# Public Desires, Private Subjects:

# Lalas in Shanghai

by

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獻給所有我在上海認識的拉拉朋友

妳們讓我和這個城市——我的出生地——更加親密

也讓我更懂得體諒我的家人

*To all lala women that I have met in Shanghai.*
*It's you who have made the city that has nurtured my childhood more intimate to me, and allowed me to become more understanding to my family.*

**Abstract of thesis entitled:**

Public Desires, Private Subjects: Lalas in Shanghai

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Since the economic reform period (1978 onwards), Shanghai has become one of the most vibrant sites of lala (the local identity for women with same-sex desires) communities in China. During my field visits from 2005 to 2007, I interviewed twenty-five self-identified lalas in Shanghai. One recurring theme that always came up in the interviews is the conflicts between the informants' desire to have same-sex relationship and the familial expectation of them to get married, or for those who have married, the pressure to maintain the heterosexual family.

The newly acquired economic freedom and geographical mobility in the reform era do not automatically translate into a breakaway from family control. The existence of rapidly developing and widely accessible tongzhi communities in both online and offline spaces, together with a paradigmatic change of the official treatment of homosexual subjects in the legal and medical domains, and the increasingly visible and organized involvements of state experts in the new normalization project of the homosexual population in the country, the exposure and discussion of homosexuality and its subjects have never been so public (in spatial and ideological senses) and diverse as compared to the past decades.

Homosexual desire is going more and more public, yet the majority of homosexual population remains to be closeted subjects who are forced to keep their desires and presence as invisible as possible in non-public contexts such as family and more specifically, the heterosexual home space.

In this research, face-to-face in-depth interviews and extensive participant observations were conducted. There are twenty-five major informants, aged from early 20s to mid 40s, and a small number of supplementary ones. They were either Shanghai residents or were active in the city's lala communities.

In this thesis, I will look into the conflict between public inauguration and the private dilemma of lalas in contemporary urban China and the strategies they employed to cope with this conflict. Also, I will theorize lalas' existences in both ideological public and private domains, and the implication of the dominant community politics of "public correctness" to their symbolic existence and survival.

## 論文摘要

改革開放後，上海逐漸成爲中國其中一個擁有日漸壯大的拉拉社群的城市。根據作者於 2005 至 2007 年間於上海進行的田野考察及訪談，在二十五位自我認同爲拉拉的被訪者中，都提及同性情慾及關係和家庭與婚姻之間的衝突，這包括未婚拉拉的結婚壓力，和已婚拉拉如何維持其異性戀婚姻家庭的壓力。

改革開放所帶來的經濟、工作和行動自由，並未能完全令個人逃離家庭的控制。另一方面，中國各地同志社群在網絡和現實的迅速興起，以及法律和醫療系統對同性戀人口作出的重大改變，和來自各領域的專家學者積極提倡的同性戀正面化運動，以理性科學的態度面對並介入同性戀社群，社會對有關議題及人口的關注及討論，同性戀議題無論在空間意義上和公眾討論方面，都出現前所未有的公開性和多元性。同性情慾逐漸進入了公共空間，但眾多的同性戀人群卻仍然被迫處於“櫃內”狀態，尤其在一些非公共的空間如家庭，和實質的家空間中，她／他們仍需隱藏同性情慾及關係。

本研究採用了面對面的深度訪談和長期進行的參與觀察等研究方法，主要被訪者爲生活或活躍於上海的二十五位拉拉，另有少數輔助性的訪問對象。

本文會集中討論當代中國城市中的拉拉，在一個愈來愈關注及認識同性戀議題的社會中，如何處理她們在私空間所遇到的壓制和消聲；她們在公／私領域的生存狀態；以及，當下中國同志社群中提倡的“公領域正確性”對拉拉的處境和社群的影響。

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## Shanghai revisited

Shanghai has long been a vibrant site for both gay men and lesbian women. In the recent decade, lalas (the local term for self-identified lesbian women)[1] have become increasingly visible, first at chatrooms and bulletin boards on the Internet, later in some gay or mixed bars, and more recently in social gatherings, cultural projects and activities organized by local lala working groups in the city. Cyberspace continues to be the most popular meeting place for lalas in the country. The founder of one Shanghai-based local Chinese lesbian website told me in 2005 that her website has more than 45,000 registered members since its inception in 2001. The city has also become the most desired destination for job seekers all over the country. Half of my informants are not Shanghai natives but were working or studying in the city away from their families in other provinces or nearby cities. The anonymity in a big city, the relative freedom to adopt different lifestyles, and the vibrancy of the lesbian and gay community in Shanghai all contribute to the rise of the city as a convergent point for lalas from across the country.

[1] Lala is adapted from the Taiwanese localization of "lesbian". It first appeared as lazi (拉子) in Taiwan, as the transliteration of "les" from "lesbian". When it was borrowed and further localized in China, lala has become the most widely used term. It is a community identity for women who have same-sex desires in China. It is used concurrently with "tongzhi" (同志), an older and Hong Kong-derived identity, in its full or gender specific versions such as nütong (女同, female tongzhi) and nantong (男同, male tongzhi); and "les", an abbreviation and a more informal term for "lesbian". There is contextual difference between the various identity terms. Lala and les are always used in informal or everyday and lesbian-specific contexts, while tongzhi is used in more formal and political occasions where community solidarity is emphasized. All identities are

In the summer of 2005, I started my journey to my birthplace, Shanghai. It is for a research of lalas in the city and also for the re-search of my fading connection with the place where I have spent my childhood. I left Shanghai and settled in Hong Kong at the age of seven. It is a journey during which I found myself often reflecting upon two previously disconnected parts of my life: my childhood experience of living in Shanghai and my adult experience of being a woman attracted to other women. In a city that I was once familiar with but no longer am, I am searching for those common experiences but in another cultural and social landscape. The experiences of being a native Shanghainese and a politically identified lesbian in Hong Kong are closely linked up in this study. As a researcher, this dual-identity positioned me vis-á-vis the informants.

**The research**

During my several field visits from 2005 to 2007, I interviewed twenty-five self-identified lalas in Shanghai. One recurring theme that always came up in the interviews is the conflicts between the informants' desire to have same-sex relationship and the familial expectation of them to get married, or for those who have married, the pressure to maintain the heterosexual family. The pressure of family and marriage has been mentioned in many studies of lesbians and gays in China or in Chinese societies elsewhere (Zhou 2000; Li 2002a, 2002c; Zheng 1997). More than a decade after Li Yinhe's first sociological investigation of the male homosexual population in Beijing, the pressure to marry is still the major challenge of my informants. Although the social context has changed significantly since the 1990s with the further opening up of the economy and labour market

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generally recognized and adopted in local communities across the country.

which resulted in greater personal mobility and the possibility of alternative life choices. Yet the familial grip on one's sexual conformity is not lessened.

In the new decade starting from the year 2000, the first generation born after the implementation of the one child policy in 1979 has about reached the suitable age of marriage. Many of my informants belong to this first generation of the only child in the country. They are taking advantage of the new economic and social developments during the reform period. The newly acquired economic freedom and geographical mobility do not automatically translate into a breakaway from family control. In fact, the pressure to marry as faced by the only child generation can be much more severe, not to mention the negative association of female celibacy in China. The social stigmatisation of single women is not as pronounced as before for women in cities who are economically and professionally privileged. But for those socially unprivileged ones and for those with a family that strongly favours the marriage norm, marriage is not so much a personal choice but an imposed obligation for the sake of one's survival in family and society. The most significant difference in the situation for lesbian and gay populations in China nowadays is the existence of rapidly developing and widely accessible tongzhi communities in both online and offline spaces. Together with a paradigmatic change of the official treatment of homosexual subjects in the legal and medical domains in the reform period, and the increasingly visible and organized involvements of state experts in the new normalization project of the homosexual population in the country, the exposure and discussion of homosexuality and its subjects have never been so public (in spatial and ideological senses) and diverse as compared to past decades. The removal of the ideological obligation of treating homosexual subjects as either perverts or criminals has paved way for more

positive representations in public. The mounting media attention of the topic and the coming out of homosexual subjects in mainstream media after 2000 is reflective of the new enthusiasm of the previously silenced and disregarded topic in the general public. Needless to say, there is a state induced understanding of male homosexuality within a public health and security framework in the age of a heightened awareness of HIV/AIDS in the country. I would say that homosexual desire is going more and more public in the reform period, yet the majority of homosexual population remains to be closeted subjects who are forced to keep their desires and presence as invisible as possible in non-public contexts such as family and more specifically, the heterosexual home space. The community formation has further intensified the discrepancy between public desire and private practice. On the one hand, the normalization project of homosexuality is actively promoted by experts from different authoritative domains, and is working hand in hand with the tongzhi community to call upon a more rights conscious and politically empowering tongzhi subjecthood, while on the other hand, according to my informants, many of them are imprisoned in the family space and are not allowed to enact their desires in the private nor to show their presence in the public.

Familial dismissal and repression of same-sex desires and relationships are always executed through the language of love and harmony with the ultimate aim to maintain the heterosexual order and surface harmony of the family sphere. This has proved to be the most effective boundary policing force to keep deviant subjects in place in Chinese context. The poetics of reticence in Chinese family and society as forcefully theorized in Ding and Liu's (2005) article shows the mechanism of heterosexual policing in Chinese societies. This cultural strategy of

making sensitive issues unspoken and deviant subjects invisible and inaudible contributes directly to the "privatisation" of lala subjects in the realm of family and marriage, despite the gradual opening up of public discussion and visibility of the homosexual population as a distinctive social group. What I mean here for "privatisation" does not refer only to the assignment of homosexual subjects back to the private, as evident in the legal regulation of sexual deviants or deviant sexual activities in most Western countries and Hong Kong as well. The privatisation of lala subjects refers more to the invisibility of them in heterosexual private contexts and their reliance on privatised and invisible, sometimes virtual, spaces within the heteronormative society and family space for their everyday maintenance of homosexual desires and practices. They have to consciously create and negotiate spaces of survival in the heterosexual private spaces. Spaces that they create for their same-sex desires and relationships can be confined only to their bedrooms, or even as small as a drawer or a real closet inside their heterosexual families in which they share with other family members. Or they can be mobile spaces that they connect for themselves on the Internet with the rest of lalas in the country. This virtual mobile space is also a portable one that allows lalas to connect with cyber tongzhi communities strategically. Or lalas can create a new home space or family by choice which is geographically beyond the regulatory network of their heterosexual families. Or they can even create a self-made marriage which consists of a "family for display" and an invisible "family for real" in the case of a cooperative marriage between a lala and a gay man.

Homosexual desires, practices and its association with public health and public security, and homosexual population as a subject for academic research are

publicly recognised in contemporary China. Homosexual subjects are on prime time TV talk shows, in mainstream bookstores, on popular magazines and are increasing accepted by the general public as evidenced in surveys[2] of popular acceptance of homosexuality. This public recognition of homosexuals as a group and as a component part of society, however, has not been immediately translated into a formal recognition of individual subjects in private domains such as families. Homosexual desires and *the* population are going public or becoming a general interest in China, but an individual lala or gay man does not enjoy the same recognition in the so-called private context of family, marriage and other inter-personal relationships. Homosexuality is a public matter in contemporary China. Contrary to the experience of many lesbians and gay men in other urban settings, homosexuality is not "tolerated" behind the private doors. Instead, individual lalas are much severely regulated behind the private family door than they are outside that door. The ways in which they negotiate spaces behind the private door under the powerful rhetoric of family harmony and filial piety and the cultural preference of "silence" as a way of collective well-being is one of the major enquiries of my research.

In this thesis, I will look into the conflict between public inauguration and the private dilemma of lalas in contemporary urban China; and the strategies they employed to cope with this conflict; and lastly, to theorize lala's existence in both ideologically public and private domains, and the implication of dominant community politics, which I term it as the politics of public correctness, to their symbolic existence and survival. The four major areas of enquiry for this thesis are

[2] An Internet survey done by a website in China found that over 70% of respondents (3,977 in total) said they can accept it if their children are homosexuals (quoted from www.cctv.com, November 6, 2007).

as follows,

1. How do lalas negotiate their newly acquired public recognition and identity brought about by the formation of tongzhi communities, changes in official treatments of homosexuality and public discussions with their roles in the heterosexual family and marriage?

2. How do lalas, as an active *and* non-heterosexual female sexual subject, situate themselves in the context of Chinese family and marriage which ideologically denies female sexuality and any non-heterosexual subject positions?

3. What are the political implications of the dominant community belief of seeing public correctness as a way to gain private recognition and eventually public recognition?

4. How do lala's forms of existence within the Chinese family and society enrich the theoretical discussions of the public and private, and the negotiations between them?

**Research methods**

I have carried out a number of field visits to Shanghai from the summer of 2005 to the summer of 2007. The duration of visits ranged from a few days to more than one month. I gained access to many of my interview informants via one prominent community leader who is also a gatekeeper of the community in Shanghai. Other informants were referred by existing informants and from others met through local

community activities. A continual contact with informants was maintained throughout the research period and even after.

Face-to-face in-depth interviews and extensive participant observations were conducted. The interviews were conducted in Mandarin, Shanghainese or Cantonese, according to the language preference and fluency of individual informants. On average, interviews lasted about one to two hours each time. For some of the informants, a second interview was conducted to gather updated developments of their lives and to follow up on topics that were unfinished in the first meeting. In a few cases, I interviewed couples together. Sometimes it was because the couple approached me together or they were referred to me as a unit. In such case, they usually expected me to interview them together. The other time I did couple interviews because I wanted to invite discussions between them on topics that were related to their relationship. I also carried out individual interviews of each partner in advance to or after the couple interview for more personal or private information.

For participant observation, I attended major events and social gatherings that have been organized both in Shanghai and other cities in China. These gatherings include lesbian parties, salon gatherings, community working group meetings, a university lecture on homosexuality, regional conferences and casual social gatherings. I lived with a lala family of four during one longer visit. I have also been involved in a community project of the Shanghai Nüai Working Group during the research period when they started to work on the oral history of lalas in Shanghai. I was the instructor of their volunteer training workshop and stayed as a consultant of the project.

In order to obtain a wider picture of the lala community and the situations of individual lalas in Shanghai, I also consulted other sources of information that were available in the field. I have collected and studied a wide variety of texts that are produced by local tongzhi groups, medical or legal experts, and tongzhi websites in China. They include cultural projects such as lesbian oral histories and magazines, newsletters published by medical and legal experts and different kinds of community information for tongzhis in China. Information and stories gathered from these sources not only enhanced my understanding of the pressing issues and current concerns of the lesbian and gay communities in China, but also supplemented and enriched my findings and analysis.

**Research positions**

I first presented myself to my informants as a research student from the Chinese University of Hong Kong and also a member of the lesbian community in Hong Kong. I was referred to one major community leader by lesbian activists both in Hong Kong and the overseas. I chose to rely on this particular leader as a significant source of information and referral due to her gatekeeper role in the Shanghai lala community. Common in feminist ethnographies and participatory research on minority populations, a gatekeeper is usually a key source to open doors for other leads. The primary role I took up in the interaction with my informants is a researcher with lesbian identification. I also revealed to informants of my Shanghai native background and the fact that I can speak the local dialect. Therefore, to native Shanghai informants, we share the same geo-cultural identity. The similarities in regional identity and spoken languages with my informants

have proved to be productive in our interactions. The common identity of being a lala or lesbian is crucial in establishing a mutually trustful relationship between the researcher and the informants. This is evident in the interview data as there were times where I conducted more than one interview with an informant. Some informants were more open to discuss further details on their intimate matters in their daily lives after first interviews were finished.

It is both my major political *and* academic motivations to contribute ethnographic details and field-derived analysis of lesbian individuals and communities in urban China. In order to obtain in-depth ethnographical information, I need to first build up mutually trustful rapport with informants. In this aspect, my gender and sexual identifications with my informants and my language ability proved to be productive in rapport building. They also allowed me to gain an easier entry into the field.

I am also aware of the differences between myself and the informants. The differences between us arise mainly from our different geo-cultural backgrounds. For example, the different accents we speak and different terms we use in conversations always remind us of the fact that we come from two linguistically shared but culturally varied societies. Visible differences between a researcher and her informants such as gender, race, age, class, sexual identity or in my case, geo-cultural background, can be challenging to deal with especially during the early stage of rapport building. Being an insider and an outsider at the same time, my strategy is to avoid a false expectation from the informants over my knowledge of their society. I always made it clear at the first time we met that I have left mainland China when I was a child and therefore I do not possess full

knowledge of the society they live. The outsider position allowed me to probe further into topics that cultural insiders will take it for granted. One question that I always asked by making use of this outsider position is why marriage is so important to my informants. By doing so, I can obtain more information and also a more reflective response from informants over topics they regard as a common "fact" with no need to explain.

The methodological concerns of my research position are about the dual role of being an insider and outsider to my informants. I will locate my discussion in the tradition of feminist qualitative research. The distinctive features of feminist methodology include an egalitarian research process that values the reciprocality and intersubjectivity between the researcher and the researched (Stacey 1988, p.22). Yet the intimate knowledge that is produced from intensive participatory field research also triggers many questions. Among them, the insider and outsider roles of researchers are much discussed in the feminist research tradition. For an insider researcher, which means she is studying cultures similar to her own, she has to engage in a constant effort to "defamiliarize" herself from cultural practices or values that are familiar to her. While being an outsider, a researcher needs to deal with the ignorance at the beginning and later the careful keeping of a sense of strangeness that might be worn off during the research process (Acker 2000, p.194). It is more complicated when a researcher is both the insider and outsider to her researched subjects, which is the case in my research. I have to deal with the challenges of both positions. My strategy is to carry out cross-references between my two positions. For example, I would foreground the geo-cultural differences between myself and my informants when shared experiences such as coming out to parents were told. I would try to defamiliarize their accounts by comparing

them with similar experiences in other societies. From there it is possible to find the cultural specifities of lalas in Shanghai. On the other hand, I am also a cultural outsider to my informants regarding our regional backgrounds. In order not to let the cultural gap between us become detrimental to our interactions, I have made a conscious effort to study the local society before and during my field research. Taking advantage of the fact that I have local kin connections in Shanghai, I took every chance of meeting local people in an attempt to get as much insider knowledge of Shanghai as possible. For example, I have learnt much about the marriage norms and culture of Shanghai by talking to local people in different social gatherings I joined during my research. Also, writing field notes is another effective way to familiarize myself with local knowledge and to refresh my insights as an outsider. This technique is especially helpful for long-term field study. Insights, comments and stories from sources other than my informants can also enrich and triangulate my research findings.

**The informants**

There are twenty-five major informants in this research and a number of supplementary ones whom I have carried out either in-depth or casual interviews for additional or specific information about the local lala community. The ages of the informants range from early twenties to mid forties. They come from different regions of the country. More than half of them are Shanghai natives. All of them are of urban origin. They were women who were in various degrees involved in the local lala communities in Shanghai. All of them are citizens of China and are ethnic Chinese. Nearly all of them had white-collar jobs (or have had white-collar jobs but were studying for a second degree at the time of interview), or

self-employed. Most of them lived and worked in Shanghai during the time of interview. A few of them were staying temporarily (for instance, studying a full-time course) and a few worked in nearby cities and came to Shanghai regularly either for home visits or community gatherings. Five of them were in heterosexual marriages and two had children. One of the five married informants was in a cooperative marriage with a gay partner. Two of the twenty-five informants were about to have cooperative marriage at the time of interview.

I have focused my choice of informants on those who were either employed or self-employed during the time of interview, and at the same time, to expand their age range as wide as possible. This is because I want to recruit informants with a certain degree of exposure in public at work. I want to investigate into in the aspect of social recognition and their existence in the so-called public domains. Therefore, I did not actively search for informants who have never been employed or who have never been involved in the labour market. In this case, I did not include school age lalas in this research. I believe that the problems that young women are facing in primary, secondary or tertiary institutions concerning their same-sex desires are categorically different, given the different economic and social positions they occupy. However, despite of my conscious effort to limit my informants to a certain group, it proved that women in their twenties with post-secondary or university education and with a white-collar occupation are the most visible group in the local offline lala communities. For those who were most active in community building, such as the voluntary hotline workers or organizing members of local working groups, they were predominately women from this age, educational and occupational group. Their regionalities might vary but all of them have urban residency. It is significantly much more difficult to find informants

who are over thirty and very unlikely to see any women over forty in public lala gatherings. There will be glimpses of women from a senior age group in some lesbian parties in downtown Shanghai. I have met a group of more mature women in one lesbian party held in an upscale bar in the downtown area. I was told by other informants that there are more private and invisible groups of affluent mature lalas with professional backgrounds in Shanghai. They meet each other in private gatherings and hence hard to be seen publicly. Their class and job nature demand a more discreet social style. I was unable to get in touch with any of them in my research.

It is not difficult to find that women who are the most visible and accessible in the lala community in Shanghai share some common demographic characteristics. This is also reflected in the profiles of informants in this research. They were mostly in their early to late twenties. Less than ten of them were over thirty. They are economically independent with a university or at least post-secondary education background. They either have a white-collar job, mostly in private corporations, or are self-employed. They are predominantly urban residents. Many of them are away from their home cities and families and currently work in Shanghai. Most of them have an independent living space or can afford to have it if there is a need. Most of them are unmarried. They are a group of women who benefit most from the economic reform and social changes that occurred in the recent two decades. The social, economic and sexual freedoms they can enjoy now are privileged ones that cannot be generalized on women from other social and economic groups. The predominance of women with these demographic characteristics in this research is reflective of the most visible and accessible group in the lala community in Shanghai. Their self narratives, strategies of

day-to-day survival, the difficulties that they are facing and the politics they believe in are only a limited version of the community concerned. It does reflect the life struggles and politics of lalas coming from other socio-economic backgrounds in the urban areas. Their voices, though dominant and powerful, can never be taken as the only ones.

**Table I: Informants' Profiles**

| | Name | Age | Education | Occupation | Community Involvement | Relation -ship Status | Residence (Natal/ Current) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Qi | 29 | University | Self-employed | Voluntary worker (1) | SWG (LD) | South/ Shanghai |
| 2 | Xiao | 25 | University | White Collar | Voluntary worker | SWG* | West/ Shanghai |
| 3 | Shu | Mid 20s | University | White Collar | Voluntary worker | SWG* | South/ Shanghai |
| 4 | Ya | 24 | University | White Collar | Voluntary worker | SWG* | Shanghai |
| 5 | Long | 25 | University | White Collar | Social member (2) | S | South/ Ningbo |
| 6 | May | Mid 20s | University | White Collar | Voluntary worker | SWG (LD) | North/ Shanghai |
| 7 | Chris | 30 | University | White Collar | Social member | SWG | Shanghai |
| 8 | Mu | 33 | University | White Collar (Manager) | Social member | MWMG (LD)@ | Shanghai |
| 9 | Ying | Early 30s | University | Student (Second Degree) | Social member | MWG | North/ Shanghai |
| 10 | Coral | Mid 30s | University | Student | Social member | MWG * | North/ Shanghai |
| 11 | Fish | Mid 30s | University | White Collar | Social member | SWMG * | Shanghai |
| 12 | Liu | 33 | Post Sec | White Collar | Social member | S | Shanghai |
| 13 | Matty | 24 | University | White Collar | Social member | SWG | Shanghai |
| 14 | Jenny | 25 | University | Teacher | Social member | SWG | Shanghai |
| 15 | Qing | 27 | University | White Collar | Social member | SWG * | Shanghai |
| 16 | Sue | Mid 40s | Secondary | White Collar | Social member | SWG * | Shanghai |
| 17 | Wei | Mid 20s | University | White Collar | Social member | SWG * | Shanghai |
| 18 | Jay | Early 30s | University | Self employed | Social member | SWG * | Shanghai |
| 19 | Grace | Early 30s | University | Self employed | Social member | SWG * | Shanghai |
| 20 | Heng | 36 | Secondary | Self employed | Social member | SWG | Shanghai |
| 21 | Bai | 23 | Master | White Collar | Social member | SWG * | Shanghai |
| 22 | Moon | 22 | University | Student (with work experience) | Social member | SWG * | Shanghai |
| 23 | Ling | 27 | University | White Collar | Social member | MWG | Shanghai |
| 24 | Tan | 27 | University | Teacher | Social member | SWG | Shanghai |
| 25 | Xu | Mid 20s | Secondary | Self employed | Party organizer | SWG | North/ Shanghai |

* All names used are pseudonyms.

* Informants' personal information such as residence of natal family and occupation are altered for the sake of confidentiality.

S: Single

SWG: Single with girlfriend

SWMG: Single with married girlfriend

M: Married

MWG: Married with girlfriend

MWMG: Married with married girlfriend

LD: Long Distance Relationship

*: Live-in Relationship

@: With Kid(s)

(1) Voluntary workers refer to informants who have joined lala community groups in Shanghai and worked for it.

(2) Social members refer to informants who are part of the lala community in Shanghai but only join as participants of social activities.

## The thesis

In this thesis, I will demonstrate the intensified conflict of public inauguration and private silencing of homosexual subjects during the reform period in urban China. Also I will illustrate the individual strategies and community politics that are developed in response to this conflict. I propose that the family institution has become the most effective gatekeeper of the heterosexual norms in a social context where the state has retreated from the direct intervention of citizens' private life. In the following chapter, I will explain the framework I use to discuss the public and private existence of lalas in China. Chapter 3, "Sexing Shanghai", is a sketch of the development of lala community in Shanghai, the rise of exclusive same-sex lifestyle in the city in recent years and its impact on the community and identity formation of lalas. Chapter 4, "The Public Homosexual" traces the discursive formation and transformation of the homosexual subject in public domains. Major authoritative discourses of homosexuality in the state's expert

system will be reviewed. In Chapter 5, "The Private Dilemma", I will demonstrate how the notions of familial silencing and erasure affect lalas in the heterosexual family space, and how the family has enacted this silencing through a day-to-day intimate surveillance and a language of love and care. In Chapter 6, "Negotiating the Public and the Private", I will discuss the strategies of lalas, both married and unmarried in coping with the pressure of marriage. In Chapter 7, "The Politics of Public Correctness", I will critically examine the politics of public correctness in the tongzhi community and its impact on the social and symbolic existence of lalas. The last chapter will be a concluding attempt to analyse the relationship between space and existence, and the implication of the reinforcement of lala subjectivity to dominant forms of family and marriage in urban China.

> "Naturalizing one's own heterosexuality means imposing one's own inability to see him or herself as Other on one's surroundings. Failing to notice your own difference as heterosexual is an act with significance. It leads to the heterosexing of space." (Nancy Duncan 1996, p. 138)

## Public/ private

The division of "nei", "wai" and "public", "private" in everyday life and as a metaphorical understanding of human existence in general have endured in both Chinese and Western histories respectively. The two pairs of concept have different historical and cultural trajectories and their meanings are highly dependent on specific cultural contexts and societies. Yet the regulatory effects they produce and imposed on the spatial order of everyday life, and on the hierarchy of visibility for different activities and subjects in society are similar in nature. The principle of "nei" (內, which literally refers to the "inside" or the private, invisible part of a house or a society) and "wai" (外, which literally refers to the "outside" or the public, visible part of a house or a society) has long been a central regulatory mechanism to keep women in place with inferior gender positions in the Confucian social order, and to keep certain activities and subjects out of sight in the domains that belong to the "wai". It has persisted in contemporary Chinese psyche as a repressive force against women's participation in public or extra-familial domains and as a cultural rule to regulate personal and private lives. The conceptualization of public and private has a long tradition in Western philosophical thought and has been vigorously criticized by both feminist

and queer scholars (Benhabib 1998; Duncan 1996; Eley 1992; Fraser 1990; Ingram, Bouthillette and Retter 1997; Landes 1995, 1998; Munt 1998; Ortner 1998; Ryan 1992; Valentine, 1996, 2000). In this chapter, I will first outline the Western theorization of public and private including feminist and queer revisions of the public/ private divide. The focus of this chapter will be put on the analysis of public/ private in the context of contemporary urban China and how they have affected the lives of non-normative sexual subjects, such as homosexuals, in the reform era China (from 1978 onwards). I will use a framework of four spaces, namely, the heterosexual public and private, the homosexual public and private to theorize the everyday existence and spatial negotiations of lalas in urban China.

The public/ private dichotomy has a long history in Western philosophical, political and legal thoughts. John B. Thompson (1995) suggests an approach to understand the history of Western theorization of public and private in two ways,

1. "the dichotomy has to do with the relation between, on the one hand, the domain of institutionalized political power which was increasingly vested in the hands of a sovereign state and, on the other hand, the domains of economic activity and personal relations which fell outside direct political control."(p.121)

2. "'public' means 'open' or 'available to the public'. What is public, in this sense, is what is visible or observable, what is performed in front of spectators, what is open for all or many to see or hear or hear about. What is private, by contrast, is what is hidden from view, what is said or done in privacy or secrecy or among a restricted circle of people. In this sense, the public-private dichotomy has to do with *publicness versus privacy*, with *openness versus secrecy*, with *visibility versus invisibility*. A public act is a visible act, performed openly so that anyone can see; a private act is invisible, an act performed secretly and behind closed doors." (p.123)

The first sense of public/ private demarcates at least two distinctive domains that are defined by the degree of state involvement. The private domain is to a large extent excluded from direct state intervention. It consists of private economic activities and personal or familial relations. The public domain is largely state owned and operated with public interests as its central concern. In a broader sense, public and private in this understanding can be referred to the distinction between the state and the civil society where the latter is understood as "a sphere of private individuals, organizations and classes which are regulated by civil law"(Ibid., p.121).

The second sense of public/ private divide centres at the differences embedded within the visibility and invisibility of acts performed. Public refers to acts or spaces that are "available to the public" and are visible to all. While private is associated with privacy, secrecy, limited visibility or invisibility. This understanding is reflective of the legal treatment of socially unapproved sexual practices in many contemporary societies. Those practices are barred from the public by law and are only allowed to be performed behind closed doors or in secrecy.

The modern Western understanding of the public/ private divide owes much to Jürgen Habermas's conceptualization of the public sphere in his 1962 book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (English translation came out in 1989). The rise of the "bourgeois public spheres" in the late 17$^{th}$ and 18$^{th}$ centuries Europe made possible of "private persons" engaging as a public in the discussions of common concerns. Universal accessibility and rationality are two principles that constitute

Habermas's ideal public sphere. Discussions in those public spheres led to the formation of public opinions that are independent of the state. Nancy Fraser (1990) points out that Habermas's public sphere allows us to distinguish between "the state, the official-economy of paid employment, and arenas of public discourse" (p.57).

> "It [*Habermas's public sphere*] designates a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction. This arena is conceptually distinct from the state; it [*sic*] a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state. The public sphere in Habermas's sense is also conceptually distinct from the official-economy; it is not an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive relations, a theater for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and selling." (p.57)

Public sphere in Habermas's theorization is more a discursive space or production site than a material space. It acts as a discursively independent site outside of the state and the system of market economy. However, the principles of universality and rationality of Habermas's idealized liberal public sphere are two of the major areas that have been most critically revisited by feminist, and later queer scholars. Among all shortcomings of the Habermas model, gender, class and racial exclusions have been most critically examined by feminist scholars. The male-centred and elitist compositions of Habermas ideal model of liberal public sphere contradict to its principle of public accessibility. The exclusions along the gender, class and racial lines also hinder Habermas to recognize other "non-liberal, non-bourgeois, competing public spheres" (Fraser, 1990). It is evident that other forms of public sphere with different gender and class compositions did exist

alongside the liberal version (Ryan 1992; Eley 1992).

**Feminist and queer challenges**

Public and private are not always self-evident categories with clear spatial and discursive boundaries. They are contextually produced and operated. They "also describe social contexts, kinds of feeling, and genres of language" (Warner 2002, p.27). Furthermore, the public and private divide is never a neutral one without any order of hierarchies. The public that is theorized as open to all is always skewed only to men in cultures that assign men to a public category. It is one of the major struggles within feminist movements in the West. Similarly, the gendered divide of public and private is also one of the issues being tackled in China. As Carol Pateman (1989) puts, "the dichotomy between the private and the public is central to almost two centuries of feminist writing and political struggle; it is, ultimately, what the feminist movement is about" (p.118). Indeed, feminist movements and gay and lesbian movements as well are movements that foreground private issues, bodies and lives in the public. They are actually, as Michael Warner (2002) claims, "public movements contesting the most private and intimate matters." (p.32). It is the public relevance of private lives that is at the centre stage of feminist and queer struggles to challenge the very divide.

