “radical,” or “pre-coming-out.” The “coming with” strategy, I argue, is a manifestation of the transformative potential of subaltern silence.

The “coming with” approach is closely related, yet distinct from the “coming home” approach that Chou (2000, 2001) delineates in his study of queer subjects in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China. In Chou’s description of “coming home,” queer subjects often live with their parents/family, resisting the hetero-marital relationships (Liu & Ding, 2005, p. 31). The strategy of “coming with,” however, is not necessarily non-conflictual as emphasized in Chou’s coming home strategy. Sometimes, the manifestation of such a strategy is not even as reticent as suggested by Chou, such as in the examples of Ada, Jane, and Gao I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, although it is usually non-declarative on the issue of sexual identity.

That being said, the “coming with” strategy shares the same commitment in harmonious familial relationships, especially with parents, seeing family as an indispensable network in queer lives. Unlike in the coming home strategy in Chou’s

definition, which implies bringing or even subsuming queer sexuality *to* the heteronormative home space, the “coming with” strategy attempts to engage the home space *with* queer desires, transforming the heteronormative family institution from within and redefine the meaning of queerness. This is different from “coming out” or “coming home”: hegemonic transnational discourse of “coming out” endorses an oppositional resistance *against* the constrains of family toward individual sexual freedom; “coming home,” on the other hand, suggests that queer subjects coming *to* the heteronormative home space, leaving the latter unengaged and thus unchallenged; in the strategy of “coming with,” however, queer subjects move *with* the family institution and redirect it into a livable space, if not a purely queer space, for queer subjects. Such a strategy, I argue, indicates a double move: heteronormative family institution is now both the site and the object of transformation, and the critical potential of such an approach lies in the resignifications of both family and queerness in the ongoing and sustainable struggles.

Conclusion

What does it mean when we say somebody comes out? Can one come out in a family where same-sex desires are not only unaccepted, but also unintelligible? Is one “out” if their parents already know of their queer desires, without speaking? Is one closeted if their same-sex desire is a socially agreed-upon “secret” between the queer subject and their parents? This chapter brings to fore the complications about coming out for queer subjects.

As seen in the preceding sections, family is a primary terrain for the struggles over sexualities. The Chinese society, to a great extent, is a family-oriented society. While recognizing the Orientalist notion of characterizing Chinese culture as “the all-

encompassing familial obligation that confronts non-Western subjects” (Cho, 2009, p. 416), I argue that family is an indispensable site to explore the practices of non-normative sexualities in contemporary China.

In a family-oriented society like contemporary China, family is a critical network where the exchange of social resources happens; it is also the site where discipline, control, and oppression take place. Chinese queer subjects are pressured to perform heteronormativity in the home space, where the home space is in fact a regulatory space. Within this heteronormative regulatory home space, queer desires become unspeakable -- not because queer subjects cannot utter the words or that they cannot make a political statement about their sexual identity-- but because queer desires are communally unintelligible and/or make no meaningful transformation in their lives.

Queer desires, while perceived by family members, are granted little space within the domestic. Yet, at the same time, queer desires are still confined to the private domain behind the door of family in order to keep queer subjects in place. Reticence/silence becomes the dominant communication norm in the struggles of non-normative sexualities.

As shown in the personal ads and microblog discussion I analyzed, as well as in my conversations with my interviewees, for most Chinese queer subjects, family is necessarily a negotiation partner that Chinese queer subjects try to engage with rather than move away from. Family is the space where negotiation and transformation happen; there is no “safe elsewhere” outside of the home space for such transformations to occur. Thus, instead of “coming out” and turning away from family, many Chinese queer subjects prefer a reticent “coming with” strategy to integrate both familial belonging and

sexual identification. In such a strategy, family is both the object and the location of potential transformation for Chinese queer subjects.

The (not) coming out practices of Chinese queer subjects engage both heteronormative family and queer desires, redefining both the meaning of Chinese family and the meaning of being queer through its sustainable struggles and persistent transformative practices. They challenge the underlying assumption in dominant Euro-American queer studies that queerness is located in the visible, public domain (see Gopinath, 2005). The unintelligibility of Chinese queer subjects, I argue, can be read as an insurrection from within, a mode of resistance in a society where institutionalized violence continues to police and contain non-normative sexualities, stripping off any queer resistance. Such resistance, although not necessarily intentional, creates fissures to evade the surveillance on and incorporation of queer desires. It is a refusal of being contained.

The experience of Chinese queer subjects also complicate the meaning of “coming out,” challenging mainstream understanding of the communication process of (not) knowing. While reticence/ silence can be used to discipline and regulate queer bodies within the home space, it is important to note that “[t]here is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses” (Foucault, 1978, p. 27).

In this chapter, I distinguished between two different kinds of silences: silence of family institution and the state as a regulatory rhetoric (authoritative silence) and reticence/silence of queer subjects as a coping strategy (subaltern reticence/silence). In the context of contemporary China, authoritative silence suggests that “tolerance” and

homophobia are not mutually exclusive and could exist simultaneously (see Liu & Ding, 2005). Subaltern reticence/silence, I argue, can be productive for queer subjects to evade surveillance, especially for queer subjects who are in more marginalized positions, such as female queers and queer subjects from the lower class.

With regard to the homonormative discourse in LGBT movements that ascends white, cosmopolitan, middle class, and male queerness, I argue that the exploration of subaltern reticence/silence is meaningful and necessary to affirm alternative queerness which is speaking from the margins. Therefore, I follow Aimee Rowe and Sheena Malhotra (2013) to advocate for a shift from “breaking silence” to “listening silence” in our scholarship: “While we affirm the importance of breaking silence, we also want to underscore an alternative path: that those in positions of privilege learn to read and respect the silences of marginalized people” (p. 14). That is, queer scholars need to recognize that our privileges can also obscure the exploration of the complexity of sexualities. We need to address the material conditions of different queer subjects, attending to the ontology of queer subjectivity—“come out as what”? In a society where family constitutes critical sources of support and recognition (Engebretsen, 2008), coming out, I argue, should not mean cutting off from the limited social network that queer subjects have currently, without providing any secure social space for the survival of queer subjects.

CHAPTER 5

QUEERING MARRIAGE: THE PRACTICE OF *XINGHUN*

IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA

In the last chapter, I explored the phenomenon of *coming out*, one of the most important narratives of being queer in contemporary China. In this chapter, I explore another important phenomenon in being a Chinese queer subject—marriage. Marriage is one of the most discussed topics among Chinese queer subjects (Chen, 2009; Engebretsen, 2009; Kam, 2012; Rofel, 2007; Wang, 2014). That being said, studies have shown that same-sex marriage is not a primary agenda among Chinese queer subjects and LGBT activists (Hildebrandt, 2011; Fu & Zhang, 2013; Wei, 2010). Curiously, in its stead, a new form of marriage arrangement — *xinghun* — has become increasingly popular and a heated topic among Chinese queer subjects (Chen, 2009; Engebretsen, 2009; Fu & Zhang, 2013; Moreno-Tabarez et al., 2014; Wang, 2014).

In this chapter, I investigate the impulses for *xinghun* and explore why same-sex marriage is not considered a “good” solution for many Chinese queer subjects. To do so, I first explain what *xinghun* is. Next, I outline the reasons why *xinghun* is preferred by some Chinese queer subjects and how Chinese queer subjects perform the “realness” of heteronormativity in a queer marriage. While *xinghun* is often accused of being “fake marriage,” I argue that the “realness” of *xinghun* is a regulatory force on queer subjects; *xinghun* reveals the performativity of hetero-marital relationship and its different effects on male and female subjects. I then trace the arguments opposed to *xinghun* that are currently circulating on social media and amongst Chinese queer subjects. I challenge these discourses by concluding the chapter with an argument for the transformative

potential of *xinghun* for queer subjects in contemporary China. I articulate the critical potentials of *xinghun* for allowing same-sex romance in a hetero-marital relationship through actively engaging the marriage institution. In my analysis, I also show how *xinghun* gives birth to a conjugal husband-wife relationship, a new agent of private life that includes and shields queer desires from the control of patriarchal family in contemporary China.

What is *Xinghun*?

For decades, the biggest concern among Chinese queers has been getting into a “real” heterosexual marriage. Many Chinese queers have expressed difficulty in maintaining a same-sex relationship in a society where the hegemony of marriage is so profound and pervasive (Chen, 2009; Engebretsen, 2009; Guo, 2015; Wang, 2014). Once they find themselves to be of the “proper marriage age,” Chinese queer subjects often feel that they have to cut themselves off from their own queer desires and commit to a heterosexual marriage. “This path is not going to work anymore” (这条路走不下去) is a popular metaphor to describe the crisis that many Chinese queer subjects face under the hegemony of marriage.

When they find themselves in this situation, many queer subjects in China resort to *xinghun*. *Xinghun*, which literally means formality marriage, is a new form of marriage arrangement that many Chinese gay men and lesbian women partake in as a means of being gay or lesbian without exiting the family kinship system. Chinagayles.com is the earliest and biggest website committed to *xinghun* in China. Chinagayles.com published a *Xinghun* Guide (形婚指南) that gave a vivid description of *xinghun*:

The more common way is that a [*xinghun*] “couple” maintains friendship without living together most of time. They show up only on special occasions such as holiday gatherings or special family events that require them to be “on camera” together. Some of them live like normal couples, living under the same roof, where bringing their respective partner(s) home is allowed. (比较常见的是“夫妻”双方保持朋友关系，平时不在一起生活，只是在逢年过节或家中有事等需要同时“出镜”的情况下，双方才一起出现。也有像正常夫妻一样，住在同一个屋檐下的，但是可以带各自的伴侣回家。)

The first *xinghun* in public sight could be traced back to the late 1990s, when identity-based homosexuality was becoming the dominant discourse in mainland China.

According to Liqing Yang (2009), Mr. Jin, a gay man who had lived in the West for years, wrote to a famous queer magazine *Pengyou Tongxin* (Friend Communication) in search of a lesbian who was willing to form a *xinghun* with him. This became the first public record of *xinghun* in China. Later, *xinghun* became pervasive among queer Chinese.

It is salient to note that *xinghun*, at the very beginning, was invented as a form of dissent against the hegemony of heterosexual marriage. While *xinghun* is now almost exclusively taken to mean marriage between a lesbian woman and gay man in China, this arrangement was actually first practiced outside of the Chinese LGBT communities.

According to Yuan Yuan, a queer film maker, the beginning of *xinghun* marriage arrangement can be traced to a practice amongst some heterosexual and asexual Chinese individuals called “a marriage without sex” (*wuxing hunyin*, 无性婚姻). For various

reasons, heterosexual Chinese individuals began to source for *wuxing hunyin* on cyberspace as a coping strategy against the hegemony of marriage. Some individuals seek *wuxing hunyin* because they are asexual; some do not see the need to be intimate in marriage and do not wish to invest anything (emotionally and sexually) in a marriage arrangement; some just prefer to be single, believing there is no necessity to participate in the marriage institution. Many of the participants of *wuxing hunyin* are, in fact, heterosexual women and men who wish to find a way to diffuse the intense marital pressure that their family and friends are putting onto them. Their response to marital pressure is to source for another individual who would participate in “a marriage without sex.” This strategy of *wuxing hunyin* was later appropriated and populated by queer subjects all over China. Over time, all kinds of cyber communities dedicated to marriage between a lesbian woman and a gay man began to sprout.

Nowadays, this arrangement is more commonly known as *xinghun*. In fact, it has become a common practice for people—they may be heterosexual, asexual, or others—to join these homosexual cyber groups to cope with the pressure of a hetero/sexual marriage (Sophia, 2015). In other words, *xinghun* has become a coalitional site that incorporates subjects with different sexual orientations and an alternative marital arrangement against the hegemony of the “sex-love-marriage” (Wang, 2013) alignment.

Having introduced the historical and cultural beginnings of *xinghun*, I now argue for how *xinghun* should be viewed as one component of a larger, even more complex context for the emergence of what I am calling the “queer Chinese subjects.” Before I discuss *xinghun* between a gay man and a lesbian woman in mainland China, it is worth spending some time to clarify the term *xinghun* itself. While *xinghun* (formality marriage,

形婚) is widely used in Chinese LGBT communities, there are other terms being circulated, both inside and outside academia, to refer to such kind of marriage. Other terms for the *xinghun* marriage arrangement include cooperative marriage (互助婚姻), contract marriage (契约婚姻), marriage for convenience, and marriage without sex (无性婚姻). Despite the plethora of terminology, none of these terms quite accurately capture the unique nature of this kind of marriage. More importantly, these terms falsely indicate that a marriage between a gay man and a lesbian woman is not a “real marriage” (I will fully discuss the “realness” of marriage later in this chapter), just because it is cooperative, contract-based, for the consideration of convenience, or not involving sexual activities. Given the above and also because *xinghun* is the term used by my participants, I have chosen to use the term *xinghun* in my study as the signifier of such kind of marriage.

It is also important to note that *xinghun* is not defined by legal recognition in my study. Instead, a *xinghun* relationship is defined by social recognition. In other words, I consider a queer subject to be participating in *xinghun* when (s)he is read as “married”—even if (s)he does not register and thus is not legally recognized by the state as “married.” For instance, my interviewee Gao self-identified as having been engaged in *xinghun* for six years, although his marriage was simply a wedding banquet without any legal documentation. What is important in his case is that in the perception of family and friends, he was read as married, and he himself identified as such. Therefore, he was considered to be a participant in *xinghun* and recruited for my study.

Why *Xinghun*?

Many Chinese queer subjects claim family relationship as the primary reason for seeking *xinghun*. Family relationship was mentioned or implied in almost every personal advertisement that I analyzed. Many of the individuals posting these advertisements state explicitly that their participation in *xinghun* was for their parents, not for themselves, and that *xinghun* was the “answer” (交代, *jiaodai*) to their parents who were often depicted as loving, caring, and even self-sacrificing.