Feminist and queer scholars contribute to the theorization of public/ private in two important directions. First they criticize the public/ private dichotomy as a highly gendered and sexualized concept (Cohen 1995; Duncan 1996; Fleming 1995; Fraser 1990, 1995; Ortner 1998; Pateman 1989; Rosaldo 2002). The assignment of men to the public sphere and women to the private domain as evident in many

patriarchal cultures hinders women from participating fully in activities that are performed in or categorized to be in the public sphere, and prevents women from gaining public recognition of their rights and endeavours. Joan B. Landes' (1995) criticism of Habermas' notion of public sphere, rationality and universality is representative of a feminist response to the public/ private divide,

> "... the structural division between the public sphere, on the one hand, and the market and the family, on the other, meant that a whole range of concerns came to be labeled as private and treated as improper subjects for public debate. Habermas overlooks the strong association of women's discourse and their interests with 'particularity,' and conversely the alignment of masculine speech with truth, objectivity, and reason. Thus, he misses the masquerade through which the (male) particular was able to posture behind the veil of the universal." (p.97-98)

Furthermore, the bourgeois model of rationality or rational-critical discussion is irrelevant to movements of gender and sexuality where embodied identities and experiences constitute the political core of those movements. The requirement for one to detach from her/his embodied identities and experiences so as to qualify for entering the public is repressive to marginal groups such as women, lesbians, gay men and other gender and sexual minorities. In other words, it is practically impossible and politically repressive for gender and sexual minorities to participate in a public that the very entry entails a detachment or disguise of their inner and private selves. Such kind of publicness actually deprives gender and sexual minorities any access to a real notion of publicness and even privacy. Warner (2002) has a very insightful discussion of the situation of lesbians and gay men under the rational public and protected private model,

> "In such a regime of sexual domination, publicness will feel like exposure, and privacy will feel like the closet. The closet may seem to be a kind of protection. Indeed, the feeling of protection is one of the hallmarks of modern privacy. But in fact the closet is riddled with fear and shame. So is publicity under the conditions of the closet. Being publicly known as homosexual is never the same as being publicly known as heterosexual; the latter always goes without saying and troubles nothing, whereas the former carries echoes of pathologized visibility. It is perfectly meaningless to 'come out' as heterosexual. So it is not true, as common wisdom would have it, that homosexuals live private lives without a secure public identity. They have neither privacy *nor* publicness, in these normative senses of the terms." (p.52-53)

The public/ private divide naturalizes heterosexuality as the sole publicly recognized intimate relationship and restricts other socially unrecognized practices and relationships including homosexuality to the invisible domain. Furthermore, feminist scholar Nancy Duncan (1996) criticizes the public/ private distinction that is used to legitimize gender and sexual oppressions,

> "The public/ private dichotomy (both the political and spatial dimensions) is frequently employed to construct, control, discipline, confine, exclude and suppress gender and sexual difference preserving traditional patriarchal and heterosexist power structure." (p.128)

The association of the private with family, intimacy, sexuality and privacy, invisibility disables any open discussion and political intervention of violence and oppressions that happen in the private sphere.

**Queer studies and lesbian spaces**

The assignment of non-normative sexual practices and subjects to the invisible

private has the effect of removing all those practices and subjects from the domain of public recognition. The male-biased and heterosexual-centred understanding of public/ private is also challenged by queer scholars from a perspective of space. The studies of queer space, or to be more specific, the lesbian and gay spaces have informed my conceptualization of the spatial existences and politics of lalas. Queer space, as defined by Jean-Ulrick Désert (1997) in his article "Queer Space", is "an activated zone made proprietary by the occupant or *flâneur*, the wanderer. It is at once private and public. Our cities, our neighbourhoods, our homes are loosely defined territories inscribed not merely by the laws of proprietary ownership but by implicit and shifting inflections of presence, conspicuous or otherwise." (p.21) Queer space is a kind of mobile space that is actualized by its occupants. The notion further destabilizes the boundary of public/ private. Also, its theoretical contribution lies at the possibility to explore various spatial politics that marginal beings used to create and transform spaces, and the possibility of multiplying publics and privates. The discussion of lesbian spaces emerges out of the need to highlight heteronormativity within spaces and to name differences from gay-identified sites. Feminist geographer Gill Valentine (1995, 1996, 1997, 2000) has studied extensively on lesbian everyday spaces and the heterosexing of public and private spaces in Western societies. Valentine questions heteronormativity on the "heterosexual street" and puts forth a suggestion in "(re)negotiations" of spaces (Valentine 1996, p.146). In positioning the street as both a public and an everyday space, Valentine questioned "repetitive performances of hegemonic asymmetrical gender identities and heterosexual desires" on the street (ibid., p.150). Instead, she called for our attention to critically examine disruptive performances on the street that will provide clues on lesbian existence. Both public and private spaces such as streets and homes are

always naturalized as heterosexual spaces. Lesbians have to constantly negotiate with the spatial rules of different spaces to survive and to reclaim their gender and sexual identities. The naturalization of heterosexuality in both public and private spaces keeps unrecognised subjects in place and forbids them from entering the realm of visibility. The divide of public and private in the context of gender and sexuality is also a moralized one, as theorized by Sally R. Munt (1998) on lesbian and space,

> "Spaces are not only gendered, and sexed, they are also moralized. Spatial boundaries are moral boundaries which expel the abject, due to the perception of difference as defilement. Thus we are constrained by a subjectivity A that repels not-A. Conversely, definition is also accorded by mutual denial, by asserting the not-A. This routine abhorrence of ambiguity occurs in the two spaces A and not-A. Selves are formed in the erection of boundaries; individuation is a consequence of this manoeuvre. Maintaining the purity of the self involves the splitting off of 'good' and 'bad' objects, an anxiety based on the idea of self as an essence and loss of self as a defilement." (p.166)

The public/ private divide does not only exclude women from public recognition, excuses violence and oppression that happen in the private domains, but also acts as a rationale to police the boundary of what counts as normal and abnormal in both public and private spaces.

Elspeth Probyn alerts us to lesbian subjectivities that contribute to a reconfiguration of spaces and recognition of lesbian sexual desires in public (Probyn 1995). Probyn continues to discuss how "the relational movements of one lesbian body to another" can prompt for an urgent examination on the sexual dimension within spaces (Probyn 1995, p.81). In other words, lesbian identity

constructions within physical spaces are constantly being formed, molded to fit, temporarily dismantled and reconstructed again. The processes do not need to take place in lesbian-identified spaces, instead everyday spaces are also used by lesbians to conduct such performative exercises. Similarly, Elizabeth Grosz raises the importance of how a lesbian body by interaction with others in different spaces will form its own bodily identification through others inhabiting such spaces and in return, have a simultaneous effect on others as well (Grosz 1995). Sally R. Munt in her usage of "the lesbian flaneur" provides an urban imagination of a lesbian woman traversing through street intersections in the city, entering mazes only to emerge temporarily, then to continue on her journey possibly masquerading as a male in between outings (Munt 1998, p.48). Munt concludes,

> "Lesbian identity is constructed in the temporal and linguistic mobilization of space, as we move through space we imprint utopian and dystopian moments upon urban life. Our bodies are vital signs of this temporality and intersubjective location. In an instant, a freeze-frame, a lesbian is occupying space as it occupies her" (Ibid.).

Furthermore, the urban city itself poses a fertile site for lesbians to connect with others, to form communities, to redefine kinship relations and to define their sexual identities. Elizabeth Grosz emphasizes how the city manages to contribute to a body's "cultural saturation" through an overwhelming bombardment of mass media messages, various "representational systems" and multiple art forms (Grosz 2003, p.511).

Queer studies in recent years witnessed a proliferation of queer Asian scholarships. There is a conscious effort of queer scholars to decentre Western models of eroticism or political activism and to recognize the cultural and historical

specificity of Asian forms of gender and sexual expressions and identifications. Chris Berry calls for a more culturally specific understanding of Asian forms of eroticism and also an understanding of the Anglo-American models not as universal ones (Berry 2001, p.213). Peter Jackson echoes similar political stance. Talking about Asian erotic identities, as a queer scholar from the West, he stresses that,

> "Analyses of gay and lesbian Asia present fundamental challenges to Western-centred theories of sexuality. [...] The expansion of Western-based knowledge to incorporate historical and contemporary forms of Asian erotic diversity will decentre many aspects of Eurocentric theory, forcing us to see Western eroticisms not as *the* model but as one set of historically specific forms beside many others." (Jackson 2001, p.7)

One of the most pioneering and important publications in Asian queer studies is the book *Mobile Cultures: New Media in Queer Asia* published in 2003 with Chris Berry, Fran Martin and Audrey Yue as editors. The anthology is a timely publication of this emerging field in queer studies. It catches the historical moment when information has "sparked a revolution, transforming lives and lifestyles... in a region that is notorious for the regulation of both information and sexual conduct." (p.1). The collection investigates the effects of new media technology on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities in specific cultural contexts in different Asian cities. It demonstrates how "global queering", the much talked about phenomenon and issue in recent years, happens in Asian contexts and the interactions between global and local in this process of cultural exchange. Culturally specific grounded research of Asian gender and sexual cultures is a new direction of queer studies. It contributes not only to the proliferation of Asian queer studies but also the growing number of Asia-based

queer scholars.

**The fluidity and instability of public/private boundaries**

The second critical revision that feminism and queer theory contributed to the theorization of public and private is by questioning the validity of such a divide. Private matters are always heavily regulated by public law and public domains are also deeply affected by changes that are happening in the private spheres, such as the case with public figures being tied up with personal connections from private networks. In fact, private bodies and activities can never be freed from public scrutiny in contemporary societies. One's sexual practices and gendered body, for instance, are heavily regulated by the public law and social consensus that have the power to define the boundary of what counts as proper and improper. The cultural assignment of everyday life, of different activities and even of different gendered and sexual beings to the domains of public and private is understood to be solely as a way to maintain the gender and sexual hierarchies in patriarchal and heterosexual societies.

Taking gender and sexuality into consideration, feminist and queer scholars question the dominance and privilege of any single public or private sphere. The notion of "counterpublics" as discussed by Michael Warner (2002) is useful to understand the nature of "new publics" that are formed by lesbians and gay men or other minority groups who are excluded by the normative public. In Warner's definition, counterpublics are "defined by their tension with a larger public" and with participants "marked off from persons or citizens in general" (p.56). They have their own rules of discussion that are different from normative publics. Most

importantly, a counterpublic has "an awareness of its subordinate status". It remains in a critical relation to authority and generates alternative discourses for circulation. Warner makes a difference between counterpublics and "subaltern publics" as raised by Nancy Fraser (1990) in her discussion of public sphere. To Warner, it is not necessary that all counterpublics are composed of people that belong to the subaltern groups. Youth sub-cultural groups and artist groups can also form counterpublics. What distinguishes a counterpublic from a subaltern public is its awareness of its subordinate status, its conscious distancing from the dominant public and its circulation of discourses "that in other contexts would be regarded with hostility or with a sense of indecorousness" (Warner 2002, p.119). Moreover, a counterpublic is able to transform private lives by creating new identities, new kinds of body and new ways of being. Warner offers the transformative power of counterpublics of sex and gender as an example.

> "Counterpublics of sex and gender are teaching us to recognize in newer and deeper ways how privacy is publicly constructed. They are testing our understanding of how private life can be made publicly relevant. And they are elaborating not only new shared worlds and critical languages but also new privacies, new individuals, new bodies, new intimacies, and new citizenships." (p.62)

Private lives and individuals can be informed and transformed by a counterpublic. This is very true when we apply this concept to the newly developed lesbian and gay cyber communities in China. Serving as a counterpublic to the dominant heterosexual one, it has directly given rise to the formation of identity-based communities of lesbians and gay men in the country.

The multiplicity of public spheres is extensively discussed by Ken Plummer (2003)

in his work on intimate citizenship. Drawing on Fraser's criticism of Habermas's negligence of other publics alongside the bourgeois public, Plummer goes on to outline a number of new publics or counterpublics about intimate debates in contemporary societies. He divides those publics on intimate issues into the interactive and noninteractive ones. The interactive public spheres "allow for direct and personal communication around public issues" and they can be found "in the active debates of social movements, in conferences, in schools and universities, and maybe more problematically on Web sites." The noninteractive public spheres can be found "in books, in the press, and on television programs – are available to the general public and they confine argument and debate within themselves: theirs is a one-way path of communication." (Plummer 2003, p.74). The interactive public spheres as described by Plummer have recently emerged as a kind of mobile public sphere without a fixed physical location or medium. Plummer cites the gay and lesbian public spheres around the world as an example of the plurality of publics. From different gay specific websites, hobby groups, TV talk shows, self-help groups, rallying events like Mardi Gras in Sydney, Australia, to lesbian and gay studies networks, journals, conferences (Ibid., p.78), the gay and lesbian public spheres challenge the former understanding of public/ private and heterosexual/ homosexual divides. According to Plummer, the development of the gay and lesbian public spheres can shift the boundary of society as "the visible culture of gayness has led to increasing recognition", "increasing equality", "the emergence of more gay institutions" and "has created a language in which gay rights and gay citizenship can be discussed" (ibid., p.80).

The new gay and lesbian public spheres and the interactive publics that are discussed by Plummer are also witnessed in contemporary China. The popularity

of the Internet has contributed to the emergence of the first large-scale interactive lesbian and gay public in China. The rising number of organized social gatherings, regional and national lesbian and gay conferences, and networking with lesbians and gays worldwide have constituted a number of ever expanding "mobile publics" that work to shift the sexual boundary of society.

**Internet and social networking**

The formation of lesbian and gay communities and the increasing circulation of information, texts and representations of homosexuality in public are closely related with the diffusion of the Internet after the mid-1990s. The number of Internet users has been growing in geometrical rate in the past decade in China. According to the "22nd Statistical Survey Report on the Internet Development in China" conducted by the official China Internet Network Information Centre, China has 253 million Internet users by the end of June 2008. By estimation of the amount of netizens in the United States, this official survey claims that the size of the netizens in China has now leaped to the first place in the world. In 2005 when I first started research, according to a survey[3] done by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences on Internet users in five cities in China (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu and Changsha), within the age group of 16-24, 87.8% is Internet users and within the age group of 25-34, 62.2% is Internet users. The finding is reflective of the Internet use of my informants. Informants in this research come mainly from these two age groups and nearly all of them are

[3] "2005 China Internet Usage Survey Report by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences", quoted from Liu Huaqing (2005) *Tianya Virtual Community: Text-based Social Interactions on the Internet* (天涯虛擬社區：互聯網上基於文本的社會互動研究), Beijing: Minzhu Chubanshe, p.33-34.

Internet users at the time of the interviews. According to the same survey, close to 90% netizens have finished college education and 67.7% have a monthly income of or over RMB 2,000. Even those who are unemployed or in between jobs account for 24.2% of the entire netizen population. The survey shows that by year 2005, the Internet has already been widely accessed by the younger generation, the high-income-high-education group and has even penetrated into the low-income groups in China's major cities.

The rapid development and diffusion of information technology in China has sparked a growing body of academic studies on the social, cultural, economic and political impacts of the Internet in China. Among them, the political impact of the Internet is one of the most widely studied areas. What is the role of the Internet in the political democratization in China? How far can it achieve this goal? Or can it really be a liberalizing force at all? Political resistances via the Internet have been widely discussed. Kluver and Qiu (2003) in their article "China, the Internet and Democracy" have outlined three major lines of arguments of academic discussions on the democratizing effect of the Internet in China. The most prominent line of argument focuses on the aspect of government control. Despite the growing accessibility of information technology and the lowering of connection cost, some argue that the presence of the Internet in China can lead to the strengthening of state control and poses a greater threat to ordinary Chinese citizens. Zhao Yuezhi (2008) provides a comprehensive discussion by outlining of the forms of state control in the digital age. There are victories of resistance via cyberspace and at the same time, measures of repression carried out by the Chinese government to control information flow and dissident activities are always present. The second line of critique of the Internet lies at its commercial nature. Commercialization

will displace the anonymity and free access of the cyberspace. In fact, the problem of digital gap in China poses another central concern for communication researchers. Bu Wei (2004) investigates the relationship of women and the Internet in China by drawing upon a nationwide survey conducted in 2001 by her and Guo Liang. They found that in five major cities in China, namely, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu and Changsha, existed a significant disparity between male and female access to the Internet. Although the gender disparity of Internet use has been diminishing since 1997, by July 2001, a significant gender gap still existed among female and male users. There were 38.7% and 61.3% female and male users respectively in 2001. In addition to the gender digital gap, from the same survey, there were also observable gaps within factors of age, educational level, marital status, occupation and family income between users and non-users. According to the study, a typical Internet user in 2001 is "male, young, well-paid, well-educated, and single; in terms of employment, the majority are [*sic*] either on-campus students, officials, or managers" (Wei 2004, p.190). While most Internet studies of China focus on cities, we cannot overlook the rural-urban disparity of Internet use. The third line of inquiry Internet studies of China as outlined by Kluver and Qiu is the user behaviour. It indicates that actual online user behaviour in China does not share the expectations for democratic change through the Internet. However, the democratizing potential of the Internet in China remains to be a major area of inquiry and critique. The latest title of this body of work is Zheng Yongnian's *Technological Empowerment: The Internet, State, and Society in China* (2008). The author remains positive of the liberalization potential of information technology and Internet-based collective action on the Chinese regime. But he also states that those actions have their own limitations and so far they have not been able to cause political democratization in China. Information

technology alone cannot lead to a drastic change of the political regime.

Another growing area of Internet studies in China is the sociocultural impact of cyber communities or networking. This body of work is not significant in quantity and many are case studies of specific online forums or bulletin boards. The growing interest in cyber communities can be witnessed in many graduate students' research projects in China. The most comprehensive one is the study of China's most popular online forum Tianya community (Liu 2005). The study is a detailed documentation of the community's development, the issues being discussed, the changing demographic backgrounds of its participants and the relationship between online networking and offline interactions of its users. The impact of online networking and community formation is a yet to be explored area in China's Internet studies.

**The new public inaugurations and private lives**

Homosexuality has gradually entered the public spotlight in China since early 1990s. The publications of *Their World: Looking into the Male Homosexual Group in China* (他們的世界：中國男同性戀群落透視) (1992) by sociologist Li Yinhe and Wang Xiaobo, and *Tongxingai* (同性愛) (1994) by Zhang Beichuan, a renowned sexual health expert and one of the first medical expert activists for homosexual rights in the country marked the beginning of a new era of academic and public interest in an once officially silenced and publicly disregarded topic. The most striking feature of the publications on homosexuality released in this era is an unprecedented passion of those writers, mostly with academic background, to have a "scientific" or "objective" understanding of the population or the

behaviour concerned. Contrary to past representations of homosexuality in official discourses, which usually were rare glimpses of homosexual perverts in medical journals or of sex criminals in police accounts (Ruan 1991), a direct and unambiguous, and sometimes even seemingly positive, recognition of the phenomenon and the population has started to emerge in certain official medical journals from mid 1980s (Ruan 1989) and in scholarly works published from early 1990s onwards. The new academic recognition has been followed by a legal decriminalization, which is the abolishment of hooliganism that has been used to criminalize homosexuals in the past in the new Criminal Law in 1997; and a medical depathologization of homosexuality, which is the removal of homosexuality by the Chinese Psychiatry Association from the list of mental illnesses in 2001. An increasing number of legal and medical experts are joining the newly emerged professional force in promoting a "correct" understanding of the previously stigmatized homosexual population. Almost at the same time, homosexuality has been put under the media spotlight. Both in print and on electronic media, homosexuals have boldly made their presence and spoken up for themselves. Backed up by a nation-wide cyber networking of gays and lesbians, flourishing local communities and bar cultures, homosexuality has gradually penetrated into the public discussion and public life in urban China.

The new public attention to homosexuals or sexuality in general has developed within a larger project of new social control, in response to the rapid social changes starting from the late 1970s. This new social and political project aims at reconstructing and re-assigning the boundary of what counts as legitimate and illegitimate in every aspect of social life. It includes a re-drawing of what is considered acceptable and unacceptable notions of sexual practices. New modes

of social control and regulation are invented in response to the shifting border of acceptability. Therefore, the new scientific attention to and seemingly positive representation of homosexuality can be understood as part of this larger project of re-defining boundary and the management of social conduct in the newly capitalized China since the late 1970s. Within which, experts from different disciplines, the lesbian and gay communities, and the rapidly commercialized state media system and among others are the major actors to re-negotiate the new sexual boundary. The re-interpretation project of homosexuality is taking shape in a social context of a rapidly growing academic endeavour in sexology and sexuality studies, and a rapidly changing public attitude towards sex and private life. The latter is resulted largely from the changing state policy on reproduction and the introduction of a consumer culture that prioritizes individual choice and enjoyment. Alongside with those seemingly positive recognitions of homosexuality and its population, a deep-rooted cultural prejudice and indifference still dominates the public scene. Despite of the official depathologization, homosexuality is still represented as a form of abnormal sexual behaviour and homosexuals are represented as sexual perverts in popular media discussion even by some medical experts in their efforts to find a "cure" for homosexuality.

There are two contesting and competing views of homosexuality currently present in public discussion. These are usually carried out on newspapers, news websites, medical journals with both professional and popular audiences, and other scholarly works. These two respective views are namely an unproportionate attention to male homosexuality and the over-representation of heterosexual views. Female homosexuality and lesbians in China are marginalized in public discussion

and in many debates on homosexuality. Male homosexuality has occupied the central place of official, academic and even community discourses. A few factors can explain such lesbian invisibility in China. Researchers like Li Yinhe (1992), Ruan Fangfu (1991), Zhang Beichuan (1994) and Lisa Rofel (1997) have all expressed the same difficulty of locating lesbians in China. It might be because of the fact that lesbian communities are less public than those of the gay ones owing to lesbians' different mode of social interactions. But it might be also the fact that a more public community of lesbians in China has developed a bit later than that of gay men. It is relatively easier for researchers to access lesbian individuals and groups in China after 2000 when online lesbian networking has become more visible.

Also, the public that is visible and accessible to everyone in the country is always a heterosexual one. A third-person position and a heterosexual identity are assumed in these public discussions of homosexuality. This includes even the most homosexual-positive scholarly publications. The fact that homosexuals are always "talked about" in the hetero public, "the potential of misinterpretation and distortion" is enormous (Evans, 1997, p.209). The "public" discussion where most homosexuals in China, at least for those in urban areas, enthusiastically participated has been taking place on the Internet. The cyberspace constitutes the most vibrant gay and lesbian public space and discursive site in contemporary China. This homosexual public space is developing in parallel along with the dominant heterosexual one. The public existence of homosexuals in China is a dialogic one between these two public spaces. Yet its participation in the heterosexual public space, which has the authority over the symbolic boundary of normal and abnormal, legitimate and illegitimate, is limited by its largely closeted

participants.

Whereas family and personal lives were strictly controlled and monitored by the danwei system (or work unit) and the community surveillance system before the reform era, they have been largely released from direct state control during the transformation to market economy. There has been a gradual shift from collective interests to individual rights and choices in the aspect of private life. Family and personal lives have been "re-privatized" in the reform period with retreating state control and the emergence of a culture of individual choices resulted from the opening of job markets and the introduction of consumerism. While family and personal lives have ceased to be targets of public scrutiny, individuals are not immediately freed from all regulations in their private lives. Direct state control has shifted to a more intimate form of scrutiny carried out in the private domain. Family members, especially senior ones, and associates from social networks take up the roles of private life inspectors. For non-normative sexual subjects, family members are usually the biggest source of stress and the space of home as the most repressed site of their sexualities. Even at a time when public recognition of homosexuality is generally improved, the existence of homosexual subjects in private contexts is still to a larger extent, repressive. Family and its spatial realization, the home, are still held to be a heterosexual privilege. In the following chapters, I will have more discussions of the family and marriage in the context of contemporary China and their effects on lalas.

**Theorizing the public and the private**

The major area of investigation in my research project is the negotiation of lalas

with their families and the notion of marriage in an era of increasing social awareness and recognition of homosexuality in the public domain. I would use a framework that consists of four spaces that are physically occupied by and discursively regulating lalas in their everyday life to discuss their negotiations with the institutions of family and marriage. The four spaces are: the heterosexual public and private, and the homosexual public and private. I conceptualize both the public and private in plural terms. There are multiple publics and privates existing at the same time and in the same space. The publics are defined as material and social spaces that consist of activities, relationships, discourses and participants that are visible to the majority of population, if not all of them. The state, systems of economic productions, the national consumer market, the state media, official and semi-official experts, popular cultures, various non-official publics and the publicly accessible and visible spaces in cities occupy the publics. The privates mainly refer to spaces that consist of personal activities, intimate relationships and participants that are largely invisible to the publics and are regulated in large part by the laws (legal and social) that govern family and marriage.

The divides of hetero and homo, and public and private are not merely theoretical ones. They are conceptualized from the splitting existence in daily life that is experienced by many lesbians and gay men in China. They have to commute between identities as they are traveling among spaces. Many organize their lives according to the spatial rules that govern different spaces. The hetero and homo publics and privates are the four symbolic living spaces that inhabit lalas' everyday struggles against these spatial rules. In the public, it is usually unexceptionally heterosexual in nature, and in the context of family and marriage,

they are required to pass as heterosexuals. Only in the homo public and the restricted zones in the hetero public, and the closeted homo private that they can exist as a sexual being that they desire to be. For many, they live a double life of public and private, heterosexual acting and homosexual hiding, lies and truths. Reality has been split up into realities. Everyday straight acting has been complicated by one's virtual (yet more real) acting (or realization) on the Internet, where she can live out another life under one or more cyber selves. The divides of public and private, real and virtual, and even hetero and homo are not as distinguishable as they appear to be. The distinctions are drawn to illustrate the symbolic boundaries of normative and non-normative in the aspect of one's sexuality. They are especially used to highlight the everyday existence and resistance of women with same-sex desires and practices in these symbolically divided spheres. It is not to equate heterosexuality with normativity and the public, or homosexuality with non-normativity and the private. I am aware of the internal hierarchies of normative heterosexuality and homosexuality. For example, monogamous homosexuality is the most normative and public version, while polyamorous heterosexuality usually does not enjoy the same visibility and authority. On the other hand, some forms of homosexuality, such as long-term monogamous same-sex relationship, are more public and socially accepted than other forms. They are conceptualized here only to demonstrate the multiple layers of existence for many lesbians and gay men in the public and private, and also to critically examine the symbolic divides that have caused many of them struggling between irreconcilable spaces and subject positions.

**The four discursive spaces**

Hetero public and private are metaphorical and physical spaces that are dominated by the logic of heteronormativity. They are hegemonic in nature with regard to their relationship with the homo public and private. The homo public and private are metaphorical and physical spaces that are cultivated by the lalas as an imagined community and as self-identified individuals to this community. They are structurally excluded or marginalized by the heterosexual centre.

The hetero public is representative of the state, its expert system, the mass media, physical spaces that are visible to all in public, and also lalas and gay men who have come out to the national audience in popular media. The hetero public is the normative public that determines and sustains sexual and gender norms. Drawing from my ethnographic evidence, it is one of my central arguments in this research that the hetero public has become increasingly inaugurative to tongzhi subjects. Though this does not mean that the practices of political, legal and medical stigmatization of homosexuality and its population have entirely disappeared in China, empirical evidence has shown that the hetero public is *not* in all cases repressive to homosexual subjects. I will further discuss the discourses of homosexuality that circulate in the hetero public and its effects on lalas' everyday life in Chapter 4.

The homo public consists of many regional or local publics (online or offline) that are formed by local tongzhi communities. It consists of gay and lala cyber communities and their closeted and non-closeted participants, the "nomadic" or mobile lala spaces in the offline world (more examples will be offered in Chapter

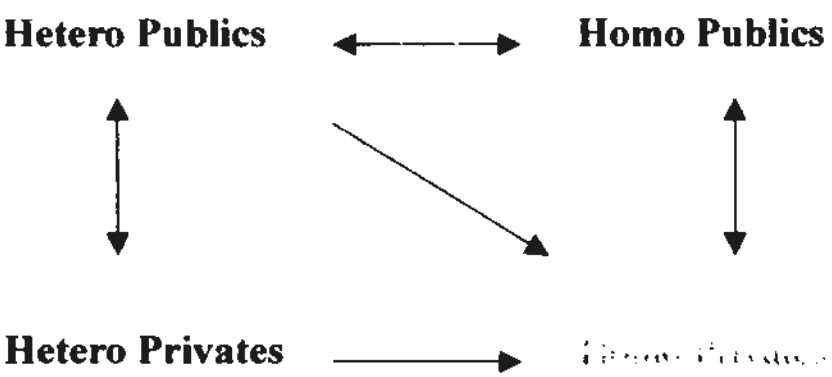
3), the identity based lala communities (as imagined or real), and internally circulating lala cultural texts (literary works, video works, performances or historical narratives produced by or about tongzhis), and finally lalas and gay men who have come out to the tongzhi community. With the presence of political, societal and family surveillances, the homo publics are usually movable or mobile in nature. In the following chapters, I will demonstrate how homo publics use their flexibility and mobility as a strategy to survive and to proliferate in a heteronormative society.

The hetero private, like the hetero public, is a discursively and spatially dominant one. It monopolizes legitimate forms and discourses of what constitute to be normative families, notions of intimate relationship and legitimate members in the private sphere. Spatially, the hetero private is represented as the physical space of heterosexual families. This major focus of this research is to demonstrate how lalas, as both women and non-normative sexual subjects, negotiate with the gender and sexual obligations of the hetero private, both in its discursive and spatial senses.

The homo private mainly consists of the intimate relationships of lalas. Its physical representation is the home space of lala couples or lala family members. Its inhabitants are mostly lalas who have not made public of their same-sex desires or relationships. How do forms of homo family or intimate union survive the day-to-day policing of their hetero families and society at large? What spatial strategies are used by lalas to sustain their homo privates? What are the emergent forms of homo private? Those are all the questions I would further discuss in the following chapters.

The following diagram attempts to illustrate the interactions between the four symbolic worlds that are experienced by lalas in their everyday life.

**Diagram I: The Hetero, Homo Publics and Privates in China**




Two-way interactions  Control  Invisible Domains

The hetero publics dominate the production of normative discourses and public discussions of homosexuality, and sexuality in general. They are the major discursive site where the drawing and maintenance of a sociocultural-medical-legal boundary of what is perceived as acceptable and unacceptable, normal and abnormal, safe and dangerous exist. The hetero publics in China are also the only state acknowledged and sanctioned public. All scholarly publications, media representations, legal regulations, popular discussions on homosexuality that are circulated offline to the general public are confined to the visible hetero public spaces that have always been heavily regulated by the state. The newly emerged homo cyber public sphere and its increasingly penetrative

offline extensions have created a discursive site of homosexuality that has become one of the most informative sources of reference for hetero publics to recognize and to regulate the population and practices concerned. The homo public discourses have the effect of creating a subject position and public visibility for the people concerned in the heterosexual society. The two publics are inter-referenced, though there is a clear order of hierarchy between them in terms of cultural and spatial authority. This hierarchical relationship is reflective of the social locations of the two discursive groups, heterosexuals and homosexuals, in a heteronormative society.

The two publics are mutually influenced by each other with one locating itself in an authoritative position while the other has a more ghetto like existence. Tensions exist between the two publics as forces of condemning and marginalizing homosexuality are still prevalent in the hetero publics. Hence, the homo publics always require to fight against those negative inaugurations and to simultaneously produce counter interpretations. There are both cooperation and contestation between the two publics. Different forms of homo public also act as critical publics or counterpublics to the normative hetero publics. Alternative discourses and lifestyles are formulated in homo publics, especially the homo cyber space. The homo publics are also characterized by their mobility. They are a kind of mobile public without a fixed or stable spatial affiliation. For instance, the homo cyber public is instable in the sense that it can be removed or temporarily terminated by state authorities. The offline homo publics, in the same way, are always under the threats of political intervention and neighbourhood surveillance or even violence. However, like all forms of public space, accessibility is not universal in homo publics. Participation in the homo cyber public, for instance, is

restricted by one's knowledge of computer, access to the Internet, and one's economic and cultural capability.

In the private domain, which is always conceptualized as the personal, intimate, sexual, domestic, or the feminine, has also been split into two discursive spheres for lesbian and gay existence in contemporary China. The hetero privates, like the hetero publics, are the only private space that is visible to the (heterosexual) public and sanctioned by state authorities. The institution of family and marriage is confined to the hetero privates through the legal, social and cultural enactments in the hetero publics. They are the private extension of the hetero publics. The homo privates are the direct product of the recently formed homo publics. They constitute the homo publics while their own existence is largely closeted or secondary to the hetero privates. The homo privates consist of individuals, same-sex relationships and families, and communities of sexually identified private social networks. Individual members in the homo privates are able to secure a collective presence in the public via the Internet. As an individual, many of them remain a shadowy existence in the hetero privates where they are usually demanded to pass as a heterosexual.

Unlike the two publics, the hetero and homo privates are mutually exclusive. The tension is always expressed through the conflicted needs of heterosexual family and same-sex relationship. It is assumed that everyone enters the hetero publics is heterosexual unless otherwise stated. Similarly, one's membership in the hetero privates is defined by her heterosexuality. If one wants to be recognized and included in the hetero privates, where one's biological and marital kinship networks are legally and culturally located, one has to have a legitimate position in

the heterosexual relationship network. This has brought about tremendous pressure to the lesbian and gay individual if s/he wants to survive in the hetero privates. The conflict of heterosexual obligation and one's same-sex desires and practices has split up the private into two incompatible ones. I will return to this private dilemma and the location of female same-sex sexual subject in the Chinese family and marriage institution in Chapter 5.

Both privates are heavily regulated by the hetero publics. The circulation and prevalence of repressive interpretations of homosexuality in the hetero publics is particularly destructive to the private existence of lesbians and gay men in China. It obscures a healthy formation of homosexual subject position and discursively erases the existence of same-sex desires and practices in the private. This discursive violence has already been observed by Evans a decade ago (Evans 1997). What has been changed ten years later is the rise of a vibrant homo cyber public along with its offline extensions and a rapidly growing community activism. Lesbians and gay men are developing their own counterpublics to the dominant hetero ones. The previously one-way influence of the dominant (hetero) publics to homosexual individuals is now also counter-balanced by the formation of the homo cyber and offline communities. Yet on the other hand, it is also because of the changes that have happened and are happening in the hetero publics that they made possible the imagination and realization of exclusive same-sex relationships in the recent decade. It is one of the major problematics of this thesis to examine the conflict caused by an ever accentuating public inauguration of a depathologized, decriminalized or even empowered homosexual subject and its violent dismissal in the (hetero) privates.

**Counter spaces?**

The boundary of the four discursive spaces is most unstable at the intersections of the two publics and two privates. The newly emerged homo publics are taking up more and more spaces in the hetero publics in terms of visibility and voices. Their penetration can be witnessed in the media coverage of homosexual topics and rising number of gay friendly business such as bars, photo studios and community events taking place in Shanghai. Yet the boundary crossings and shifts happen only sporadically at the intersections of the hetero and homo publics. The homo publics still remain at large to be mobile publics with no fixed and secured sites of existence. The boundary shifting at the two privates can be witnessed from the expansion of the homo privates and their "cutting in" into the heterosexual privates. One prominent example is the increasingly popular practice of cooperative marriage (a fake heterosexual union of a lala and a gay man) in Shanghai among the generation of lalas in their mid to late twenties. It demonstrates one of the possibilities to turn the usually mobile homo privates, given its invisibility and unrecognized status in the hetero privates, into visible and potentially stable ones inside the heterosexual family context. It also shows the possibility of the formation of a counter private by lalas who are struggling to survive in the heterosexual family. Through a cooperative marriage, they can create a counter private space that they no longer need to distance themselves from the domain of visibility but to inhabit right at the centre of the institution that used to drive them out of sight. There will be more discussion of the strategy of cooperative marriages in later chapters.

Is there any possibility of counter spaces for lalas to realize their same-sex desires

and relationships within the four-space life world? In the following chapters, I will discuss further of the four spaces that I have laid out as lalas' life world, the tensions between them, the strategies lalas used to reconcile the public inauguration and private repression, and the possibility of counter spaces and boundary crossings.

> "Apart from big cities like Shanghai within the country, some smaller cities, especially those small towns without even traffic lights, within these rural villages, they basically don't have access to a lot of information. It's only when the Internet becomes more popular can I…I was already twenty something without access to any information, it was about time for me to start dating guys. When I was a student, I had intimate experiences with other (female) classmates but we didn't think of it as a big deal, and nobody… absolutely impossible for anyone to tell us, I won't go asking around, there are no books, no Internet, don't know what it is. Then we thought of it as a process, we thought that the time would come for us to date men and to prepare for marriage. That's it. Until I… I feel I'm very lucky that I came upon the Internet after I broke up with my boyfriend. I have always felt that I'm very fortunate or else I would have married him for sure. Can you imagine how hard it would be for me if I knew of who I am on the Internet after I got married to him and after I recalled all my school memories with that classmates? That is why I feel that access to information and communication is very important." (Qi, 29 years old)[4]

Shanghai has long been a city of desire. For hundreds of years, it has been a metropolis of commerce and trade, adventure and entertainment, and sex and desires. The old Shanghai in pre-1949 had been dubbed as *the* Paris in the East, *the* Hollywood in the East and the paradise for adventurers. Entrepreneurs, opportunists from all walks of life, movie stars, socialites, pleasure seekers, well-known prostitutes, politicians, writers, artists, and manual labourers from rural areas all conglomerated in this coastal city of China. It has been romanticized

[4] "國內除了上海這樣的大城市，一些小的城市，甚至是一些小的鄉鎮，就是一個紅綠燈也沒有的那種鄉鎮，更小的是在農村裡面，她們根本就沒有機會得到很多的資訊。我只有在這個網絡發達的時候，我才能夠…我沒有得到這個資訊的時候，我已經二十幾歲了，我要談男朋友了，我在讀書的時候我也跟我的…同學有過親密的接觸，我們都不覺得這是什麼，也沒有人…不可能有人告訴我們，我又不會去問別人，也沒有書籍，也沒有網絡，不知道是什麼。然後…我們就覺得這只不過是一個過程，那到了時候我就應該去談戀愛，然後去交男朋友，去準備結婚，就這樣了。一直到我…我覺得我很幸運的是我跟我男朋友分手，然後我知道了網絡。我一直是覺得很幸運的，不然我肯定要嫁給他了。你想想如果我嫁給他，到我上了網，到了網上才確認自己，我回想我以前跟我同學的事，那我不會覺得很苦嗎？所以我覺得這個資訊溝通很重要的。"

as a city that everyone can turn dreams into reality and desires into practice. This is the most popular way of narrating the old Shanghai. Even for those generations that were born after the establishment of the so-called "new China", they are proud of the city's glamourous past. The nostalgic sentiment was a common everyday emotional ritual of local Shanghai residents during my childhood in the 1970s. Old people lived on old memories. The younger generations continued the legend of the city through a sense of pride that is nurtured by a collective nostalgic atmosphere. Migrants from all over the country have been attracted to this city by its legendary past and its present economic opportunities. After 1949, Shanghai had to bid farewell to its capitalist glamour and to become a monotonous socialist city. It was not until thirty years later that Shanghai could restore itself to be a city of desires and dreams. In 2005, the year I returned to Shanghai to start my research, it has truly become a migrant city with people coming from all over the country to pursue their desires and dreams of all kinds.

**The anecdote**

There is a widely circulated anecdote about a group of women who was labeled as the "mirror-rubbing gang" (or Rubbing-mirrors Party, Mojing Dang 磨鏡黨) for their same-sex sexual practices and community bonding in the late nineteenth century Shanghai. Their stories can be found in many early writings about the city. Ruan (1991) also mentions this legendary female group in the chapter on homosexuality in his book *Sex in China: Studies in Sexology in Chinese Culture*, which is one of the few early works in the 1990s that has touched on the topic of female homosexuality in China,

> "...the "Mojing Dang" ("Rubbing-mirrors Party") was active in Shanghai in the late nineteenth century. It was said to be a descendant of the 'Ten Sisters,' which a Buddhist nun had founded several hundred years earlier in Chaozhou, Guangdong (Canton) province. Members of the "Ten Sisters' lived together as couples. The[y] refused to marry, and some even avoided marriage by committing suicide. A few are rumored to have killed their husbands so that they could maintain their lesbian relationships. The nineteenth-century Rubbing-mirrors Party was also led by a Cantonese woman and lasted about twenty years. It had approximately twenty members, including three who were mistresses of wealthy men, one who had never married, and more than a dozen rich widows. They attracted new members through their knowledge of sexual technique." (p.136)

The story of the mirror-rubbing gang is more like one of those novel anecdotes of the old Shanghai that people would not treat it as a serious historical fact but it has an enduring effect in popular imagination. The term Mojing Dang has entered the everyday lexicon of the general public to refer to women with homosexual practices, but always with a negative and mocking undertone. The gang is one of the most vividly depicted images of women with same-sex desires and practices in modern Shanghai, and is a prominent example of how sexually "deviant" women, as defined by the heterosexual male active/ female passive model, are demonized by mainstream discourses. Almost a century later, I was in the same city looking for women with same-sex desires and practices, where I found no reference to this early group. Now there are not only groups, but an entire community of sexually identified women, predominantly active on the Internet but also increasingly visible at offline spaces. A prominent leader of the Shanghai lala community told me that there were always women with same-sex desires in the city or everywhere in China, the question is whether these individuals or groups are visible to the public or aware of each other.

It is out of this research's scope of investigation to go in depth of the history and the cultural heritage of lala community in Shanghai. Here I will provide a preliminary explanation of the possible historical and cultural influences that have contributed to the rapid development of tongzhi communities (both online and offline) in contemporary China. The emergence of lala communities in contemporary China and its rapid development owe much to the more established tongzhi cultures in Taiwan and Hong Kong and to a lesser extent, the Western lesbian and gay cultures. This is particularly true to lala women born after 1980s. The concept of space can explain, to a certain extent, the informational flows enabled by the emergence of the Internet revolution in China. Many scholars have discussed how space as a concept has been compressed, displaced and destabilized (Castells 1989; Giddens 1990; Harvey 1989). Since there are many dimensions to such identities as in cultural, political, sexual and social dimensions, the complexities of Shanghai lalas identities are also influenced by spatial considerations. For example, physical travel distances are shortened and information flows from metropolitan centres to remote areas and vice versa. This is evident in how information on gay and lesbian identities has been in constant movement from urban to rural and vice versa, from rural to urban. The implications of such informational flows are multi-fold. First of all, information on globalized lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, queer identities, media images and social movements accessible through the Internet enable social networking and information exchange can result in both international, regional and local mobilization efforts. Cultural learning and assimilation among lalas in different Chinese societies can happen in regional or inter-city tongzhi events. One

of the examples is the lala training camp held in 2006. It pooled together lesbian community leaders, organizers and scholars from Hong Kong, Taiwan and North America to engage in cultural and political dialogues in a coastal city in China. He Xiaopei, one of the prominent lesbian activists and scholars in China, talks extensively about the contemporary history of female tongzhis in China in *Talking about Their Love: An Oral History of Women Who Love Women in Shanghai I* (她們的愛在說－愛上女人的女人·上海·口述歷史(一))(2008). She reveals many real life accounts of women with same-sex relationships in the pre-identity and pre-community period of contemporary China. She argues that female tongzhis, as defined as women with same-sex desires, have always been there in China. Her argument is echoed by the community leader that I have met in Shanghai. It is the formation of communities that have made female tongzhis in China more visible to society, to each other and to the world. He Xiaopei also relates the formation of lala community in China with the cultural interflow between Taiwan, Hong Kong and China,

> "The word 'lazi' spreads from Hong Kong to Mainland China and became 'lala'. Right now in China, there are lala websites, lala meeting places, lala bars and lala communities that become part of lala organizing and lala activities in general. Therefore, the emergence of the word 'lala' did not only enable lalas to identify with their own sexual identities. But moreso, they have used a lala identity to build their own communities, to gather and to reach out to more lalas for new activities and for organizing such activities." (p.192)[5]

During the pre-Internet period, which is before mid-1990s, it is possible that there

[5] "拉子一詞，傳到香港又傳到大陸中國後，演變成拉拉。在現在的大陸中國，就出現了一些拉拉網站，拉拉驛站，拉拉酒吧和拉拉社區等各種各樣的女同性戀的組織和活動形式。因此，拉拉這個詞語的出現，不僅使女同性戀者得以去做身份認同，也使得她們能夠利用這一身份，去創建自己的社區，去團結和發現更多的拉拉們來開展活動和組織活動。"

was a small-scale circulation of lesbian and gay cultural texts from Taiwan and Hong Kong in cities where contacts with foreigners were available. Lesbian and gay subcultures from Taiwan and Hong Kong have also been brought in by individual visitors to China during the 1990s. Individual contacts are an important and major source of information for people in pre-Internet China to learn about lesbian and gay cultures in other Chinese societies and the West. The Internet in China has been put into popular use after mid 1990s. Almost all of the informants in this research have tried to search for information on homosexuality on the Internet. The earliest of them that have done this can be traced back to the late 1990s. Due to language accessibility, most of them searched in Chinese and looked for Chinese information. The most accessible Chinese information on homosexuality, and lesbian and gay communities are those from Taiwan and Hong Kong, in addition to the few academic texts on homosexuality written by local Chinese scholars that were circulated on the web. Language accessibility and cultural proximity are two major factors that led to the heavy borrowing of cultures from Taiwan and Hong Kong. We can trace the influence from these two regions from many aspects of the local lala cultures in China. For example, the identities of tongzhi and lala are borrowed and localized from Hong Kong and Taiwan respectively. While "gay", "homosexual" (translated into tongxinglian or tongxingai) and other gay related terms such as MSM are introduced from the West. Localization and local interpretations of these originally borrowed terms exist in common usage and the study done by Sun Zhongxin, James Farrer and Kyung-hee Choi (2005) on sexual identities among men who have sex with men in Shanghai is one of the pioneering investigations of the relationship between cultural flow and gay culture in China. In addition to identity terms, models of community building, organizing and forms of lesbian socializing have been

introduced by individuals from Hong Kong and Taiwan or organized exchanges between the two regions and China. For example, the most popular lesbian party in Shanghai at the time of my research was organized by a woman from Taiwan. Cultural texts such as films and videos imported either legally or illegally from Taiwan and Hong Kong and cultural texts that are about Asian queer representations are always in high demand and circulated widely in Shanghai's lala circles. I will propose that the availability of the Internet and the interflow of tongzhi cultural texts, discourses from other Chinese societies such as Hong Kong and Taiwan and also the intensifying interactions of tongzhi groups and individuals in the three regions have contributed largely to the rapid formation of lesbian subcultures and communities in China. The interflow of tongzhi discourses and movement models within Chinese societies is one of the much needed topics of historical enquiry for researchers in future.

**Entering the community**

I had my first field visit to Shanghai in June 2005 and during which I met Echo, the community leader who has been referred to me coincidentally by both my lesbian networks in Hong Kong and the United States. Echo was in her late twenties and had relocated to Shanghai from her hometown in the Southern part of China a few years ago. By the time I met her, she was running one of the most popular nation-wide lala websites with over 45,000 registered members. I have contacted her via email before my trip and asked for her help to introduce lalas living in Shanghai.

It was an evening in June 2005 when I met Echo for the first time in person. She

asked me to join her for dinner in a restaurant with her friends in downtown Shanghai. I was uncertain if Echo and her lala friends would feel comfortable with me as an outsider from Hong Kong. Moreover I have never made it explicit to Echo of my sexual identity and she did not ask me before we met. That evening I did a little trick by wearing a necklace with a female sex sign on it so as to declare subtly of my identification with them. Later I found this trick worked as one of the women I met that evening told me later they noticed my necklace and confirmed more of my sexual identity. This made them feel more at ease with me and also became more interested in me personally. When I got to the restaurant, Echo and a small group of friends were already there waiting for me. She introduced me to her friends that I am a researcher from Hong Kong. All of us were a bit nervous and shy at the beginning but very soon the atmosphere was lightened up when I took out my book, *Lunar Desire*[6], which is published in 2001 in Hong Kong with 26 Chinese women from Hong Kong, Macau and overseas writing their first same-sex love stories. I carried a few copies to Shanghai as gifts for informants I would meet. They were very interested in the book and some even started to read it during dinner. By then it was very clear to all of them I am a member of them and this made the interaction much easier. The fact that I can speak the Shanghai dialect is another ice-breaking revelation to those who are also Shanghai natives. The revelation of my Shanghai background further blurred the insider/ outsider boundary. The moment of my speaking the dialect always caused a small uproar in the group and would significantly change the group dynamics. Sometimes I was the only person in the group who can speak the local dialect as many of them in the community are coming from other parts of China. As a Hongkonger, I was a

[6] Kam, Lucetta (2001) (Editor and illustrator), *Lunar Desires: Her first same-sex love in her own words* (月亮的騷動——她她的初戀故事：我們的自述), Hong Kong: Cultural Act Up.

foreigner to them in most part, as there are visible cultural differences across the border. Yet my ability to speak the local dialect makes me more like an insider of the city than many of them. This hybrid cultural background, together with my lesbian identification, allow me merge much easier with lalas in Shanghai. The first time I was aware of this multi-directional ice-breaking effect was during this evening with Echo and her friends.

That first evening was followed by a "lesbian night" in a bar in downtown and a gathering with Echo's friends in a karaoke till midnight. The weekly "lesbian night" was co-organized by Echo's website, Huakaidedifang (or Huakai in short, 花開的地方), and the ex-owner of " Bar 1088", a once popular lesbian bar in the city, through a contractual deal with the private bar owner. The lesbian nights were running on every Friday and Saturday. During these two evenings, the bar will be named as "Huakai 1088". Bar 1088 was one of the first to start the practice of cooperating with lesbian party organizers to hold lesbian nights every weekend. The bar started the weekly lesbian party in the summer of 2002. The next year the lesbian nights were stopped despite of its sweeping popularity.[7] The combination of Huakai and 1088 was a synonym of lesbian bar to insiders and both of them were well-known "labels" in the community. The organizers were expected to promote the event via their websites and networks. Helpers from Echo's website sold tickets at the entrance. The ticket was priced at RMB30 each including a free drink. Certain parts of the bar will be allocated as a women-only zone for the

[7] There are different views in the community of the reasons why there were no more lesbian nights at the bar in 2003. Some said it is because of its popularity and alarming size of attendants. On a typical weekend evening, Bar 1088 can attract more than three hundreds people. One woman even told me she was there in one of the crowded weekend lesbian party at the bar when police suddenly appeared and ended the party. Women were asked to line up and be inspected. The police said they were reported of illegal drug use in the party. But the woman said the police was not difficult at all and they released all of them at once. Others said there was no police crack down or intervention of

lesbian night goers. During the other days of the week, the bar will be running as a straight bar as it originally is. This is a very common arrangement in Shanghai for ordinary bars (that is, bars that are not targeted at lesbians and gay men or without a regular clientele from these two groups) to cooperate with lesbian party organizers, in most cases they are lalas themselves and have strong connections in the community, to hold one or two lesbian nights regularly during weekends. There were always at least two or three regular party organizers who organized lesbian nights nomadically in different bars in the city, always at easily accessible downtown locations. Those parties are always spread around by words of mouth in the community, or by postings on online message boards of gay and lesbian websites. The nomadic nature of these parties makes partygoers very dependent on their connection with the organizers or in other words, since it is hard to have a permanent location, it is essential for organizers to maintain a good connection with their clientele. The most talked about reason I have heard about why organizers have to change locations is disagreement with the bar owners. It can be different views on how to run the party or unsatisfactory attendance rate due to the location or other physical factors of the bar concerned. Rarely it is about police intervention or shutdown, though the risk is still present especially when certain activities such as erotic dance are introduced or the scope of operation exceeds the limit that the authority can tolerate. But since exclusive lesbian bars are extremely rare in Shanghai and given the high financial investment and possible political risks involved in running those bars, this kind of informal and relatively flexible cooperation between well-connected lesbian party organizers and private bar owners has persisted to be the most popular way of responding to the mounting demand of quality social gatherings for the younger and economically well-off

1088. The lesbian party organizers left because they had disagreement with the bar owner.

lalas in the city. Besides, it is also a profitable business cooperation. The ordinary bar can be profited by the additional and almost guaranteed crowd of lala clientele on every weekend. The size of these weekend lesbian parties can be more than 150 people per night for a medium size bar. Furthermore, the commercial party organizers or community leader like Echo can profit from the commissions and more importantly, the opportunity to have a precious space for community networking.

I met more lalas in "Huakai 1088" through Echo. The crowd there was mostly in their early twenties with mixed regional affiliations. All of them were of urban origin. There were women coming from other cities and now working in Shanghai. A few of them worked and lived in nearby cities and came to Shanghai only to spend weekends with their lala friends. A few were local residents who would chat in Shanghai dialect with each other. For group interaction, we all talked in our national language, putonghua.

After the bar gathering, Echo kindly invited me to join them for karaoke and told me that they were going to help a friend to throw a surprise party to make a marriage proposal to her girlfriend. I was very happy to be invited. Shortly after we arrived the karaoke, I started to help decorate the karaoke box with others. We lit up candles and arranged them in the shape of one big and one small hearts. We threw rose pedals around the candle hearts and made ready a bunch of flower that was used for the proposal. Not long after we finished the decoration and made sure cameras were standby, the couple arrived. Someone was assigned to wait at the door to stop the one to be proposed from entering the room and let her partner to enter first. The rest of us were all waiting anxiously in the room. It was an

unforgettable scene. Lights switched off. The candle hearts glittered silently in the dark. The woman held the bunch of flowers when her partner, accompanied by friends, entered the room. She kneeled down to make the proposal. The small room was packed with an anticipating audience and the happiness was felt strongly by everyone in the room. It was all within inches that I witnessed and also participated in the first lala proposal I have ever had. The most surprising part was that the couple was both married with children. They were in their mid-thirties and have been together for more than three years. Married lalas are not uncommon among women over thirty in China. The demand of social conformity was more severe during their younger years. Marriage was less a choice but more often it was something everyone should do it when the time comes. Also because of lack of information, some women were only aware of their same-sex desire after marriage when the Internet was accessible in the late 1990s. For some of the married lalas I have later interviewed or casually chatted with, they did marry voluntarily to their husbands out of love but it was only until later they found themselves falling in love with another woman. The term bisexuality rarely came up in the conversation. Many of them were commuting between the two relationships and worked hard to accommodate both with each other. I will have a more extensive discussion on this area in Chapter 5 and 6.

**The lala sites and activities**

There are both online and offline lala communities in Shanghai. The latter are composed of lesbian bars (both weekly and permanent ones), lesbian student associations in colleges and universities, organized community activities such as salons, social gatherings, hotline services and cultural events, and commercial

services such as studio photo-taking. Some of the offline activities are organized by groups originally developed from online communities. Apart from lesbian parties, other commercial activities targeting at the lesbian market started to emerge in recent years. There is a privately run studio serving gay and lesbian clients who want to take wedding pictures or studio shots. A café for lesbians is also said to be open soon in the expensive central area of the city. Merchandizes such as accessories, T-shirts and chest binding tops are available on lesbian websites. Lesbian novels that claimed to be written by lesbian writers have appeared in mainstream bookstores.[8] *Gender Game* (傷花 2006) by Tracy Ni, a native Shanghai video artist, is an independent documentary on Ts[9] in Shanghai was screened inside the community, and was also featured in the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in 2006. Since 2003, the Fudan University in Shanghai, one of the top ranking universities in the country, started the graduate course of "Homosexuality, Health and Social Science" (tongxinglian jiankang shehuikexue) in the School of Public Health with the funding of the Hong Kong based Chi Heng Foundation; and in 2005, the same university started the general education course on "Lesbian and Gay Studies" (tongxinglian yanjiu) for its undergraduate students. In the following part, I will provide an overview of the online communities, the developments of lesbian bars since the late 1990s, the organized community activities, and a brief discussion of the community subculture.

[8] Two of the novels that have been circulated widely in the lala communities are Zhang Haoying's *Shanghai Wangshi* (上海往事, The Bygone Story in Shanghai) published by Guangxi Renmin Chubanshe in 2003 and Hailan's *Wode Tianshi Wode Ai* (我的天使我的愛, My Angel My Love) published by Zhongguo Xijue Chubanshe in 2007.

[9] T is the masculine identified lesbian gender in China. It is naming after the lesbian gender culture in Taiwan, where T is classified as the masculine role and P (or Po) is the feminine role.

Almost all my informants came to know homosexuality and the communities from the Internet. It is especially the case in the late 1990s when the Internet service has been extended to popular use. Message boards of many popular BBS websites have first become a meeting point for gay and lesbian visitors in the country. The most frequently mentioned BBS website of my informants was Tianya (天涯), on which there was a message board targeted at the homosexual group in the country. By early 2000s, there have been three major lesbian websites, Shengqiuxiaowu (深秋小屋), Aladao (阿拉島) and Huakai, all were operated by women based in Shanghai. Shenqiuxiaowu has been more inclined to women's literature and creative writings. Aladao is the most enduring first generation lesbian website in Shanghai with a more pronounced Shanghainese identification. Its founders are a local lesbian couple. Huakai is a lesbian website catering for lalas all over the country. Its founder, Echo, moved to the city in 2003 and since then she has based her website and offline community networking in Shanghai. It has message board administrators (banzhu, 版主) from different cities. By the time I carried out my research, Huakai was the most popular lesbian website in the country given its number of registered members. The cyberspace has dramatically changed the lives and ways of interaction for people with same-sex desires in China. Identity-based lesbian and gay communities have developed in various cities in just a few years' time since the late 1990s. For all my informants, the memory of getting in touch with other lesbians in the country was not remote at all. Within a decade after the emergence of the cyberspace, individuals are connected and developed into online and offline communities. Lesbian and gay websites were flourishing in a speed that is out of anyone's imagination. Some estimated that there were over 300 lesbian and gay websites operating in China in 2008 and the number is still growing rapidly. The moment of discovering other gays and lesbians on the

Internet was overwhelming to my informants. More than one informant told me that her first thought when they realized that there were other people like them from the Internet is "I'm not the only one!". Cyberspace has nurtured the awareness of collective existence and more importantly, it has offered a relatively safe space for those socially condemned sexual "dissidents" to search for and connect with each other. It has not only allowed the formation of online lesbian and gay communities, but also paved the way for a more visible community in the offline world. The Internet remains to be the single most important medium of social interactions for lesbian and gays in China. It is particularly crucial for those who cannot risk exposing their sexual orientation in offline world. There are many who can only afford to realize their same-sex desires through virtual relationships in cyberspace. However, cyber community is not a risk-free and all welcoming public space. Accessibility is restricted to certain groups along lines of gender, age, locationalities, education, income and occupation. According to a research on China's Internet use in 2005, which is during the time of my research, the dominant Internet users were male (57.2%), aged 16-24 (87.8%), had university education or above (almost 90% of them were netizens), not married (77.2% of this group were netizens), had a monthly income of more than RMB2000 (67.7% of this group were netizens), and their occupations were teachers, researchers, managers in state, private or foreign enterprises (over 80% of them were netizens)[10]. Therefore, the dominant netizens in China during my research were young men with at least university education and above average level income. The cyber community of lalas and gay men in China is relatively difficult to recruit

[10] "2005 China Internet Usage Survey Report" conducted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in five cities in China (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu and Changsha), quoted from Liu Huaqing (2005) *Tianya Virtual Community: Text-based Social Interactions on the Internet* (天涯虛擬社區：互聯網上基於文本的社會互動研究), Beijing: Minzhu Chubanshe, p.33-34.

members who are economically, technologically, occupationally, culturally and spatially deprived of Internet access. This has affected the composition of the offline lala communities that are largely informed by the online communities. For those who cannot afford the initial costs that are necessary to enter the cyber world, the entry of the offline communities are not any easier as the latter is highly dependent on the former. The restriction of Internet access and use has led directly to the over dominance of women with certain economic, educational, occupational, regional (predominantly urban), and marital backgrounds in offline lala communities. Moreover, the cyber world is not a risk free domain. The most threatening risk for lesbian and gay netizens in China is the possible exposure of their real identities. Sometimes exposures can lead to criminal activities such as blackmailing. The threat is not an imagined one. Cases of blackmail in cyber communities were discussed and circulated on online forums and offline gatherings. In a typical case of Internet blackmailing, the offender usually asks for cash reward from the blackmailed in exchange of not to exposing the victim's sexual orientation or her/ his engagement in gay communities to her/ his family or workplace. Fear of being exposed, the blackmailed usually would not and cannot ask for help from the police or other formal channels. Without any legal protection, it is also very hard for lalas and gay men to fight against such criminal activities on the Internet. In fact, blackmailing is not restricted to the cyber world. It also happens in offline situations. As long as homosexuality is a stigmatized practice and identity in society, lesbians and gay men will find them vulnerable to the threat of exposure.

The bar community has existed in Shanghai even before the popularity of online interactions. The earliest bar that was frequented by lalas in the city, as recounted

by my informants, is a bar called Baifengzibashi ("Eighty Percent", 百分之八十) operated in 1998 in one of the hotels in the city. A small crowd of lalas, less than ten in number, would gather there regularly. More often, informants who were bar goers in early years (that is, before 2000) told me they usually hanged out in gay bars in downtown areas. One of the most popular gay bars (and it is still in business, though has moved to another location in downtown by the time I carried out my research) was Eddy's 1924 at the People's Square where is at the heart of the city. The bar was opened in 2001 and was owned by a gay man. It is one of the first well-known gay bars in Shanghai. Its central location contributes to its visibility and popularity. There are informants who told me that they would hang out in Eddy's with gay friends or just went there out of curiosity. Together with other less popular ones in the late 1990s, gay bars were the only available visible public spaces for lalas to get in touch with each other or for some, the only way to see other lalas.

Regularly held lesbian nights appeared in the city in early 2000s. Commercial cooperation of private bar owners and party organizers (usually lesbians themselves), in the form of baochang (包場) has been the most popular practice of organizing lesbian parties. The baochang agreement usually requires the party organizers to hold lesbian parties in the weekend, usually on Friday and Saturday. They will share a certain percentage of the income for each ticket sold and also the overall consumption of drinks and orders from the menu during the party nights. Each party organizer will have a special name for the lesbian nights. Party goers usually only refer to the name of the party, rather than the name of the bar that hosts the party. For example, at the time I was doing my field visits, the biggest lesbian party was the Hudieba ("The Butterfly Bar"). The party changed locations

frequently, but wherever it "landed", people will only refer to the Butterfly Bar instead of its hosting bar. Supporters of these events will follow well-known party organizers throughout the city. They are like nomadic tribes always searching for oasis, or space that is essential to their group existence. At one time, there are usually three or more lesbian parties organized regularly during weekends in the city. "1088" was one of the most successful parties of this kind. Its popularity has made its label, 1088, a synonym of lalas in Shanghai. It later set up a website under the same name. The virtual 1088 was as popular as its offline one. At the end of 2004, the owner of 1088 sold the bar shortly after the bar stopped to organize lesbian parties. She then became a lesbian party organizer herself, and co-organized with Huakai, the lesbian website, to run lesbian nights at a quiet bar (that is, bars with light music and without a dance floor) in one of the central areas in the city. It was the "Huakai 1088" party that I have visited.

It was not until 2004 that a pure lesbian bar, Hungba ("The Red Bar") was opened opposite to Eddy's 1924 at the People's Square. It is said the owner of Hungba is also a lala. It was a small bar with a cultural atmosphere. It was popular among lalas who do not like to join those lesbian parties with deafening music and a huge dancing crowd. However, Hungba was short-lived. Some told me it is because of financial difficulty that led to its closure. Unlike gay bars, lesbian bars are only busy during Saturdays. Many informants agreed that lalas are not as economically well off or at least as willing as gay men to spend money in bars. This makes a pure lesbian bar extremely difficult to survive in Shanghai. This can explain why in years the baochang practice has remained to be the dominant form of lesbian bars while a number of exclusively gay bars were able to survive in the city. Echo attributed the lack of pure lesbian bars also to the social risk for lesbians to run a

bar. Even if they are economically capable to run a pure lesbian bar, they might not want to deal with the social consequences if they are still closeted.

Similarly, lalas' offline community activities have started in Shanghai in the early 2000s. There were lesbian hotlines, volunteer groups, and regularly held salon meetings. The first lesbian hotline operated in the city was the Tongxin Hotline (同心熱線). In June 2004, a lesbian hotline was launched in addition to the existing gay hotline under Tongxin. The Tongxin Hotline, or Tongxin AIDS Intervention Hotline (同心艾滋病干預熱線) in full, was a semi-official operation supported by the International Peace Maternity and Child Health Hospital (上海國際和平婦幼保健院) in Shanghai and located in the hospital . In addition to hotline services, it also provided medical consultation of sexual health, legal consultation for the homosexual population and also other outreach activities. The medical services included free of charge HIV test for gay men. They also ran a website and a newsletter in both print and digital versions. In 2004, the hotline posted a recruitment notice on its website and other gay and lesbian websites to look for female volunteers to run the new lesbian hotline and related community projects. Based on existing resources, which included medical experts at the hosting hospital and a pool of experienced male hotline operators, Tongxin provided training for the newly recruited female volunteer workers. The first semi-official hotline for female homosexuals (nütong, 女同) was set up in the summer of the same year. One former Tongxin lesbian hotline operator told me the number of calls from women was not as many as male callers from the hotline for male homosexuals. Many of them called from outside Shanghai, which means those callers were not local residents. There were also parents and family members of lesbians and gay men who called in for advice and information. Some women only

called to have someone to listen to them. The hotline operators would only provide objective advices and if there were any medical problems, they will refer the callers to the doctors in charge of the hotline operation in the host hospital. The former operator also mentioned it was one of the principles of operators not to encourage callers to engage in homosexuality. They adopted an "understanding but not encouraging" (rentong danbu guli) attitude, especially to callers who are still at school and economically dependent on their families. The entire Tongxin Hotline has been closed down at the end of 2005. Many in the community believed that the closure was due to government intervention. It is not sure if the closure was also related to the crack down of the homosexual cultural festival held in Beijing at the same time, which might indicate a possible tightening up of government control over tongzhi activities. Almost a year later, the same group of female hotline volunteers set up a new lala hotline, which is the "800 free hotline" funded by the Hong Kong based Chi Heng Foundation. It is a hotline with tongzhi-identified operators established in 2006. The 800 lala hotline is operated on every Saturday for two hours in the afternoon.

In June 2005, Shanghai Nüai Working Group (上海女愛工作組) was founded by a group of more than ten self-identified lala volunteers who are all based in Shanghai. Nüai is the first self-initiated lala volunteer group in the city without official and overseas affiliations. The group also operates a lala hotline on every Friday night. It organizes social activities such as tours to nearby cities and celebration activities on international days of lesbian and gay men. It has carried out a number of salon gatherings for lalas with various themes. Topics included legal issues of tongzhi, lesbian relationship, the issue of coming out, etc. The gatherings were usually held in rented tea houses or bars with tickets sold at

RMB20 for each. Guest speakers were invited sometimes for special topics such as lawyers have been invited to talk in the meeting on legal consultation for lalas.