For example, a gay man talked about why he wanted to engage in *xinghun* in his personal advertisement: “Gradually I am getting old, and there are in fact somethings I have to do; my family has done so much for me, and I don’t want to break their hearts on these issues, so I have to take it seriously and find a *xinghun* partner.” (阿拉斯: “年纪渐渐大了, 有些事情确实不得不做, 家人为我付出太多, 不想因为这些事情让家人伤心, 因此还是要认认真真找一个形婚对象。”) Another advertisement announced: “My only one [requirement], since we choose *xinghun*, is that this is all [done] for my parents, [so] filial piety for the aged [parents] is a must.” (霜月: “唯一一条(要求), 既然都选择形婚, 都是为了父母, 务必孝顺老人。”)

Many gay men and lesbian women listed filial piety as their expectation for prospective *xinghun* partners. In fact, some even listed filial piety as the only requirement for their prospective partners. On Chinagayles.com, registered members are required to use labels to describe themselves as part of the self-introduction for other *xinghun* seekers. One of the most common labels among those labels is filial piety (孝顺, *xiaoshun*). Self-labels like “filial man” (孝顺男, *xiaoshun nan*) and “filial woman” (孝顺

女, *xiaoshun nv*) define *xinghun*-seeking queer subjects by their relationship with parents (or prospective parents-in-law).

Within the polarized construction between family obligation and same-sex desires, as I discussed in Chapter 4, *coming out* or refusing to engage in a hetero-marital relationship is sometimes condemned as “selfish” because it fails to fulfill family obligations, which is coded as communal or collective and therefore more noble than “selfish” satisfaction. The discussion of *xinghun* was often associated with the potential negative consequences of *coming out* to society, especially the pressures on “innocent parents.” A popular saying among Chinese queers—“When children come out, parents step into the closet” (子女出柜, 父母就入柜)—epitomizes the antagonism between the desire to come out and the well-being of one’s parents: “Even if you come out, I believe that parents are not open enough to allow you come and go with another man; [they] still wish for you to get married like normal people, and have a partner when you are old. It is too selfish to come out—it is just passing on your burden to your parents.” (encoreb: “我相信就算出柜 父母也没有开放到让你和你一个男的同进同出, 还是希望你想正常人一样结婚, 到老有个伴, 出柜太过自私, 只不过甩压力给了父母”). The interest of one’s parents, who are imagined as always already heteronormative, is constructed as being in opposition to the interest of queer subjects, especially with regards to their desire to come out. The stigma attached to the homosexual is described as a transferable “problem” that could be passed from the individual to their parents. The “problem” of homosexuality circulates in the family economy, threatening to “bankrupt” the social status of parents.

Moreover, there is a tendency to frame this antagonism as a moral dilemma, rather than merely a conflict of interest. For *xinghun* seekers and/or supporters, the potential discrimination against parents is juxtaposed against the “debts” that queer children owe to their parents, thereby eliciting a guilty feeling in queer subjects. For example, in a debate on the “rightness” of *xinghun* on A-Qiang’s microblog, a microblogger argued: “The key is how parents face relatives, friends, and society at large. Only selfish people will let their parents face these by themselves. Unless society is accepting, so parents will have nothing to worry about. It is not easy for parents to bring us up; it is so wrong to let them carry the burden of social discrimination for us.” (“关键是父母怎么去面对亲戚、朋友和这个社会。自私的人才会让父母独自去面对。除非社会认可，让父母没有后顾之忧。父母一辈子不容易，再让他们为了我们的生活背负社会的歧视就太不应该了。”)

Here, the power struggle between queer subjects and their parents, as well as the conflict of interests between them, is obscured. The power struggle is concealed in the moralistic discourse; it is as if the power struggle is not a key point in the situation at all. Instead, the moral tension between “selfish me” and “my sacrificing parents” is foregrounded. In order to ease this moral tension, queer subjects engage in hetero-marital relationship and/or procreation as the ultimate way to pay back the economic and affective “debts” they owe their parents. As I have mentioned earlier, filial piety was a key word among *xinghun* seekers. The moralistic discourse here suggests that the cultivation of a moral self is largely dependent on his/her manifestation of filial piety (Knapp, 2009; Radice, 2006); when the heterosexual marriage comes into conflict with

one's sexual interest, the discourse of filial piety shows its enormous moral weight (Radice, 2006) to keep queer subjects in their place. In this sense, gay men and lesbian women seeking *xinghun* are encouraged to see themselves as moral agents who make moral choices.

It may thus make sense why some personal advertisements even concluded that *xinghun* “was not meaningful for *tongzhi*, but it was very meaningful for their parents” (类似熊：“对同志没有意义！但对其父母有相当大的意义”), because “many people do not live only for themselves; [they] live for the face of family. The only exception is when you do not have family around.” (joey-左：“很多人 都不能为自己而活 是为了家人的面子而活 除非 你家人没在你身边”).

The tension between family obligations and sexual freedom is temporally resolved through prioritizing the former over the latter. *Xinghun*, therefore, is placed in a moralistic discourse and framed as a sacrifice for family and it is justified for its altruistic motivation. In fact, I argue, filial piety has become a technique for regulating queer subjects to comply with the hetero-marital norm.

The Role of Parents in *Xinghun*

As discussed above, one of the primary goals of *xinghun* is to satisfy one's parents. This means that when some gay men and lesbian women are looking for *xinghun* partners, what they are actually seeking is someone who they imagine would meet their parents' expectations rather than their own satisfaction. In other words, parents are the intended audience of the *xinghun* they were seeking, and it is parents' expectations or the imagined expectations of one's parents that set the criteria for a good *xinghun* candidate.

The central role of one's parents in *xinghun* is most evident in my interviewee Macky's classification of *xinghun*. When I asked Macky about the different types of *xinghun* that she had ever seen, her response was something that I did not expect:

“*Xinghun* has three different modes: one is when the parents of both sides do not live in the same city [where queer subjects live]; one is when the parents of one side live in the same city; the other one is when the parents of both sides live in the same city.” (形婚其实有三种模式：一是双方父母都不在同城；一是一方父母在同城；还有就是双方父母在同城。)

What is interesting here is that the queer subject has completely excluded themselves in the classification of their own marriage arrangement. Instead, the whole narration of *xinghun* is around one's parents and the spatial relationship with one's parents, the latter of which determines the performative labor of queer subjects in *xinghun* (I will discuss such performance later in this chapter). Therefore, while *xinghun* is a hetero-marital union between a lesbian woman and a gay man, the parents of queer subjects are the invisible players behind the scene and parents actually play a critical part in *xinghun*.

The central role of parents in *xinghun* can also be seen in the personal advertisements that queer subjects posted for *xinghun*. Many gay men and lesbian women advertised themselves as “the type that parents liked” (父母喜爱的类型, *fumu xiai de leixing*). Others advertised themselves as being able to take good care of parents and to satisfy their needs. For instance, a gay man promised to treat his prospective *xinghun* partner genuinely and “take good care of the parents of both sides, making them satisfied” (pizilong: “好好照顾双方的父母，让家人都满意”). Sometimes, according

to my interviewee Macky, a gay man and a lesbian woman would pair up and buy a forged marriage certificate, showing it to their parents. The audience of such a *xinghun* would be nobody else but their parents. That is, it becomes a marriage recognized only in the familial domain without further social influence.

This prioritizing of the needs and satisfaction of parents suggests a hierarchy between parents and gay/lesbian adults, in the sense that the happiness of one's parents is more important than one's own happiness. In addition to that, the internalized placement of importance is often narrated as spontaneous affection of queer subjects for their parents rather than the explicit control of parents over their queer children. That is, the queer child is imagined as the origin of an instigating agent of affecting, concealing the operation of power in the heteronormative family.

My analysis therefore demonstrates how queer subjects' personal advertisements narrated their search for *xinghun* as an act of filial piety rather than as a response to oppressive parental meddling in their marriage affairs. Through appealing to affection in the discourse of filial piety, gay and lesbian adults end up perpetuating the patriarchal family system, feeling that *they want to* participate in marriage arrangements even when it means compromising their sexual freedom.

My analysis also shows how love was a prominent theme in the discourses of *xinghun*. There are two kinds of love that were frequently mentioned: family love, or more specifically, love between parents and children, and romantic love out of same-sex desires. Both kinds of love were often described as indispensable in the lives of queer subjects. Yet, at the same time, both kinds of love were constructed as conflicting modes of affection. That is, there was a tendency to view family as a haven of mutual love and

care. This is an extremely strong discourse in the personal advertisements among those who were seeking *xinghun*. Simultaneously, there was an affirmation of romantic same-sex love as mechanisms for the crafting of an authentic self and the cultivation of liberation. This romantic love, however, is presented as in conflicting tension with the former.

Regaining Control of One's Life

A lesbian woman who sought *xinghun* on Chinagayles.com described the struggle between her desire to come out and her concern for her parents in this way:

The words are on the tip of my tongue but I end up swallowing them every time. Looking at my old parents, [I] really don't want to hurt them but I cannot follow their "this is for your own good" advice either. Wanna to live my own life, wanna control my own fate."(猪猪包子：每次话到嘴边又咽了回去，望着天天年迈的父母，真心不想伤害他们，更不想按照他们“为你好”的想法去做，想要有自己的生活，想要自己掌握命运。)

Her words indicate that for some queer subjects, *xinghun* is a way of taking back control of their own lives in a society where staying single is not perceived as a viable option.

My interviewee Dee put it in a more direct way:

I would rather solve the problem actively than waiting for the day [of a heterosexual marriage] to come...So I chose *xinghun*...because it was me that chose my partner, so that I had more agency. I got married because of the pressure of parents, but I still have some control in how my marriage is going to be. (与其被动地等这样一天到来，不如主动地想办法解决这个问题...所以我选择形

婚 …因为这个对象是我自己选择的。这样子的话我的自主性更大一些。虽然我迫于父母的压力，无奈结婚了，但是我的婚姻到底怎么样，我自己还是可以控制的余地。)

This sense of two conflicting modes of affection, in fact, is also emphasized among those who criticized *xinghun*. The difference between *xinghun* supporters and critics is whether they see filial piety as a moral obligation that warrants compromising one's sexual freedom, or as a form of family control that obstructs one's affection with a same-sex partner. This polarization reflects the two contesting discourses of family and sexuality, the tension between which Chinese queer subjects involved in *xinghun* trying to navigate.

But Isn't Marriage a Private Issue? The Double Meaning of Private Life

One cannot understand *xinghun* without understanding the complicated meaning of “private life” in China. One begins to understand the meaning of “private” in contemporary China by tracing events that happened after the Maoist era (1949-1976). During the Maoist era, the private sphere shrank, and the individual, the family, and society became conflated as one (Jin & Liu, 2010). It was during this time period that the state —through the vehicle of “*danwei*” (单位) or state-owned work unit— became the primary agent of control over the private lives of individuals (Kam, 2012).

In the reform era (from 1978 to the present), China witnessed a transformation of private life (Kam, 2012; Yan, 2003) as a response to the developmentalist discourse toward a “modern society.” The family as a social institution rises to “be a center of private life and a refuge” (Yan, 2003, p. 8) after decades of state domination in the domestic life in mainland China.

Coupling with the shifted center of “private life” from the state to the family, there is another contestation over the structure of family. Emerging during 1956-1980, according to Yuanxiang Yan (2003), the conjugal husband-wife relationship has gradually taken central place in the private life of the Chinese society. Family, which used to be the site of economic, social, and political exchanges in the Chinese society, is now reconstructed as “an affective unit, an institution that produced not goods but emotional satisfaction and happiness” (D’ Emilio, 1983, p. 103). This is what Yan (2003) calls “the triumph of conjugality”:

While the horizontal conjugal tie replaced the vertical parent-son relationship as the central axis of family relations in both nuclear and stem households, parental authority and power further declined and the previously unprivileged members of the family—women and youth—began to acquire their own space and independence. (p. 14)

That being said, it will be overstated to claim a lineal triumph of conjugality over patriarchy. Different discourses and family structures coexist and compete with each other rather than one replacing the other; their power dynamic changes over time, mediated by the state’s intervention. In other words, the state plays a crucial part in initiating or causing profound changes in the power dynamic within the family structure, shaping the dynamic between different discourses in the private life of queer subjects to regulate and produce its desired citizens.

As Yan (2003) points out, led by the state, several generations of youths were encouraged to challenge patriarchal power during the Maoist era; they gradually gained more “independence in their private lives yet became dependents of the collectives and

the state in public life” (p. 16). At the same time, Yan (2003) observes another private sphere that has been emerging over the past few decades—the rise of personal lives within the family. This rise is interpreted as a response to the transnational discourse of modernity that foregrounds individualism and personal choice. This is what Yan (2003) calls “the dual transformation of private life” in the Chinese society, where “private” means “the private family” and “the private lives of the individuals within the family” simultaneously (pp. 15-16).

Given this “double meaning of private life” (Yan, 2003, p. 18) in contemporary China, marriage as a “private” event is both familial and personal. On the one hand, since family is a primary agent in controlling the private life of individuals, marriage is part and parcel a family event. More importantly, the Chinese society is, to a great extent, a patriarchal society. Social resources are greatly controlled by the older generations, and the survival of the younger generations still heavily depends on the investments of parents in areas like education, employment and housing. This means that fathers are the most authoritative figures in the family site, and parents—the father and/or the mother who speaks as the father—become a critical concern in marriage arrangements. Under this patriarchal structure, marriage is understood as the bonding of two households instead of two individuals (Chou, 2000). This is shown in the wedding invitations, which often describe a wedding as *jiazu lianyin* (家族联姻)—marriage between two families or two clans, rather than between two individuals.

The existing patriarchal structure in the Chinese society explains why parents have almost always been the center of queer lives, even for their marriages. That being said, we cannot neglect the role of the state in reaffirming and reinforcing the patriarchal

family structure, as most clearly shown in Chairman Xi Jinping's advocacy of filial piety in the last few years. As I have discussed earlier, the dominance of the patriarchal family was disrupted by the state during the Maoist era in order to gain absolute control over the private lives of individuals. As socialist China transits into a neoliberal society, however, the neoliberal state appeals to the value of filial piety to shirk its once promised responsibility of supporting and caring for the elderly in the country. More importantly, given the influence of the Confucian discourse of *jia gong tong gou* (家国同构)—the same structure in both the family and the state—filial piety, which means to follow one's parents' wishes, is also a trope to promote political loyalty to the state (see Knapp, 2009). On the other hand, Euro-American discourses of identity politics, which define being lesbian or gay as liberating from “traditional” family structure toward nuclear coupledness, give rise to personal life within the domestic sphere.

The Realness of *Xinghun*

On April 11, 2013, *The Atlantic*, a U.S. magazine, featured a “special” marriage between a gay man and a lesbian woman in mainland China: “The marriage, essentially, is a sham: both the husband and wife continue to have their own same-sex partners and may not even live together” (Lim, 2013). In a similar thread, on Towleroad, a U.S.-based news website that is dedicated to “news with homosexual tendencies” (<http://www.towleroad.com/>), the reporter introduced such kind of marriage extensively to its audience, and this time in a sympathetic tone: “The two are in what China's LGBT community has coined a ‘cooperative marriage’ (*xinghun*), which is essentially a fake marriage between a gay man and a lesbian woman” (Chiu, 2015).