I have attended a salon gathering organized by Nüai in December 2005. It was a Sunday afternoon. The gathering was held in a bar located at a convenient location of the city. There was a small notice put up at the entrance of the bar, which wrote "salon gathering" follows by "Nüai working group" in a smaller font size. A large rainbow flag was put up on the wall facing the entrance. There was a piece of cardboard hanging on the wall inviting participants to sign on it. In less than one hour before the gathering, people began to show up one by one. At two o'clock in the afternoon, the meeting started. Two of the workers of Nüai hosted the meeting and all of us were seated casually around the hosts. The topic was "When love begins" (戀愛之初). We were suggested to talk about how couples met, fall in love and issues such as same-city love, long distance love, and the trend of underage love (which usually refers to love relationships between teenagers). There were about forty women in the room. Some of them were newcomers and some were regular participants. Most of them were in their twenties. From their self introductions, I learnt that the youngest participant was seventeen years old and the oldest was over forty. Many came with partners. Some of them were coming from outside Shanghai. Therefore, as in other social gatherings in the community, putonghua was usually the major language. Several couples were arranged to share their experiences on love and relationships. Their experiences included same-city relationship, long distance relationship, TT love (that is, two Ts as a couple), virtual relationship (wanglian, 網戀), and a young couple of seventeen years old and twenty-two years old was also invited. Participants were eager to join the discussion. The atmosphere was casual and informal. Only when sharing

about virtual relationship, there was disagreement from the audience over its necessity and sincerity . And it was also not hard to sense the age division among the women. Not like the party crowd, the dominant age group of salon gatherings is women in their mid twenties or over. The dominant group always referred to the younger generations as those "born after the 80s" and women who were born in the late 80s were regarded as "kids" by other older salon goers. The age boundary seems even larger than the regional boundary among lalas in Shanghai. Other groups such as Shengqiuxiaowu also organized seminars for lalas in the city. They usually attracted different crowds of women according to the networks of the organizers.

The community activities have exceeded the boundary of the city border and its cultural and social spaces. Groups and individual website founders in Shanghai have furthered their presence by participating in other lesbian and gay activities in and outside the country. They have attended female tongzhi conferences and activities held in Beijing, the International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO) Parade and Pride Parade held in Hong Kong, the Lala Camp, with lesbian organizers and workers coming from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and the United States, held in China in 2007 and 2008, and international gay and lesbian conferences held in Asia and North America in recent years. Community building and rights activism are developing side by side in the lala community of Shanghai. Community originated discourses on lesbian and gay people in China, such as those discussions and writings in the cyberspace and within salon gatherings, are productive in creating alternative discourses of homosexuality in a social context of stigmatization and alienation. There is also an intensifying cooperation of medical, legal and academic experts and the lala community in

Shanghai. For the endeavour of rights activism, the involvement of experts is particularly visible and also essential. Lawyers, medical practitioners and professors were present in lala salon gatherings to provide specialized information and support for the group that once has been condemned most severely by experts from these sectors. I will have a more extensive discussion of the medical and academic involvement in the shaping of tongzhi community in China in next chapter.

One will assume that the vibrant community activities and increasing visibility of lesbian and gay people in the public spaces such as the media would bring about a similarly relaxing existence of lalas in the private sphere. However, this is not entirely true. With the development of public communities, both online or offline, the social interaction has become much easier among lalas in the cities. Yet for many, the possible danger of exposure and its consequences are still a major consideration. Most of my informants kept their same-sex desires and relationships strictly in secret from their parents and families. For some, they cannot afford to make it known in their workplaces. In other words, most of the lalas I met personally and most people in the community, were closeted. No matter how active they were in the community, most of them cannot make this part of life outside the community. Therefore, they have developed a way of interaction which places primary emphasis on one's privacy and these practices of discretion are unwritten rules in the community. Everyone uses net name, or nickname, instead of a real name to refer to each other in the community. It would be rude if one asks for the real name of a person in their first or even later meetings. Some stick to using net names to refer to each other in all public occasions. Sometimes those net names might sound awkward when they are used in face-to-face

interactions. It took me a while to realize this practice and since then I was careful not to ask for the real names or even hometowns of any of them in group interactions. The practice is so deeply rooted that women will even refer to their girlfriends by net names in public or during my interviews. I have been told by one woman about how "annoying" it was when another woman kept asking people of where exactly they are coming from. She would probe further for the exact city even people have told her the name of the province. For native Shanghai lalas, they are reluctant to tell others where they work and live. It would be impolite if one probes them too far for personal information. Their cautious attitude is not totally out of an imagined fear of exposure. Occasionally there are cases circulating on websites or in the community about gay men and lesbians who are threatened by people they met online or offline to expose their sexual orientation to their families and workplaces in exchange for money or other things. As long as social discrimination and penalty in various forms still exist, it is impossible for gay men and lesbians in China not to be cautious in the public.

With many lalas in the local community coming from other parts of the country, they have contributed to the emergence of a new type of lesbian kinship, that is, the lala family. Small group of lala friends who came to know each other in community gatherings or lesbian websites move in together and proclaim themselves a lala family. Each of them may take up a role in the family like those in the traditional heterosexual family according to their gender/ sexual identification (for example, T or P), personalities or their specialization in household chores. During one of my longer field visits in the city, I was accepted by one of these lala families to stay with them. They were a group of four women with some of their partners moving in and out. They related to each other in terms

of kinship relationships. The T in the family was the father, and the most capable P was assigned the role of mother, even though they were not a real couple. The rest of the flat mates were daughters to them. Not only did they live and eat together, they also worked together for community activities. The fact that all of them and their lovers were closeted to their natal families has forged stronger bonds among them as an alternative family. They supported each other emotionally and offered each other the kind of care that is impossible to get from their natal families owing to their closeted status. The support of a lala family is particularly essential in occasions when any family member has a relationship crisis. This is the part for them that they cannot share with parents, siblings and even with their close straight friends. They would be enthusiastically involved in each family member's relationship whenever there is a need for it. The support also extended to other living apart family members. The lala family I have stayed with has secondary lala family members, such as "cousins" and "nieces", who were also closely connected with the core family members. The lala family plays multiple roles to both of its members (core and secondary) and the community as a whole. For family members, it provides around-the-clock emotional security and a family space so that they do not need to hide their sexual identity. For other members in the community, the existence of a lala family is like a private community centre that they can socialize with each other without the worries they will have in bars or in other public spaces. Other cohabitating lala couples also provide similar social gathering spaces for friends in the community. With the increasing mobility of people within the country along with more lalas being economically capable to live away from natal families, the number of lala families, either bonded by friendship or love will be rapidly increasing in Shanghai and also other big cities in China. Lesbian kinship in urban China will be one emergent area for further

research.

**Changing society and the rise of communities**

The reasons why lala communities have become increasingly visible since the late 1990s are due to political, economic and social changes in the country in the past decades. In the follow part, I will have a brief discussion of the numerous factors that have led to the rise of lala communities in recent years.

It is certain that the increasing geographical mobility of job seekers in the past two decades have contributed to the emergence of visible lesbian and gay communities in big and economically well off cities in China. Individual mobility, either geographically or socially, has been significantly heightened after the economic transformation since the late 1970s (Lu 2004). The implication of this policy change is that social control on individuals, which has been long carried out through centralized job assignment system, has been significantly lessened. In the past, mobility between jobs was almost impossible and mobility between cities was even more difficult. The danwei of an individual controlled almost every aspect of her/his social and private life, from the provision of housing to the regulation of one's love life. Therefore, the opening up of the job market and hence the loosening of state control through danwei have created new opportunities for people to live their personal lives more privately. The newly acquired geographical mobility encourages people from less developed parts of the country to seek jobs in more developed cities. Big cities such as Shanghai are densely populated with job seekers from all over the country. For non-natives, the city can provide them a kind of anonymity that they can never enjoy in their

hometowns, and this is crucial to people who want to live alternative lifestyles. For many people, Shanghai is a place to fulfil their career aspirations and also their desired way of living. The availability of information and relatively safe meeting spaces for lesbian and gay people are other reasons why the city has become one of the most active lesbian and gay centres in the country. For some of my non-native informants, Shanghai is where they first put their desires into practice.

During the past decade, we can also witness a relaxation of political control over homosexuality in the country. Within a few years, homosexuality was excluded from legal prosecution (the abolishment of "hooliganism" of Article 160 of the old Criminal Law in 1997, which was applied to male homosexual activities) and the medical category of perverts (the Chinese Psychiatry Association has formally removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorder in 2001). The decriminalization and depathologization have at least enabled a more positive representation of homosexuality and its population in official discourses. They enabled a new discursive space for experts in legal, medical, and academic domains to discuss the issues without former ideological obligations. Throughout the 1990s and especially during the later years, a number of publications, targeted on sexuality studies which include formerly condemned forms of sexual practices and relationships were released to the public. During which Li Yinhe and Wang Xiaobo's (1992) study on male homosexuals in China and Zhang Baichuan's (1994) comprehensive discussion of homosexuality from a medical perspective are two important earlier works in the field. The two works also inaugurated the active intervention of experts from medical science and social science in the construction of contemporary discourse of homosexuality. (I will discuss further of how these two sources of intervention have affected the formation of

contemporary homosexual subjects in next chapter.) After 2000, publications on alternative sexual practices, sexual health, and sexual education targeting at the general public have continued to appear in the market. The proliferation of publications on sexual topics in recent years is developed in a context of the decriminalization and demedicalization of homosexuality and the intensification of involvement of experts from the scientific disciplines in the process of discourse production.

The changing economic and political atmosphere in the past decade is also accompanied with a significant change of sexual morality in urban China. One prominent change is the de-orientation of sex from the social/collective to private/individual. Many agreed that the new Marriage Law in 1981, which allows divorce to be filed on the basis of "broken down of affection" between wife and husband, has brought about a shift from collective interests to individual rights in intimate relationship (Evans, 1997; Ruan, 1991; Woo, 2006). Ruan (1991) also believes that the national birth control policy has led to an unanticipated public enthusiasm on sexual pleasure when contraception has become an official practice and sex has been freed from reproduction. One visible evidence of the changing sexual morality in urban China in the 1990s is the flourishing sexual health industry. McMillan (2006) attributes the emerging sexual health industry to the government's conscious effort to create a scientific and civilized discourse of sex and to regulate sex within the domain of public interest. The officially supported sexual health industry in other words legitimates sexual pleasure as an aspect of physical health. This is another ideological move from collective interests, that are expressed in terms of reproduction in the pre-birth control era, to individual rights, which emphasize pleasure and satisfaction in sex. Evans (1997) even believes the

public interest of women's sexual pleasure can be dated even earlier to the beginning of 1980s, where first in media, there is a "greater prominence of discussion about women's sexual pleasure" (p.9).

The change of sexual morality is also evident in a more tolerant attitude in public discussion of groups that deviate from the monogamous heterosexual norm and have formerly been labelled as sexual "deviants", such as celibate women, men and women with multiple sex partners and homosexuals as well. Female celibacy is more accepting in big metropolitan cities when increasing number of women are freed from the danwei system which used to put unmarried women in an economically, politically and socially inferior position. For certain class of economically independent women, the stigma of being a celibate woman has been much lessened during the reform period. The increased tolerance of unmarried women allows women in city at least to lead a life that is free of marriage and child bearing, and for non-heterosexual women to be free from the pressure of marriage. The relaxation of political and social control of "abnormal" sexual subjects due to the changing economic reality and social morality is another factor that made possible the emergence of lesbian and gay communities in urban China.

The emergence of lesbian communities in Shanghai and the rest of China in the late 1990s, apart from the above-mentioned economic, political and social factors, is impossible without the help of the Internet. The popularity of the technology among urban residents in late 1990s has contributed dramatically to the social existence of lesbian and gay people in the country. This is the single most important factor that has led to the emergence of identity-based communities of gay men and lalas in contemporary China and its importance and limitations are

discussed elsewhere in the thesis.

**The marginal existence**

Despite of the numerous factors that favour a more positive existence of lalas in the cities, they are still marginalized in many aspects. In both of the public and private domains, lalas in China have not yet been able to gain a full recognition.

Politically, female homosexual practices are generally considered to be much less a threat to social security than male homosexual practices. Therefore, it is comparatively rare for women to be penalized for same-sex sexual activities. Though there are still cases of women being detained for their homosexual "sex crimes" in the 1980s as documented by Ruan (1991). The lenient treatment of female homosexuals by the authority reflects a long history of cultural tolerance or dismissal of erotic activities among women. The positive side of this cultural legacy is that it provides a less regulated and punitive social space for women with same-sex desires and practices. Being an inferior gender group, their "abnormal" sexual behaviours are less threatening to the dominant social order. However, this different treatment of male and female homosexuality has partly contributed to the "symbolic annihilation" of female homosexual subjects in both the public imagination and actual social resource allocation. One prominent example of the marginalization of female homosexuals in the public sphere is the unequal representation of gay men and lesbians in the discourses of sexual health and homosexual rights activism in contemporary China. This has resulted in the uneven allocation of resources among the two groups. It is especially obvious when the contemporary homosexual rights activism is conducted in the context of

AIDS prevention and funds are mainly channeled in from sexual health programmes or foundations from outside the country. Lesbian community organizers in major cities are aware of their marginalization in the process of community building and fundraising. Yet the current situation is that they have to rely on male resources to build up communities and carry out projects. The Tongxin female hotlines and the new 800 lala hotline in Shanghai are two examples of how lesbians are dependant on gay resources for community building.

In the private sphere, lalas in China also suffered from the deprivation of being an independent sexual subject in the family system. Lalas in Shanghai are under tremendous pressure of marriage as much as gay men do. The pressure primarily comes from their families. The only difference is, while both women and men will be considered as a non-adult if they are not married, women suffer from a double condemnation of a non-adult and a sexual non-subject. Unmarried women are deprived of being legitimate sexual subjects according to the male active/ female passive sexual belief which denies any active female desires. Moreover, the monogamous heterosexual marriage norm naturalizes heterosexual union and women's receptive role in sexual relationships with men. This cultural belief of female sexuality obscures the possibility for unmarried non-heterosexual women to be recognized in the Chinese family as legitimate sexual beings. It is even harder for them to be fully recognized sexual subjects in a culture of gender that is built on their very sexual inactivity. This is the cultural logic behind the fact that why female homosexual practices are more "tolerated" in Chinese culture and why women are less severely punished because of their homosexual activities. I would argue that this is the very challenge that lalas in Shanghai and elsewhere in

China are currently facing and have to struggle against. Coming out for lalas in China is a doubly difficult task. They have to both come out for their homosexual desires and at the same time, an even more challenging task is to be also out as a legitimate *sexual* subject. I will have a fuller discussion of the subject position of lalas in Chinese family system and their coming out to parents and family in Chapter 5 and 6.

> "I fantasized that there would be a place where homosexuals can converse and interact freely. I fantasized having a lover. But fantasy is not real. In reality, homosexuals do not automatically love all other homosexuals. They choose their partners just like heterosexuals. But where can I find them? In this wide world all homosexuals hide their true identity. It is so much more difficult for a homosexual to find his ideal partner than a heterosexual. I sometimes was tempted to openly seek a homosexual friend. But how can I? I do not think a homosexual person will do any harm to the country and other people. But why can't we openly discuss homosexuality? We should provide ways for exclusive homosexuals to contact one another. I sincerely wish that our country and related governmental agencies could openly show their concern about our problems. (Letter 8)" (Ruan 1991, p.128, original in English)

This is quoted from one of the 56 letters that Ruan Fangfu, a medical expert in China, has received from gay readers who responded to his article "Homosexuality: An Unsolved Puzzle" (同性戀——一個未解之謎) published in one of the country's popular health magazines, *To Your Good Health* (祝您健康), in 1985. This gay respondent was desperately yearning for a space where homosexuals in China can get in touch with each other freely. To him, it was like an unattainable fantasy. Twenty years later, the fantasy has turned into reality.

In this chapter, I will further theorize the relationship between the heterosexual and homosexual public spaces by mapping the new public inaugurations of homosexuals that have happened in the domains of medical science, law and sociology during the economic reform period (1978- ). In the following section, I will first lay out the interactions between the two publics and also their

relationships with the two privates, which are the formally acknowledged heterosexual privates and the closeted homosexual privates. I will have further discussion of the two privates and the existence of lalas in these spaces in the next two chapters.

It is evident to many that lesbian and gay men in China, together with other formerly condemned sexual "deviants" and practices, have started to appear in public discussions. New terms, which imply new conceptual frameworks, are invented to inaugurate them to morally less judgemental subject positions. Among those newly invented or popularized sexual identities and terms are tongxingai, tongxinglian, douxinghuoban (multiple sexual partners, 多性夥伴), hunwailian (extra-marital loves, 婚外戀), yiyeqing (one night stand, 一夜情). New subject positions are created through these new conceptualizations of non-normative sex and relationships. This public naming has an effect of inaugurating the formerly "private" beings or practices and those that have been confined to the invisible private spaces into the public for both open discussion and regulation. Evans (1997) analyzes how dominant discourses in communist China interact with the changing subject positions of gender and sexuality,

> "Moreover, texts are effective not through their 'message', their 'content', but through the explicit and implicit, conscious and unconscious, positions they make available. The 'gaps and silences' are as important in shaping the interpretative possibilities as the explicit terms of the narrative. [...] So, with particular reference to China, whether in the constrained ideological atmosphere of the 1950s to the early 1970s, or in the more consumer-oriented context of the last ten years, the dominant discourses and the practices they inform have established the broad parameters within which women and men become gendered and sexualized subjects. Whether or not individual persons consciously acknowledged the dominant gender categories of these

> discourses, they also participate in reproducing them by making representations and self-representations – both consciously and unconsciously – with reference to them." (Evans 1997, p.19)

Public discourses circumscribe the visible (and invisible) boundaries that one can imagine a life to be and where she can locate herself in the changing contour of social acceptability. The changing official representations of sexual subjects might also signal a changing direction in the social control of the population and practices concerned. Homosexuals are among others the most significant group that has been brought to the public by a form of linguistic demoralization, with a more positive interpretation in the hetero publics and a sense of community empowerment in the homo publics.

This new public inauguration of homosexuals is a direct result of the drastic changes that have happened in the social, cultural and economic aspects in China in the past two decades. The economic changes are essential to the formation of an identity culture of lesbians and gay men in China. The newly acquired geographical mobility, economic freedom and information technology create a material reality that enables the practice of alternative lifestyles and community formation. Homosexuality has for the first time entered the (heterosexual) public sphere as an independent category of people and a distinguished set of practices, and also in an unprecedented "positive" representation as compared to that in the past. Lesbians and gay men have also created a public of their own on the Internet and gradually this homo cyberspace further spills over to the visible street level that has traditionally been a heterosexual territory.

In the following sections, I will chart the process of how homosexuals are going

public in post-reform era China through an analysis of the few major discursive sites that are participating in this inaugurative project.

**From patients to subjects of public health**

Experts have been one of the major participants in the production of dominant or official discourses in the communist China. Among them, experts from the medical field, social science and legal discipline are the most significant sources of knowledge production of homosexuality, and sexuality in general. Especially during the reform period, there has been a reemergence of both an expert and a popular interest in a *scientific* understanding of sex and sexuality. There has been a general criticism of the state imposed silence on sex discussions in the past especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). This new scientific emphasis is "considered essential to the healthy development of the nation's future" (Evans, 1997). A "correct" and "objective" attitude towards sex has been first promoted by experts from the medical profession in the country in the early 1980s. In this section, I will have an overview of the medical intervention of homosexuality during the reform period. Furthermore, I will provide a summary of another two axes of expert intervention, namely, the legal and the academic.

The new medical interest of homosexuality can be traced back to the development of sexual science (性科學) since the early 1980s. One of the major areas of this new scientific examination is abnormal sexual behaviour and psychology. After a long period of silence since the formation of the new communist state, the study of sexuality in medical science reappeared with unprecedented enthusiasm in the early 1980s. It is generally agreed that the publication of *Sexual Medicine* (性醫學)

in 1982, which is an edited translation of *Textbook of Sexual Medicine* (Kolody, Masters and Johnson, 1979) published by the Scientific and Technical Documents Publishing House (科技文獻出版社) in Beijing has started a new wave of sexual science studies in contemporary China. However, this first major publication in the field has removed four chapters from the original volume. They are the chapters on rape, homosexuality, sexually transmitted diseases and sex change. The editorial explanation provided in the "Prelude" of the book for the omission is "[the four chapters] not clinically relevant" ("與臨床醫學關係較小"). This reflects the cautious attitude of early attempts by medical experts in testing the forbidden water. In 1985, the same publication house released the first popular text of sex education in the country, *Handbook of Sexual Knowledge* (性知識手冊), written by Ruan Fangfu, then a medical professor in Beijing, and a team of medical experts. In this booklet, homosexuality is mentioned but is defined as a form of abnormal sexual behaviour. According to Liu (2000), both books have been so popular that they have been reprinted many times to meet the market demand. The two books, one professional and one popular, were both packaged as medical and sex education texts. To Liu, this is a conscious editorial strategy of the publisher to make sure writers did not step on the ideologically "landmines". This notion of scientific packaging forms a safe shield against any moral and political accusations. In the following two decades, sexual studies in the name of medical science continued to flourish in significant quantity.

As early as in the first half of the 1980s, articles of homosexuality on medical and other academic journals started to appear occasionally in China. Early medical interpretations of homosexuality can be exemplified by an article titled "Phenomenon of Homosexuality in the Red Chamber" (紅樓中的同性戀現象)

published on *Popular Medicine* (大眾醫學), a medical journal for a lay audience and has been a popular household magazine at the time. The writer of the article is a medical doctor and talks about homosexuality with reference to the classical literary text *Hungloumeng* (or *The Dream of the Red Chamber*) written in the Qing Dynasty in which male and female same-sex desires and practices are described. The following is quoted from this short medical article,

> "Is homosexuality a disease? One cannot provide a simplistic conclusion. We can only say that homosexuals are mentally ill and psychologically abnormal. It is because a normal person's psychological condition is often pointed towards heterosexuals, in other words, 'The young fair lady, For our lord a good mate'. For homosexuals to desire someone of the same-sex is a form of sexual perversion. But what is the reason for such a psychological change? Here it might be a situation of three factors: biological, psychological and social. [...] If we find out that the main reason to be a homosexual is due to biological changes, then we should treat it as an illness and provide it with proper treatment. [...] From an abnormal psychology point of view, the ones who are psychologically abnormal among homosexual lovers are primarily the effeminate husbands and the masculine wives. [...] Therefore, they are most likely in need of treatment or therapy because they are psychologically abnormal." (Zhang 1981, p.42-43)[11]

It continues the tradition of discussing homosexuality in the perspective of sexual abnormality. This perspective has been the dominant medical interpretation on homosexuality before the reform period. Homosexuality has been treated as a deviant sexual behaviour and as a term of abnormal psychology. People with such

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[11] "同性戀是不是病呢？那可不能簡單地作結論。我們只能說同性戀者的性心理是不正常的。因爲正常人的性心理活動的指向，總是異性，也就是所謂'窈窕淑女，君子好逑'。而同性戀者的性心理指向，所愛慕的對象卻是同一性別的，這是一種性心理方面的變態。但是，爲什麼造成性心理的改變呢？這裡可能有生理、心理和社會三個方面的因素。[...]如果發現同性戀患者的主要原因是生理改變，應作爲'疾病'來對待，並給以適當的治療。[...]從變態心理學角度分析，同性戀的戀人中，性心理反常者，主要是女性'丈夫'，和男性'妻子'。[...]所以，他們可能是需要接受治療或心理指導的對象，因爲他們心理學上的性定向是不正常的。"

behaviour and psychology will be assigned a sick role as the homosexual patient. Before 2001, homosexuality was officially regarded as a mental illness in China. Diagnosis and treatments were available in hospitals. And even after 2001, many medical experts still hold onto the old medical belief that homosexuality is a mental disorder and psychiatric counseling and aversion treatments are still provided in some hospitals since the new "Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders (3rd version) (CCMD-3) issued in 2001 still keeps the category of "self-discordant homosexuality".[12]

A pathologized understanding of homosexuality was also presented in the works of some medical experts in the 1980s who intended to promote a more tolerant attitude towards the practice and the population. For instance, in one of the early articles of homosexuality by Ruan Fangfu, "Homosexuality: An Unsolved Puzzle" (同性戀——一個未解之謎), published in 1985, contrasting views of the topic were both presented. On the one hand, Ruan calls for a fairer treatment of homosexuals,

> "Homosexuality is not compatible with innate biology. From a biological point of view, human sexual behaviour is connected with reproduction. There is no reproduction between same sexes. The proliferation of homosexuality among humans will lead to serious problems of reproduction. But there should not be punishment towards homosexuals simple because homosexuality does not lead to reproduction. There are a significant portion of heterosexual couples (the figures are not lesser than homosexuals) who are non-reproductive. The society does not blame them for this. In this era of family planning, a majority of sexual behaviour has nothing to do with reproduction. The society does not blame it but instead encourages it, then why does homosexuality has to be criminalized and blamed for being

[12] "自我不和諧的同性戀"

non-reproductive?" (Ruan 1989, p.14)[13]

Yet a few paragraphs later, he dismisses homosexuality, though at the end he still calls for a more reasonable treatment of the subject.

> "Of course, it is not about advocating homosexuality here. Actually, one cannot see the pros of homosexuality especially when homosexuals face a series of social, moral, economic and medical pressures with all sorts of dire consequences. As a result, it is not worthy of advocacy and in reality, one cannot change a 'strictly heterosexual' person into a homosexual. Just as it is impossible to change a 'strictly homosexual person' into a heterosexual person. It is also not possible to eradicate homosexuality in countries, ethnic or religious groups that condemn homosexuals to death penalties. What is to be emphasized here is the need to address the issue of homosexuality and to treat it in a reasonable manner." (Ibid.)[14]

In the concluding paragraph, he returns to the dominant medical discourse of prevention and uses the most frequently employed technique of marginalizing sexual deviants by citing discourses of protecting juniors and familial harmony,

> "In terms of homosexuality, it is better to strive for prevention in order to keep a family harmonious. Provide good sex education to children including appropriate and timely sex education. Create a civilized environment for young people to get to know persons of different sexes will help to decrease

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[13] "同性戀是不符合生物本性的。從生物學的觀點來看，人類的性行爲是與生殖聯繫在一起的。同性是不能生育的。同性戀在人群中的擴展，將導致種族繁衍上的嚴重問題。但是，也不能因爲同性戀不生育而蔑視以至懲罰同性戀者。有相當一部份異性夫婦（其數量不少於同性戀者）是不育的，社會並不因此而責難他們；在計劃生育的時代，絕大部份性行爲也是與生殖無關的，社會不僅不責難，反而要提倡這一點。爲什麼同性戀就要因爲不育而受罪責呢？"

[14] "當然，這裡並不是提倡同性戀。確實看不出同性戀有什麼好處。而且同性戀者面臨著一系列社會的、道德的、法律的、經濟的、疾病的壓力，有種種後果。因此，根本不值得提倡。事實上也提倡不了，沒有辦法把一個'絕對異性戀者'變爲同性戀者。正像沒有辦法把一個'絕對同性戀者'變爲異性戀者一樣。即使對同性戀者處以死刑的國家、民族或宗教裡，也沒有能夠根絕同性戀。這裡所要強調的只是：應該正視同性戀問題，並合理對待它。"

the incidence of homosexuality." (Ibid., p.16)[15]

But still, this article is one of the rare ones to call for a fair treatment of homosexuals in the early reform period. The consequence of its publication was an influx of 60 letters from readers (mostly gay men) responding to the article. The letter quoted at the beginning of this chapter is from one of the gay respondents. Six years later, in Ruan's book *Sex in China: Studies in Sexology in Chinese Culture* (which was published in English language by a publisher in New York), there is an obvious change of attitude in discussing the same subject. In the chapter on homosexuality in this later English publication, he mentions the above article published in 1985 and also includes some of the letters from the readers. However, what he does not mention about this earlier article is the preventive treatment he promotes in the concluding paragraph. Instead, he shifts to a gay rights discourse in this English publication and criticizes China's repressive policies on homosexuals. Both articles show a genuine concern for the situation of homosexuals in China but they apply entirely different narrative strategies and resort to entirely different discourses of homosexuality. One starts with a positive recognition and ends with a repressive comment which is in line with the official narrative of homosexuality at the time in China. The other is more discursively consistent by adopting a gay rights perspective that is familiar to the Western readers. Ruan in his English chapter on homosexuality even unambiguously calls for a policy change in China for gay people,

> "It is time – past time – for the Chinese government to change its policies. Not only must it recognize the rights of gay people and develop educational

[15] "對於同性戀，也是'預防爲主'。家庭的和諧；對兒童進行良好的教育，包括及時而適當的性教育；創造青少年之間異性交往的文明環境和條件等等，可能都有助於減少同性戀的出現。"

> programs promoting public acceptance of their lifestyle, it must begin promoting safe sex practices, ultimately preventing the premature deaths of perhaps millions of innocent people." (Ruan 1991, p.134)

Although he emphasizes the importance of preventive measures for homosexuality in the 1985 article, in his later English publication, he describes it as "sad" when 21 among the 56 gay men sending him letters asked how they might be healed (Ruan 1991, p.129). Similar change of views or contradictions is present in works by other medical experts, as seen in the well-respected expert activist of gay rights Zhang Beichuan. He also adopts the dominant repressive narrative in his book on homosexuality published in 1994. The repressive narrative is characterized by a concluding comment that always reaffirms a preventive treatment towards homosexuality, regardless of how "progressive" or sympathetic the preceding paragraphs or chapters are. Evans also mentions this narrative split in many expert texts of homosexuality in post-reform China,

> "Other observations about homosexuality reveal a similar tension, between sympathetic demands for tolerance and recognition on the one hand, and a persistent attachment to the view of homosexuality as a deviant or diseased state on the other. Liberal scholars working on sex education and other sex-related issues continue to present homosexuality as a sickness, despite their demands for recognition of homosexuals' rights." (Evans 1997, p.209)

Given the always unpredictable political climate, it is understandable that why many sympathetic medical, academic and legal experts would have contradictory comments on homosexuality in different works or even in the same piece of writing. It is important to pay attention to the social contexts of the texts concerned, particularly to the fact of when and where they are produced and to whom they are speaking to. The repressive narrative form has more or less become a formula of

medical and other expert discussions of homosexuality during the 1980s and even after the depathologization. In Liu Dalin's book on homosexuality in China that is published in 2005, he still concludes his book with a chapter on "Prevention of Homosexuality" (同性戀的防治), regardless of the fact that he is one of the most progressive sex experts in contemporary China. Sometimes it would be hard to reach a conclusion of whether or not the writer is deploying this repressive narrative out of political concerns. But it is evident that political consideration is still a weighty one when one wants to engage in publication or public discussion of controversial sexual practices or populations in contemporary China.

It was until the early 1990s, after the release of *Tamen de shijei* in 1992, the first sociological study of male homosexuals in China in Chinese language by local sociologists, there came the first comprehensive medical study of homosexuality, *Tongxinai* by Zhang Beichuan in 1994. Zhang is a medical professional specialized in human sexualities in China. In his prelude to the book, he mentions two reasons why he was so determined to write this book. The first reason is the inadequacy of homosexuality research and publication in China at the time. The second one is the sufferings of many homosexuals that have come to his clinic for help and the prejudice and ignorance of the homosexual population in society. He makes his stance clear in the same prelude that he does not agree with homosexuality. But as a medical practitioner, he is obliged to "understand the reasons and meanings for it cogently, to thoroughly understand the dangers for its existence, to use scientific methods to actively pursue ways to prevent and to deal with it' (p.4).[16] Alongside his sympathetic undertone, a repressive narrative

[16] "切實認識它的起因和意義，透徹地明白它可能存有的危害，用科學的方法積極進行預防和處理。"

echoing with those earlier medical texts on homosexuality is not difficult to identify. The chapter outline reflects a typical structure of repressive narrative of homosexuality. There are ten chapters in total, which are, "A history of researches on the phenomenon of homosexuality", "The definitions, the current state and categorizations of homosexuality", "The practices of homosexuality", "The causes of homosexuality", "The relationship between homosexuality and psychological (mental) illnesses", "The prevention and treatment of homosexuality", "Sexual deviances that are related to homosexuality (sexual practices)", "Sexually derived bodily illnesses among homosexuals", "Homosexuality and sexual mores", and "Homosexuality and laws on sexuality".[17] It is unquestionable that Zhang is driven by a deep sympathy as a medical doctor to have a more comprehensive and scientific understanding of his patients. People come to doctors to get medical help or to seek for explanations of their undesirable physical or psychological conditions. Therefore, it is not surprising to find many medical accounts seeing homosexuals as miserable people who are in desperate need of help. Also, Zhang's book is published before the official depathologization of homosexuality. On the cover of the book the author announces his sympathetic view on homosexuality ("homosexuality is a sexual crisis and tragedy entrenched within society")[18] and the book's major aims are: to improve the medical and popular understanding of this subject, to help the heterosexual majority to have a scientific treatment to the homosexuals, and to help homosexual patients to enforce their self discipline.[19] Despite of its use of a

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[17] "同性愛現象研究史", "同性愛的定義、流行狀況和分型", "同性愛的表現", "同性愛的起因", "同性愛與心理(精神)疾病的關係", "同性愛的預防與治療", "與同性愛(性行爲)有關的性偏離", "同性愛者與性有關的器質性疾病", "同性愛與性道德", "同性愛與性法律"。

[18] "同性愛是一個社會深層的性苦難和性悲劇。"

[19] "以期改變我國目前學術界，特別是醫學界對這一常見社會現象的知識匱乏、認識膚淺的現狀，並幫助廣大讀者澄清這一現代的性誤區；幫助異性愛大眾科學地認識與對待同性愛者，並幫助同性愛患者增強自我規範的力量。"

repressive narrative to confine homosexuality in the terrain of sexual abnormality, *Tongxinai* is the first full length medical publication to speak directly of and to the homosexual population in China. It is one of the first attempts from the state experts, who have been traditionally a power source of social control over non-normative sexual subjects, to publicly express a sympathetic view towards homosexuals. Zhang's later efforts in lesbian and gay activism and HIV/AIDS health campaigns in the country are a continuation of his earlier endeavours in the demystification and destigmatization of homosexuality. His efforts in different periods of time were vented through different inaugurative discourses that are allowed and intelligent at the time and space concerned.