Xinghun is often called “fake marriage” or “sham marriage” in Western media, and even among some Chinese queer subjects. These incredulous assessments raise a set of questions about the “nature” of *xinghun*: What, or who makes them believe that *xinghun* is a fake/sham marriage? What makes a real marriage? For Chinese queer subjects in *xinghun*, how do they perform their marriages?

The Discursive Construction of “Real” Marriage

The Chinese notion of love (爱*ai*), Adolf Tsang (1986) argues, signifies “an altruistic consideration” (as cited in Chou, 2000, p. 15). It was not until the early 20th century during the May Fourth Movement (Chou, 2000, p. 15), which is usually defined in Chinese textbooks as the end of the semi-colonial period of the Chinese society, that “romantic love,” or *ziyou lianai* (自由恋爱, which literally translates into “free love,” or “marriage for love”) was popularized in intimate life in the Chinese society.

The discourse of romantic love, which grounds marriage as a “personal pursuit of (sexual) happiness” (Chou, 2000, p. 104), has become increasingly important in the intimate life of contemporary China. As a result, marriage for love is usually cited as the “opposite” of arranged marriage and is often associated to tradition and the pre-modern situation.

The hegemony of the “sex-love-marriage” (Wang, 2013) matrix, which is implied in the discourse of marriage for love, is a new invention in contemporary China. This is shown in the current marital law: incompatibility of affection (*ganqing polie*, 感情破裂) is the primary criteria for judgment used by the courts in divorce cases. In fact, marriage for love has become such a dominant discourse that any marriage that falls out of this category is considered as *inauthentic* or even *fake*.

While *xinghun* is most commonly accused as a violation of “marriage for love” and sometimes called “fake marriage,” it is important to note that “marriage for love” is a new ideology which became popular only in the process of “modernization” in China. According to Lulu (2014), the practice of alternative intimate relationships, especially that of marrying a concubine (*qieshi*, 妾士, means “second wife”), is acquiesced among the upper middle class in Chinese society. For example, in Hong Kong, the legalization of monogamy was not established until 1971. And it was not until 1949 that the practice of marrying a concubine (*naqie*, 纳妾) became illegal in mainland China under the name of modernization. The practice of marrying a concubine is but one of many kinds of marriages that are not necessarily “for love” (more commonly for economical consideration) in Chinese society throughout time. But not-for-love arrangements such as these do not bear the accusation of being “fake.” That is, until queer subjects are involved.

In a recent controversy over the homo-hetero-marriage (*tongzhihun*, 同直婚), for instance, the Beijing Intermediate Court suggested that homo-hetero-marriage should be legally revocable, and people involved in such a marriage should be considered as “never married” after revocation, although such a proposal was not passed (Zhang, 2013). Under current marital law, the revocation of marriage is granted only when coercion is employed. However, in the controversy over homo-hetero-marriage, the court argued that such a marriage could be revoked by the heterosexual party for the mere fact that a queer subject was involved in the marriage; such a marriage was considered as not “real” and thus revocable because it was not established on hetero/sexual intimacy. This selective regulation indicates severe surveillance of homosexuality in China. As a result, for queer

subjects who want to (or have to) participate in the marriage institution, performing heteronormativity to “hide” their queerness seem to be inevitable.

Performing Heteronormativity

Most *xinghun* do not end with the wedding banquet. A marriage is often a lasting performance under constant surveillance. Family, especially parents, is the immediate audience; society at large is the imagined broader audience of such performances.

Wang Yingyi (2014) observes that parents, rather than queer subjects who get married, are often at the center of a *xinghun* wedding. Her interviewee Xiaoyi points this out insightfully:

Our marriage is mainly for parents so let them be the main part of the scene. We are just son and daughter, [the most important things are] creating a warm [wedding] scene and highlighting our parents. We do not have to (be highlighted). (我们结婚觉得最主要的是父母，就让他们成为场面的主体，我们仅仅是儿女，把场面弄得温馨，突出爸妈，我们也就（不用突出）。)

Xinghun is, in fact, a “performative union” (Kam, 2012, p. 87) that requires constant performance of heteronormativity from queer subjects. The key of such performances is how to perform the “realness” of heteronormativity in a queer marriage.

The “realness” of *xinghun* is a regulatory force on queer subjects. A gay man wrote in his personal advertisement: “After marriage, [we] won’t live together, but [we] need to pass the tests from parents and friends. Although it is a *xinghun*, there are some normal marital procedures [we] need to follow, otherwise the façade would be exposed.” (婚后不会住一起，但父母关、朋友关要过；虽是形婚，有些东西不可避免还是要按正常婚姻流程走，不然容易穿帮。) For many Chinese gay men and lesbian women

believe, “realness” is a check point (*guan*, 关) that queer subjects need to pass in their *xinghun*. These “check points” in *xinghun* suggest that Chinese queer subjects are under constant surveillance in their family lives. Performing heteronormativity, therefore, becomes a mandatory lesson that Chinese queer subjects need to learn in order to pass these “tests.”

One cannot understand such an imperative of heteronormative performance amongst Chinese queer subjects without first understanding the notion of the ideal family in Chinese society. The notion of *ideal family* is deeply shaped by the Confucian tradition. It is a tradition that places the heterosexual family-unit at the center of social relations. Such a family unit is organized by the principle of filial piety, a principle that prescribes a particular parent-child relationship with corresponding performances. According to Thomas Radice (2006), there are three manifestations of filial piety that are demanded for an ideal family: 1) filial piety as a ritual that is performed at certain moments in time (p. 158); 2) filial piety as providing material benefits for one’s parents (p. 162); and 3) filial piety as an affective bond between parent(s) and child (p. 160). While all these three dimensions can still be found in contemporary Chinese society, the notion of filial piety as the affection for one’s parents is the most prominent one in my data. There were, for instance, multiple references to the Confucian adage “不孝有三，无后为大” (There are three ways of being unfilial, and to not have an heir is the worst) in my data/texts, and the emotion of “guilt” was often associated with such an “unfamiliar” act. Such a familial discourse, within which the moral self is intelligible and cultivated, demands a heteronormative performance from Chinese queer subjects.

If *xinghun* is performative, one may ask if there is a script for such performances. Based on the personal advertisements on Chinagayles.com and my interviews, I argue that Chinese queer subjects often employ an exaggerating heteronormative script to perform the “ideal” heterosexual marriage in their imagination, or what Lucetta Yip Lo Kam (2012) calls “an extreme performance of normative heterosexuality” (p. 101), in order to achieve the “realness” of *xinghun*. While the “realness” of a *xinghun* allows queer subjects to perform filial piety without cutting off their queer desires/relationships, such “realness” also means constant self-surveillance from queer subjects to perform convincing, sometimes even exaggerated heteronormativity (or hyper-heteronormativity) for their audience.

Such a heteronormative script, I argue, has significant implications in terms of social class, gender norms, as well as reproduction. In other words, not every Chinese queer subject has access to *xinghun*; queer subjects who fall short of class, gender, and/or reproduction scripts will be considered “bad actors” and thus excluded from participating in *xinghun*.

Classed *Xinghun*: The Properly Matched Marriage

Social class is an implicit agenda in the process of *xinghun* seeking. Some *xinghun* seekers argued that the negotiation of *xinghun* was more difficult than a heterosexual marriage. This is because *xinghun* was not established on the premise of love, which was often believed as the foundation of marriage among straight couples. It is also important to note that heterosexual marriage is often based on class and material conditions as well. Such imagination indicates both the romanticizing of heterosexual marriage and the pathologizing of queer desires in Chinese society. It is not surprising

that Chinese queer subjects who face such pathologization are pressured to perform hyper-heteronormativity in *xinghun* in order to look “real.”

As a result, material conditions seem to be more explicitly discussed in *xinghun* than in a heterosexual marriage, the class issue of which is often concealed by the ideology of romantic love. In the negotiation of *xinghun*, matched social status and other material preconditions are often highlighted. According to the *Xinghun Guide* (形婚指南) on Chinagayles.com:

Xinghun stresses more on *mendang huidui* (matched family backgrounds) than regular marriages. People are here not for love or money, but for their face. It is normal that they stress on external conditions. So if you have a decent job with decent pay, have a house and a car, or if you are good looking with nice personality and being filial to the elderly, don't be shy. Speak them out so that you are in good hands. (形式婚姻比普通的婚姻更讲究门当户对，人家不图你的情，不图你的钱，就图个面子，讲究外在条件很正常。如果你职业体面、收入高、有房有车或者是长得帅、人品好、对老人孝顺等等，不要客气，把这些都亮出来，这样才有竞争优势。)

The importance of matched social status is affirmed by my interviewee Dee, who believed that matching was critical in performing *xinghun*:

At first, I thought I need to find someone that would make my parents satisfied. Later I realized that the importance of matching conditions was not about how much you can satisfy your parents, but about how to make them believe this marriage is a real one, not so fake....So for my *xinghun*, I have to find someone

that matches me in all aspects. They [parents] would think, my daughter is 30 and she has found such a person, and it looks normal to them. I wouldn't find a guy they would feel suspicious at first sight. (我一开始的时候是以为我要找一个父母母亲满意的对象，但后来我才发现，谈条件的重要，不是在于要让父母有多满意，而是在于让他们相信这个婚姻是真的，没有那么假。…所以我形婚的话，一定会找一个各方面都很妥帖的对象。他们会觉得，我女儿30岁了，她找了这样的一个人，看起来也很正常。我不会找一个他们见了第一面就会怀疑的对象。)

In Dee's opinion, performing a *xinghun* is ultimately about the matching (*dengdui*, 登对) of queer subjects: the matching of education and family backgrounds. She used a metaphor of actors and acting to describe the significance of a properly matched marriage: "This [*xinghun*] is already a performance, if you find an actor who does not match you at all, it is too difficult to compensate [the performance] with good acting."

(这已经是表演了，你还找了一个演员跟你完全不搭，这就很难用演技来弥补了。)

The performative nature of *xinghun*, she concluded, determined the significance of matching: "I do not have to fight for marrying this guy, because this marriage is, to begin with, a performance for parents." (因为我没有必要要争取和这个人结婚啊，因为我结婚本来也就是给父母看的。) The importance of class matching is, in fact, evident in the personal ads I examined as well. As a result, social mobility between different classes is obscured by the regulatory expectation of "realness" in *xinghun*.

As I discussed earlier, a marriage happens not between two individuals, but between two families in the Chinese society. This makes the negotiation of *xinghun* more

complicated since one needs to take the demands and expectations of one's family into account. The result of such negotiation, I argue, is the reinforcement of dominant discourse about social class and material conditions. Queer subjects who cannot meet the class expectations in *xinghun*, therefore, are marginalized or even rejected access to such a queer practice.

Gendered *Xinghun*, or, Is *Xinghun* Really So Different from “Real” Marriage?

The “realness” of performing *xinghun* also means performing proper femininity/masculinity that aligns with gender norms. Not all gay men or lesbian men are appropriate candidates for *xinghun*. Among the personal advertisements I examined on Chinagayles.com, the most prominent expectation for *xinghun* candidates is normative femininity/masculinity of queer subjects. For instance, a gay man described his expectations for *xinghun* candidates this way:

Appearance: preference for long-hair female, with delicate and pleasing features. Fe/male (“female man,” means tough girls), fake guys (tomboy), and *lala* T (butch) please ignore me. Sorry this is not discrimination against you, but it looks too fake if we stand together. It will not even convince ourselves, let's not waste our time. (外貌：长发女性优先，长相清秀端正即可。请女汉子、假小子、拉拉T无视我，抱歉不是对你们有歧视，是因为站在一起实在太假了，连自己都骗不过去，就不耽误大家的时间了。)

In this advertisement, long hair as a sign of normative femininity was emphasized, while different kinds of gender non-conforming women were called out-- Fe/male, fake guys, and *lala* T, and excluded from participating in the *xinghun* marriage.

Recognizing the gender discrimination in such a description, the man featured in the above example defended his gender preferences as necessary for performing “real” marriage. Here, we can see clearly that the imperative of “realness” in *xinghun* has become a regulatory force of gender policing. What is sought after in *xinghun* is not just a partner of a different sex, but rather, someone who can properly perform normative masculinity or femininity that will be recognized by the heteronormative society.

This is evident in the parents’ complaints my interviewee Macky received on the performance of her *xinghun*. During her five-year *xinghun*, the complaint she heard from her *xinghun* husband’s parents was almost always about her failing to reproduce, while complaints about her husband were mainly about financial contributions. Such gendered discipline in *xinghun*, I argue, is not so different than in a heterosexual marriage.

Relatedly, female *xinghun* seekers place less stress on gender expression and more stress on the material conditions of ideal candidates. While gay men tended to emphasize their normative masculinity along with material success on Chinagayles.com, lesbian women seemed to be less concerned with the gender expression of their potential *xinghun* partner. Such a difference between gay men and lesbian women in *xinghun* may be caused by the intense competition that gay men perceive in the *xinghun* market—they are more pressured to show that they are “good” candidates in a heteronormative sense. More importantly, it indicates a gender anxiety among male subjects: masculinity is something that needed to be defended, while femininity is not.

On the other hand, it also speaks to the normative construction of masculinity in Chinese society, where manhood is established more on material success than on gender expression: on this regard, the material success of a man can compensate for his

“inappropriate” gender expression, while similar logic does not apply to women. This is affirmed by Li, a scholar who has been studying *xinghun* in China for six years. Li (personal communication, June 6, 2015) observes that feminine gay men in China do not face much discrimination from their *xinghun* partners’ families. Such a discrepancy suggests that femininity is more narrowly defined compared with masculinity, regardless of sexual orientations.

The gender discipline of femininity is primarily about female bodies, from their gender expressions to reproductivity. My interviewee Dream Horse, for example, had a preference for “long-hair girls” as well. He could not accept a woman who “smokes a lot and goes to the pub” (抽很多的烟、泡酒吧). This expectation, he explained, was all about reproduction: “My plan is that we will have kids in the future, and this [life style] is not good for [reproducing] kids.” (我的想法是未来要有小孩子，这样对小孩子也是不利的。)

Another interviewee Yaqing, told me that such potential control and discipline was the reason why she did not want to involve in *xinghun*: “Sometime you think that you *xinghun* with a gay man, but the gay man probably will not distinguish between a straight woman and a *lala*.” (有时候你觉得你是跟一个gay形婚了，但是gay的话也许不会区分跟他结婚的人是直女还是拉拉。) In other words, the fact that a lesbian woman is not sexually attracted to her *xinghun* husband does not exempt her from following the heteronormative script. Same-sex desires, which are supposed to distinguish *xinghun* from a “real” heterosexual marriage, do not, in this case, exempt queer subjects from participating in normative, gendered performance.