In the context of a state promoted belief in scientific objectivity, the medical institution is always granted the authority to have the last say of what is normal and abnormal, and in extension, what is legal and illegal. The sociological account of Li Yinhe (2002) of an informant who was serving in the army during the Maoist era (1949-1976) shows how medical science intervenes one's private life and changes one's social position,

> "I was caught sleeping with someone of the same sex and penalized by the army. At that time, I was wrongfully accused of sodomy. During the years of 1968 – 1978, they also wrongfully accused me of sodomy. Until my sentence was handed down, I requested for a medical examination. I was not allowed to have a medical examination due to the attitude of my danwei. Later, I sneaked out to X hospital for examination and realized I am a homosexual. Then I went to three hospitals in Beijing for further examinations and got clinically diagnosed as homosexual. In 1980, the high court at the provincial level made corrections to the court sentence and I was allowed to work again. But up till now, my party membership and the missed work payments were

never re-issued." (Li 2002a, p.391)[20]

After his medical diagnosis, his judgement of the criminal court has been changed to,

> "The case of hooliganism for defendant X will be sentenced to a fixed term imprisonment of two years outside of jail under surveillance. It was later dismissed of criminality and went under review. The original sentence confirmed that it is not a criminal offence because X has a medical condition of homosexuality. Therefore, the original sentencing and subsequent reviews will be corrected." (Li 2002a, p.391)[21]

Although the medical interpretation of homosexuality as a sickness saved this man from criminal punishment, it put him under the equally severe surveillance of medical control by defining him a patient. Medicine has long been critically regarded as a form of effective social control and this has been particularly the case in China where medical professionals play a major role in the expert system of social control. The medical organ of socio-political control is well discussed by Evans,

> "Identification of a range of 'abnormal' or 'deviant' behaviours (bu zhengchang xing xingwei) that have been produced since the early days of the People's Republic has served to legitimize the values and practices subscribed to by official medical and professional agencies. When contained by a state discourse, as in China, public discussion about 'peripheral' sexualities functions to support an agenda that corresponds with official

[20] "我在部隊因同同性睡覺，受過黨內警告處分，當時扎我當做雞姦錯誤。1968 至 1978 年間，也把我當做雞姦錯誤處理，直到判刑……我要求到醫院檢查，由於單位的態度，不准我去檢查，後來我還是偷偷地到 xx 醫學院檢查，才知道是同性戀。然後又經北京三所醫院檢查，確診爲同性戀。1980 年省高等法院糾正錯判後，才恢復工作，但至今卡住黨籍和錯處期工資未補發。"

[21] "被告 xxx 因流氓罪--案，判處有期徒刑二年監外執行，後改判免予刑事處分。現經再次複查：原判認定事實不構成犯罪。因 xxx 患有 '同性戀' 病。爲此，撤銷原判和複查改判的判決，予以糾正。"

interests in social control." (Evans 1997, p.187)

Homosexuality during the pre-economic reform period had been strictly confined to a form of medical abnormality. During the reform period and after the official depathologization of homosexuality in 2001, it is still subject to medical intervention. Though the context of regulation has been changed when HIV/AIDS health intervention programmes were introduced as part of a state project since mid-1990s, much effort has since then been put into public discussion and the research of the male homosexual population after the state identification of the AIDS crisis. In 1995, the first official recognition of the existence of the homosexual group appeared in the country through the publication of *Handbook of Health Education* (健康教育手冊) by the National Health Education Institute and the Ministry of Health. One of the booklets directly addresses to (male) homosexuals in the country (referenced from Pan 2004, p.253). This marks the first official inauguration of homosexuals into the public and signals an end to the era of official denial of the presence of homosexuality in the country. Although to some, it might signal a new form of stigmatization as homosexuals are first called into the visible public by the state through the representation as a contaminating agent of the HIV virus. As Pan puts it,

> "In this discussion, AIDS infections become a cultural tool for a country to intrude into private lives. Moreover, the meaning of AIDS prevention stretches beyond publicity materials. It became a reason for the police and other authorities to harass and to imprison homosexuals. The deep distrust in homosexuals by legal authorities and medical organizations became a result of this." (Pan 2004, p.257)[22]

[22] "在這場討論中，艾滋病的傳播本身就成了一種文化工具。國家用它來擴大對私人生活的干預；並且，對於宣傳冊的讀者來說，這個意義遠遠超過預防艾滋病。這是由警察和其他權力機構對同性戀者的騷擾和拘禁，以及執法機關和公共衛生機構對同性戀者根深蒂固的

It is possible that one of the effects of the state imposition of sexual health campaign would lead to a stringent control of an individual's private life. The officially enforced association of HIV/AIDS and male homosexuality would make it even harder for the people concerned to be accepted as normal and healthy subjects. Yet it is currently the only politically sanctioned discursive position that homosexuality is allowed to be discussed and represented publicly. Also, this political opening gave rise to a more resourceful and socially visible community activism of gay men, and to a lesser extent, lesbians in China.

**Legal controversies**

The most important development about homosexuality in the legal domain during the reform period is the removal of sodomy and hooliganism from the revised Criminal Law in 1997. The two crimes have been used to penalize male homosexuals in the past. The newly introduced "Obscenity Law" (Article 237) does not mention homosexual conducts. The abolishment of these two crimes is regarded as an official attempt to decriminalize (male) homosexuality. However, it does not mean that all homosexual activities in China will be freed from legal control. Hooliganism is still included in the new Criminal Law issued in 1997 and its ambiguous definition might lead to possible penalization of homosexuals.[23] The legal domain is always the most controversial and ambiguous in its treatment

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不信任所造成的。"

[23] For example, in Article 19 Section 4 of the "Regulations Governing Offences Against Public Order" issued in 1994, it states that,"inciting gang activities or violence, behaving in a riotous or disorderly manner, or insults at women or other forms of hooliganism"(結伙鬥毆，尋衅滋事，侮辱婦女或者進行其他流氓活動的), the content of "hooliganism" can be open to arbitrary interpretations. (Information source: Jia Ping (2005) *Report of rights, legal problems and related issues of homosexual (bisexual) in China* (同（雙）性戀相關法律問題綜述), Beijing: Aizhixing

of homosexuality in China. The major reason is that there has never been any law prohibiting homosexuality since 1949 and there was only an umbrellas term of hooliganism that covers all socially deviant conducts. Even sodomy and hooliganism were always open to arbitrary interpretations of local legal authorities. As Li Yinhe (2006) comments, "the most serious threat to same-sex sexual conduct between consenting male adults comes neither from legal sanctions nor from police arrest in the name of public security, but rather from social prejudice, which as resulted in the arbitrary imposition of administrative penalties and Party disciplinary sanctions." (p.82) As indicated by the above case of Li's informant, the legal treatment of homosexual conducts depends very much on individual danwei's attitude and the degree of medical intervention. The nature of administrative penalties is highly arbitrary. They are abundantly demonstrated by the personal experiences of Li Yinhe's (2002) gay informants. This kind of administrative penalties and party disciplinary sanctions exercised through the danwei and public security system is especially destructive to the individual if s/he relies on the danwei for the provision of everyday needs, as it was the case for almost everyone before the economic reform period. The penalties directly threaten an individual's political, social and economic survival.

Zhang Beichuan, in his book on homosexuality, which is written before 1997, mentions that male homosexuals are always prosecuted under hooliganism and sodomy. He offers a case of public arrest of male homosexuals under hooliganism in 1988,

"For example, in Hangzhou around 1988, legal authorities arrested more than

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Institute of Health Education, p.12.)

> sixty male homosexuals citing Article 160 [my note: which is 'hooliganism']. The Article states that 'group fights, disturbance of public order, grave situations will be sentenced to a fixed term of seven years or below, detention or community order. Key persons involved in hooligan groups will be sentenced to seven years or more fixed term imprisonment.'" (Zhang 1994, p.633)[24]

He also mentions that there are huge differences in the treatment of male homosexuals in various cities since mid 1980s when semi-public and public male homosexual corners started to appear in urban areas (ibid., p.635). There were mass arrests of male homosexuals in police raids of gay nightclubs in one city while in another city, male homosexuals gathered at public spaces were only "invited" by the police to talk about their situations with confidentiality being assured.

Public remarks by authority figures and state organs remain as an important source to understand the legal treatment of any controversial social conduct in the country. Alongside an understanding of homosexuality as a mental disorder, there has been a general official recognition of the practice as a social security issue that it should be put under the control of criminal law. For instance, Zhang mentions an official remark of homosexuality in 1987, "The legal authorities in 1987 stated in response to the legal positioning of homosexuality: 'Due to social immorality as caused by homosexuality, its disturbance within the order of society, its harmful influence on youth psychology and overall health, homosexuality is a form of criminal behaviour.'" (Zhang 1994, p.633)[25] In 1989, the authority announced that

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[24] "如杭州一市 1988 年一年左右，司法機關即拘捕男性同性愛者 60 人以上。拘捕須判刑的主要依據是刑法第 160 條。該條文規定：'聚眾鬥毆、破壞公共秩序，情節惡劣的，處 7 年以下有期徒刑、拘役或管制。流氓集團的首要分子，處 7 年以上有期徒刑。'"

[25] "我國司法機關 1987 年曾就同性愛的法律地位所做的申明：'由於同性愛違反社會公德，擾亂社會治安，影響青少年身心健康，確屬犯罪行爲。'"

"'Homosexuality is a behavioural and psychological abnormality' which may 'lead to theft, prostitution and murder" (*Renmin jincha* (People's Police) 1989, p.11-12, quoted from Evans 1997, p.210) It is obvious in this official remark that repressive discourses from both medical and legal interpretations are applied to condemn homosexuality. Ruan in his 1991 publication observes that "When public figures do speak out on homosexuality, it is usually to condemn it." (Ruan 1991, p.131) He quotes the public speech by one of the most famous attorneys in China on homosexuality in the 1980s, in which the legal profession supports and justifies the importance of penalizing homosexuals administratively and criminally by social and security reasons (ibid., p.131).

Yet at the same period of time, the debate and discussion of whether homosexuality is a criminal conduct was always present in the medical and legal domains. Inconsistencies in treatment of homosexuals by local legal authorities and contrasting comments of officials and experts were common in the reform period. In 2000, there was a public remark made by the Chinese Ministry of Public Security that "people had the right to choose their own sexuality" (Gao 2003, quoted from Li 2006, p.83). It is not sure that if this is the first official announcement of individual's sexual rights in the country. But undoubtedly it marks a discursive shift of official narrative of sexual orientation. There opens a door for people to imagine a form of sexuality that is outside the heterosexual monogamous model. Within a decade, we witness a drastic change in public remarks made by legal experts, and medical experts on homosexuality. The social reality has changed significantly from what has been observed by those authors who have published their works on homosexuality during the 1990s. While in 1991, Ruan concludes that all public figures spoke to condemn homosexuality in

the country. Ten years later, we have witnessed a growing force of legal professionals fighting for gay rights in China. Among them, Zhou Dan, a Shanghai-based legal professional and the first publicly out gay lawyer in the country, is a prominent public figure in promoting gay rights in the country. Increasing academic and community efforts are put to understand homosexuality through a rights-oriented discourse that is developed from the legal empowerment. The heightened awareness of homosexuality in the public space is partly resulted from the heated debates and discussions of the subject in the legal domain during the reform period, but also from the increasingly public support of some legal experts in acquiring legal rights for lesbians and gay men in the country. This supportive legal force is especially visible in the twenty-first century, as a result of the legal change of homosexual status in 1997. The increasing visibility of lesbians and gays in contemporary legal discussions in China contributes to the public recognition of the legal rights of lesbians and gay men as legitimate citizens together with the introduction of sexual orientation, alternative sexual practices and lifestyles into public discussion.

One example to highlight this trend of expert engagement in gay rights campaign is sociologist Li Yinhe's bold attempt to lobby for same-sex marriage. Being the first sociologist in the country to conduct research on male homosexuality and the academic spokesperson of homosexuality in China, Li pushed her effort further by formally filing a petition to the National People's Congress to lobby for the legal recognition of same-sex marriage in China both in 2001 and 2004. In her "Petition of the legalization of same-sex marriage" to the National People's Congress, Li argues for same-sex marriage in four discursive paths: legal, political, public health, and nationalist (Li 2005, p.112-114). Legally, Li states that there is no law

to prohibit same-sex marriage in China. The recognition of same-sex marriage will be a good indicator of the country's human rights status (even better than the United States); an effective measure to stabilize homosexual relationships and hence to prevent sexually transmitted diseases; and finally, it is beneficial to the overall societal harmony and national image of the country. Although Li's two attempts were failed due to the lack of positive votes, it demonstrates the increasingly visible and public endeavour of the state experts to call for changes of the legal status of the homosexual population.

The legal developments and changes in the last two decades have two implications to the lesbians and gay population in the country. First, as legal actions against homosexual conducts are always pointing to male homosexuals, female homosexuality and sexual subjects are rarely visible in public discourses. This contributes to the already prevalent ignorance of female homosexuality in society. Secondly, the decriminalization of male homosexual conduct also leads to a legal denial of homosexual existence. In light of legal visibility, it can be even worse than the ambiguous inclusion under "hooliganism" and the crime of sodomy in the previous time. The new legal denial has been acknowledged by the lesbian and gay community in China as an indication of no legal protection of the population concerned (Jia 2005, p.12).

With respect to the invisibility of female homosexuality in dominant legal discourse, it reflects a much severe social surveillance of male homosexual activities. Or in other words, it gave rise to a heightened cultural anxiety towards male homosexuality. Female homosexuality is culturally considered to be less threatening to social security. Yet tolerance and silence does not mean that female

homosexuality is socially or legally accepted in the country. Occasional local news reports about female homosexuals are usually about murder or suicidal cases. Or random cases of female same-sex practices are released from police accounts of sex criminals in the country. Ruan in 1985 conducted interviews with three women who were imprisoned in the Shanghai Women Delinquents Correction Institution. All of them had same-sex sexual activities and were arrested both for their female homosexuality and other illegal sex practices such as prostitution and promiscuity (Ruan 1991, p.141). Another more recent and important legal case of female homosexuality, which has been termed by media as "the first homosexual case in new China" and has been widely reported, happened in the Wuwei county of Anhui province in 1991. The case began with the parent of one of the two female homosexual lovers filed a "prosecution letter" to the local public security office against the couple and requested the authority to "severely punish this ugly phenomenon"[26]. The reply from the public security bureau stated that, "The definition of homosexuality and the responsibilities of homosexuality are not clearly stated in current legislation. Under this condition, the questions you have raised can be neglected in principle. It is also not appropriate to use hooliganism as a form of punishment to ensure public safety. The way to settle this case will be up to different procuratorates or courts for settlement." (ibid. 2005)[27]. The official remark has been said to mark the first step towards the decriminalization of homosexuality in China and the first public legal litigation of a female same-sex relationship. However, female homosexuality is still largely ignored in public discussion. The over-representation of male homosexuals in legal discussions as a

[26] Quoted from Huakaidedifang (花開的地方), http://www.lescn.net/, on December 15, 2005.
[27] "什麼是同性戀，以及同性戀的責任問題在目前我國法律沒有明文規定的情況下，你們所反映的問題，原則上可不予受理，也不宜以流氓行爲給予治安處罰。本案具體如何處理，可與檢察院、法院等有關部門研究解決。"

result from a much stringent police control of male homosexual activities in the public space contributes to the public invisibility of female homosexual population and related issues.

In the post-criminalization era, lesbians and gay men in China are still under the threat of arbitrary administrative penalties, even though the decline of the danwei system has reduced the political, social and economic damages to individuals who have been accused of homosexuality. The absence of any explicit or implicit mentioning of homosexuality in the new criminal law issued in 1997 on the one hand has released mostly male homosexuals from the fear of being arrested under the crimes of sodomy and hooliganism. On the other hand, it also implies a new legal denial of homosexuality and its consequent absence of legal protection of the population concerned. The newly emerged legal reform movement of lesbian and gay rights is directly induced by the decriminalization of homosexuality and also by an ever enthusiastic public and expert discussion of homosexual rights in China.

**The sociological other**

The third major public inaugurative site of homosexuals in the reform period is through academic discourses.

As mentioned above, Li Yinhe and Wang Xiaobo have published the first sociological work on male homosexuality in China in 1992 based on their interviews with dozens of male homosexuals in Beijing during the period of 1989 to 1991. The significance of this book is that it is the first sociological study of

homosexuality after a prolonged silence in the field of social science. Yet the book is also criticized for its otherization of homosexuals under a dominant heterosexual gaze. The title of the book, *Their World* (他們的世界), tells a lot about the positioning of the researchers and their subjects, that are the male homosexuals. Evans criticizes the research as, "it represents homosexuality as a 'phenomenon' distanced from dominant heterosexual culture and objectified for the purposes of study." (Evans 1997, p.209) Homosexuals are first called upon into the academic space as the sociological others. In this first sociological work of homosexuality, homosexuals are being put under heterosexual scrutiny in much the same way as they are being medically examined. Despite the authors' humanistic concern of the stigmatized population and the call for equal rights, the presence of an authoritative heterosexual judgement clearly demarcates the power hierarchy between the researcher and the researched.

Subsequent publications in the same period demonstrate a similar otherization of the homosexual subjects. Notable examples are *Homosexuality in China* (同性戀在中國) (1995) by Fang Gang, which was published in China and *Black Souls under the Red Sun* (紅太陽下的黑靈魂) (1995) by An Keqiang, which was published in Taiwan. A number of publications, either sociological or about personal accounts also appeared in Hong Kong during the 1990s. Hong Kong sociologist Zhou Huashan also carried out interviews of male and female homosexual subjects in China and they were published in a number of his books during the 1990s in Hong Kong. Personal accounts of male and female homosexuals in the country have been published in Hong Kong, they are, *We are Alive* (我們活著) (edited by Wu Chunsheng and Zhou Huashan in 1996), and *Beijing Tongzhi Stories* (北京同志故事) by Zhou Huashan in 1996.

Sociological studies of homosexuality in the country have accelerated in speed during the 21st century. Within a context of a fast growing sexuality studies in social science, more and more local researchers started to study homosexuality in China. Large-scale surveys on sexual practices have included homosexual practices in different age and social groups, such as those among university students, rural and urban residents (Liu 1992, 2005; Pan 2000, 2004a, 2004b, 2008). As mentioned in the previous chapter, a few universities including Fudan University in Shanghai have started undergraduate and postgraduate courses on sexuality and homosexuality after 2000. Homosexuality has become a popular subject in university classrooms and students assignments. It is a common scene to have university classrooms packed with enthusiastic students and even people from the general public whenever homosexuality is the subject for lectures.

Experts from the medical, legal and academic domains occupy a central position of the production of authoritative knowledge of homosexuality in the reform period. In the hetero publics, they always have the last word of any debates or discussions of the topic. Even lesbians and gay men in the country would refer to those (heterosexual) experts for information or consultation of their same-sex desires, relationships and personal health. Experts have become the public spokespersons for the silent population of lesbians and gays in China.

**Public visibility and private passing**

The enhanced public visibility of lesbians and gays in China has also resulted from the new media enthusiasm of the subject. Early in the late 1990s, lesbians and gay

men have been interviewed on television programmes. In the 21st century, the presence of lesbians and gay men continued on television talk shows, newspapers and more of them are "out" on the Internet. Not to mention the collective "coming out" of lesbians and gay men in the cyberspace since the late 1990s when Internet has been open for public use. Yet it is also important to note that the "coming out" in both hetero and homo publics is a conditional one and is restricted to a certain group of lesbians and gay men in China. Those who can afford to appear in the hetero publics, which include mainstream television shows, newspapers and websites, are always "model" homosexuals who possess other identities that are (hetero) socially favourable. While those who can participate in the collective cyber coming out belong to the group of technologically and culturally privileged ones. This has contributed to the development of homonormative regulations that encourage certain forms of personal image, lifestyle, sexual practice, relationship and belief in the community while on the other hand, disapprove those that do not fit into the preferred models. Also, the newly cultivated bar space in the hetero public is restricted in a similar manner to those with cultural capital and economic capability. The internal exclusion or hierarchization of the tongzhi communities will be more extensively examined in Chapter 7.

The public inauguration that is happening in both hetero and homo publics is both enabling and disabling to the private existence of lesbians and gays. On the one hand, the positive public interpretations of homosexuality can reinforce the legitimacy of the private existence for lesbians and gays. On the other hand, they can also hamper the already fragile protective shield of lesbians and gay men in the hetero private spaces. The heightened public awareness of homosexuality can make the heterosexual acting of many closeted lesbians and gay men even more

difficult in the hetero privates. It intensifies the tension between the public inauguration that invites the participation of lesbians and gay men in the public, and the private passing that is still, for many lesbians and gay men in China, the only possible way to survive in the hetero privates. In the following chapter, I will further discuss this seemingly unreconcilable existential conflict of lalas in public and private.

"Around summertime, or maybe more like between spring and summer, there is a wide open space in X city with a water fountain. Everyone will enjoy sunbathing in the noontime. We are just lazily basking in the sun during our lunch break. X city is not a big city. If you work in city centre, you only need to walk ten minutes and you can easily get to the plaza, have lunch, enjoy the sun, check out the water fountain and if you have time, you can even walk your girlfriend to work. It's like on March 8th Women's Day, the weather was good and we went out for sunbathing. The sunshine felt really good on us." (Shu, mid-20s)[28]

"Just open the closet. Half of it has my clothes in it, the other half has hers. She lies next to me every night in bed. There is not one night that I am left alone. [*But the reality is*] I go on the net on my own. Whenever I am unhappy, I would cry alone. I hope I can have her in my life. This home belongs to two people and not only the stuff that belongs to me. I hope that she can truly be a part of my life, completely and thoroughly." (Moon, early 20s)[29]

Marriage is to almost all of my informants, married or unmarried, the major source of pressure in everyday life. Family is now the primary institution that functions to impose this pressure on individuals in China when direct state control on people's private life through danwei and communal surveillance has been gradually decreasing after the reform period. In the previous chapter, I have mentioned that the hetero privates are officially recognized by the dominant hetero publics as the only legitimate private through the naturalization of heterosexual family and marriage as the only legitimate model of intimacy. With the emergence of online

[28] "大概在夏天還不到的時候，在春夏的交屆那樣，我們 X 城有一個廣場，有一個很大的噴泉。中午，大家就在那裡曬太陽。我們不會在陽光下怎樣，但是我們純粹是曬太陽，懶洋洋的，利用午休走走。因爲 X 城的地方不大嘛，你在市區上班，那個地方很中心，大概你走十多分鐘就可以到了，吃完飯在那裡，曬太陽，看看噴泉，有時候還可以送女朋友上班之類的。好像我們三八婦女節去曬太陽，那天的天氣很好，很舒服的陽光。"

[29] "打開一個衣櫃啊，一半是我的衣服，一半是她的，每個晚上她都在我的身邊，沒有一個晚上是我自己度過的。[*可現實是*] 我一個人上網。遇到不開心的事，我會自己一個人哭。我希望我的生活裡都有她的氣息。這個家是兩個人的家，而不光只有我自己的東西。我希望她徹徹底底的成爲我生活的一部分。"

and offline lesbian and gay communities since the late 1990s, and the rise of exclusive same-sex relationship and family in urban China, the conflict between the hetero and homo privates, one public and one silenced, has become increasingly acute.

In this chapter, I will map out the relationship between the two privates and the forms of interactions between homo publics, especially the homo cyber public, and homo privates. I will demonstrate how lalas, as women and socially "abnormal" sexual subjects, are symbolically denied from being represented and recognized in both public and private domains in China. I will particularly focus on various forms of control imposed by the institutions of marriage and family on lalas' everyday life, and the deep-rooted stigmatization of women who are not in marriage or any forms of heterosexual relationship.

**The homo privates**

The homo privates are directly produced by the cyber homo public which was dramatically built up during the late 1990s and early 2000s when the Internet has been available for popular use in China. Previously impossible ways of life have since then entered people's imagination and many began to give reality a test of what they dared not even to imagine before. The private lives of many people in China have been enriched by this new public communication tool with endless possibilities and new experiments. One of the groups that has been benefited most by this new cyber opening is the lesbians and gay men in China. Started with ambiguously named message boards and chatrooms that were only knowable to insiders, the homo cyber community is currently, as said by some, consisted of

more than 300 lesbian and gay websites in the country. It is a dramatic process that within a few years, the cyber community has built from ground zero and has been developing in a speed that it might take decades for a traditional offline community to accomplish the same size and scope of influence. For instance, community subcultures that have been developing in Taiwan and Hong Kong for decades have all at once appeared and assimilated within mainland China's cyber homo communities in just a few years. New localized identities and subcultures are rapidly introduced and reproduced. It is a highly condensed process of community building, cultural formation and transformation. The Internet has created an unprecedented homo public space. This public community has drastically transformed the private lives of many individuals who can now imagine to live out their formerly unspeakable desires. The homo privates, with their participants desiring a life of exclusive same-sex relationships, have come into existence following the cyber inauguration.

In 2005, when I first started my research in Shanghai, everyone I met has only joined the community very recently. No one has a community history of more than five years. Almost all of my informants told me that they first came to know of lesbian identities such as lala, T and P, from the Internet. Everyone started her journey of being a lala from this or that message board or chatroom. Some of them already had same-sex relationships before the advent of the cyber communities and some of them only realized their sexuality, or knew how to express their formerly ambiguous or "shameful" desires in words, from the Internet. My informants usually started by inputting the words "tongxinlian", or "lesbian" in English in local search engines. Searching by "tongxinlian", Chris (30 years old), a Shanghai native, has found one of the major lala websites in China and also the

information of a lala bar in Shanghai at that time. She went to the bar alone and made friends with a group of lalas there. At the time of the interview, she has only joined the community for a month. Being torn apart by the pressure to marry and her same-sex desire, Chris was a troubled soul at that time. She was uncertain of if it is possible to have a future with a female lover. But after living under intense marriage pressure for several years, she was determined to find a way out. When I returned to the city a few months later, Chris happily showed me her first girlfriend and she was already surrounded by a group of trustworthy lala friends. Two years later in 2007, Chris had her second same-sex relationship and told me she was planning for a cooperative marriage with a gay man. Chris' experience is illustrative in a way that it shows how the homo cyber public can transform one's private life. Before Chris' entry into the cyber lala community, she could not imagine a life with a female lover. In 2005 when we first met, it never occurred to her that she would one day have a cooperative marriage with a gay man. She found her gay marriage partner on the Internet after she was encouraged by the increasingly popular practice of cooperative marriages in the community. The cyber public has greatly informed the life choices of Chris. It is a major reference point to many lalas who are exploring a form of life that was unknown and unthinkable to most people in the country.

It is also a common story of my informants to start their "self" searching journey from the Internet. As many of them, especially those born after 1980s, have already learnt terms that were used to describe homosexuality. Terms such as tongxinlian, tongxinai, and tongzhi have appeared more frequently in print or in public discussions during the reform period. Homosexuality has been popularly interpreted as a practice that is carried out by a distinctive group of people. It refers

to a specific category of people, as defined and implied by experts in medical publications, legal discourses and academic researches. Therefore, although some of my informants did not associate consciously their homosexual practices or desires with a public homosexual identity, they were very often called upon into this "self" revelation once they started an Internet search and engaged in online interactions. Ying (in her early 30s) had a four-year same-sex relationship before she joined the cyber community in 2003. She was resistant to the idea that she is a homosexual and she disliked the term tongxinlian. It was only until she found the online community then she started to associate herself with the identity category of tongxinlian,

> "There are both male and female tongzhis in that chatroom. They're all quite young. When I first started to join the chatroom, I just observe what's going on. You are just checking out what's are they talking about then you'll get more curious because you didn't know that there are so many people who have the same experiences as you do. I have never thought of that. That there will be so many tongxinlians. At first, I tended to condemn them. I am different from them. But in reality, the more you read, the more verification you get and you knew you're one of them. Later, when I went to the voice chatroom as well as other websites, I will keep finding things from others that resonated for me."[30]

Moon (22 years old) fell in love with a female classmate in university and she tried her best to please her lover. Later her classmate rejected her directly by saying that she is not a tongxinlian so she cannot return her love. Moon was shocked that she was regarded by others as a tongxinlian. The idea never occurred to her even

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[30] "那個聊天室，當然是男同、女同都有，而且年紀比較的小嘛。進去了，剛開始的時候在看，看她們在聊，然後就很好奇，原來有這麼多人跟自己有類似的經歷。但是沒想到是這樣的，是同性戀，我就很排斥這樣，就不會……我跟她們是不一樣的。但事實上，你看到的愈多，你就驗證的愈多，你就知道你就是其中的一個人。再後來，慢慢的到語音的聊天室啊，然後到一些網站去看，然後你一邊看，一邊找自己身上跟她們相認證的東西。"

though she admired a woman. However, Moon and the classmate started a romantic relationship shortly after but still both of them did not think they are homosexuals. Moon's girlfriend was particularly resistant to that socially stigmatized label. During the summer vacation in 2003, out of curiosity and also a desire to understand herself more, Moon started to search for information on the Internet. She typed in "nütong" (female tongzhi) on a local search engine,

> "I typed in 'nütong' on the Baidu search page and out came a website and a few academic reports. I did not choose to see the websites but instead I read the academic reports, just some writings from professors and mostly very scholarly writings. They discussed 'nütong' very broadly, like in the world of 'nütong', there are categories such as 'T', 'P' and 'bufen'. These concepts crept into my mind instantly and my relationship with her became mimicry of them. It also made these concepts clearer to me. Later, I tried some websites and the first one I entered was one called 'When a dream begins'. It's not a very sophisticated website but it gathered a lot of les. So I read some of the writings on sex between 'nütong'. That's where I get to know how women have sex with each other, like what is oral sex or what to do with your fingers. I didn't even know those general things. Later I met a nütong and she brought me to a chatroom. She was the moderator of a women's webiste and it was because of her that I entered into the chatroom. Once I got in, wow, it was all les, there were so many of them, I am not alone and I am not an alien. In fact, there were so many!"[31]

Moon was informed by academic articles and community interactions on the Internet of who she really is and what kind of relationship it is between her and her

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[31] "我在百度搜了'女同'兩個字，然後上了之後，跳出來了一個網站，和一些學術的報告，我沒有選擇看網站，而是看了些學術的報告，一些教授和一些很學術的文章，非常的寬泛的說了女同，在女同的世界裡，分爲 T、P 和不分等等這些的概念。一下子就在我的腦海裡，於是我和她的關係就 copy 進去，也明確了許多的概念。隨後進了一些網站，我第一個進入的是叫'夢開始的地方'，是一個不是很成熟的網站，但是也聚集了許多的 les，於是看了一篇女同文章，是關於女同之間做愛的，然後我就明白了女同之間是怎麼做愛的，什麼口交和手指，我也是很籠統的我也不懂。後來認識了一個女同，帶我進入了一個聊天室，她當時是某女同性網站的管理員，因爲她我就進了那個房間。一進去就發現，哇噻，裡面全都是 les，就覺得有那麼多，我並不孤單，原來我不是異類，原來有那麼那麼多！"

lover. The cyber public has provided a framework for her to understand and articulate herself and her intimate relationship. Moon's private life practice was cross-referenced by the frameworks that have been circulating in the homo publics. It is a naming process. Moon has since then come into terms with the lesbian identity and started to interpret her then relationship in a new way. More important, the cyber encounter has allowed her to have a positive understanding of homosexuality and also introduced many essential tips of having same-sex relationships. Moon's experience is typical that it is from the Internet that she has come to realize there are so many others out there in the country just like her. This is a significant moment of self-empowerment and self-normalization. Many other informants shared this joyful moment with Moon. Qing (27 years old) is one of them. She articulated very well how important the cyber community was to her,

> "My first thought was that you think your own experience of being in love is unique because it was very important to you. But once you go on the net and saw many similar postings, and having a crush on someone is what everyone goes through, like the way you cannot say it out directly, then my goodness, it's really hot! You will find out that many people are like that on the net. That is to say, my first reaction was, you're not the only one, they're all united. Then the second reaction was, you can see that they will want to meet each other, to make friends. So when this kind of information gets out, you will feel that it's normal. It's normal for people on the net to say that they want to see each other in person. Then you start to feel that this is not any different than people you see everyday. We can also have good lives. Thirdly, when you talked with others on similar ideas and similar future outlooks, you start to feel... like that time when I went to Beijing, I began to see through them that there is hope in my future. I wouldn't think of that in the past because you won't feel that it can be this way, it can be real. I can't see any examples or alternatives. But when I see them, I can see the future."[32]

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[32] "我第一個感覺就是說，你會覺得你自己的戀愛的過程是獨一無二，你的經歷對你來說是最重要的。但是你到網上去看很多帖子的時候，忽然發現很多是類似的。因爲暗戀一個人是每個人幾乎都有的過程，無法表白。哎呀，你會發現這麼火！你在網上你會發現很多

Apart from the self-inauguration, the cyber community has allowed Qing to imagine a future together with a woman. The life experiences of other lalas that are circulating on the Internet are a powerful source of reference to the rest of the community. When most people are still exploring or yet to explore their desires and still imagining a way of life outside heterosexual marriage, or in other words, when the homo privates are yet to be constructed and struggled for their existence, the lived stories in the cyber public help to forecast a future that is promising to many who are still searching for their way in the dark.