Such a rigid control on female bodies is, in fact, not uncommon in *xinghun*. As a result, lesbian women who cannot or are not willing to meet such a narrow definition of femininity (such as butch lesbian women) often find themselves unpopular candidates in *xinghun*, or even denied access to such a queer practice. This, to some extent, explains why there are less lesbian women than gay men in the *xinghun* market.¹²

How do Queer Subjects Perform Reproduction in *Xinghun*?

Reproduction is a central issue for gay men and lesbian women who are seeking *xinghun*. While many gay men and lesbian women see *xinghun* as “cooperative marriage” or “contract marriage,” reproduction is the most concerned and most contested part in such a cooperation or contract.

According to the statistics on Chinagayles.com, about 70% of gay men listed plans for children explicitly, while only 30% of lesbian women said that they wanted children and 50% denounced childrearing firmly among their registered members. The ads I examined show a similar gendered divide on reproduction. Among the personal advertisements I analyzed, 43 out of 74 (58.1%) gay men claimed that they wanted children in *xinghun* (12% lower than the overall percentage provided by the website), compared with 16 out of 50 (32.0%) lesbian women with the same plan. Such a gendered divide has made reproduction a decisive issue in the negotiation of *xinghun*.

¹² Another reason may be, as some scholars have noticed, gay men are facing more pressures to carry on family bloodline, because it is the patrilineal family line that needs to be carried on in Chinese convention (Rofel, 2007). More importantly, family as an institution “still provides men with moral privilege and access to social power, which is not true for women” (p. 100). As a result, lesbian women are more willing to renounce marriage (see also Engebretsen, 2008).

The gendered inequality in reproduction is shown clearly in *xinghun*. The increasing economic and emotional costs of reproduction have lead many women to delay childbearing or avoid it altogether (Waldby & Coopa, 2008). Unlike in a heterosexual marriage where the reproductive imperative is seldom challenged, many Chinese queer subjects who seek *xinghun* acknowledge that women make more contribution in terms of reproduction. For instance, many gay men are willing to cover most, if not all, of the cost related to reproduction and/or raising children. In fact, some men even said that they would be willing to pay their *xinghun* partner for bearing children, pegging their monetary compensation to the market rate for surrogate child-bearing.

Despite the economic compensation that many gay men are willing to offer for reproduction, many lesbian women are not willing to have children with their *xinghun* husbands, as shown in the statistics above. However, such a denouncement on child-bearing often faces a lot of challenges when it comes to maintaining a *xinghun*. While *xinghun* queers see themselves as performing or even “faking” a heterosexual marriage, their marriage is often perceived as a “real” heterosexual relationship in the eyes of their audience. In a heteronormative society, a “real” marriage without children is itself a process of forever explaining. My interviewee Dave shared his story about how difficult it was to shake the ideology of reproduction in Chinese society:

[They] expected me to get married and have my own kids, carrying on the bloodline, things that I have not yet accomplished in my life. They believed that these are the most important things in your life....One time I told my dad I might not get married, his first response was: “Oh, I will die without descendants

(*duanzi juesun*, 断子绝孙)!” He isn’t a person who expresses his sadness, but he was very upset at that moment. I was shocked. In fact, we had a fight in that phone call. He said he would kneel and beg me that [I] must have the next generation.... This is so incredible to me: a father would kneel and beg his son to carry the family line. It told me how strong his desire was to carry the family line though. If a father has his own dignity, he could give up his dignity for this. He could pay extraordinary cost to meet such a desire.” (就是期望我结婚生子，有下一代，这些人生未竟之事，他们会觉得这是人生中最重要的事情。…有一次我跟我爸提过，我可能不会结婚。我爸第一个反应是，啊，那我就断子绝孙了。他是那种不太会表现难过情绪的人，但是当时他表现得非常难过。当时我吓到了。那次其实在电话中，我们吵起来了，他就说他要跪下来求我，一定要有下一代。…我觉得不可思议，一个爸爸居然要跪下来求儿子做这个传宗接代的事情。但是让我知道了他对这个传宗接代的渴望有这么强。如果说平常爸爸有一个尊严在那边的话，他可以为了这个不要尊严。他可以付出超乎一般的代价来实现有下一代这个事情。)

As a socially recognized elite who is working in the financial industry, Dave felt that he was nothing (*yiwushichu*, 一无是处) if he failed the reproductive expectation from his family: “It feels like if I do not get married and have my own kids, I have committed the most terrible crime: you fail your family, you fail everybody, anything you have done does not worth it.” (好像如果我不结婚不生小孩，就犯了弥天大罪的感觉，感觉你就对不起家庭、对不起所有的人，你做的任何的事情都是不值得的。) Under such

intense reproductive pressure from family, reproduction has become a primary source of distress among *xinghun* queers after they get married. The “realness” of *xinghun* prescribes a path that eventually leads to parenthood. If reproduction is something that is negotiable and sometimes challenged when queer subjects were planning for *xinghun*, the reproductive discourse becomes stronger and more difficult to shake when queer subjects enter the marriage institution. Such reproductive pressure is much stronger on female subjects, whose bodies are more intensively disciplined and controlled in *xinghun* toward reproduction, as I discussed earlier.

Macky told me the great pressure she felt in her *xinghun* on the issue of reproduction: “If you do not have children, your family is going after you, your husband’s family will push you: Not having one yet? Hurry up!” (但是没有的话，家里人会追着你，男方家里人会催你——还不生，快点生啦). This pressure, she said, made it very difficult to perform a “good” daughter-in-law and later she was not willing to visit her *xinghun* husband’s family any longer: “At the beginning, I could do it. But because I did not get pregnant, I started to feel sorry and embarrassed. You go to their place and his parents’ eyes are just staring at you.” (我开始的时候也可以的，但因为我一直没有生，是你自己会觉得不好意思，去到人家家里，他父母的眼神，看着你。)

In Macky’s case, the “realness” of *xinghun* requires her reproductive labor as part of the performance; her failing to perform such a reproductive role caused a lot of anxiety in her *xinghun* and eventually prevented her from performing the heteronormative script

totally, which was a major trigger for her divorce. *Xinghun*, some believe, may end up with reproduction or breaking up.

For *xinghun* couples who decide to have children, the negotiation of fertility is another challenge. Most of *xinghun* couples prefer using reproductive technologies, rather than direct intercourse, toward fertilization. However, not everybody can get access to reproductive technologies. As I have discussed in Chapter 3, in contemporary mainland China, reproductive technologies are legally exclusive to married couples who can provide medical evidence of infertility. Therefore, queer subjects who turn to reproductive technology now have to first be legally recognized by the state, which means entering a hetero-marital relationship. Other queer subjects try to use syringes to transfer the sperm from the gay male body to the lesbian female body, in order to get rid of the economical and/or legal pressure.

Sometimes, the fertilizing process is much more complicated. For instance, my interviewee Zien said that his *xinghun* wife would carry and deliver a baby with Zien's sperm and her girlfriend's egg in order to create a "connection" of their *xinghun* family. Dream Horse, a 29-year-old gay man, told me that he was planning to offer his sperm to both his *xinghun* wife and his wife's girlfriend, who was "out" and single but still facing the pressure of reproduction from parents. At the time I interview him, his wife's girlfriend was seeking a surrogate in Thailand and hoping to get the sperm from him: "If [she] find a stranger, somebody she does not know well, it would be a troublesome process-- say she find a [random] gay friend, who she never lived with and does not know well." (如果是外面找到的陌生的、不了解的, 这个程序也比较麻烦。比如她找别的gay的朋友, 也没生活过不了解。) Living under the same roof after *xinghun*,

he considered his wife's girlfriend a member of their *xinghun* family, and therefore was willing to help her to cope with reproductive pressure. From these two examples, we can conclude that *xinghun* offers a site to destruct the male/husband-female/wife intercourse model of reproduction through their creative fertilizing practices.

It is important to note that male/female intercourse sometimes does happen in *xinghun*. Not all Chinese queer subjects who self-identified as lesbian or gay reject intercourse with a different sex. Some of them, such as my interviewee Jane, are sexually attracted to both men and women, so male/female intercourse is an option toward fertilizing. Moreover, sexual attraction between a self-identified gay man and a self-identified lesbian woman is not impossible. Dream Horse, for example, emphasized that he wanted a “pure lesbian” for his *xinghun*; he was worried that lesbian women may “turn straight” (变直) after marriage. The fluidity of sexuality, I argue, adds to the complexity of reproduction in *xinghun*.

Are Queer Subjects Lying in *Xinghun*?

A widely circulated argument against *xinghun* is that *xinghun*, at the end of the day, is deception to family. People who are against *xinghun* argue that *xinghun* is a moral issue: *Xinghun* is wrong because it is built on deception; a “good” result of *xinghun*, if it is even possible, cannot justify the fact of dishonesty in *xinghun*.

A-Qiang, for example, posted a quotation from a book about *xinghun*: “The most difficult part during the whole process, is that participants have to give the biggest lie in their lives, to parents who trust them the most.” (整个过程中最让人难受的, 是当事人不得不将生命到目前为止最大的谎言, 给了最信任自己的父母。) A-Qiang as an

activist is known to be a strong opponent of *xinghun*, and the implication of his gesture is clear: condemning *xinghun* by using the moralistic framework of honesty.

Such a quotation elicited strong emotional responses from his cyber-readers. What really drew my attention were justifications that *xinghun* was not really deception. For instance, a commentator wrote: “I am not going to hide from my parents. I am just going to hold a banquet to send the message to family and friends in hometown that I am married, so that nobody is going to make it difficult for my parents. I will not only come out [to parents], but also marrying a man with our kids.” (我也不准备瞒着父母，我只是办场酒席，让老家父母乡亲们知道我结婚了，就没人“为难”我父母了。我不仅会出柜，我还要和男人结婚，还要有孩子。) ¹³ In this story, the man is going to “come out” to his parents, so his same-sex desire will not be a secret to them. In this rendering, his would-be *xinghun* is, in fact, not about “lying” to parents, but a (tacit) agreement between them.

This example demonstrates that *xinghun* is not necessarily about *xinghun* queers lying to their parents, but that it could be a tacitly agreed-upon arrangement between queer subjects and their parents. Queer film maker Xiaopei He argues that the notion of “deception” is tricky in *xinghun*. In her documentary about *xinghun*, a mother of a lesbian woman comes to live with her daughter, knowing that the husband is actually gay. Two same-sex couples involved in that *xinghun* as well as the mother have been living together for almost three years. At the end of the story, the lesbian woman said: “How is it possible that parents have no idea [about our same-sex relationships]?” (Sophia, 2015)

¹³ Although he considered his would-be marriage as a same-sex marriage, I see such a performative union as *xinghun*, because he is perceived as marrying a woman rather than a man by his intended audience.

On the societal level, the notion of deception is even more suspicious. As I have discussed in Chapter 4, marriage is still an obligation for most Chinese subjects. In a society where same-sex marriage and not-getting married are both “not permitted,” a hetero-marital relationship has become mandatory and almost unavoidable for Chinese queer subjects. As Hao Wang (2013) points out, while heterosexual subjects can freely express their heterosexuality, homosexuality is not allowed to be expressed in all aspects of life in Chinese society. That is, concealing or “lying” about queer desires is, in fact, mandatory for Chinese queer subjects to continue to be functional beings in their society. In other words, Chinese heteronormative society demands heteronormative performance from queer subjects, while simultaneously requiring them to be “dishonest” and then condemning such “dishonesty.”

Such performances, as I discussed earlier, often follow scripts that are established on romanticized heterosexual marriage and, therefore, may be more extreme than the actual practices of heterosexual couples. That being said, such performance is not just “faking it.” In order to perform a “real” heterosexual couple, “real” affection is required in *xinghun*. For example, some *xinghun* advertisements listed genuine care for parents-in-law as a precondition of *xinghun*. Similarly, some of my interviewees believe that “real” affection for the families of their *xinghun* partners, especially for parents-in-law, would make the demanded performance of a heterosexual couple easier. That is, at the cognitive level, Chinese queer subjects perceive *xinghun* as a “fake” marriage; at the bodily/affective level, *xinghun* feels “real” to them because of their affective investment. Such affective investment complicates our understanding of the “realness” of *xinghun*: Is it cognitive perception or affective enactment that makes a marriage real? If queer

subjects feel “real” affection in *xinghun*, can we say that the nature of their *xinghun* has gone beyond their intentions and thus been transformed? *Xinghun*, I argue, is an ambiguous site with various kinds of slippages, threatening to transgress and refusing to be stabilized.

Based on above discussion, I argue that a “real” marriage is an impossible position to achieve for Chinese queer subjects. Not all sexualities are public or private in the same way: being in public in Western contexts could be a privilege when it allows a sense of unity between the public selves or roles and private ones, which are usually required to be filtered or repressed for others (Warner, 2002, p. 24). By traditional convention, the “public” and the “official” are often considered to be synonymous with each other, and the unit of the “private” is constituted by the family instead of the individual (Jin & Liu, 2010; Rankin & Mary, 1993). In the context of marriage, social reluctance to address queer sexualities in the official sphere has contributed to the unintelligibility of queer subjects in the private domain in contemporary China, affirming the primacy of family over sexualities (as discussed in Chapter 4). Such a discursive violence has caused a splitting feeling among Chinese queer subjects between a “fake” self in performing *xinghun* and a “real” self in one’s same-sex relationship(s). Therefore, any discussion of “honesty,” “authenticity” and “realness,” I argue, is not helpful for Chinese queer subjects without the premise of a secure public identity.

What does *Xinghun* Allow Queer Subjects to Do?

Xinghun offers an alternative path toward marriage, although it is not without its own problems. In recent years, two problematic discourses have arisen with the popularization of *xinghun*. One discourse describes *xinghun* as evidence of the sexual

oppression in China (see Moreno-Tabarez et al., 2014, p. 129), suggesting that Chinese queers are subjects waiting to be liberated by Euro-American style sexual politics; the other criticizes *xinghun* as compromising, if not perpetuating heteronormativity, arguing for a more transgressive politics that is completely self-determining through a liberal subject position.