The homo publics have gradually extended to offline spaces. Salon meetings organized by local lala groups are held regularly in cities like Shanghai and Beijing. Participants came from different parts of the country. During my visit to Shanghai in 2005 to 2007, there were also lala salon meetings organized by local community groups. These salon meetings were always based on different topics. They were held usually on issues that are related to lalas' everyday life, such as how to come out to parents, how to maintain or manage a relationship, and legal concerns for the lesbian and gay population. Salon meetings are another source of reference for women who want to pursue an alternative life. They presented a real space for the sharing and circulation of life stories that are otherwise unspoken and invisible. They also catered for the needs of lalas who long for a safe and exclusive space to engage in personal sharings and more serious discussions. The homo

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人都是這樣子的。這就是說，第一個反應就是，你不是唯一的，你們是一體的；然後第二個就是，她們會發出一些她們想見面啊，徵友啊這樣的資訊。這種資訊發出來了後，你覺得很正常，覺得大家可以相互之間見面的。然後這個跟你平時看到的這個人沒有太大的區別啊，大家都這樣生活得不錯啊。第三個，你們一起聊共同的想法以及未來的時候啊，你覺得……像我去北京的話，我就覺得，哦，你十多歲也能這樣，那我的未來遠景是不錯的。她們讓我看到了希望。那你以前不會去想，因爲你覺得不現實，你看不到這樣的例子，或者是怎麼樣。但是看到她們的時候，就是有未來。”

publics, both online and offline, are the major reference site for participants in the homo privates.

**The conflicts**

Informants found them suffering most from the conflicts that are resulted from the incompatible expectations of the two privates. While encouraged and empowered by the homo publics, and to a lesser extent, the hetero publics as well, to imagine and pursue a life that they desire, they are always forced to keep their life in the homo privates strictly invisible when they appear in the hetero privates, which dominate all publicly visible domestic lives, and intimate relationships. The hetero privates are legitimized by the institutions of family and marriage which define all socially and legally recognized forms of family and sexual relationships. In extension, they demarcate the boundary of what counts as normal and abnormal sexual subjects. The hierarchical relationship between the hetero and homo privates causes the latter to be always located in the illegitimate terrain and be erased from any public demonstrations of domestic lives and intimate relationships. The homo privates are forced to exist in shadow. Although in recent years, there has been a substantial increase of lesbian and gay presence in the hetero publics, even on mainstream media, the hetero and homo privates remain as two completely separate spheres. They are not only mutually exclusive but also with one dominating the other. When heterosexuality is assumed in the hetero privates, they requires every participant to act at least as a heterosexual or in other words, to be related in terms of heterosexual relationships. This compulsory demand has caused many of my informants to engage in heterosexual acting when they have to survive in the dominant hetero publics. Their heterosexual acting

includes self-regulation of gender expression (especially in case of informants who identify as Ts), elimination of any reference to their lala social life in daily interactions, and the faking of heterosexual relationships, such as attending blind dates arranged by parents and relatives, or even practicing cooperative marriages with gay men. This straight performance allows lalas to survive in the hetero privates, but it is done at the expense of a recognition of their *real* desires and intimate relationships that they are so eagerly to obtain in the hetero privates and publics.

The conflicts between the two privates are expressed primarily through the institution of family and marriage. In the following part, I will illustrate how important marriage is to individuals and their families in contemporary urban China. I will also discuss how family has become increasingly crucial as a gatekeeper of the heterosexual institution since the reform period.

**Marriage in contemporary China**

Heterosexual monogamous marriage is a state enforced model of sexual union since the issuance of the country's first Marriage Law in 1950. It has been firmly supported by and interlocked with other state policies of resource allocation, social hierarchy, and communal control. It has long been defined by the medical institution as the most biologically desirable and "normal" way of sexual and psychological relationship. Experts from different authoritative domains such as legal, medical and official women's and youth groups have been cooperating with each other for decades to uphold the model as the only legitimate, healthy and morally correct form of adult intimate activity. The politically enforced

naturalization of the monogamous heterosexual model has led to a discursive erasure of any alternative sexual relationships and subject positions. Those who cannot fit in the dominant model can only survive as sexual deviants or inferior citizens with less than average share of resources and social respect. To women, the dominant heterosexual marriage model places them strictly at the positions of wife and mother. These are the only two socially recognized subject positions that adult women are entitled to exist in the hetero privates. Evans (1997) explains very well of the effect of this discursive hegemony on women,

> "The priority the dominant discourse gives to maintaining monogamous marriage as the site and pivot of all sexual activity and experience is overriding. This leaves no discursive space for women – or men – to choose difference, whether this means simply not marrying, having a lover outside marriage, or rejecting heterosexuality. In fact, it leaves no alternatives for representations of a women's sexual fulfillment except in the subject positions identified by the status of wife and mother. The possibility that women may prefer to live separate lives, removed from the dominance of the male drive, cannot be contained within a discourse which naturalizes monogamous marriage as the only legitimate form of adult existence." (p.212)

Even after the reform period, marriage is still a very secured and powerful institution in contemporary urban China. According to the official data collected in 2004, 19.5% of the entire population aged 15 or over is unmarried (that is, never married), of which unmarried females constitute 16.5% of the entire female population aged 15 or over, and for unmarried males, it is 22.5% (China Statistics Press 2005). There is no significant change of the size of unmarried population aged 15 or above over the last five years in China. In 1999, 18.8% of the entire population aged 15 or over is unmarried, including 15.3% of females and 22.2% of

males who are unmarried (China Statistics Press 2000)[33]. The figures of 2004 also show a drastic decline of unmarried populations in the age categories of 20-24, 25-29, and 30-34, which are 69.3%, 21.4% and 5.7% respectively (China Statistic Press 2005). This indicates that the norms of suitable age for marriage still have a tight grip on most people in China. In urban China, 25-29 is considered to be the most suitable age for marriage for both sexes. By that time, people have finished their education and probably for many, already have a stable job. Most people will experience the strongest and also most organized pressure of marriage during these few years before they turn thirty. Parents, relatives, or even colleagues and friends will start to introduce possible mates to them and arrange meetings. Even in Shanghai, a city which is generally considered to be progressive in many social aspects, marriage is still the norm for most people. The percentage of unmarried population of the city in 2004 (18.2%) is even slightly lower than that of the country's total (China Statistic Press 2005).

The pressure is particularly felt by women. As my informant Tan (mid twenties) said, the pressure to marry usually comes earlier for women. Women are expected to get married a few years younger than men. The pressure of marriage can come as early as early twenties when most women have finished their education and reach a climax when they pass mid twenties. It is contrary to Lisa Rofel's observation of the Beijing gay scene that women face less pressure of marriage (Rofel 1997). Women not only have to face the pressure earlier, but also they are

[33] In comparison with other Chinese societies, the figure of unmarried population aged 15 or over in Hong Kong is 31.5% in 1996 and 31.9% in 2001 (Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 2005) while it is 34.1% in Taiwan in 2004 (National Statistics 2005).

less capable to escape it because women's freedom of mobility is still less than those of men's in China. Their freedom to move away from their parents' home before marriage or to move to another city on her own is relatively restricted as compared to that of the male population.

The reasons for the importance of marriage and for the high involvement of parents in their adult son and daughter's marriage can be cultural, social and political. While politically there is no law in China which states that everyone should get married, the punitive effects are obvious for people who choose not to marry. Even though state control has weakened, the danwei system, which has been in place for decades, still has control on various aspects of people's lives. Married people in state-run enterprises would get more economic rewards than unmarried people. For example, married couples are assigned a bigger apartment while unmarried people might have to wait years before they are assigned with an independent flat. There is also the factor of general economic inequality of women and men. Marriage is still a popular way for many women to attain upward social mobility.

Besides economic benefits, married individuals enjoy much higher social recognition than unmarried ones. Marriage is the ticket to adulthood. One cannot be a socially recognized adult until s/he has her/his own conjugal family and household. This cultural belief is always expressed through the discourse of social responsibility. To be an adult means s/he needs to take up more social responsibilities and be more productive to the country. It is every citizen's social responsibility to get married and to reproduce the next generation. Therefore, if a person has reached the age of marriage but refuses to get married, then s/he is

avoiding the responsibility s/he needs to fulfil for family and society, and hence s/he cannot be considered as a responsible adult. Marriage and whether one can have a child are socially seen to be evident of one's value in society and of one's physical or psychological well-being.

**Marriage pressure**

The social expectation to lead a "normal" life as everyone else does is very strong in China. The force of social conformity is evident from everyday language usage (such as the choice of many informants to use "normal" or "not normal" to describe different kinds of lifestyle or sexuality) to real life choices (such as marriage and childbearing). Almost all informants have experienced the pressure of marriage. Most of them attended matchmaking meetings arranged by parents, relatives, colleagues or friends. It seems that most of them accepted that marriage is not something one can take full control of, either in fulfilling or relinquishing marriage as a controlling social factor. It is more like fulfilling a responsibility to parents and to society. In her mid 20s and not yet married, Shu's view on marriage is quite representative of women of her generation:

> "Since marriage is not a simple matter of love, you need to consider many things. Such as family... society... Since a person's marital status can affect society [...] a marriage can affect things that one might think does not matter before. It can also well be the reason why someone would attack you. And this will make your parents worry."[34]

[34] "因爲婚姻不是一場簡單的戀愛，你會考慮很多東西，家庭啊，社會啊。因爲一個人的婚姻情況會關係到她的社會。因爲有時候會因爲你的婚姻關係會影響到其他本來看是不相干的事情，也可能這會是給了別人攻擊你的把柄，你的父母會擔心。"

Informants always stressed their duties to parents when talking about marriage. Especially for married informants, marriage is an individual's duty to satisfy her/his family's expectation and to not upset the social order. Ying has met her first girlfriend before her wedding and since then she has had a very difficult long-term extra-marital relationship. But even at that time, she had never thought of not getting married:

> "I have never thought of marriage is an option. I felt that everyone must get married. [...] I didn't have any point of reference. I felt that everyone has to walk this path. Maybe I thought I was just a bit different from others. But still you cannot upset social order because you're different or special. You still have to bear the responsibilities for others, for your family, for your parents, including for yourself. I didn't see how you can have the ability to challenge [*all this*]. At that time, both of us [*Ying and her girlfriend*] did not think about [*not getting married*]. It didn't seem like an issue. It didn't feel like it's a question that was worth serious consideration because it's simply unimaginable to consider its possibility."[35]

Apart from responsibility, Ying also mentioned the importance of role models. Although she knew there are single women in the country, she had never encountered any positive role models. Similarly, she did not have any idea of what a lesbian's life would be like when she started her first same-sex relationship. Ying did not know if it is possible not to get married and have a family with a woman:

> "At that time, it was really terrifying to hear people mentioning those three words [*tongxinglian*]. When our friends made fun of us and said 'you two look like you're tongxinglian', I and my girlfriend would fight back at once.

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[35] "沒有想過這是一條路，就是覺得每個人都應該結婚[...]沒有這樣參照的例子啊，覺得每個人都應該走這樣的路。可能那個時候想的最多的是自己比較特殊吧，你的特殊不能破壞社會正常的秩序，你還是要負責任的，對家人、對父母負責。包括自己的狀態，你都不見的有那樣的能力去挑戰，況且兩個人都沒有想過，好像就已經不是問題，就覺得這不應該是考慮的問題，根本沒有考慮的可能性。"

First of all, it's about not acknowledging your own being. But now I understand the reason why we fought back is also about others not acknowledging your behaviour [...] Both of us didn't know what to do at that time when we got together. We would always cry when we called each other, and talked about what we should do, because there was nothing to refer to. I thought if we had access to the Internet at that time, we might have gotten together, we might have been with each other... overcome many obstacles. You basically won't think of living this kind of life. You feel there is no future for this. You think that no one would embark on this road and that this road is impossible to begin with. You feel that everyone should get married [...] I remembered the night before I got married, she went with me and stayed at a hotel. There were many relatives at home and it provided an excuse for me to stay out in order to get a good rest. So she stayed with me at a hotel room. The next morning, I had to return home to put my makeup on and to prepare for the wedding. It was really...together we were crying and crying till four in the morning. That was the night before my wedding."[36]

Ying has repeatedly mentioned that it never occurred to her when she was younger that she can have an alternative way of life other than marriage. Marriage to her is not a choice but a natural process of life. To another informant, Coral (mid thirties) who is married with a stable lala relationship, marriage is a duty and a collective matter,

"You're not married, right? If you have never gotten married, you probably won't know what it feels like to have the weight of marriage on your shoulders. What it really meant. I am putting it simply as responsibility. You might wonder what does it mean by responsibility. You might feel that it is an

[36] "那時候很怕別人提到這三個字，因爲我跟我那個女朋友在一起的時候有朋友會開玩笑說你們兩個好的像同性戀一樣，我們兩個就會一起反擊。因爲首先對自己就是一種不認可，其實到現在看來就是對自己這種行爲的不認可，所以才會去反擊。不過如果說我們兩個人從剛開始就接觸到了這樣一個環境，就說會有人給你一種方向吧。那個時候我們兩個在一起自己都不知道該怎樣辦，經常都會撥了電話以後就兩個人一起哭，說以後該怎麼辦，就是沒有什麼東西讓你參照。如果我想如果那個時候我們上網可能會在一起，會在一起...衝破很多東西。你根本不會去想你可以過這樣的一種生活，覺得沒有將來，覺得沒有人走這樣一條路，沒有想過這是一條路，覺得每個人都應該結婚[...]我記得我在結婚前的一個晚上，是她陪我在外面，家裡去了很多的親戚，剛好就找了一個理由說，這樣休息不好，就她陪我去外面開房間住在那邊，第二天早上回去化妝啊，做一些準備，真的是...兩個人整整的一直在那裡哭，哭到零晨四點鐘，我結婚的前一天。"

abstract idea. But actually, marriage is not between two persons, it involves many people way more than the two persons, you're talking about families, even friends, colleagues. You don't really know about it, as a person who hasn't gotten married before, you won't really know about it. You might be able to understand me, or to have sympathy for me. But there are other feelings that you have no idea of."[37]

To women, marriage is also an economic decision. In general, women are expected to marry economically better off men. It is materially beneficial for a woman to get married in China. For instance, the contemporary marriage custom in Shanghai requires the male side to provide housing for the new couple. House is always the biggest economic investment in a marriage. There is a popular saying in Shanghai which says to have a daughter now is much better than to have a son. Women may experience pressure of marriage for material reasons. For economically dependent lalas, it is more difficult to convince their families that they can support themselves without marrying an economically better off man. It is evident in my research that the importance of economic self-sufficiency is often rated very high for women who have decided not to get married. I will elaborate more on this factor in the next chapter.

**"Abnormal" women**

There is a history of stigmatising women who depart from the state enforced heterosexual monogamous model in communist China. The category of "abnormal" women consists of unmarried women, impotent women, sexually

[37] "你沒有婚姻吧，沒有婚姻的人不會知道把婚姻挑到肩膀上的時候，意味著什麼。我就是這樣簡單得跟你講就是責任，你就會覺得說什麼是責任，你會覺得很抽象。實際上婚姻並不是兩個人的事情，會牽涉到兩個人之外很大的一群人，家族，甚至朋友，甚至同事，你不會懂，沒有婚姻的人你真的不會懂。你也許會理解我，或者是同情我，但是很多感覺，你也是感受不到。"

promiscuous women, asexual women, homosexual women, and sexually dominating women. Women who deviate from the dominant model will not only be punished in formal or informal ways, but also they will be categorized as sexual deviants who are considered a threat to social order and morality. For women with same-sex sexual practices, unlike sexually active heterosexual women, their sexual activities are always dismissed by society as it is unthinkable in the dominant heterosexual model of active male and passive female. Li Yinhe (2002a) in her work on gay homosexuality in China states that since same-sex sexual activity does not associate itself with marriage and reproduction, it is considered both "improper" and "insignificant" in China (p.254). To homosexual women, we should add that their sexual activity is even unimaginable to the heterosexual majority. However, women with same-sex practices are still considered not normal in popular imagination in contemporary China. Although they are much less severely regulated and punished by the legal institution as their male counterparts, their cultural dismissal is as violent a form of discrimination as other more visible punishments. There is a hierarchy of stigmatisation for "abnormal" women. In contemporary urban China, the least stigmatised categories are unmarried women and impotent women followed by sexually active or promiscuous heterosexual women. Homosexual women remain to be the most socially unrecognised sexual "deviants".

To diminish the stigmatising effect of being both an unmarried and a homosexual woman, many of my younger informants who are now facing the pressure of marriage resort to tell their parents they want to stay single. Although staying single is a less preferable and socially recognized lifestyle, it is easier for most parents to understand it than to accept or to gain an understanding of

homosexuality. But stereotypical thinking of single women is still very prevalent in cities. People over the suitable age for marriage but who are still single are socially stigmatized. In the past decades, daling qingnian (overage young people) has been identified as a social problem. Especially for overage unmarried women, the term lao gu'niang (literally old girl) is still popularly used in Shanghai. Lao gu'niangs are usually associated with physical unattractiveness, bad social skills, poor health, and personality defects. The status of marriage is therefore seen as closely linked to one's "internal essence". Parents will be also affected by this social stigma if they have an unmarried and "overage" daughter.

Chris told me she thought about staying single after a frustrating experience of dating a man for one year (so as to please her parents). But she knew her parents will never understand or allow her to be single. She would never tell them if she really decides to live a life of singlehood. Even her colleagues reacted negatively when she once mentioned to them this idea of staying single,

> "I am not going to hurt others but I also don't want to hurt myself. That's why even though I may not be able to find a loving relationship, it's alright to be single. Yet this creates more pressure for me because it is a harder fact for families and friends to accept my decision. They will think that you should have a family and find one's shelter in it. I told them that I am not suitable for this kind of life because I prefer freedom and I don't want to be restrained in any form. I have told them before. Of course I did not tell my parents that I wanted to be single. I feel that there is no way for them to accept it. When I told my colleagues and friends that I wanted to be single, they were so shocked! They said, 'How can it be!' and immediately told me not to have this kind of thinking."[38]

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[38] "我不會去傷害人家，但我也不想去傷害自己，所以即使說找不到一份你很有感覺的感情，哪怕是單身也無所謂。但是我覺得這是比較有壓力，因爲對家庭來說，或者對身邊人來說，他們是很不能夠接受的。他們當然覺得隨便怎樣你當然是應該有婚姻、有好的歸宿、有家庭這樣，但我跟他們說，像我也不太適合家庭生活，因爲我覺得我是一個比較喜歡自

The popular imagination of single women is still dominated by negative stereotypes. To many, to stay single for life means leading a miserable and incomplete life. Not to mention the many gossips you and your family will have to face and endure if you are an overage single woman. Since marriage is the one and only imaginable and socially approved way of life, any other alternative life choices will be inevitably subjected to social scrutiny. The family of the single woman and herself will get much unwanted attention that is directed towards the woman's private life. There is a hidden message behind this kind of seemingly well-intended enquiries. That is, there must be something wrong about the woman. She and her family might need to struggle against this unwanted social scrutiny as long as the woman stays single. Ling (27 years old), who has just officially finished the marriage registration with a gay man to form a cooperative marriage by the time of our interview, explained very well of the reason why parents are so frustrated if their daughter chooses to stay single and why people will think that they have the right to interfere with the private life of a single woman,

> "A single woman usually gives others an impression of being unfortunate. Why? Because who cares if she is a career woman, you would still think that her love life is less than perfect. If not for a simple reason like not having a man who loves her, or even having a woman who loves her, then she would never choose to spend life alone. She is single because she cannot find a relationship that can satisfy her needs, or a wonderful and harmonious relationship. Why would she be single if she has a good relationship? It doesn't matter if you're a career woman. Even a workaholic will not be like that. It is still the power of social pressure. They feel that if their child is by herself and for different sorts of reasons, the pressure is still too much to bear.

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由的人，不希望被人來束縛我這樣子。我曾經說過，當然我沒有對我父母說過我要單身，因爲我覺得他們是絕對不能夠接受的。我曾經跟我同事跟朋友說過我要單身，他們就一下子都跳起來了，'那怎麼可以啊？！'，隨後他們就馬上說，'你不應該有這種想法'。"

> [...] Also, there were many times that you become the target for much caring if you are not married. Someone might say to you, is your daughter still unmarried or does she have a boyfriend? Or something like that. If you are not married, you will always be the target for this kind of caring. Once you are married, and married off to someone, no one would care for you."[39]

However, there are parents who would rather have their daughters remain single than to have a homosexual relationship. The latter is an unambiguous departure from the heterosexual norm and discursively, any non-heterosexual subjects are incomprehensible in the hetero private. It is relatively easier for parents to incorporate an unmarried daughter into the heterosexual kinship system. But it would be a much more difficult task for them to accept a family member whose very presence would disturb the entire heterosexual framework of marriage and reproduction. It is a discursive violence to categorize women who do not fit into the dominant heterosexual monogamous model as abnormal, and to eliminate non-heterosexual women from the domain of family and marriage.

**Family and the institution of heterosexuality**

As state intervention of individual's personal life has significantly decreased in recent decades along with the opening up of the job market and the introduction of consumerism into the country, people are now less dependent on state provisions for their daily necessities. In the old days when centralized job assignments were

[39] "一般獨身的女孩子給人的感覺蠻不幸的，爲什麼？哪怕她是女強人，總是覺得她的感情生活不如意。否則的話，如果能找到一個疼愛她的男人，哪怕是女人也好，她肯定不會選擇一個人過。她獨身，是因爲她沒有找到一段符合要求、很美好很和諧的感情。只要她有好的感情，爲什麼會獨身？哪怕是女強人，再工作狂也不會這樣。還是輿論的力量，他們覺得他們的孩子自己一個人，外面人各種各樣的原因，承受的猜疑壓力還是受不了的。[...] 還有很多時候，你不結婚，永遠是被關心的對象。有人跟你說，你女兒還沒結婚？還是沒有男朋友嗎？或者是怎麼樣。只要你不結婚，你永遠是被關心的對象。如果你結婚了，出嫁了，就沒人理你。"

the norm and marriage was encouraged more by state policies through the danwei system and networks of communal surveillance over people's daily life. Now we can see that family has turned to be the most active force in the maintenance of the institution of heterosexuality. With the power of political intervention fading out from people's everyday life, contemporary Chinese parents, who have grown up in a uniform society in which any politically or socially deviant behaviours would affect their livelihood severely, are now actively taking up the role of the guard to ensure that their children are leading a normative heterosexual life and are not becoming deviants in any sense. Even though there is a growing population of younger urban dwellers who choose to remain single, to most parents of my informants, a life without marriage seems unthinkable. These parents believe that responsible parents should help their children to find a good match and to establish a new family[40]. This is why many parents are eagerly involved in the matchmaking of their children and have committed emotional and economic investments in their children's marriage.

According to my research, parents play a significant role in their daughters' decisions on marriage, which includes the decision to get married or to remain single, when to get married and the choice of husband. Relatives are the second most powerful group in deciding the marriage partner of younger generations. Although strictly arranged marriages are very rare in urban areas like Shanghai, semi-arranged marriages are not uncommon. Meetings with potential partners

[40] There is a park in downtown Shanghai where there is a Saturday matchmaking event once in a month. It attracts many parents to look for suitable mates for their adult children. Regular participants of the event will hold a cardboard on which it writes the information of the person who is looking for a partner. Parents will usually carry the cardboard with their child's personal information and also the kind of partner they expect for their children. Parents will exchange contact numbers if they are interested, and both sides will proceed to arrange meetings of their children if they are interested in seeing each other.

introduced by relatives or friends of parents are usually arranged for younger members in a family who have reached the suitable age for marriage. After the initial meeting, the young people can decide whether or not they want to further develop the relationship. According to a survey done by Li (2002b), 40% of the 200 respondents had their marriage decided by themselves yet with the approval of parents, 13% had their marriage decided by parents but with their own approval. Only 17% managed to be in full control of their marriage although 55% said they would prefer to have full control over their marriage.

An unmarried homosexual woman is therefore doubly stigmatized and marginalized by the normative heterosexual discourse. There is a hierarchy of social recognition concerning one's marital status in China, in decreasing order, they are: married, single, divorced. Being a homosexual is even more stigmatized than being single or divorced. In recent years, in the context of increasing public discussion of homosexuality in the country, a few parents even came out to the media to support their gay son or lesbian daughter. An Internet survey done by a website in China finds that over 70% of respondents (3,977 in total) said they can accept the fact if their children are homosexuals (quoted from www.cctv.com, November 6, 2007). The survey was conducted immediately after the report of Wu Youjian, who publicly supported her gay son on media. The decision of Wu has been applauded by many on the Internet as a brave act from a supportive mother. This can explain partly why the survey result was unrealistically positive. Contrary to the survey, most of my informants did not receive any support from their parents concerning their sexuality. Some of them have never thought about the possibility. One of my informants, Jenny (in her mid 20s), told me that her mother has once said to her, "I would rather that you don't get married for the rest

of your life. I will not give you my approval for this kind of matter [being a homosexual]." How to cope with family and marriage is the biggest challenge for women in China who are now struggling to pursue a life that is deviated from heterosexual norms.

As I mentioned above, there is a cultural belief in China that a person can only be recognized as a full adult when s/he gets married and has her/ his own nuclear family. To stay single means that you do not have the social status that allows you to be an autonomous adult. That explains in large why parents, relatives or even friends feel obliged to persuade the single daughter in the family to find a mate. It is not anything honourable to the family if they have an overage unmarried daughter. Tan (27 years old) concluded that it is all about the mianzi (face) of parents,

> "It is because they [parents] feel they have no 'face'. You are no longer a part of the family once you get married and you won't be cared after so much. It's like taking care of their 'face'."[41]

Since a woman can only be independent of her natal family when she gets married, therefore, her parents no longer need to take care of inquiries from others about their daughter's business when she has officially left the family. This has also resulted from the tighter familial control over daughters in China. Men enjoy a much higher degree of freedom concerning the choice of abode and mobility in general. For women, it is unimaginable to many parents to have an unmarried daughter living away from them not because of work or other "proper" reasons. It

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[41] "因爲他們覺得沒有面子哦。如果你結婚就不是我家的常屬人員，不會被關心這麼多了，就是照顧一下他們的面子了。"

is unbelievably hard for informants whose family is in the same city to move out and live alone or with their partner. Not to mention that many of my informants, those who were born after the late 1970s, are the first generation of the single child policy. Being a woman and the only child in the family, it is extremely difficult for them to move out before marriage. Chris is a Shanghai native who lives with her parents. She was aware of the difficulty if she wants to get rid of her parents' control. However, it is impossible for her to leave Shanghai for another city in China to work. Shanghai is already one of the most developed cities in the country. Unlike her lala friends from other parts of the country, Chris cannot use the same excuse of seeking for better career prospect in an economically more advanced city. She can only resort to another economic incentive to convince her parents of her plan to move out,

> "The only way I can leave my family completely is to move out and to buy a place for myself. My parents won't accept it even if I move out to rent a place. There is nothing else I can do other than to move out and buy a place. That is why when you put those two things together, that is to say, if I did not get any pressure from my family then my desire to buy a place will not be that strong. There is still pressure because I cannot keep renting a place for me and her [*girlfriend*]. I will feel insecure. I have to buy a place. But the schedule for me to buy a place becomes much shorter with family pressure. It could have been longer, like five or ten years' time."[42]

It is quite common for informants to refer to economic or material recognition whenever they were talking about how to come out to their parents or how to make

[42] "因爲我覺得徹徹底底擺脫家裡，唯一的方法就是自己出來住，自己買房子。因爲你出來租房子，父母肯定是不能接受，除非我自己出來買房子，這點沒有話可說。所以這兩個壓力結合在一起，如果我在家裡沒有任何的壓力的話，我買房子的欲望就沒有那麼的強烈，但是一定會的，因爲不可能是想跟她一起就一直的租房子住，我覺得很缺乏安全感的，一定會自己買房子。但是對家裡的壓力，在自己的時間表裡就要求得更短了，本來我可以時間長一些，可能是五年或者是十年的時間。"

them accept their choice of staying single. Since economic success is highly regarded in Chinese family, it can allow the unmarried daughter to have more freedom of mobility and higher degree of autonomy before parents. Socially, a higher economic status can alleviate a marginalized positioning caused by an inferior sexual status. That explains why material security and success, or being able to live a life as good as (if not better than) married women, is heavily emphasized by lalas in China. Material recognition is used to compensate for their lack of recognition in the sexual aspect. And to many, it is a way not only to free themselves from familial control, but also to make up the loss of their parents who they thought have been deprived of a "normal" family life with grandchildren and son-in-laws. I would name this kind of compensation tactic as the politics of public correctness. Lalas would try to out perform in other aspects of life to achieve the familial and social recognitions, so to compensate for their being failed heterosexuals, and in the end, to hope for one day their homosexuality can be accepted and traded off with other public goods. I will have more discussion on the politics of public correctness in Chapter 7.

Familial control of homosexuality can also be found in the policing of the daughter's gender expression. It is obvious in the lives of informants who have a masculine or androgynous gender expression. May's (mid twenties) experience is a typical demonstration of parent's anxiety over gender anomaly and its implied association of masculine or androgynous gender expression with lesbianism.

> "That is why if I have never had a boyfriend and I looked androgynous, she will raise her suspicions or even ask me directly if I am. [*Did she ask before?*] Yes, she did but I did not answer her directly. She did not pursue any further. Sometimes one can feel a certain sense of sensitivity. You can't push on

certain matters. [*Have you always been androgynous since you're young?*] Yes, but sometimes I appear more feminine as well. It's not like pure T or pure P. I 'm more like bufan. [*But your mother is still suspicious?*] A little bit. But in the last two years, I appear more feminine by wearing dresses and growing my hair longer. I took some photos as evidence for her. (Laughs) [*She is more relaxed now?*] Yes. It's obvious that she feels more comforted. Because she has a side to her that is very emotional and very childish. You can tell right away that she is unhappy if for a day I wear a shirt or cut my hair short. But if she sees me the next day with a skirt on, longer hair length, wearing heels, standing up straight, walking with my head held up high and my chest lifted. She will be ecstatic about it. She will feel that it's more normal this way. The other day is abnormal. (Laughs)"[43]

The familial gender policing ensures that no sign of homosexuality can be exposed in the hetero privates. Their consistent regulation requires the family member concerned to put on a heterosexual guise whenever she has to appear in the family setting. Without being seen and heard, there is neither discursive nor physical space for lalas to present in the hetero privates as a fully recognized homosexual subject. From Ling's experience we can see that lalas are made invisible in the hetero privates by her partner's mother reference to Ling as a family member,

"There is no way I can join all her family activities. I can have dinners or sleepovers at her place. I can be there with her even watching television or hanging out. But it's just like that. I cannot take part in public activities. That is impossible. If her mother's friends are there, she will say I'm like her sister's daughter or niece as a cover-up for me. I cannot be isolated outside of her home, definitely not, I will be at her place often and I would be seen.

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[43] "所以如果我一直不交男朋友，打扮過於中性的話，她會懷疑，甚至會直接了當的問我，你究竟是不是？〔*問過？*〕問過，但是我沒有正面回答，她也沒有正面追問下去。有時候人會有一種敏感度，很多東西不能過於執著。[*你從小都是比較中性的嗎？*]對，但是也有時候是非常女性化打扮的，並不是那種所謂的純 T 或者純 P，我是不分這種。[*但你媽媽現在還是懷疑？*]有一點懷疑，但是我這兩年打扮得女性化比較多，也穿裙子，也留過長髮，拍過照片給她作爲存檔証據給她看（笑）[*比較放心了？*]對，她心裡就安慰很多。真的很明顯，因爲她也是一種很情緒化的很孩子氣的，很明顯的就能看得出我某一天穿襯衫剪短髮，她會很不高興，但是某一天如果我穿了裙子高跟鞋，昂首挺胸的走的話，留著長髮，她會樂不可支。她覺得'唔，這兩天比較正常，那個時候肯定是不正常的'。（笑）"

That's not easy at all."[44]

Ling's partner was living with her parents. Ling was allowed to have dinner and to stay overnight in her partner's home. But while she was welcomed in the private home, she was prohibited from any public family activities which involve other kin members and family friends. The public/ private or inside/ outside boundary is clearly defined in Ling's case. In the context of family, non-heterosexual subjects are confined to the invisible inside where homosexuality is tolerated behind closed doors. When a homosexual subject is exposed in the public, she will be disguised as a heterosexual family member. The dismissal of Ling as her daughter's partner by Ling's mother before her friends shows exactly how lalas are symbolically eliminated from the hetero private, and how lala relationship and subjects can only have a shadowy existence in the hetero family context.

**The discursive erasure**

Lalas face the dilemma of fulfilling incompatible expectations as an eligible member for both the hetero and homo privates. They are constantly being discussed, represented, and to some extent, even positively inaugurated in the hetero publics. At the same time, the online and offline extension of the homo privates have empowered a community of women who are enthusiastic to experiment an alternative way of intimacy. The homo privates are a direct product of the rapidly growing homo publics and the ever-increasing recognition of

[44] "參加她們家的所有活動，這是不可能的呀！我可以到她的家吃飯，然後我可以睡在她的家裡，我可以陪她，甚至可以看看電視，有時候聊一下，就這樣吧，不可能參加公眾的活動，這是不可能的。如果看到了她媽媽的朋友的話，她會說是她姐姐的女兒，外甥女，等於是替我們來撒謊。我不能孤立在她們家之外，肯定不會，我會經常去她的家裡，我會經常被人看到，很不容易。"

homosexual population in the hetero publics. However, a major discursive rupture happens between the hetero and homo privates. Being enthroned as a space to inhabit all kinds of legitimate domestic and intimate relationships, the hetero privates are lived upon the reproduction of the heterosexual institution. While homosexuality and heterosexuality have been continuously reinforced to be two mutually exclusive categories in official discourses since 1949 in China, it has been discursively impossible for the hetero privates to coexist with the homo privates with equal status. While the heterosexual monogamous model has long been naturalized as the only biologically healthy and socially moral form of intimate relationship, it denies other forms of sexual practices, either non-heterosexual or non-monogamous, to be proper or normal.

Lalas are doubly dismissed for their gender and sexuality. Being women, they are not active sexual subjects but only passive respondents to male desire according to the dominant heterosexual framework. Hence, women are culturally dismissed to be a full sexual subject, unless they are represented as sexual deviants or categorized as "abnormal" women. Being a homosexual, their same-sex desires and relationships are always trivilized and would not be regarded as anything "real" or substantial. Unlike men, women are discursively sexual non-subject. Their intimate relationships are usually violently disregarded. Lalas are considered less a threat to the heterosexual order and are generally more "tolerated" in Chinese families. However, tolerance cannot be interpreted as recognition or acceptance. It is precisely because of the double dismissal of lalas as sexual subjects that leads to their discursive erasure in both public and private domains. They disappear in legislation and become secondary in medical concerns. They are "invisible" to researchers and are almost completely absent in families.

> "It's like being pulled by two different forces. Being pulled non-stop. It's just like that, unstoppable." (Ying, early 30s)[45]

Lalas have to reconcile the conflicts caused by public inauguration and private dismissal, as discussed in the previous chapter. The conflicts are mainly expressed through familial control and familial pressure over their marriage. In other words, lalas are pressured to conform to the heterosexual norms whenever they have to appear in the hetero privates, which dominate all legitimate forms of domestic lives and intimate relationships. To survive such conflicts, most of my informants found themselves working in two directions. Some of them tried very hard to assimilate themselves into the hetero privates by following the norms that regulate every individual in that space. Others explored ways to avoid any direct confrontations with family, whether it is natal or conjugal, by exiling themselves emotionally or physically from the heterosexual family. Whether one wants to assimilate into or distant from the hetero privates, both strategies do not disturb the very institution that causes the sufferings. The heterosexual institution is safeguarded by the discourses of familial harmony and collective responsibility which demand individuals to perform duties to society and the state. The emphasis of familial harmony in Chinese families is particularly forceful to regulate many of my informants' relationship with parents and husbands. It is also the major cause that pushes many into a self-imposed exile from their family and marriage, and for others, into an extreme form of heterosexual acting, the cooperative

[45] "好像天天被兩種的力量不聽得轉啊，轉啊，就是這樣一直轉下去。"

marriage.

In this chapter, I will discuss the various ways that lalas used to cope with the pressure from family and marriage in their everyday life. In the first part, I will focus on the interactions between lalas and their natal family; and the second part, I will discuss specifically the situation of married lalas.

**Coping with family**

Parents are usually the people my informants concerned most. This accounts for why most of the informants felt that the biggest pressure of marriage comes from their parents. They might also experience similar pressure from friends or from co-workers, but it is usually easier for them to dismiss comments from those social groups. The heavy emotional attachment and responsibility that my informants imposed on themselves towards their parents are major causes of their frustration or even feelings of guilt for being a lala. For those informants who have siblings, they usually chose not to tell them about their sexuality. Siblings seem not to be a significant source of pressure or support to my informants. For those who are the only child, they do not in all cases face more pressure from parents. It depends more on their relationship with parents and whether they are living away from them or with their parents.

***In and out the closet***

The biggest struggle for lalas was how to tell parents of their sexual orientation or same-sex relationship, or whether they should let them know at all. Lalas call the

act of telling others of their sexual orientation as "chugui" (literally, getting out of the closet). Chugui is the most concerned and talked about topic in the lala community as evident by the popularity of the topic in cyber discussions and offline salon meetings. Discussions are always about whether if one should or should not chugui to parents or people at work for instance, or how can one do it in a better way, or what will be the possible consequences if one chooses to chugui. There is no consensus in the community of whether chugui is a must or not to its members. More often, the discussions are about a strategic consideration and careful planning of chugui. It is usually understood not as a single act, but a process that might involve long-term effort and planning. To most of my informants, an impulsive chugui to parents, co-workers or straight friends is not considered as positive act. This can be partly due to the fact that most of my informants were above the age of mid twenties and were considered to be financially competent career women. The social and economic risks involved in chugui are relatively higher for them than the younger generation. They are representative of the views of the more mature group in the community. May, an experienced lala hotline worker in Shanghai, was skeptical of the necessity of chugui,

> "Although coming out is a very admirable behaviour but it also depends on the situation. It's not like you are going to be a martyr. [*Will you say so when you are on the hotline?*] Yes, I will tell her that I do not encourage one to come out. This is a very serious matter, a matter that requires serious consideration, especially if your conditions don't allow you to come out. It's about being realistic. I often tell them directly in a stark naked way, can you [*a prolonged tone*] afford to come out?"[46]

[46] "雖然說 come out 是一個非常值得欽佩的一種行爲嘛，但是必須去看具體情況而定的，不是說你去做勇士了。[*你接熱線的時候也會這樣說嗎？*]對，我會這樣跟她說，我不鼓勵出櫃，這是一個需要慎重而慎重考慮的事情，特別是...你的條件允不允許你出櫃，很現實的，

It is a strategic decision. Many tied it to material considerations. It is believed that the process will be much smoother if one can prove to their parents that they are financially capable to live the life they want. And to some, it is evidently not a possible option in a society that homosexuality is still socially stigmatized.

It is evident in my research that younger informants tend to be more active in confessing their sexual orientation to their parents. Ya, in her early twenties, has "actively" confessed to her parents of her sexual orientation. Her parents finally accepted her same-sex relationship after a period of broken relationship, during which Ya moved out of her parents' house. Bai, also in her early twenties, told her mother directly about her desire of women. Fortunately, her mother supported her and even followed after her daughter to be publicly out as a parent of a lala daughter. She even spoke as an out parent in the class on homosexuality studies in Fudan University in Shanghai in 2005. Another younger informant, Moon, confessed to her mother of her sexuality by making use of the countrywide craze of "Super Girls" (超級女聲)[47],

> "My mom also likes both of them [*two of the super girls*] and she knows of the rumours about them as a couple, too. I also told her. Other entertainment news also reported that Li Yuchun kissed some girls, this and that. My mom saw some of the photos, too. My mom has always liked her. Then I suddenly felt that this is the right timing. My mom knew so much about Li Yuchun and

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我會非常的...就是赤裸裸的告訴她們的，你（長音）出櫃得起嗎？"

[47] "Super Girls" (or "Super Voice Girls") is a televised singing contest of young women in China produced and broadcast by the Hunan Satellite Television, following the style of "American Idol". The show started in 2004 and soon became a nation-wide hit. Super Girls finalists were followed after by crowds of fan from all over the country. A few of them turned to be lesbian icons for the younger generations. The most famous ones are Li Yuchun (李宇春) and Zhou Bichang (周筆暢). Their androgynous style resembles Ts in the lala community. They attracted millions of lala and straight women fans from diverse age groups.

He Jie as homosexuals, especially Li Yuchun. All these negative coverages did not make my mom like her less. Instead, she introduced her to all her friends and colleagues so that they can also follow her. There was this time, when she was watching the finals of 'Super Girls', all nervous, happy and terribly excited at the same time, I asked her directly, 'Mom, why do you like Li Yuchun?' Then she went on and on about how much she likes her and about how when Li Yuchun cried she will also cry with her and all that. I went on asking, 'Did you know that Li Yuchun likes girls?' 'It didn't matter. She's so boyish. I've already thought of that.' Then I said, 'Do you want to believe that she liked me before?' My mom looked at me and said, 'You two went to the same university and in the same year. No way.' 'I rejected her.' My mom then asked sadly, 'Why did you reject her?' I just gave a smile and said, 'You go back to watching television.'[...] I went on saying that girls like Li Yuchun are plenty, in every city, every country, every world, plenty of them. But a lot of people don't get it. There are millions in China. Just the city I live in, there are so many and there are even more in schools."[48]

Moon continued the conversation by a hearty confession to her mother. It was a very successful chugui. She was received positively by her mother.

There are a few informants whose parents have "discovered" their sexualities by accident. Jenny (in her mid twenties) was one of them. Her parents now avoided the topic after many bitter confrontations. It is quite common for parents to avoid the topic or even to deny the entire issue. Chris' parents have been suspicious of her sexuality, but they never spoke about it or confronted their 30-year-old

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[48] "我媽媽也很喜歡她們兩個人，然後就傳她們是一對啊，我媽媽也知道。我也跟我媽媽說，而且其他的娛樂的新聞也說，李宇春跟一些女孩子接吻啊什麼的一些照片，我媽也看見了，我媽也就一直也很喜歡她。我突然就覺得這個契機快來了，我媽知道這麼多關於李宇春和何潔的同性戀啊，尤其是李宇春啊這些負面的報導，我媽沒有絲毫減少對她的喜歡，而且我媽還介紹那些阿姨、同事，介紹她們一起去喜歡李宇春。有一次，決賽的時候，是'超級女聲'，我媽看得很緊張，而且很開心很興奮，於是我就問媽，你這麼的喜歡李宇春啊，她滔滔不絕的說了大堆喜歡李宇春的原因，她還說她哭，就是李宇春哭，她也哭，'那你知不知道李宇春是喜歡女孩子的？''這沒有關係的啦，她這麼的男孩子，我也想得到的啦！'然後，我就說，'你想不相信她喜歡過我？'我媽就看看我說，'你們是同一個大學的，而且同屆的，不可能的。''是我拒絕了她。'，我媽很失望的說，'你幹什麼拒絕她？'然後我就笑笑說，'哎呀，你看電視吧！'[…]我說像李宇春的這些女孩子在這個城市，在這個國家，在這個世界，是非常非常得多的，嗯，也許很多人不理解，但

daughter directly. Instead, they have reverted to a tactic of actively arranging matchmaking meetings for Chris.

For others who did not tell their parents, two tactics were most frequently used. The first is, "to come out softly and gradually", as some term it as "ruan chugui" (軟出櫃, literally "to come out softly"). Flora[49], in her late 20s, told me she first showed a picture of her and her girlfriend to her parents casually and then occasionally brought her girlfriend to her parents' home for dinner. She wanted to prepare her parents for the fact that sooner or later she would move out to live with her girlfriend and would confess to them of their relationship. The second and more popular coping strategy with parents is not to tell them at all. The discourses of filial piety and familial harmony govern the decision for many informants whether they should let their parents know. Many of them chose to leave home after they decided to pursue a life that they thought would not be understood by their parents. Ying's story is illustrative of this reasoning. As a married woman in her early 30s, she had a traumatic break-up with her second girlfriend. After that she decided to leave her parents and her husband to head south to Shanghai. Ying had a serious nervous breakdown last year before she left and she told me why she would never let her parents know of her other life,

> "I felt bad when I look at my parents. I remembered vividly one time when I stayed at their place for a week because I was sick. Each time before a meal, they would push open the door lightly to check and see if I were sleeping. They would always ask me what I would like to eat. It was very hard on me. I didn't feel like eating but I pretended that I wanted to eat something. It got too hard on me afterwards. It's also too much for them physically and

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是中國有幾千萬，而且我生活的城市有很多，我們的學校更多。"

[49] Flora was one of the supplementary informants in addition to the 25 major ones.

emotionally to keep looking after me. Then one afternoon, I got up from the bed suddenly and announced that I would leave home. In fact, my body was too weak. My parents tried to stop me. November is usually very cold back in the North. I did not wear warm clothes when I first returned home. But I put on my coat and told them I was going home without discussing it with them. I wouldn't listen to them either. I put on my coat and pushed the door of my room open and left. My mother kept saying out loud, 'You cannot go back, there will be no one to take care of you.' But she saw how adamant about leaving I was, she went back into the house to fetch my jacket. I didn't know about this. I had already rushed out, caught a taxi and sat right inside it. I ran really fast so I didn't notice the cold wind. When I sat in the taxi and turned my head around, I saw my mother holding my jacket and running after me. I would never forget this image for the rest of my life. That is why I thought if I chose to live this kind of life, I could never do it in front of them. [...] I might never come out of the closet on my own. It's not because I don't want to face it. I feel that if it is going to hurt people you love around you by doing this, then it's not necessary. Avoid it while you can, right? It doesn't matter with others but for your parents... you can never leave them behind just for the sake of yourself. I have done this before already. I will certainly try to avoid it from now on."[50]

Some informants also chose to leave their hometowns. Huang[51], in her late 20s, has actually fled to Shanghai to avoid an arranged marriage. Qi, in her late 20s, came to Shanghai to have a more anonymous social life that is impossible in the small town where she has grown up. Jenny is a Shanghai native. She and her

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[50] "當時我看到我爸爸媽媽也蠻難受的。我記得最清楚的一次是，我在他們那邊養了一星期的病。每次他們要吃飯的時候，就把門輕輕推開，進來看看我是在睡覺還是怎麼樣，總問我要吃什麼怎麼樣。很難受，自己吃不下，可是爲了他們又裝出來自己想吃什麼。後來實在受不了，這樣養下去也把我爸爸媽媽折磨，太操心了。有一天下午，我就突然從床上坐起來，說我要回家，那時候身體其實很虛弱，後來我爸媽就執意不肯。北方的十一月份已經很冷了，因爲我去的時候也沒有穿很厚的衣服，那我就披了一件外套。就是我就講了一下我要回家，也沒有跟他們商量一下，也不會聽他們意見。我穿了外套，就拉開房門我就出去了。我媽媽就一直喊我說你這樣不能回去啊，回去也沒有人照顧到你。看我執意要走，就匆匆忙忙跑進去要幫我拿外套，但是我不知道，當時我就衝出去了。等我坐到一輛出租車裡，我走得很快，頂著風，有點像小跑那樣。我坐到出租車裡一扭頭，看到我媽媽拿著一件外套在那裡追我。那個情景可能我一輩子都忘不到。所以我就想之後我要選擇這樣的生活絕對不要在他們的面前。[...]我可能永遠不會主動的去出櫃，不是說我不能去面對什麼，是我覺得如果這種東西，如果讓周圍愛你的人受到傷害，那大可不必。能避免的東西還是去避免，對嗎？別的人倒沒什麼，但父母...永遠不能對他們說爲了你自己把他們置於一個不管不顧的地步。我想我曾經已經這樣做過了，以後會盡量避開。"

girlfriend were even planning to leave the country. To Jenny, it is the fear of losing face that has led her parents to react so drastically to her same-sex relationship.

> "Actually parents always want you to be happy. I feel that the problem is more on their pride or their 'face'. There are many relatives and friends here. That is why I thought that it might be good if I left the country. They can tell others that I don't want to get married as I'm alone outside of the country. They cannot see you so there is no need to tell others. Just like that time when my father said to me, 'You can't be like this in China. China is not that open yet. If you stay in your ways, you cannot be respected in your career or anywhere.'"[52]

Jenny's parents can easily have a very good excuse to explain why their daughter is not married if she is living outside China. The physical distance relieves the pressure for both parties. Matty, in her mid 20s, has also decided to leave China. She has kept her three-year relationship in complete secrecy. Although she led a very well off and even affluent life in Shanghai, she decided to give up everything and to start a new but most probably much less comfortable life in a foreign country with her girlfriend. Matty told me why she had no way but to take this drastic action to leave China:

> "Although some would say that love between two persons has nothing to do with others, but at least we shouldn't put pressure upon people around us, or affect them. What you're doing should not affect other people's lives...I feel that they don't know how to understand [*the situation*]. If you can leave it out of your family, just leave it out. You know you would get yelled at if you talk about it and it's not necessary. Wait until the day when you really have to talk

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[51] Huang was one of the supplementary informants in addition to the 25 major ones.

[52] "其實爸爸媽媽總是希望你自己開心的，我覺得他們的問題是在面子上過不去。這裡很多親戚啊朋友啊什麼的，所以我覺得真的出去了也有好處，他們說起來她一個人在外面不想結婚。他們看不到你，就算你告訴了他們，他們沒有必要跟別人說。他們其實是...就好像有一次我爸爸跟我說，像你這樣子在中國是沒有辦法做的，他就這麼跟我說。他說這個國家還沒有這麼開放，你這樣做...你以後工作啊什麼的你沒有辦法抬起頭來。"

about it to bring the matter up. Hide it at least for now. Don't talk about it. It might not be a good situation..."[53]

***Staying single***

As discussed in last chapter, some informants would tell parents that they want to lead a celibate life to avoid marital pressure and to prevent a direct confrontation between them and their parents. Despite of the fact that a life without marriage is still considered to be less preferable for the older generations, it is much less stigmatized as compared to homosexuality. For economically well-off informants, it is a convenient excuse to justify their choice of not getting married. Liu was in her early thirties and had a professional career. It is relatively easier for her to convince her family that she does not want to marry nor to have a boyfriend. But it is not always an easy justification. Informants who are financially independent but live with parents are more difficult to free themselves from the day-to-day confrontations with their parents about the marriage issue. They would be less capable to reject matchmaking meetings arranged by parents and to move out before marriage. However, staying single is an increasingly accepted way of life in urban China among the younger and economically capable generations. It allows a certain class of lalas to survive in the hetero publics and privates without a heterosexual disguise, or to be labeled as "abnormal women".

[53] "雖然有些人說我們之間的戀愛跟別人是沒有關係，但是至少不要給周遭的人帶來非常大的壓力，或者是非常大的影響。你的事情不要影響到別人的生活...我覺得他們沒辦法理解。家裡的話，能不講就不講。講出來還是會鬧，那就沒必要。等到有一天真的沒辦法，那麼，就公開了。但是我至少覺得...到現在爲止，能藏就藏吧，不要去講，講了一定會是不好的

As it is evident for informants who claimed to lead a single life, either as an excuse to parents or as a lifestyle choice, material sufficiency is a prerequisite of such a claim. In addition to the practical reason that one has to be economically capable before she can live a self-sufficient life, there is also a logic of category exchange. As economic achievement is highly valued in Chinese society, being economically successful can "save" a previously stigmatized subject from the "bad" category, such as homosexuals. For women who want to live a life that deviates from the accepted norms, such as if they want to stay single or have same-sex relationship, they can trade off the social stigma of alternative ways of living by enhancing other socially rewarded identities. Materialistic success can be one way to obtain social and familial recognition that lalas cannot obtain by their intimate relationships. It is also a way to obtain for themselves an approved subject position in the hetero publics and privates. Therefore, for many informants, regardless of their age, have repeatedly emphasized the importance of economic well-being to familial acceptance of their same-sex relationship. May believed that the quality of her life as a single woman is the most convincing fact to her parents,

> "Since now I am walking along the path as a lala, I think it is a point of juncture. First of all, I am a lala. Secondly, I believe in staying single. I can state firmly that due to these two factors, I will not get married. I will do and use whatever and however I can to prove to my parents that I am living well. [*As a single person?*] Yes, that is, from my career, my social circle and my quality of life, the truth will override all arguments. Although I cannot say that I am up to a certain standard, but at least I can say that I am not any less than someone who is married at my age, right?"[54]

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狀況。"

[54] "那現在我既然走的是拉拉這條路，那我想這正好就是一個重合點啦。首先我是拉拉，第

It is even the most important part of a successful plan of chugui. For Qing, she ranked the economic factor and the choice of partner as the two most decisive factors of a chugui plan.

> "I have thought of this problem. What kind of situation is better for me? First of all, my family members would feel that this person is being good to you. Secondly, my family will accept her. Because if she is to be your girlfriend, she has to be good to you and not otherwise, also both of you need to have a material base. That is to say, both persons can have a decent living together without any problems. If this is the case, it is still quite rare for our families to accept us. To approve us is to see us being together for a long time, like two to three years or even longer, then they feel that it is normal for both of you to be together, and she takes such good care of you and your family don't feel that there is nothing missing in her, this is the right timing then, then I feel I can slowly let my family know about our situation. It's still too soon for now."[55]

Realistically speaking, some informants believed that it is the economic factor that determines the survival of a lala relationship. Both Liu and Ying, one single and one married, stressed the importance of economic security,

> Liu: "I don't know what is the biggest obstacle for two women to be together. But I know, if two women decided to be together, the best guarantee is finances, to have good enough finances can give you protection to keep being with each other. [...] Being with a woman means both of you will still have

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二我是獨身主義，那我肯定是雙重的否定不會去結婚。我會以各種各樣的方式來向父母證明我這樣活得很好，[*獨身？*]對。就是從我的事業，從我的朋友圈，從我的生活的質量，來告訴他們。我覺得事實勝於雄辯，至少不能說我這樣就好到一個什麼程度，但我至少不比我同齡的結婚的那些差，對吧？"

[55] "我想過這個問題，什麼樣的狀態對我來說比較的好。就是第一個，家裡的人覺得這個人對你很好，第二個就是家裡的人能夠接受她，因爲作爲你的女朋友絕對是對你好不會對你壞的，還有你們兩個必須要有一定物質的基礎，不會說兩個人在一起生活都成爲問題了，那這樣的話家裡人也是很難接受，肯定是我們在一起過了很長的時間，過了兩至三年，甚至是更久了之後，她們是覺得你們在一起很正常，而且她非常的照顧你，家裡人看不到她覺得少了什麼東西，很重要的時候，那我覺得可以慢慢得跟他們說這些的狀況，而現在還是太早啦。"

many problems even if you have excellent finances. Being with a man means nothing matters even if both of you are not well-off. It's only a relationship issue, it's only about your feelings."[56]

Ying: "I remembered the first friend that I met on the Internet told me one thing. She said, 'No matter what kind of love relationship it is in this world, it still needs a strong material base. This is especially true for this kind of relationship. There is nowhere to turn to for help. You are not going to get help and you are all alone. If you cannot even support yourself, it is extremely hard to be together.' Maybe these words are too realistic but the reality is like that. How many love relationships are unconditional? It's impossible."[57]

It is the lack of other social support that renders lala relationships so vulnerable to economic conditions. Economic deprivation will further stigmatize lalas' already marginal existence and cause them more difficulties to obtain familial and social recognitions.

***Heterosexual acting***

As heterosexuality governs all forms of domestic and intimate relationships and it is the only framework of reference for interpersonal relationships in the hetero privates, lalas are demanded to pass as heterosexuals. Heterosexual performance is common among informants to hide their sexualities before parents. Many of them had the experience of attending matchmaking meetings arranged by parents, relatives or even co-workers. Although these meetings are in theory voluntary, it is

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[56] "我不知道兩個女人走下去最大的困難是什麼，但是我知道，如果要讓兩個女人一直走下去，最大的保障是什麼，是經濟，有足夠的經濟才能更大的保障你們可以走下去。[...]跟一個女人在一起，即便你們的經濟基礎很有保障的話，也會有重重的困難；而跟一個男人在一起的話，即便你們的經濟不是很好，但是其他的都不成問題，就是只看兩個人的感情的問題啊。"

[57] "我記得我上網的認識的第一個朋友，她跟我說的一句話，她說，'這個世界上無論怎樣的一種的愛情，都需要物質基礎的，尤其是這樣的一種的愛情，因爲你得不到任何的援助。你是孤立無援的，如果你再不能爲自己支撐起來一些東西，那是很難在一起。'這話可能太現實了，其實是事實是這樣，有多少沒有條件的愛情，不太可能。"

always impolite to reject them if they are arranged by senior members in family or co-workers. Informants were invited to join matchmaking meetings most frequently during the so-called suitable age of marriage. May was a frequent target of matchmaking meetings. Although her parents and relatives were not in Shanghai, they still managed to arrange meetings for her through their social networks. May usually tried her best to attend and to perform well at the meetings, whether if she has a girlfriend or not. She took it as the obligation of a junior member in the family, and a way to show her gratitude to parents and relatives for their caring.

> "I feel that even though blind dates are laughable matters and we can say that they are being nosy and meddlesome, yet if you think of this matter from a different angle, it is precisely because they are your relatives and your friends and because they care about you, that is why they are doing this. If you are at this age and no one cares whether you have a boyfriend or girlfriend, no one cares if you are single or with someone, no one cares if you ever need a partner, then this is too scary. I feel that this is my largest fear."[58]

More than one informants told me that once you have a boyfriend or are married, then you can finally get rid of the unwanted attention from family members. The pressure to conform to the heterosexual norm of dating and marriage can last for several years. It reaches a climax when informants are approaching or at their late twenties. Turning thirty is a threshold. Some informants said the pressure will be much lessened after they have passed thirty. However, since parents of some informants were already suspicious of their daughter's sexuality, they would be

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[58] "我覺得雖然相親是件很可笑的事情，也很嫌他們很多事很難婆。但是你換個角度去想，他們正因爲是你的親人，是你的朋友，他們會關心你去做這個。假如你到了這個年紀，沒有任何人關心你是否有男朋友或女朋友在你身邊，沒有人在意你是一個人兩個人，沒有人去想過你是不是需要一個伴侶，那這個人真的是太可怕了。我覺得這反而是讓我恐慌的事情。"

even more eager to pressure their daughter into a "normal" heterosexual life. Chris had been under tremendous pressure since she was twenty-six. She was pressured incessantly by her mother, friends and co-workers to find a date and then settle down in a marriage. The pressure mounted to a climax when she was approaching thirty. She finally decided to give herself a test. She started to date a man who was introduced by one of her mother's friends. Not only did she spend time with the man as a normal couple does, she also disguised her gender expression to be more like a feminine woman. Self identified as a T in the lala community, Chris dressed herself much more femininely when she was dating the man. Her torturing heterosexual performance lasted for almost a year. At that time, she thought the only way for her to get out of material pressure is to find a man and get married, no matter she loves him or not,

> "It is because at that time, I thought the ultimate solution is... at least he [*the man Chris was dating*] is not too bad. Fine, just get married! If it doesn't work out then get a divorce. Then at least to me, I don't have any more pressure. At least I was married once. There is nothing to say even if I get divorced afterwards."[59]

Marriage is a passing test for adult women and men to secure a recognized subject position in the hetero privates. There is still a cultural anxiety towards single daughters and sons in contemporary China. Although state imposed deprivation of unmarried people is no longer as significant as before, worried parents do not disappear. Heterosexual acting to some is not an occasional performance, but an everyday trauma. Ironically, marriage seemed to be the only way to save her from

[59] "但是因爲當時我已經想到最最徹底的方法就是啊...不怪怎麼樣講至少人家蠻好的，結婚就結婚吧，即使不好就離婚囉。那麼對我來說，我已經沒壓力了，反正我已結過婚了，那麼離婚和之後的事情，就用不著再說了吧。"

all of the pressure when Chris was in her late twenties. Divorce would be the ultimate relief of all heterosexual disguise.

**Coping with marriage**

Since the institution of marriage is so powerful in contemporary China, it is not surprising to find that many lalas who are over thirty in the community are married. Married lalas have been increasingly visible as a distinctive and significant group in the lala community. Online message boards dedicated to married lalas are increasing in number in recent years. Many discussions and articles about married lalas are put up on the Internet and more attention has been directing to the special needs and situations of this group.

For married lalas, the pressure that they need to face is different and also much more severe. It mainly comes from three sources, namely, the natal family, the conjugal family, and their extra-marital same-sex relationship.

We can divide those married or about to get married informants into two groups: those who have started same-sex relationship before marriage, and those who have started it or aware of the desire after marriages. Chris (30 years old), Ling (27 years old) and Tan (27 years old) had same-sex relationships and were either planning or having cooperative marriage at the time of interview. Ying (early thirties) had same-sex relationship before marriage but she still got married to a man. Mu (33 years old), Coral (early thirties) and Heng (36 years old) only started same-sex relationships some years after marriage. Their coping strategies of marriage, either to maintain the marriage or to survive the pressure of getting

married, can be categorized into three major ways: 1. Secret dual life: to hide their same-sex extramarital relationship or practices from their husbands and their natal families; 2. Make it open: have open or semi-open negotiation with husbands; 3. Fake it: to have cooperative marriage with a self-chosen gay man. It is possible that informants have gone through different stages of negotiation before or after or during their marriage. For example, one might lead a secret dual life at the beginning of her extramarital relationship and it is only until later that she can manage to reach some kinds of mutually agreed settlement with her husband. Or one can struggle between her parents and her secret same-sex relationship or practice for a long time and only after the cooperative marriage that she can gain more freedom to live independently from her parents' control. By the time of our interviews, Ying and Coral were struggling with stressful dual lives between marriage and their same-sex extramarital relationships. Mu and Heng managed to have open and semi-open negotiations with their husbands to accommodate their extramarital same-sex relationships. Chris, Ling and Tan chose the least confrontational way by arranging cooperative marriages for themselves.

***Secret dual life***

Ying and Coral, both in their early 30s, chose to leave their hometowns and husbands temporarily to stay in Shanghai. It is a hard won opportunity for them to leave their husbands for a few years. Physical distance seems to be very important for them to strike a balance between marriage and their extramarital same-sex relationship.

Both of them have told me the difficulties of keeping a same-sex relationship

outside of a marriage. Coral was staying temporarily in Shanghai and during these few years she could live with her girlfriend. She told me how she was tortured everyday by this triangular relationship and how difficult it is to have a divorce,

> "My husband knew [*my extramarital relationship*] within a year… A person who has never been married will not understand or realize the weight of marriage. In actuality, a marriage between two persons is not only about those two parties; it involves a lot of people, family, even friends and colleagues… A person who has never been married would not understand… Now I believe that a married woman should not…love another woman. If I knew that it would be like this three years ago, no matter how much I loved her, I would have controlled [*my feelings*] because you will end up hurting three persons. All three persons will be in pain. If I knew it would be like this situation now, I would rather have felt a bit heartbroken at the beginning. It's really hurtful to others. […] She is in a lot of pain now. She feels she has no security. I cannot give her much security and I cannot give her any promises. On the other side, my husband is also suffering because I cannot provide him with what a normal man would have. I have suffered a lot as well. Sometimes I just want to live simply, not to feel any burden when I open my eyes in the morning, to have the simple joy to smile, to work and to read. Now each morning when I open my eyes, I can feel a heavy load, a dead weight. […] At that time, I wanted a divorce. I have talked with him about a divorce. He was nonchalant about it. He said, 'Don't worry. Just do what you need to do. It doesn't matter. No need to worry about me. I'll be here, forever. When you decide to return just come back.' If his attitude were not so accommodating, I would have been more determined to get a divorce, but his attitude has rendered me useless to do anything about it."[60]

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[60] "開始了一年以內丈夫知道…沒有婚姻的人不會知道把婚姻挑到肩膀上是意味著什麼，實際上兩個人的婚姻不是兩個人的事，牽扯到很大的一群人，家庭，甚至朋友，甚至同事…沒有婚姻的人真的不會懂…我現在是覺得有婚姻的女人不要…去愛另一個女人，如果我是三年前知道是這個狀況，儘管我很愛她，我一定會控制的，因爲這樣的話你害的是三個人，三個人都痛苦的。如果我可以知道是今天這個場面的話，我寧可在當天小痛一下，真的是很害人的。[…]現在她很痛苦，她一直覺得沒有安全感，我給不了她安全感，又不能給承諾。然後婚姻那邊先生他也很痛苦，因爲正常的男人可以擁有的一切我也給不了他。我自己也非常痛苦，有的時候就想過很簡單的生活，每天早上睜開眼睛感到沒有任何的壓力，簡簡單單的笑一下，工作、看看書。現在每天早上醒來一睜開眼睛覺得心裡很多東西壓著，很沉的。[…]那個時候我很想離婚的，我跟他都談過離婚的，他的態度就是沒有關係，你不用擔心，你去做你想做的，沒有關係的，不用考慮我，我就在這邊，一直在，你願意回來就回來。他如果不是這種寬容的態度，也許我離婚的決心就更大了。當時他那種態度讓我沒辦法。"

Ying's husband did not want to get a divorce even though their relationship had never been easy since the first day of marriage. They still pretended to be a normal couple in front of families and friends. It seems that the price of getting divorced is even higher than suffering in a bad marriage. That probably explains why divorce rates are consistently low in China over the years. For example, the divorced population of people aged 15 or over in China in 2004 is only 1.07% (China Statistics Press 2005), while it is 5.2% in Taiwan in 2004 (National Statistics 2005b) and 2.7% in Hong Kong in 2001 (Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 2005).