The underlying assumptions of these two narratives is that Chineseness or Chinese culture “can never be more than a distraction” or “a distortion from the originary truths of gayness” (Rofel, 2007, p. 91); in order to transgress the normative family structure, Chinese queers need to move away from the constraints of the “traditional” family model toward homosexual “nuclear” coupledness in order to properly express their “free” modern sexuality (Blackwood, 2012). Those who “fail” to recognize, display, and maintain this transgressive queer position are considered “trapped” in developmental time and “deferred” in the process of becoming modern subjects.

As such, the process of racialization is advanced by the homonormative discourse, which positions Chinese queerness (or sexual cultures) as “anterior, premodern, and in need of Western political development” (Gopinath, 2005, p. 12). That is, cultural difference is identical to racial hierarchy. This colonial construction is “less a reflection of progressive gender relations than of regressive race relations” (Haritaworn, Tauquir & Erdem, 2008, p. 10). Therefore, rather than disavow traditions and histories, I argue that “it may be more politically efficacious to engage them critically” (Smith, 2010, p. 49). In the following pages, I focus on the critical potentials of *xinghun* with regards to the particular cultural and historical contexts of the Chinese society.

***Xinghun* Allows Same-sex Romance in a Hetero-marital Relationship and Transformation of Gender Roles within Marriage**

There is a misperception that *xinghun* is the opposite of same-sex marriage, which is often advocated in transnational LGBT movements. While there are obvious distinctions between *xinghun* and same-sex marriage, *xinghun* is much more nuanced than just being the opposite side of a legally recognized same-sex relationship. This is exemplified in one of the advertisements in my data.

In a modest tone, a gay man expressed his vision of *xinghun* that would allow both the performance of a hetero-marital relationship and the conduct of a same-sex relationship: “And [I] have a selfish request, that you need to allow me to have him, to go dating with him occasionally, and this would not affect our family life for sure” (潘文 2: “还有一点自私的请求，就是你要允许我有一个他，能偶尔和他约约会但绝不会影响到家庭生活。”). *Xinghun*, in this view, is a union that includes both a hetero-marital relationship and same-sex romance. In fact, all of my seven interviewees who engaged in *xinghun* had/have same-sex relationship(s) during their *xinghun*.

It is salient to note here that a hetero-marital relationship and same-sex romance are not inherently incompatible (Cho, 2009; Engebretsen, 2008; Jones, 2007). Chinese queers rarely exhibit discomfort in claiming participation in both a hetero-marital relationship and a homosexual romance (Jones, 2007); in contrast, it is primarily within the imagination of Euro-American identity politics that this would be regarded as a contradiction. In Chinese history, homosexuality was mainly constructed as sexual practices, rather than as an identity (Kong, 2011). According to Wah-shan Chou (2000), same-sex activities in China were historically portrayed in predominantly social terms (as

social roles, social relations, or a style) rather than sexual terms (pp. 22-23). Chinese culture recognized the differences between same-sex and different-sex eroticism, but sexual desire “neither signals a master category of identity nor is it the constitutive principle of the self” (Chou, 2000, p. 22). Homosexuality was thus seen not as an essential condition monopolized by a particular group, but as a social practice that everyone can experience in specific relations (Chou, 2000, p. 22). Therefore, the “contradiction” between a heterosexual marriage and a homosexual relationship is only imaginable when one presumes a Euro-American model of identity-based homosexuality, whereas a hetero-marital relationship with homosexual romance is, in fact, “a possible outcome of a kinship-structure society” (Kong, 2012, p. 153) for Chinese queer subjects.

In this case, the hetero-marital relationship of *xinghun* does not exclude same-sex desires. Rather, queer desires are an implicit part of *xinghun*, which, as articulated in another advertisement, “allows better opportunity to be with the loved one” (KFC里的狗不理: “会有更好的机会和自己的爱人在一起。”)。 My interviewee Zien’s experience affirms such a possibility. For a long time, Zien’s parents gave his boyfriend a hard time, showing their disagreement with their same-sex relationship. After Zien’s engagement with a lesbian woman, a reassurance of his fulfilling the marital obligation, his parents started to loosen up: “Sometimes [they] even made jokes [with my boyfriend], treating him like their kid.” (有时候还开开玩笑啊, 就把他当孩子一样的。) In Zien’s case, the tension between his biogenetic family and his same-sex partner eased exactly because of his participating in *xinghun*; instead of excluding his same-sex relationship after his entering a hetero-marital relationship, his family included his same-sex partner as part of

the family and tacitly agreed Zien's involving in both a hetero-marital relationship and same-sex romance.

Xinghun, therefore, offers a way to navigate between the seemingly contradictory discourses of family and sexuality. Both the filial discourse and the discourse of identity homosexuality are so prevalent in contemporary China that some queer subjects try to be responsible to both their homosexual identity and the marital obligations for their families. For example, a gay man who had come out to his father was seeking a lesbian on Chinagayles.com because of the social pressure that parents face as well as their hope to carry the blood of the family. A mother posted a *xinghun* ad for her lesbian daughter: “the child does not want to hurt the parents, and the parents want their child to have a family and a kid when the time comes, so that she won't be lonely when she is old. [That's why] I am here.” (nj1955: “我是同志母亲，孩子为了不让父母伤心，父母为了孩子能有个家庭时机成熟能有个孩子，老了不孤单，来到这里。”).

Here, we can see that coming out does not exempt queer subjects from their filial obligations; neither does the familial discourse subsume their homosexual identity. Coming out as a gay man or lesbian woman and engaging in a hetero-marital relationship coexist—one does not exclude the other. Moreover, it is exactly through actively engaging the marriage institution that *xinghun* gives birth to a conjugal husband-wife relationship, a new agent of private life separated from the control of patriarchal family.

As I mentioned earlier, the Chinese society witnessed a structural change in terms of family structure during the Mao era. While family still plays a crucial role in the private life of queer subjects, the rise of conjugality offers a powerful discourse that queer subjects can draw on to fight against the control of patriarchal family that subjects

queer desires to the procreative imperative of patriarchy. The process of getting married is the same process of establishing a new family, a rite of passage that one's full humanness is recognized. By pursuing a hetero-marital relationship, Chinese queer subjects create a horizontal family structure that is becoming a central site of private life, a space that includes and shields queer desires from the control of patriarchal family.

This is especially valuable for lesbian women. While women are still largely confined to the domestic sphere, studies show that non-married lesbian women often face intensive scrutiny within their biogenetic families in contemporary China (see Engebretsen, 2009; Kam, 2012; Wang, 2014). While none of the male interviewees mentioned any gendered intervention from their parents, most of my female interviewees articulated extensively the patriarchal control they faced in their everyday life. Although there is no direct explication about the patriarchal surveillance on lesbian women in the personal advertisements in my data, a significant portion of lesbian women indicated that they lived with their parents, which was not the case for gay men (most gay men suggested in their personal ads that they have their own place). *Xinghun*, therefore, offers an effective way especially for lesbian women to evade the patriarchal surveillance from one's biogenetic family through a careful manipulation of the conjugal family space that *xinghun* opens up.

Xiaoye, for example, appreciates the freedom that *xinghun* provides. Xiaoye is a journalist who is now living in a cosmopolitan city in China. Before she got married, she had her own apartment and was financially secured. However, her parents intervened in so many aspects of her life, including how she dressed and how she spent her spare time,

trying to control her private life toward marriage. Xiaoye says this in her interview with me:

One good thing about marriage [*xinghun*] is the freedom in this aspect of life. [Parents] believe that your husband and you should have your independent family, so [they] respect you more relatively.... In fact, they do not think you are a full human being, but because you have a husband now, [you] separate from your original family. This is not the same thing as you yourself are independent [from your family]. But you gain relative freedom through such a way. (结婚之后有一个很好的, 就是有这方面的自由度, 觉得你跟你老公之间应该是有个独立的家庭的, 相对而言更加尊重你...实际上他们也不认为你是一个完全的人, 实际上是因为你有老公了, 就从原来的家庭里独立出来了, 但这不等于你自己本身独立出来了。但是你通过了这样一种方式, 获得了相对的自由度。)

More importantly, because there are more gay men than lesbians seeking *xinghun*, *xinghun* might be an opportunity for lesbian women to negotiate their gender role within a hetero-contractual marriage. Compared to heterosexual marriages where gender roles are often prescribed by normative gender norms, *xinghun* is a site where duties and rights (including gender roles) are constantly contested in the negotiation of the *xinghun* “contract.” Some gay men even complain that *xinghun*-seeking lesbian women are more “difficult” (*nangao*, 难搞) than straight women. My interviewee Dee, however, pointed out that the difficult negotiation in *xinghun* made fairer marriage:

If they believe that *lalas* are more difficult than straight women, the only difference is that the *lala* does not love him, but the straight woman might love

her boyfriend. As a result, on many issues which she should negotiate, she may not say anything, because [she is afraid that] he will no longer love her if she say too much. Or [she believes], why do I need to say anything? If he loves me, of course he will do it. Straight women may have such illusions, so [they] give up a lot of things. But of course the *lala* does not love him, so [she] will not take gender into consideration, just negotiation between two adults. (他们如果认为拉拉比直女难搞的话, 唯一的就拉拉不会爱他, 但是直女会爱这个男友。所以有很多她应该拿出来协商的问题, 她可能就不会说, 因为说太多了他可能会不爱我。或者说, 这个问题我还用说吗? 他爱我他自然就会这样做。直女可能会有这方面的幻想, 所以会放弃很多东西。但是拉拉当然不会爱他啊, 所以会撇除性别, 就是成年人和成年人之间的协商啊。)

Xinghun, therefore, offers a platform for Chinese queer subjects to contest existing gender roles in marriage. Although it is hard to believe that gender norms do not take parts in such negotiation, as Dee suggested optimistically, the absence of the myth of love has revealed the other sides of the story more clearly, such as the economical exchange and the exploitation of women within the marriage institution.

My interviewee Xiaoye's experience further affirms such a demystification of marriage in *xinghun*. Explaining why she decided to participate in *xinhun*, she said: "In fact I think marriage itself as an institution, you do not have to take it too seriously. It is only a game rule among many other game rules. The only [different] thing [of my *xinghun*] is that you won't have too much imagination or illusion. You just treat it as a rule." (其实也是觉得这个婚姻制度本身, 你也不需要太把它当一回事。它也不过是

很多游戏规则当中的一种。唯一的就是你对婚姻这件事情不会有太多的想象或者幻想，你只是把它当成一个规则。)

On the similar note, a microblogger (夕阳爸-爸) wrote on A-Qiang's microblog: "Worldlings, look through it [marriage], use it when you need it. Over 90% heterosexual marriages are instrumental, and I don't think same-sex marriage can get rid of instrumentality. True love only exists in affairs and your gay friends [same-sex lovers]." (俗人们，看穿它，需要的话就用起来，异性恋婚姻90%以上都是工具婚姻，同性婚姻我想也摆脱不了工具的形式。真爱只在小三和基友那里。)

Such a comment, although offered with a sarcastic tone, suggests that some Chinese queer subjects have gone beyond the sex-love-marriage matrix, taking up marriage as a useful tool for better conditions of queer lives. In a word, *xinghun* demystifies marriage through its exposure of the power dynamic and its influences on men and women within the marriage institution, and thus opens up opportunities for negotiation and transformation.¹⁴

¹⁴ Others argue that marriage as a sexist institution can guarantee nothing but a sexless marital life; all the constraints, inequality and unfairness of existing marriage system will be unavoidably imposed on those who participate in *xinghun*. They believed that *xinghun* wouldn't be very different from a heterosexual marriage: as long as the fixed gender roles within marriage do not change, inequality between male and female partners is unavoidable, no matter the reasons with which one enters a marriage. This is supported by a recent study (Liu, 2013): "The expectation is that in these *xinghun* arrangements, both parties would fulfill gender-specific roles such as housekeeper and family caregiver for women and provider for men" (p. 506). Many lesbians are worried that the "promised" equality will be compromised in *xinghun*, because the "formality" of the heteronormative is the real premise of *xinghun*.

***Xinghun* Transforms the Structure of Marital Relationship**

On the structural level, *xinghun* transforms the structure of marital union by including a same-sex relationship in conjunction with the hetero-marital partnership. As I discussed earlier, *xinghun* is not a heterosexual marriage replacing same-sex relationships; rather, in most cases, same-sex relationships are incorporated as an implicit part of the intimate union, the shadow side of *xinghun* (see Fu & Zhang, 2013). It is for this reason that Chinese queer subjects do not always reject the *xinghun* of their same-sex partners. In fact, some of them actively involve or even initiate *xinghun* for their same-sex partners.

Xinghun can take different forms. On the surface, *xinghun* looks exactly the same as a heterosexual marriage (as shown in Figure 5.1)—the bonding of a man and a woman, as well as their families, in Chinese society. In the figures that I have crafted,¹⁵ the basic unit of this model is the family (instead of individuals), bonded by marital relationship or blood. Other family members, including relatives, are potential participants in the decision making of *xinghun*, as shown in dotted cloud in the figures below.

However, there are implicit or shadow parts of *xinghun* that could not be found in a heterosexual marriage—the same-sex relationship that is outside of, yet closely related to the hetero-marital relationship. This is an indispensable part of *xinghun*, a relationship that participants strive to maintain. Figure 5.2 shows how one might distinguish *xinghun* from the more common practice among Chinese queer subjects—marrying heterosexual folks.

¹⁵ Figure 5.2 is developed on Fu and Zhang (2013)'s *xinghun* model. Compared with Fu and Zhang's model, my model emphasizes that family is the agent (or unit) of *xinghun*, rather than queer individuals; the same-sex relationship is part of, rather than external to, *xinghun*.

Figure 5.1 Nuclear Heterosexual Marriage in Chinese Society

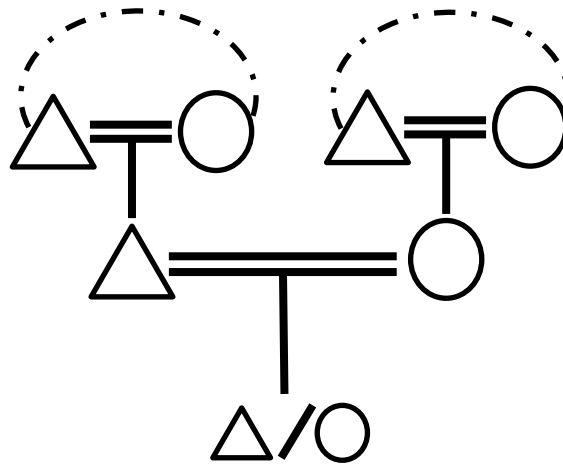
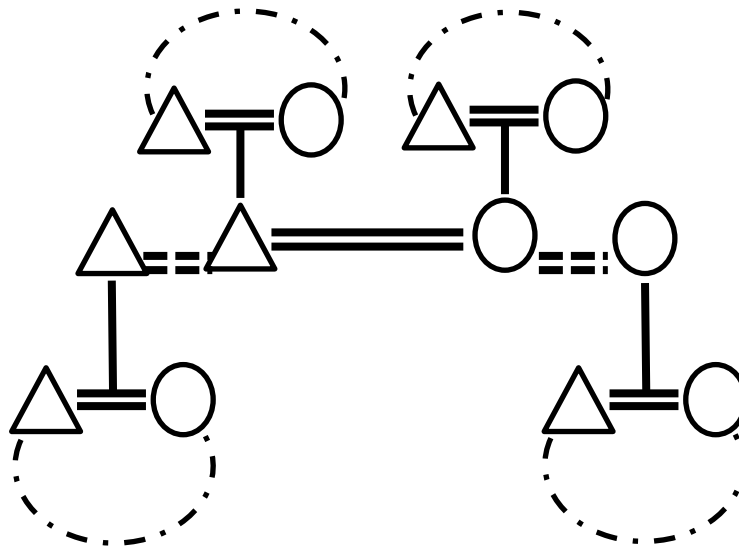


Figure 5.2 Simple *Xinghun*

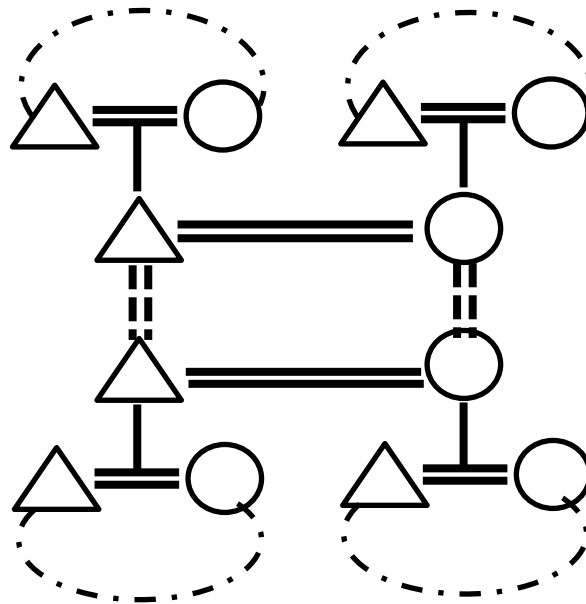


Moving on from the simple *xinghun* format, it is not uncommon that a same-sex couple seeks another same-sex couple of a different sex to form seemingly two family units. This constitutes a special *xinghun* union, which many same-sex couples believe is the “ideal” form of *xinghun*, according Li (personal communication, June 3, 2015). This is manifested in the *xinghun* advertisements I examined. For instance, a lesbian woman

wrote: “My GF [girlfriend] is a T [butch]. Hope to find a stable couple to be with us. If not possible, one from a couple is fine.” (HRain: “我的GF是T，最希望有一对感情较稳定的和我们一起，实在不行就单方。”) When marriage becomes inevitable for queer subjects, a *xinghun* formed by two stable same-sex couples, as shown in Figure 5.3 on the next page, seems to be the simplest structure that involves the least negotiation; therefore, it is considered to be the “ideal” form of *xinghun*.

In a similar vein, the *xinghun* that my interviewee Dream Horse told me, for example, was always about a four-person union: Dream Horse with his boyfriend and his *xinghun* wife with her girlfriend: “*Xinghun* as I understand, is not a marriage of formality. I hope it is like a normal marriage, a special form in this circle [LGBT community].”(我所理解的形婚，它不是一个形式的婚姻。我更多地希望它还是等同于正常的婚姻，是这个圈子特殊的形式。)

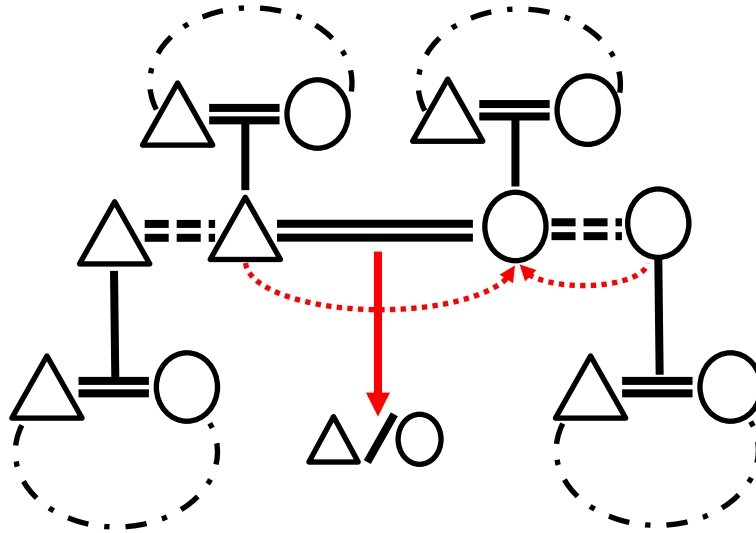
Figure 5.3 “Ideal” *Xinghun* (Without Children)



My interviewee Zien gave a more concrete example of how *xinghun* transforms the heterosexual marriage structure. Zien's *xinghun* family (Figure 5.4) consists of four people, all of whom get along with each other. At the time I interviewed him, they were planning to have their own children. In this plan, Zien's *xinghun* wife will carry and deliver the baby, with Zien providing the sperm and her girlfriend providing the egg. "She said this is a connection," (她说这是一个连结) Zien explained. The four people in this *xinghun* live together and will take care of the kid, their "connection."

Zien emphasized that they are a real family: "If it [*xinghun*] is entirely a formality, I may not have spent so much efforts to manage it. At least, our current goal is to build a family. We have built our family, although it is different from a traditional one." (如果完全是形式的, 我可能也不会花很多心思去经营。至少说, 我们现在的目标是组建一个家庭。我们还是成了家, 只不过性质区别于传统的家庭。) Zien's story proves that *xinghun* as a queer practice has the potential of transforming the structure of marital relationship and the way how family looks like. Ironically, the denial of the state to recognize same-sex relationship has established conditions in which Chinese queer subjects maintain both the hetero-marital relationship and same-sex relationship(s), which would otherwise be criminalized as an offense of bigamy for heterosexual subjects (see Wang, 2013). That is, the unintelligibility of same-sex relationship in the official discourse has in fact shielded Chinese queer subjects from the surveillance of the state in imposing a narrowly defined monogamy in intimate relationship.

Figure 5.4 Zien’s *Xinghun* Family



Even in their simplest form of *xinghun*, such as depicted in Figure 5.2, when their same-sex partners are not involved in hetero-marital relationships, *xinghun* is more complicated than a heterosexual marriage because it includes both hetero-marital and same-sex relationships. In addition, the structure of *xinghun* is complicated because the “nodes” in a *xinghun* network are not always stable. The numbers of nodes vary, and the same-sex relationships tend to be more flexible because families usually are not invested in those same-sex relationships. The complexity of *xinghun* means complicated communicative and performative labor.

From the analysis above, we can conclude that *xinghun* is a queer practice that disidentifies (Muñoz, 1999) with heteronormative marriage arrangement, rather than a mere mimicking of the latter by queer subjects who are trying to pass as “normal.” Transnational discourses of identity homosexuality often tell the liberation story in which Chinese queer subjects need to be liberated “from family to properly express a ‘free’ modern sexuality” (Blackwood, 2012, p. 446). This narrative, however, antagonizes

sexuality and family value. It creates a false dichotomy, suggesting that Chinese queer subjects can only choose between one against the other. It fails to address the integration efforts of sexual desires and filial loyalty among Chinese queers.

The emergence of *xinghun* is, therefore, an effort to harmonize familial obligations and queer desires, “a dual emphasis on pro-gay rights and pro-family values” (Wong, 2011, p. 165), rather than prioritizing or absolutizing the latter as suggested by the Euro-American discourse of identity homosexuality. As a new kind of marriage practiced by many Chinese queers, *xinghun* offers a new site to disidentify (Muñoz, 1999) with dominant marriage arrangements, creating a queer space within rather than outside the marriage system. It allows Chinese queer subjects to sustain their same-sex relationship in a heteronormative society; by disidentifying with the marital system, they evade the totality of patriarchal family toward a *xinghun* union, where queer relationships are included, if not necessarily encouraged.

Conclusion

Xinghun is an indigenous exploration of Chinese queer subjects to create better conditions for the everyday life without exemplars to follow. To cite the words of my interviewee Dream Horse: “Our generation has just started; no one has taken this path before. There is neither a good template, nor a guideline from abroad, telling us how to do it. It is all exploring.” (这条路，我们这一代人才刚刚开始走，之前都没有人走过。没有一个很好的范本，也没有一个国外的指南，写着我们应该怎样去做的。都是在摸索。) *Xinghun* may not be the best way, and it is hard to predict how it goes in the future. That being said, for many Chinese queer subjects, it may be the only viable option they have to cope with the difficulties in their everyday lives.

The circulation of transnational discourses has changed the meanings of private life in China. The dynamic among sexual independence, conjugality, and patriarchy is shifting in the process of “modernization” as a result of transnational geopolitics. The changing dynamic redefines the meanings of homosexuality, marriage, and cultural citizenship, thereby reshapes queer subjectivity in mainland China. In particular, dominant sexual culture in China has defined marriage as only between a heterosexual man and a heterosexual woman. As a result, Chinese people with same-sex desires find themselves in a dilemma: on the one hand, they are doomed to fall short of the category of marriage because of the narrow definition of marriage that excludes queer experiences; on the other hand, marriage is still culturally expected for all people and a ritual through which full humanness is granted. Responding to this dilemma, *xinghun* began to emerge among queer subjects in Chinese society.

Xinghun is not a once and all performance. The key of the performances of *xinghun* are how to perform the “realness” of heteronormativity in a queer marriage. In order to look “real,” Chinese queer subjects often employ a hyper-heteronormative script to perform the “ideal” heterosexual marriage in their imagination, with significant implications in terms of social class, gender norms, and reproduction that exclude some Chinese queer subjects from participating in *xinghun*. Such “realness” of *xinghun* is, I argue, a regulatory force on queer subjects, demanding “real” heteronormative performances and “real” affection. In the process of such performing, I argue that *xinghun* reveals the heteronormative expectations in a hetero-marriage, which is often concealed by the ideology of romantic love. If transgenderism reveals the performativity

of gender (Butler, 1990), then *xinghun* reveals the performativity of hetero-marital relationship and its different effects on male and female subjects.

While *xinghun* is often accused as “fake marriage,” I argue that a “real” marriage is an impossible position to achieve for Chinese queer subjects. What’s worse, the discursive violence of heteronormativity has caused a splitting feeling among Chinese queer subjects between a “fake” self in performing *xinghun* and a “real” self in one’s same-sex relationship(s). Therefore, any discussion of and “realness” or “authenticity,” I argue, is not helpful for Chinese queer subjects without the premise of a secure, public, sexual identity.

Xinghun is often condemned by some LGBT activists as betraying homosexual identity by being complicit in heterosexual marriages. However, my study shows that *xinghun* also opens up opportunities for Chinese queer subjects to disidentify with hegemonic queerness and heteronormative marriage arrangements. Instead of reading *xinghun* as not radical or transgressive enough, I tend to see it as a rich site of contestation and transformation. I argue that it is more meaningful to examine what *xinghun* allows queer subjects to do that is otherwise difficult, if not totally impossible.

Xinghun challenges, if not necessarily subverts, heteronormative marriage institution by transforming its arrangements and structure. It is important to note that *xinghun* does not exclude homosexual relationships (Engebretsen, 2009). Engaging in *xinghun* does not mean that queer subjects turn away from queer desires toward heteronormativity. Rather, *xinghun* is often a conscious effort of queer subjects to maintain queer relationship in a hostile environment. *Xinghun* offers an alternative way to create a queer space within a hetero-marital relationship, while conforming to

heteronormativity at the same time (Engebretsen, 2008). *Xinghun* is empowering because it sustains queer relationships for those who find no elsewhere to place their queer desires. In other words, the empowering potential of *xinghun* lies in the fact that it deconstructs the dichotomy between same-sex desires and hetero-marital relationship, and allowing queer desires to thrive in an otherwise exclusionary institution.

The changing dynamic between multiple discourses in the private domain also means opportunities toward transformation. As a queer form of marriage, *xinghun* challenges heteronormative marriage institution by transforming its arrangements and structure. It allows Chinese queer subjects to sustain their same-sex relationships without existing the kinship system. It offers a new site to disidentify with dominant marriage arrangements, creating a queer space within rather than outside the marriage system. In the context of contemporary China, queer desires emerge and thrive “within the confines of the home and ‘the domestic,’ rather than a safe ‘elsewhere’” (Gopinath, 2005, p. 153). *Xinghun*, therefore, can be seen as a culturally specific resistance. Its queer potential does not lie in “radicalness” of such resistance, but in what it allows queer subjects to do in a heteronormative and increasingly homonormative (Duggan, 2003) environment.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

As I write the concluding chapter of my dissertation, a controversial book brings homosexuality to the sight of the public in China. Published in Hong Kong, a new book titled *The Secret Emotional Life of Zhou Enlai* claims that Zhou Enlai (周恩来), China's much-respected first premier who played a critical role in the political life of Chinese society, was probably gay. According to its Hong Kong-based author, Tsoi Wing-Mui (蔡咏梅), Zhou's queer desire may be evidenced in observations of his "tepid marriage" and in his cool treatment of his wife, Deng Yingchao (邓颖超) (Dawson, 2016; Forsythe, 2015; Tsoi, 2015).

Despite Zhou's long marriage, Tsoi wrote, it was a "marriage in name only. ...He was never in love with his wife" (Blanchard & Lim, 2015). From the materials released so far, we do not see any discussion of Deng's sexuality, and thus we cannot make any conclusion about whether the marriage that is lived and experienced by Zhou and Deng is similar to what I have discussed as *xinghun* in this study. That being said, even though a direct comparison to *xinghun* was not made in the book, Tsoi (2015) did suggest that Zhou's marriage was a non-confrontational effort to negotiate among political risks, social/family pressure, and sexual desire in a hostile environment.

Despite the official silence on the book in mainland China (the book is expected to be banned in mainland China), Tsoi's reinterpretation of Zhou's sexuality has drawn a lot of attention, both domestically and internationally. This is because of Zhou's role in the Communist movements. As China's first premier, Zhou is considered to have played a critical role in the political life of Chinese society. The official silence on this book in

mainland China, however, should not be equated with tolerance: CCTV, the China state television broadcaster, digitally erased and blurred out the face of a Hong Kong actor (Wong Hei, 王喜) from a reality show *The Great Challenge* after he referenced Tsoi's claim about Zhou's sexuality on Facebook (Brown, 2016; The Initium, 2016). According to the news, "Wong's post provoked an uproar in Chinese social media, ultimately leading the director (of the reality program) to posting an elaborate *mea culpa* on Jan 1" (Brown, 2016). Hence, although Tsoi's reinterpretation of Zhou's sexuality seems to be welcomed in Chinese LGBT communities, many others see the claims made in the book as an attack on Zhou's character.

My mention of this particular controversial book is not intended as a foray into an investigation of whether or not Zhou was, indeed, gay. Instead, I mention this example to draw attention to how a controversial claim on Zhou's sexuality was made, the range of public responses to this claim, and the nature of the controversy that ensued. My purpose of highlighting this example is to reiterate how in contemporary China, sexuality is still a critical site where humanness and power are granted and distributed. The controversy raised by Tsoi's book highlights how members of contemporary Chinese society need to navigate carefully among family, politics, and sexuality in daily life.

Tsoi's new book also makes obvious how the seeming public silence about sexuality in Chinese society does not mean that nothing is happening in the sexual terrain; nor does it mean a lack of discourse with regards to sexuality in mainland China. Rather, sexuality in Chinese society is a rich communicative phenomenon with particular discursive/material manifestations that require critical, historical, and cultural explorations. On this rendering, my dissertation expands and stretches communication

scholarship by exploring the non-confrontational queer politics of Chinese queer subjects who work from within the family space. More specifically, my dissertation engages with and contributes to the following scholarly conversations:

Queering Communication

Despite the crucial role of sexuality in the constitution of human subjectivities and in the organization of social life, sexuality as a communicative phenomenon has largely been neglected in the communication discipline (Chevrette, 2013; Yep, 2003). When it is addressed, the discipline of communication shows itself to be predominantly heteronormative (Chevrette, 2013; Owen, 2003; Yep, 2003; Yep, Lovaas, & Elia, 2003), with some exceptions like *Communicative Sexualities* (Martinez, 2011) that studies the different ways that human beings come to perceive and express sexualities.

Communication research that is built on such heterosexual assumptions only serves to “perpetuate notions of sexual difference and gender complementarity as prerequisites for romantic relationships” (Chevrette, 2013, p. 177) and family structures, notions that have long been disaffirmed by diverse sexual experiences in reality and challenged by feminist scholarship.

Even among the scant research on homosexuality, Gust A. Yep (2003) points out, the ways in which homosexuality was approached were largely problematic: Starting in the early 1990s, according to Yep (2003), the field of communication studies witnessed a growing interest in sexuality. That being said, most of the early research—especially research in interpersonal communication—tended to use a “minoritizing view” to study non-normative sexualities (see Chevrette, 2013; Yep, 2003). That is, early studies often suggest that issues of sexuality are no more than the “special interest” of sexual

minorities (Yep, 2003, p. 17). This has the effect of leaving the hegemony of heterosexuality in the communication discipline invisible and unquestioned (Yep, Lovaas, & Elia, 2003). The normalization of heterosexuality, Warner (2002) reminds us, is a site of violence wherever it happens (including in scholarly disciplines).

Recognizing the violence of heteronormativity (see Yep, 2003), queer theory brings sexuality into discussion, exposing the unspoken assumption of heteronormativity and their effects in the field of communication. “To study sexuality as a communicative phenomenon,” Jacqueline M. Martinez (2011) reminds us, means that we need to examine the presuppositions in our perception about sexuality, because “we will never be able to actually see heterosexuality if heterosexuality defines how we see sexuality” (p. 3). Joining the queer scholarship, my study explores homosexuality as a communicative phenomenon among Chinese queer subjects, bringing a queer perspective that has been marginalized in our discipline. More specifically, my dissertation is a queer intervention of the heterosexual construction of the notion of family in communication studies.

Roberta Chevrette (2013) notes that “family communication has largely assumed the ideology of the heterosexual, nuclear, white, middle-class family” (p. 174). Research conducted with such ideology excludes and even pathologizes the experiences of non-normative subjects, thus perpetuating the dominance of heteronormativity. In particular, the notion of the heteronormative Chinese family is often evoked to construct a “paradigmatic Other” (Liu, 2010, p. 300) of Western culture. Such a construction can be found in two different registers. First is the belief that the Chinese family is inherently heteronormative and that the sexualities of Chinese queer subjects “are unarticulatable and oppressed” (Patton, 2002, p. 207), waiting to be liberated by Western civilization.

Second is the discourse that sees Chinese family as “innocent” (read: heterosexual) until the “pollution” of Western sexual culture. Despite the different functions they serve, these two discourses associate the “authenticity” of Chinese culture with the heteronormativity of Chinese family and thus locate queerness outside the site of the family. The teleological discourse of “coming out,” as manifested in privileging voicing and visibility in transnational queer politics, has thus become a normalizing vehicle that is complicit with the imperialist discourse that critical intercultural communication aims to dismantle.

Informed by public sphere theory and postcolonial feminism, my study challenges the heterosexual construction of the Chinese family by revealing the silent intervention of some Chinese queer subjects within the family system. Dominant Euro-American queer discourse situates queerness in the visible, public domain and suggests that family is “a place to be left behind, to be escaped (from)” (Gopinath, 2005, p. 14). The practices of “coming with” and *xinghun* that I have described in the previous chapters, however, challenge the binary between family and sexuality, suggesting that queerness can emerge and thrive without exiting the (heterosexual) family. Moreover, a careful examination of the conditions of “private life” in China affirms the efficacy of the silent intervention of some Chinese queer subjects. *Xinghun*, for instance, gives birth to a conjugal husband-wife relationship, an increasingly powerful discourse in private life that includes and shields queer desires from the control of bio-genetic family. As Rudy (2000) points out, queerness is often imagined as being “public, hard, aggressive, ‘in-your-face’” (p. 207), valorizing the public and political parts of life. Other attributes, such as caretaking and relationality that is often coded as feminine, Rudy (2000) argues, are “dismissed as soft

and accommodationist” (p. 207) by dominant queer discourse. In this vein, contempt toward reticent negotiation and family connection that many Chinese queer subjects value can be read as a reflection of the Orientalist discourse in queer politics, where the East is coded as the feminine Other. Therefore, my study is a postcolonial feminist intervention in the communication of sexuality through affirming the value of reticence and relationality.

Culturalizing Queer Theory

The queerness of Chinese queer subjects comes not only from their non-normative sexualities, but also from their cultural otherness. The cultural practices of Chinese queer subjects deviate from the “universal” queer politics—the confrontational, identity-based sexual politics that is based on the experience of metropolitan, white, middle-class queer subjects and is centered in transnational LGBT movements. Queer of color critique questions the whiteness in mainstream queer theory, bringing in a race/culture perspective in our exploration of sexuality. Joining the dual critical commitments of queer of color critique, my dissertation unravels how sexuality and race/culture intervene in the site of family communication as a queer and cultural intervention into the studies of human communication, mapping the racialized, cultured, and embodied experiences among some Chinese queer subjects.

First of all, my study is a critical intercultural intervention to the whiteness in dominant queer discourse. By centering the life experiences of Chinese queer subjects, my project intervenes in the teleological discourse of “coming out” that is circulated both in transnational LGBT movements and within academia. Specifically, such a critical intercultural invention is achieved through investigating the material conditions of

queerness which is emphasized in queer of color critique: by unravelling the economic drives behind the discourse of “coming out,” I reveal how the affect-loaded notion of “coming out” is utilized in the emerging Chinese pink market to move queer subjects emotionally toward business opportunities. I argue that the teleological discourse of “coming out” fails to address the material risks of Chinese queers subjects, especially those less privileged bodies, in a family-oriented society where losing the familial support means losing the most important part of one’s social resources. In a word, the materiality of Chinese queer subjects, as shown in my study, challenges the legitimacy and efficacy of the “coming out” discourse that is imposed upon Chinese queer subjects.

In addition, my dissertation investigates the non-confrontational communication practices—the strategies of reticence/silence and *xinghun*—that some Chinese queer subjects employ to navigate the tension between kinship and sexuality. Transnational LGBT movements privilege a queer politics that is oppositional and confrontational, with an emphasis on the visibility of sexual identity. Such a narrow imagination of queerness fails to see the disparities among queer subjects in different social locations; it puts different ways of being queer (because of their different accesses to social resources) on a temporal, lineal scale, measuring their “progress” or “subversiveness” based on the standard of the white, middle-class, and metropolitan queer subjects. My study demonstrates that the “coming with” and *xinghun* strategies that some Chinese queer subjects embrace are not a “pre-coming out” phase or a lesser version of “coming out.” Rather, they are another way of being queer for people who live in a particular historical moment and in particular cultural contexts in mainland China. They are the ways that

some Chinese queer subjects participate in a queer world making and live with the difficulties they face in their everyday lives.

The aim of my study is to expand on and stretch out our imagination of what it means to be queer, troubling “the teleological investments in the ‘closeting’ and ‘coming out’ narratives that have long been critiqued by poststructuralist theorist for the privileged (white) gay, lesbian, and queer liberal subjects they inscribe and validate” (Puar, 2007, p. 2). When visibility is imagined as speaking up, silence and reticence appear as failures of queer subjectivity. The experience of Chinese queer subjects, however, challenges the simple equation between “breaking silence” and empowerment. There are many silences (Foucault, 1978), and not all silences are the same. My study shows that subaltern reticence/silence, or reticence/silence of queer subjects as a coping strategy, can be productive for queer subjects to evade surveillance, especially for queer subjects who are in more marginalized positions, such as female queers and queer subjects from the lower class. It is a way of undoing the heteronormative system from within, a culturally specific resistance to the institutional violence of targeting and policing non-normative sexualities.

For Chinese queer subjects, their reticence/silence on their queer sexualities and their participation in *xinghun* may be uneasy and full of tensions, but many of them embrace such strategies unapologetically. My study thus raises questions with regards to the meaning of queerness. Here I echo Liu (2010) in arguing that queerness can be expanded, revised, and transformed by the everyday practices of Chinese queer subjects. As such, my dissertation can contribute to critical intercultural and critical rhetorical communication by exploring and theorizing reticence/silence, a culturally specific

communicative phenomenon among Chinese queer subjects, challenging mainstream understanding of the communication process of (not) knowing. Therefore, my dissertation is an attempt to culturalize queer theory, putting queer theory in relationship with a complex understanding of Chinese culture.

Moreover, through bringing in a transnational perspective to the studies of sexuality, my dissertation joins other critical communication scholars to go beyond the “nation-state” paradigm in intercultural communication and public sphere studies. Focusing on movements rather than national boundaries, my project examines the “deterritorialization and reterritorialization” (Dingo & Scott, 2012, p. 7) process within the Chinese queer communities along with the circulation of identity-based sexual discourse, revealing how Chinese queer subjects are shaped by transnational queer discourses, as well as how they create a culturally specific queer space within the home space—something different from the one prescribed in dominant queer discourse—through a careful navigation among different discourses. Specifically, as a critical intercultural and critical rhetorical communication scholar, I am interested in the diverse ways of being queer in different cultures. The critical potential of queerness, I argue, has been constrained by the narrow cultural context in mainstream queer studies, which associates queerness with the Western culture and the West. A transnational lens on sexuality thus enables us to go beyond the Western imagination and brings in an intercultural complexity to our discussion. As shown in my study, transnational queer flows have transformed what it means to be queer in contemporary mainland China and have resignified the social/cultural meanings of “Chinese” (Rofel, 2007). That being said, Chinese queer subjects are not empty entities that simply execute the “will” of

transnational queer discourse. Instead, they are historical and cultural bodies that revise queer discourses by their embodied, day-to-day practices. In other words, local knowledge and practices of Chinese queer subjects, as demonstrated in the “coming with” and *xinghun* strategies in my study, do not necessarily mean a distortion or rejection of queerness. Rather, it means that the notion of “queer” is not fixed and is constantly contested and transformed by what is “Chinese” (Liu, 2010, p. 297).

On this rendering, my study of Chinese queer subjects can contribute to transnational queer scholarship through “transform[ing] the signifier of ‘China’ into a useful set of queer tools” (Liu, 2010, p. 316). That is, what it means to be Chinese expands our imaginations of being queer, as shown in my study. Queer scholarship can be transformed by the everyday experiences of Chinese queer subjects, whose lives and loves appear to be “oblique, strange, and out of place” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 570) because they do not follow the script prescribed in dominant queer discourse.

Putting the “Queer” in Front of the “Theory”

Echoing the critical commitment of queer of color critique to attend to the material life of queer bodies, my dissertation focuses on the everyday struggles of Chinese queer subjects and the transformative potential of their practices. In spite of its deconstructive power against the violence of heteronormativity, queer theory has been criticized for its institutionalization and normalization within academia (Aiello et al., 2013; Halperin, 2003). Lisa Kahaleole Hall, for example, expresses her concern about queer theory’s obsession with high theory: “I am disheartened by the jargon, abstraction, and disinterest in theorizing practice that is so common in much of what has been

canonized as ‘Queer Theory’ in the academy” (Aiello et al., 2013, p. 98). David M. Halperin (2003) worries that queer theory has lost its critical edge for allowing “the ‘theory’ in queer theory to prevail over the ‘queer’” (p. 341). “Queer,” he argues, has “become a harmless qualifier of ‘theory’” (p. 341), turning into “a generic badge of subversiveness, a more trendy version of ‘liberal’” (p. 341). Recognizing the danger of the abstraction tendency in queer theory, my dissertation is less interested in articulating the most “radical”/ “transgressive” theory than in exploring the everyday struggles of Chinese queer subjects and the possibility of social changes. Guided by such a pragmatic drive, my study maps and theorizes the non-confrontational strategies of some Chinese queer subjects.

Mainstream queer theory, Yep (2003) points out, is driven “by a significant deconstructive impulse” (p. 37). While the deconstructive spirit of queer theory is necessary and effective, one may ask: deconstruction toward what? The culturally specific resistance of Chinese queer subjects shows that queer theory is about fighting for better conditions for life—the queer politics we advocate should not lead to more suffering. Our scholarship, following Butler (2004), “must be guided by the question of what maximizes the possibilities for a livable life” (p. 8) and “what minimizes the possibility of unbearable life or, indeed, social or literal death” (p. 8). My interviewee Xiaoye reminds us: “Many things are just strategic. Even on the ‘should be’ level—is gayness innate or a choice—is in fact not important. For ourselves, [family issues] are something that we need to face in our lives. ...It is not worth it to [sacrifice] for a principle. In fact, every family is different, and everyone needs to face her/his own family. No theory can solve it completely. ...I know this [*xinghun*] is not the best way,

and I don't know how it goes in the future, but this is the only feasible strategy at that time.” (很多东西是策略性的。甚至是在一件事情应该是怎样的层面来说——到底gay是天生的还是后天的，其实这件事情是无关紧要的。对于大家自己来说，这些事情是必须在生活当中面对的。…是没有必要为了一个原则性的问题去。其实每个家庭都是不一样的，每个家庭都需要自己去解决。没有一个什么理论是可以把它完全地解决掉的。…我也不知道这是不是最好的方式，也不知道以后会是怎样的结果，但这是当时唯一可行的一种策略。) The studies of sexualities, therefore, must be grounded in the lives that people actually live.

In other words, queer theory needs to acknowledge the contingency in queer lives: to locate our studies “within the intricacies of our immediate and embodied interconnection with the social world in which we are situated” (Martinez, 2011), rather than be obsessed with its transgressive agenda. Otherwise, queer theory will be lost in the “predetermined and fixed sense of radical anti-normativity incapable of accounting anything other than facially recognizable acts of being against something, most notably, the norm” (West, 2014, pp. 25-26). In addition to asking the question of “what do we fight against,” we need to ask ourselves “what do we fight for”? Or like Isaac West (2014) says, we need to move from the question of “who I am” to “what I want for us.” Queer scholarship in communication “needs to maintain the productive tension between the constructive impulses and the deconstructive impulses” (Yep, 2003, p. 47) for a more livable queer world.

Theorizing a Post-Oppositional Queer Politics

The major contribution of this dissertation is to theorize and expand what AnaLouise Keating (2013) calls “post-oppositional politics” among some Chinese queer subjects. Queer politics in the United States has long been characterized as “radical, confrontational, in-your-face” (Yep, 2003, p. 37). Such an oppositional thinking is so firmly embedded in contemporary queer politics that it is difficult to envision a queer politics that goes beyond oppositionality. The non-confrontational strategies of some Chinese queer subjects, however, give us some concrete examples of how a post-oppositional politics may look like.

1. Intersectional Queer Subjects

As I have discussed earlier in Chapter 3, a “rights” discourse along with a “coming out” rhetoric is advocated in transnational LGBT movements and circulated in Chinese LGBT communities. The “rights” discourse indicates an individualistic, “rights bearing” subject. The “coming out” rhetoric pictures a queer future that is independent from the heterosexual kinship system. Against this backdrop, the non-confrontational strategies that some Chinese queer subjects employ, such as “coming with” and *xinghun*, are often accused as evidence of poor sexual identification and/or a lack of bravery. However, these judgments are simplistic and superficial. In interpreting the non-confrontational strategies that some Chinese queer subjects employ as such, these two discourses fail to recognize the intersectionality of Chinese queer subjects: sexuality is not the only important site of struggles. Chinese queer subjects have multiple identities with multiple needs and obligations, one competing with another. The acknowledgement

that Chinese queer subjects face intersectional struggles means that a single-dimension politics that prioritizes sexual identity would not be sufficient, if useful at all.

My dissertation shows that the intersectionality of Chinese queer subjects and their complicated relationship with their bio-genetic families underlie the economic and affective conditions of the “coming with” and *xinghun* strategies among Chinese queer subjects. Given that the Chinese society is still largely collectivistic—where family serves as the major source of social support—leaving the home space and entering the neo-liberal, public domain may not be a viable choice for most Chinese queer subjects. This is especially so for the less privileged queer subjects such as lesbian women and Chinese queer from the rural areas. Engebretsen’s (2008) study proves that family is an indispensable source of support and recognition for Chinese lesbian women despite the struggle and despair it imposes on them. This suggests a complicated relationship between queer subjects and their families, both economically and affectively. As a result, confronting or cutting off from one’s bio-genetic family, as prescribed in the “coming out” narrative, may mean losing one’s network of social support. For Chinese queer subjects, leaving the support network that the kinship system provides often means a more fragile and less protected life on the bumpy journey of life ahead. The “coming out” narrative, I argue, is not able to answer the critical question that Day Wong (2007) raises: “come out as what?” That narrative fails to address the social support and protection that are required for any meaningful resistance and agency to happen, for life to be livable.

2. Post-Oppositional Politics

Under such contexts, a post-oppositional politics becomes popular and is embraced by many Chinese queer subjects. Women of color feminist Keating (2013)

points out that post-oppositionality is not the same as anti-oppositionality in that post-oppositionality acknowledges the necessity and usefulness of oppositionality in our politics. Post-oppositionality, she argues, is not a rejection or negation of oppositionality:

By “oppositional” I mean binary either/or thinking and us-against-them dynamics that pit one person, one group, or one way of thinking/acting against another—with no room for compromise, for creating new answers, or for developing any type of third space. This dichotomous oppositionality locks us into the status quo and reactionary stance... . . . [R]ejecting oppositional politics re-activates the oppositionality which I find so limiting. We’ve learned a lot from our oppositionality. So, post-oppositional embraces oppositionality, learns from it, moves through it, and develops new approaches. (Maparyan & Keating, 2014)

In other words, a post-oppositional politics is a non-binary, non-oppositional framework that recognizes the intersectionality of social struggles and favors a holistic approach towards social transformation. It acknowledges the complex relationship we have with the perpetrators—such as with our bio-genetic families—and the interconnectivity between “us” and “them,” allowing “room for compromise, for creating new answers, or for developing any type of third space” (Maparyan & Keating, 2014). Instead of asking Chinese queer subjects to “‘choose’ one aspect of their lives” (Phelan, 1997, p. 66)—sexuality over kinship (or vice versa) as I have mentioned in Chapter 1—a post-oppositional politics insists that both same-sex desires and familial belonging are indispensable parts of Chinese queer subjects, centering a queer politics that can hold contradictions and ambiguity (see Anzaldúa, 1987). For instance, while the queer activist A-Qiang advocates for visibility of queer subjects within the family, many Chinese

queers prefer “coming with” their family, creating a conjugal family space that includes their same-sex desires without breaking away from their bio-genetic families through *xinghun*. Such a post-oppositional queer politics recognizes the dual inability of Chinese queer subjects—the “dual inability ever to fully separate or fully belong” (Phelan, 1997, p. 66) as I have discussed in Chapter 1, and therefore advocates for a politics that focuses on blending and inclusion rather than separation and exclusion (Phelan, 1997)

That being said, post-oppositional queer politics has its own limits. Chinese queer subjects may still be pushed away from their family network even if they do not confront their families with their same-sex desires. For instance, my interviewee Gao, who had been in *xinghun* for years, told me how his social network had changed with a covert queer life: “In China, people show their concern for your private life. The closer you are, the more likely they will ask about your wife, your children, and how you live. So you avoid all of these, consciously or unconsciously, but your relationships are getting further away.” (在中国，别人比较关心你的私人生活，可能越是要好的，他们越是会问起你的老婆、你的孩子、你的生活状态。所以你会有意无意地逃避这些嘛，但是关系也渐渐地疏远了。) He concluded: “I do not have my next generation, and I do not have much contact with my generation. It feels like the path of my life is getting narrower and narrower, and slowly [you] close yourself up.” (自己没有下一代，这一代的人联系得也不多，感觉人生的路越走越窄，慢慢把自己封闭起来了。) As a metaphor, the contraction of life path indicates a shrinking of resources and support that substantiate the opportunities to queer lives to flourish and thrive. In this case, the post-oppositional *xinghun* that Gao employed did not prevent him from losing some important parts of his

social network, although he managed to maintain his relationship with his parents eventually.

Despite its limitation, non-confrontational *xinghun* offers a third space for some Chinese queer subjects to maximize their life chances in a hostile environment. From a long-term perspective, M. Jacqui Alexander (2005) reminds us, “our oppositional politics has been necessary, but it will never sustain us” (p. 99). Society is a constantly contested terrain, and there is no once-and-for-all solution for our on-going struggles. A post-oppositional queer politics offers an answer to a more sustainable future toward social changes and transformation.

Post-oppositional politics, I argue, is particularly valuable for less privileged queer subjects. Queer theory will lose its critical potential if it “only account[s] for bodies that find no obstacles in their way” (Aiello et al., 2013, p.115). Under the oppositional framework, those who are more privileged with more social resources are more likely to win and survive. Queer subjects who are more marginalized, however, may not be able to afford the cost of a confrontational/oppositional contestation. In fact, they are usually more vulnerable in social struggles, and thus are more likely to be harmed by the consequences of social movements. For instance, queer activists in mainland China observe that the Euro-American confrontational approach is often met with anxiety and critique from local queer communities. This is because they, especially LGBT organizations, are concerned about governmental backlash against local queer communities (Moreno-Tabarez et al., 2014, p. 125). The growing visibility of homosexuality in mainland China comes with greater surveillance, and some people are worried that it is those marginalized individuals within Chinese queer communities who

will have to bear the cost of visibility because they are less protected within current social system (*Queer Lala Times*, 2014). For these reasons, I echo Chevrette (2013) to argue that our research should be grounded in “the needs of marginalized rather than privileged populations” (p. 182).

Taking a post-oppositional approach, as seen in the “coming with” and *xinghun* strategies in my study, allows resource-disparate queer subjects to participate in queer politics, to strategize with the limited resources that they have, and to survive the on-going social struggles toward a queer world making. In fact, my study shows that those less privileged queer individuals, such as lesbian women in China (see Chapter 4), may occupy a more advantageous position in terms of sexual freedom due to the unintelligibility of their queer desires in a patriarchal society. Through the post-oppositional disidentification (Muñoz, 1999) with the home space and with the marriage system, Chinese queer subjects blur the boundary between “us” and “them,” and reorienting the home space and marriage institution becomes possible.

On The Way toward a Queer World

More than ten years ago, communication scholar Yep (2003) posed four theoretical challenges that queer theory faces in our discipline: “questions of race, gender, class, and transnationalism” (p. 41). Today, these four challenges are still relevant to our field, asking for more intersectional and transnational research in the communication discipline. Communication studies as well as queer theory must continue to interrogate the transnational potentiality of embodied queer practices in relationship to different social locations, such as race, gender, class, and many more; and continue to investigate

how they can serve as queer tools to transform the landscapes of our field and our society.

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APPENDIX A
LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Name (pseudonym)	Interview Media	Interview Duration	One-inch margined, single- spaced typed pages of transcription (in Chinese)
Doudou	Wechat (texting)	1 hour 1minutes	9 pages
Norman	Wechat (texting and voicing)	51 minutes	5 pages
Fanlun	Wechat (texting)	35 minutes	4 pages
Ada	Phone	49 minutes	7 pages
Jane	Phone	1 hour 5 minutes	7 pages
Dave	Phone	1 hour 1 minutes	7 pages
Zien	Phone	53 minutes	7 pages
Yaqing	Phone	28 minutes	4 pages
Xiaoye	Phone	1 hour 23 minutes	9 pages
Dream Horse	Phone	1 hour 19 minutes	9 pages
Dee	Phone	1 hour 22 minutes	11 pages
Gao	Phone	47 minutes	8 pages
Macky	Phone	27 minutes	4 pages
	Phone	30 minutes	6 pages
<i>Total</i>		10 hours 4 minutes	97 pages

APPENDIX B

BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF INTERVIEWEES

- Doudou, male, 26-year-old; self-identified *tongxinglian* (同性恋), working for a Fortune 500 company.
- Norman, male, 30-year-old; self-identified *tongzhi* (同志), a professor at a famous university in China.
- Fanlun, male, 31-year-old; self-identified gay; in a *xinghun* and was expecting a child when interviewed.
- Ada, female, 26-year-old; self-identified *lala* (拉拉), seeking a Phd in United States.
- Jane, female, 33-year-old; self-identified *lala* and pansexual, working for a LGBT rights organization and was married to a heterosexual man.
- Dave, male, 33-year-old; self-identified *tongzhi*, working in the financial industry in Singapore.
- Zien, male, 33-year-old; self-identified *tongzhi*; engaged with a *lala*, self-employed designer.
- Yaqing, female, 19-year-old; self-identified *lala*, security officer in the metro system.
- Xiaoye, female, 30-year-old; self-identified *lala*; in a *xinghun* for about one year.
- Dee, female, 32-year-old; self-identified *lala*, civil servant; in a *xinghun* for almost a year.
- Dream Horse, male, 29-year-old; self-identified *tongzhi*, manager; in a *xinghun* for about half a year.

- Gao, male, 35-year-old; self-identified *tongzhi*, working for a public institution; self-identified as in *xinghun* for about six years without a marriage certificate.
- Macky, female, 34-year-old; self-identified *lala*, working in a family business; in a *xinghun* for about five years.

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

On “Coming out”

- What is/will be the most difficult part of “coming out” to your family?
- Have you ever introduced your same-sex partner(s) to your family? Why or why not?
- In the Chinese society, there are some festivals, such as the Mid-Autumn Festival and the Spring Festival (Chinese New Year), when you are supposed to “come home.” Have you ever experienced any tension between “coming home” and your homosexuality?
- Have you and your family ever *talked* about your homosexuality? How did it go? What vocabularies did you and your family use to refer to homosexuality?
- Do you think that being “Chinese” make it more difficult to “come out”? Why or why not? What does it mean to be “Chinese” to you?
- Do you think that Chinese gay men and lesbian should come out to their family?

On Xinghun

- What made you decide to engage in *xinghun*?
- Do you currently have a same-sex partner? How do you maintain your relationship with your same-sex partner while engaging in a *xinghun*?
- Is there a *xinghun* “contract” or agreement between you and your *xinghun* partner? What is it about? How did you negotiate it?
- How does it *feel* like in a *xinghun*?
- What are the responsibilities of your *xinghun*? What are the benefits of it?
- Do you have kids or plan to have kids with your *xinghun* partner? Why or why not?

- Do you ever regret your *xinghun* decision? Why or why not?
- How would you respond to some of the critiques about *xinghun* within Chinese LGBT communities?
- Are there other things that I haven't asked that you would like to add?

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