***Make it open***

Mu, in her mid 30s and as a mother, has a long-term girlfriend in the overseas. Her husband accepted her same-sex relationship partly because of the geographical barrier that exists between Mu and her girlfriend. Heng, also a mother, was considerably free in her marriage since she and her husband only kept their marriage for the sake of their young son. Both of them had extramarital relationships at the time of interview.

The girlfriend of Mu is also married. Both of their husbands knew of their relationship and fortunately both of them have accepted it. Mu said it is because of the geographical distance and the gender of her lover that have made it easier for her husband to accept it.

"How was his reaction? It's a surprise. Then it feels like, my goodness, how

can his life be like this? It's enough to write a story on it. How can this happen to him? But since it happened, even the another party is a woman, being of the same sex poses less of a threat to him. And then, the distance is so far, therefore he accepts it."[61]

When being asked about whether she has considered getting a divorce, Mu named children and economic viability as factors that were of greatest importance to her:

"Children are a very huge reason. If no children are involved, two persons would have gotten a divorce without much to care about. Both parties can figure out their finances and draw the separation. But it would affect the children a great deal if they're involved. We absolutely cannot be too selfish. We cannot ruin a child's future or a child's prosperity for the sake of your lone pleasure. Part of it is economic. But the child will be affected personally, that is why it cannot be good for a child's growth or a child's well-being. We cannot impinge upon a child's future only to fulfill your own happiness. This is a very important reason. Of course there is also the economic factor, if, let's say, if it is not economically viable for two people to be together, then there will be a lot of tension. A breakup will happen after fighting. If after spending tremendous energy and so much effort into being together, the end result is still going to be a separation, then the stakes are too high. There is no point to it."[62]

Heng also told me the reason she stayed in marriage is not to affect her son too much because of her deteriorating relationship with her husband. It is also because

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[61] "他的反應？就覺得出乎意料。然後就覺得他的人生可以寫個故事了，怎麼會有這樣的事情發生在他身上？但是既然已經發生了，再說對象也是個女的嘛，對他來說不是男性的話對他不會有那麼大的威脅，而且又隔得那麼遠，也就接受了。男的肯定不接受，她的丈夫也一樣，覺得你們兩個女的反正也做不成什麼事情嘛，(笑)。但是一開始她老公那邊也覺得很...很生氣，怎麼有外遇了，後來知道是個女的，就慢慢、慢慢的接受了。"

[62] "孩子是相當大的因素，因爲沒有孩子的話，兩個人離婚就離婚了，也就無所謂，經濟上大家分隔一下就好了。有了孩子的話，這對孩子的影響非常大，這絕對不能夠太自私爲了自己的幸福來把孩子將來的人生或幸福給破壞掉了。一部份是經濟，還有小孩子個人會受到打擊，會受到影響，所以說對孩子的成長、健康不是很有利，不能爲了自己的快樂而影響到孩子的未來嘛。這是一個很重要的考慮因素。還有當然還有經濟方面的因素，如果說經濟上面不成熟的話，兩個人待在一起將來很可能還是好不了的，因爲會有磨擦嘛，那磨擦了以後就會分手。如果說花了驚天動地的力量待在一起，結果還是分手的話，那就代價太高了，沒有意思了。"

her husband rejected her request to be the caretaker of their son if there is a divorce. Yet both she and Mu managed to accommodate their same-sex relationships within their heterosexual marriages with different degrees of mutual consent with their husbands.

### *Fake it: Cooperative marriage*

It seems that cooperative marriage is an increasingly popular option of younger informants in my research. At least for the three relatively younger married or about-to-get-married informants in this research, cooperative marriage is their way to cope with family and other social groups.

Cooperative marriage is not new to many lalas and gay men in urban China. By the time I started my research in Shanghai, I have only been told about the idea through word-of-mouth gossips about people having cooperative marriage. But when I returned in 2006 and 2007, I have heard real stories about people having cooperative marriages and later I found out that some women that I have met or interviewed earlier were planning or having cooperative marriages themselves. Only in less than two years the once experimental idea of cooperative marriage has been enthusiastically put into real life test by many desperate lalas and gay men in the cities of China. The rising popularity of cooperative marriage in such a short period undoubtedly reflects the desperate conditions in which lalas and gay men face in their everyday struggles of hiding a significant part of themselves. Also, its popularity can be attributed to the ever-expanding cyber community of lalas and gay men in China. Both Ling and Chris told me that they found their "husbands" on the Internet, either from reading an advertisement posted by a gay man

searching for marriage partner, or from posting an advertisement on a gay or lesbian website themselves to look for a marriage partner. The process is similar to conventional match making, just in this case, it is about a fake marriage of a lala and a gay man who are both desperate to get rid of the pressure to get married and also to get rid of the control of their parents and the excessive care from their relatives, colleagues and friends to their love lives. The typical process of a cooperative marriage begins with one party posts an advertisement or respond to an online advertisement of marriage partner. Then a meeting will be arranged for both parties after initial contact and very often same-sex partners of both parties will also attend the first meeting. As I was told by Ling, Chris and Tan, a cooperative marriage is not only a marriage involving the lala and gay man, but it is also a marriage that will affect their respective partners. Therefore, it is in many cases, a marriage of four people. After the first meeting, if all parties think it is a suitable cooperative partner, then they will start to detail their plan of meeting each other's families as heterosexual couples do when they date each other. If both families accept them as their daughter or son's possible mate, then they will plan further of their future "married life" or marital arrangements such as living arrangements, visits to parents of both parties, financial arrangements and so on.

In the case of Ling, she has spent over a year to "date" her future husband. During which her gay cooperative partner spent much time with her family as a boyfriend. Fortunately her family accepted her gay partner and they have registered for marriage at the time of our interview. They will have a wedding banquet and they will make their families believe that they will live together in their newly bought apartment, which is actually her gay partner's home with his same-sex partner. Ling will stay with her own same-sex partner after marriage. She told me it is the

only way for her to live outside. After getting married, she can live away from her parents' control. More importantly, in this way, her parents do not need to cope with her sexuality that would be impossible for them to accept or even to understand at all.

Tan and Ling is a couple. Tan was also thinking about to get married at the time of our interview. She has come out to her mother. It is impossible to know how do parents think of cooperative marriage since almost no one will confess to their parents that their marriage is a fake one. But in Tan's case, her mother has once implied to her girlfriend that she would rather Tan have a fake marriage than staying unmarried but having a same-sex relationship. Ling recalled this conversation with Tan's mother,

> "Actually, her mother talked to me about this problem before. She wished that I can talk to her. Even though they knew of the fake marriage, they don't want the groom's side of the family to know this, that is, it's better to have a half-son who can get along with the family and live happily together, and to pretend that we don't know about this or to play a role in not knowing anything about her. Her mother feels that if everyone knew it is a fake deal, it's really embarrassing, so why don't we just pretend not to know."[63]

Therefore, Tan was thinking of finding a cooperative partner to follow what Ling has done. She thought it is a way to save parents from social pressure,

> "They care the most about what people will say about them. They think of their relations with their relatives. They feel that if this matter [*Tan's*

[63] "其實，這個問題她的媽媽也跟我聊過，希望我勸勸她。她們雖然知道這個婚姻是假的，但不希望男方知道女方父母知道這個婚姻是假的。就是說，能夠像多了半個兒子那樣，好好的和睦地生活，假裝不知道這個事情，或者是扮演這樣的一個角色，不知道她的事情。如果大家都知道這是假的，她的媽媽會很尷尬，就假裝大家都不知道。"

*marriage*] can be done appropriately, then a solution can be found. If the problem is solved, then both of you can just move out. No one will bother you anymore and parents can relax."[64]

Chris, one of the first lala women I have met in Shanghai in 2005, told me two years later she was thinking of having a cooperative marriage. She was almost thirty when I first met her and was under severe pressure from her family to get married. She has found the right gay partner and her wedding banquet would be held very soon. It was a relief to her parents since they have been suspicious of their daughter's sexual orientation. Yet to Chris, although she had full control of her marriage this time, it is actually a marriage that she would rather it will never happen.

**Shadowy existence**

The fading state control over one's private life as a result from the economic reform has once again made the institution of family the major gatekeeper of one's intimate life. Assimilative and non-confrontational coping strategies are adopted by my informants when they face pressure from family and marriage. Using other more recognized social identities to compensate for their unaccepted sexuality and to employ heterosexual disguise are two common ways for lala daughters to deal with their parents. Married lalas suffer the most as they are doubly burdened by their natal and conjugal families. Many lalas are forced to live a dual life and have their extramarital same-sex relationships and desires hidden forever under the guise of a heterosexual marriage. The newly emergent form of gay and lesbian

[64] "他們最多想得就是輿論，和親戚的關係。他們就覺得這個事情妥善地解決掉，問題解決了，你們就出去吧。別人不關注你們了，父母就輕鬆了。"

union, as in a cooperative marriage between a lala and a gay man, shows again the absurdity of normative heterosexuality. But in the present social and cultural context of urban China, a cooperative marriage as a fake union of love, is ironically a proof of love that many lala daughters and gay sons need to demonstrate to their parents, and the only "ining" (into the hetero privates) that can allow a way out for their *real* same-sex relationships, even though that actually means the ultimate erasure of the very relationship from the domain of visibility.

"Your partner's character and whether your family likes your partner is very important. If your partner is commendable or if they approve of this person, if they don't think of her as a bad influence then it is hopeful that they will accept it." (Ling, 27)[65]

"Our individual efforts are less powerful when we face mainstream society. It might be better to imagine the society around us as the wide open seas and ourselves as fishes. Fishes can never swim against the current. But if we use our lala identities to our advantage and swim with the current, we might be able to get whatever we want in this complex job market."(L, *Les+*, Volume 07, 2006.12, p.27)[66]

"Coming out is not the best choice. It is not even the bravest. Most importantly, one has to choose an appropriate, safe and stable way of life. Everyone can be a warrior using a weapon closest to her to fight a courageous battle. A fake marriage is a promise between ourselves and our families to keep a smile at the surface, it is something that we have to give, it is something more than anyone can imagine." (Dudu, *Les+*, Volume 09, 2007.5, p.33)[67]

In previous chapters, I have discussed the four discursive spheres of reality (the hetero publics, the hetero privates, the homo publics and the homo privates) of lalas in their everyday existence. In this chapter, I will further discuss a politics that has been circulating widely in the lala community. I name this collective politics as the politics of public correctness. It has been weaved into the subject formation of lalas who are struggling for their legitimate existence in both the hetero public and private spheres. This politics is best exemplified by the recurring

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[65] "你的伴侶是怎樣的人，你的家裡喜不喜歡你的伴侶是非常重要的。如果說你的伴侶很優秀，或者說他們認同這是一個好孩子，不是外面交的壞朋友，那麼他們的接受是有希望的。"

[66] "面對龐大的主流社會，我們個人的力量是微薄的，這時候不妨把這個社會想像成大海，我們是魚，魚是不會和水流對著幹的，順流而動，發揮我們拉拉的優勢，在這個佈滿了人際關係的職場裡，我們就如魚得水了。"

[67] "出櫃並不是最好的選擇，甚至不是最勇敢的。重要的，是選擇一個合適自己的方式，幸福又安穩地生活下去。每個人都是個鬥士，選擇自己最順手的武器，勇敢地戰鬥著。虛假的婚姻，其實是我們對彼此和家庭的承諾。維護住表面的微笑，需要付出的，比任何人

theme of calling for a "healthy" (健康) and "bright" (陽光, literally means "sunny") lifestyle and positive representation in community discourse. The generally held belief is that one has to "stand up" (站起來) before she can make public of her homosexuality. There is a circular logic behind this politics of public correctness. It is believed that being "correct" in public, such as being a legally abiding citizen, an economically productive social member, an obedient daughter and a model homosexual (that is, one fits into the homonormative imagination of "healthy" and "bright" representation), will bring about a positive recognition in private, and finally gain the ultimate acceptance in return from the public. It is a kind of understanding and survival strategy that is reflective of the everyday dilemma that lalas are facing. We have discussed in Chapter 5 and 6 of the splitting subjecthood of lalas when they are negotiating their legitimate existence in and out of family spaces. The public has been increasingly endowed by a still shaping but forceful discourse of homosexual visibility and rights. The process has especially speeded up with the emergence of the homo publics and with the collective "coming out" of lesbian and gay subjects in the cyberspace. While the family space has been reinforced to be a major counter site against the existence of any non-heterosexually normative sexual subjects, the repressive role of Chinese family towards non-normative sexual beings is highlighted during the economic reform period when the state has been retreating itself from possessing direct control over private lives. In this chapter, I will look into the socio political context that has enabled the family space to turn into an effective regulative space to non-heterosexual subjects. Only through a critical understanding of this very historical context that has empowered the family as the most effective heterosexual gatekeeper can we be in a better position to discuss the implication of

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能想像的都要多。"

the politics of public correctness to the existence of lalas in contemporary China. The repressive nature of the family has been mentioned by many researchers in their studies of the homosexual population in China (Li and Wang 1992; Li 2002a; Zhou 1997, 2000; Rofel 1997). Yet we cannot take it as a self-evident cultural phenomenon that the Chinese family is always repressive to sexually deviant members or it has been repressive in the same way trans-historically. The current socio/ economic/ political development has played a major role in keeping and transforming the repressive, and also the productive side of the heterosexual family institution towards homosexual subjects in urban China. The politics of public correctness is a direct outcome of this historically contingent development of the repressive/ productive force of the family.

The major problematic of this chapter is to investigate first the socio-historical context of this politics of public correctness. I will pay special attention to the changing role of family after the reform period in regulating sexually deviant members, and how the politics of public correctness emerged to be a conscious community strategy to cope with this changing contour of social control over one's private life, that is, from a direct and all-imposing state control to a day-to-day intimate surveillance executed by the family through the language of love and care. Also, I will discuss the ways where experts from various state authorities work together to give official currency to this politics of correctness and acceptance. Finally, I will return to the implication of this politics to the social and symbolic existence of lalas in and outside family, and the notion of cooperative marriage between a gay man and a lala, as one of the most elaborated and creative practices of the politics of public correctness.

**The context**

The politics of public correctness has emerged in a social context where modes of effective social control over individuals' private life have undergone a paradigmatic shift from direct state control through danwei and neighbourhood surveillance to a more intimate form of day-to-day scrutiny via one's own family. The retreat of direct state intervention over one's intimate life during the reform period has further highlighted the gatekeeping function of the family to the heterosexual institution. The control of sexual deviants in the family sphere is exercised through a compulsory system of reciprocal care and love between parents and children. The provision of mutual love and care is always justified and legitimated by a reference to the Confucian principle of filial piety, which is generally held unproblematically as a Chinese traditional value. It also justifies the collective participation of parents and relatives in one's marriage choice when marriage is considered not solely as a personal matter, but a duty one owes to society and family. The discourse of filial piety and the preference of keeping surface harmony in the family space have put sexually non-normative subjects in a discursively disadvantageous position. Resisting subjects will find it hard to rely on any cultural resources to free them from compulsory participation in keeping the surface harmony of the family. There is a lack of a discursive tool for non-normative sexual subjects to disrupt the surface harmony of hetero privates and at the same time still be recognized as legitimate inhabitants. In a social context of increasing liberalization of state control over one's private life and the development of an increasingly visible and rights-conscious lesbian and gay community, the family has remained to be one of the major repressive forces against the existence of exclusive same-sex relationships. For informants who

were born after the 1980s, the implementation of the one-child policy in urban areas has put many in a further disadvantageous position when dealing with the familial pressure of marriage and child bearing. Yet it is also important to note that the one-child policy has a profound effect on the relationship between parents and child in China. While the single child generation is disadvantageous in a way that they have to face the pressure of marriage and childbearing alone, we cannot deny that they also enjoy a more tolerant social environment of non-normative sexual practices and to some, even a more tolerant attitude from parents to their various life choices. It is an interesting area for further researches to look into in what ways do the changing dynamics between parents and the single child generation affect the existence of lesbians and gay men in China.

In Zhou (1997, 2000) and Li's (1992, 2002a)) studies of the homosexual population in China, they analyze ways of repression against homosexual subjects in Chinese society and family. To Zhou, the "silent" repression of the Chinese family and society can be coped with a set of culturally specific strategies that are non-confrontational, not sex-centred, non-hetero/ homo based and traditional Chinese value-oriented (Zhou 2000, p.215). Li also believes that the dominant mode of repression against homosexual subjects in China is not "ruthless persecution and extreme hostility" as those happened in the West, but "ignorance and prejudice in the mainstream society" (Li 2002a, p.406). This has led to a coping strategy of being non-confrontational and escapist for many homosexual subjects in China, as Li explains. The belief of a more "tolerant" Chinese culture towards homosexuality, usually with reference to the more physically expressed culture of homophobia in the West, has mounted to be a popular contemporary re-interpretation of traditional Chinese culture in academia and also the tongzhi

communities in China. Many of the informants in this research also shared this belief. May's remark on Chinese society towards homosexuality is a typical one.

> "It's probably good that China and its culture is quite mediocre. Afterall, it is a patriarchal society and no one is particularly sensitive to the oppression experienced by lesbians or gay men. Everyone seems to lead a steady life. Many gay men and lesbians proceed to get married when it is time to do so. One's pain and suffering, one's desolation, all has been stashed away in a hidden corner never to be exposed under the bright sunlight. Everyone feels that if you cannot see it then it must not exist. That is why no one will care about these issues in the past. It will only slowly and occasionally come up as an issue. For example, like which tongzhi bar got too racy and got shut down or if two persons went an extra mile to get married. Just like that, just like another piece of news coverage. It is still not about things that happen around us everyday. Basically, I think it is still quite relaxed. If you can adjust your personal feelings about and find for your own path, it won't be that much of a big problem. At least you don't have the feeling that when you're living in a foreign country where you fear for your life."[68]

The silent and non-physical repression of Chinese family is sometimes interpreted as a kind of cultural tolerance towards homosexuality. But silence can be a violent form of symbolic erasure. The silent repression not only silences the repressed subjects but also erases them entirely from sight. Their existence is always a shadowy one at the "hidden corner", as understood by May. This is a form of symbolic violence that cannot be read as Chinese cultural tolerance towards homosexuality. We can only say that the form of repression is culturally different

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[68] "而中國正好文化很像很中庸的，畢竟它是以父系社會爲主的國家，大家沒有明顯的感覺到這種女同志或男同志對社會的衝擊力，大家都是非常的很平穩的在生活。很多男同女同不管怎麼樣到了該結婚的年紀還去結婚了，他的痛苦他的絕望或他的怎麼樣都是在背後陰暗的角落裡的，沒有被那個拿到陽光下面來的，大家覺得看不見就是不存在的，所以也沒有人會過多去關注這個事情，只是很緩慢的偶爾可能會有冰山一角會露一出來，說哪裡什麼酒吧同志的色情活動被衝擊啦，或者某兩個人特別的海枯石爛一定要去結婚啊這樣子，這只是作爲新聞去報道，還不是那種經常會發生到我們身邊的事情。我覺得基本上還是很寬鬆的，只要你自己能夠調整好自己的心態，就是找到你今後想要找到的道路的話，問題不是很大，沒有到一種就是在國外有時候會擔心人身安全這種地步。"

in the Chinese context and it might generate an entirely different framework of survival strategy and understanding of what constitutes a political tongzhi subjectivity.

While in the context of an omnipresent discursive struggle against the dominant West (mis)interpretation of non-West societies and cultures and against a Western framework of lesbian and gay activism, the widely popular belief of a more tolerant Chinese culture towards homosexuality can be read as a form of cultural resistance and re-definition exercised by the local society. However, this belief is proved to be both illusionary in nature and contradictory in reality. Ding and Liu (2005) makes a critical response to Zhou's celebration of the Chinese way of tolerance towards homosexuality by revealing the violence of this silent tolerance of Chinese family against homosexual subjects. They argue that the "poetic of reticence", as essentialized by Zhou as the Chinese way of tolerance, is a kind of violence that deprives the homosexual subjects of any speakable and visible position,

> "The order of things whereby some things are more speakable than others and therefore allow those unspeakable things to remain in the shadow 'where they belong' – *this* order is what is preserved.
>
> We further suggest that cooperating in the preservation of such an order has itself homophobic effects to the extent that its very preservation in a narrative as influential as Zhou's will allow for the continued spawning of just this sort of benevolence and reticent good will, with its especial containing force in the areas of personal sexual and affective behaviour. Zhou writes as if containment itself (baorong) were not in this particular 'Chinese' space/ time a sufficiently effective form of homophobia and discrimination." (p. 49)

In reality, in addition to the symbolic violence as forcefully theorized by Ding and Liu, many physically violent cases of homophobia in contemporary China that have been reported by the media, documented by researchers and also personally witnessed by some informants in this research have proved that the belief of a more tolerant Chinese culture towards homosexuality is no longer valid in contemporary China. What has made this belief more illusionary and contradictory today is the rapid development of an identity-based tongzhi community and its increasingly articulate effort in obtaining an exclusive same-sex lifestyle that is not secondary to any visible heterosexual relationship as what has been practiced and even promoted under the framework of silent tolerance. The emergence of a sexually identified community has transformed the relationship between the heterosexual family institution and homosexual individuals in significant ways. The self-understanding and expectations of homosexual subjects have been transformed drastically since late 1990s when community networking first appeared on the Internet. A self-empowering and rights-conscious community discourse was absent during the 1990s when Zhou and Li first started their researches. It is the presence of communities and more importantly, the emergence of a self-empowering discourse that has intensified the conflict of the lala subject and her heterosexual family since the late 1990s.

From the four coping strategies formulated by Zhou with reference to the cultural tolerance in Chinese societies that he enthusiastically promoted, and informants' remarks on the same tolerant culture in this research, we can see that if ever there is tolerance towards homosexuality in Chinese culture, it is one with conditions. The tolerance is only possible when the surface order or harmony of the family space is not disrupted. Silence, as Ding and Liu argue, is the only language

permitted to keep everyone in place within the heterosexual order. That is, the sexual deviants will always be confined to the shadow or secondary existence. Silence is a symbolic force of boundary maintenance. It defines what is speakable and what should be silenced. It also regulates the surface purity of the hetero publics and privates by visibly erasing any non-heterosexual beings (or any heterosexual non-normative beings) and by requesting a compulsory disguise from anyone who is not eligible. With the retreat of legal and medical regulations of homosexual subjects in the reform period, the language of love and care of the family institution has been left to be the most effective tool of social conformity. The repressive force of silence against homosexual subjects in the family is carried out along the axis of familial love and harmony. Tolerance is offered on the condition of keeping the surface order within the heterosexual family space. Surface order or harmony of the family space is both symbolic and visual. It demands a discursive clarity of the heterosexual family relationship and a visual purity of the family space. The surface order of family is usually expressed by informants through the concept of saving the family or parents' face. The quotation in the beginning of this chapter is illustrative in explaining the importance of the harmony over the surface of the family. "To keep a smile at the surface" stresses more of the keeping of a symbolic or visual order of the heterosexual family institution than the symbolic or visual recognition of the deviant subject in the family space at the expense of upsetting the existing order within that space. In other words, the participation in a collective effort to maintain the order at the surface level of the family space is more emphasized than a visual recognition of the deviant subject since that will inevitably disrupt that surface order. The maintenance of the "surface smile" of the family space is also echoed by many informants. A non-confrontational strategy of coming out, or coming out

softly, or not to come out to parents at all, and cooperative marriage are popular ways lalas use to maintain the surface order of their family. While doing so, they usually employ the same language of love and care as that is used to keep them out of the sight of the family space to justify their choices of strategy. The appropriation of the language of individual sacrifice in the name of filial piety is one way to respond to the repression of the heterosexual family institution under the same cultural logic. But this has resulted in a working with rather than working against the repressive order that has caused the symbolic displacement of the homosexual subjects from the family space. The only difference is when compared to the pre-community time, lalas today have built up their own space on cyberspace and in reality, this newly emerged homo space is still erased from the surface of the family. Its existence is still shadowy and its inhabitants are still required to engage in compulsory heterosexual acting when they have to enter the hetero space.

Outside the family, the politics of public correctness is also a response to a long history of state imposed medical and legal stigmatization of the homosexual subjects during the communist rule. The decades long pathological treatment of people with homosexual activities and punishments exercised by the legal and the social security authorities before and after the abolishment of the crime of hooliganism in 1997 have long established in society that homosexuality is often associated with mental and moral degradation. To many in the newly emerged tongzhi communities, destigmatization prioritizes other efforts in both the public and private domains. In this project of destigmatization, experts from various disciplines have played a major role. The abolishment of hooliganism in the new criminal law and the depathologization of homosexuality as a mental disorder

have paved way for an active participation of state experts in the construction of new authoritative discourses of homosexuality and the subjects concerned in the country. Experts' participation in the new discursive construction of homosexuality is also part of the bigger project of a scientific study of a previously forbidden subject. A scientific attitude towards sex has been promoted in the country since the reform era. During the 1990s, the threat of HIV/AIDS to the notions of public health has again called for participation of medical experts in a national campaign of new sexual morality. Under this social context, state experts, especially medical professionals, turned up to be the most eligible candidates for a new scientific study of sexual deviance. A group of sympathetic medical professionals launched the first journal in the country on homosexuality in 1998. It is the *Friend Exchange* (朋友通信) and is circulated within the tongzhi communities and among medical experts. In its first issue, participating experts regard it as their undeniable responsibility to society to engage in an anti-discrimination campaign,

> "Homosexuals often hope to live with someone who loves them as much as they love them. Due to a backward development of our society, a lot of homosexuals have to resort to a promiscuous lifestyle under pressure from the discrimination they faced. It makes it very difficult for them to have stable, reliable and good monogamous relationships and difficult for them to find a suitable partner. For many of them, they have no alternative but to have sexual relations with strangers in order to fufill their biological drive and deeper psychological needs. This situation makes them highly susceptible to HIV infections and sexually-transmitted diseases. Hence, in this era of AIDS, it is an important scholarly endeavor with grave responsibility to change the social conditions and discriminating environment for homosexuals." (*Friend Exchange*, 1998, p.4-5; quoted from Zhou 2000, p.302)[69]

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[69] "同性愛者普遍希望與自己傾心並傾心於自己的人一同生活，但由於社會文明的相對落後，大量同性愛者在歧視的壓力下過著多性伴生活，難以建立良好、穩定、可靠的單一伴侶關係和尋找適合作伴侶的人，他們之中很多人無可奈何地只能與陌生同性發生性關係，

The following years since the launch of *Friend Exchange*, state experts contributed to a new discursive construction of homosexuality and community activism. Increasing number of experts has taken part in the normalization project of homosexual subjects since the late 1990s. Li Yinhe, a prominent sociologist in the country, has petitioned to the National People's Congress for the legalization of same-sex marriage in the country. Medical and legal experts have been official advisors and organizers for tongzhi hotlines and working groups in different cities. The active participation of state experts in the destigmatization campaign can be also explained by the specific political context of China. Cooperating with state experts or their affiliated state institutions can ensure the political and financial security of the project or working group concerned. The presence of experts can also be advantageous in conducting effective communication with the general public. Experts are aware of their strategic role in this project of anti-discrimination. Another issue of *Friend Exchange* elaborates the experts' role in a model of cooperation with the state,

> "On the other hand, there is a need to liberate issues on sexual orientation. Denmark as a Scandinavian country achieved this by first having gay organizations talk to academia, and then academics began to talk with the government, and the government then began to educate the public on how to resolve gay issues. China is following the footsteps of Scandinavia because it is closer to the situation in China. That is, to have a cooperative relationship with the government, to gather everyone including those with different perspectives and attitudes, then China's issues with homosexuality can be solved. Take into perspective the scientific knowledge and let the general public understand and accept homosexuals will help eradicate discrimination,

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以滿足自己的生理需要和深層次心理渴求。這一現狀使他們生活在極易被愛滋病毒和性病感染的高危因素。因此，在愛滋時代，改變歧視同性愛人群的社會環境，是相關學術界重大的義不容辭的責任和義務。"

and furthermore, to create a productive dialogue with homosexuals in general."(December Issue, 2002, p.44)[70]

The political context has partly contributed to the development of the politics of public correctness. In this aspect, state experts have played a major role in creating a new discursive space for a normalized homosexual subject position, as opposed to the medicalized and moralized interpretations in the past.

**The strategies: "Walking under the sunlight in pride!"**

At the community level, the politics of public correctness is demonstrated by the frequent use of "healthy" and "sunny" to refer to an ideal version of tongzhi existence and public representation. The reference of healthiness and sunlight is reflective of the stigmatized and shadowy status of homosexual subjects in real life. In the first issue of *Les+*, a community newsletter/ magazine published by a group of younger generation lalas in Beijing, the slogan on the cover references the imagery of darkness and lightness again,

> "After the darkness fades away, I'll be holding your hand walking under the sunlight in pride, blatantly happily living our lives ever after!" (Issue one, 2005)[71]

The divide of darkness and lightness is sometimes applied to the spatial difference of the cyberspace and the offline world. Community members are used to refer to

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[70] "另一方面則需要大力普及有關性取向的解放；北歐國家如丹麥，則是通過同性戀社團與學術界溝通，學術界再與政府溝通，政府再教育大眾的方式解決同性戀問題。中國目前走的是北歐的路子，因爲這更適合中國國情。與政府保持良性合作關係，團結所有的人，包括不同觀點和態度的人，才能比較好地解決中國同性戀問題。取向的科學知識，使大眾理解、接納同性戀者，消除歧視，進而爲同性戀者的良好交流創造空間。"

[71] "在黑夜之後，握著你的手，在陽光下驕傲地走，坦然 happy 地過我們的生活！"

the offline world as reality (現實). There has been a constant effort in the community to extend cyber activities into the "real" world, and also to expand community social life from darkness to broad daylight. The symbolic use of darkness/ brightness and the emphasis of a healthy community image tie in with the struggle of visibility and positive representation in the context of social stigmatization.

The effort of building up a positive tongzhi image both within and outside the community is a significant part of the normalization project of homosexuality of the state experts. They represent an authoritative voice of calling upon a positive tongzhi subjecthood with self-respect and self-discipline. The following passages are quoted from the December issue (2002) of *Friend Exchange*. It represents the dominant attitude of the group of sympathetic state experts towards social acceptance of homosexual subjects.

> "Among homosexuals in China, there are many who have modern tastes, who aspire to better quality lives and who work tirelessly to fulfill a life's worth. For some homosexual friends who lead decent lives, they usually work very hard to climb up the ladder in society. Once they have achieved a level of success and made contributions to their parents and families, then they will find the courage to discuss their sexual orientations. Some homosexuals believe that the underlying meaning of being a homosexual is to first be a human person with integrity. To possess integrity has nothing to do with homosexuality.
>
> Furthermore, there are homosexuals who would say that as a homosexual, one should advocate for self-discipline. Given this notion of self-discipline, we are worthy of asking the public and the government for tolerance and kind treatment. If there is no attempt for self-discipline, what and when can we ask for what we deserve? It is hard to gain recognition and approval from the wider public if we cannot self-discipline ourselves. This is common for

anyone who lives in a community or in a country. For those homosexuals who are still struggling to gain public recognition, they should pay extra attention to their own image. We should all strive towards establishing a healthy and respectable image in society, even though we are not perfect beings but we can still strive towards this goal. We need to assume societal roles, to obey the law, to cultivate integrity, to self-discipline ourselves and to take up personal responsibilities. We can only gain public recognition if we take up personal responsibilities and in return, take up others' responsibilities and those of our society. " (December Issue, 2002, p.49)[72]

Self-discipline and "a healthy and respectable image in society" are considered to be the prerequisite to public acceptance of one's homosexuality. Here the logic of public correctness, expressed through the language of social conformity and responsibility, is used to justify social recognition of homosexual subjects. In other words, one has to first become a model citizen before she can demand "tolerance" and "fair treatment" from society and the government. The demand for a homosexual subject to conform to social norms contributes to the surface purity of the hetero publics and privates, and it remains as a recurring theme in the expert project of normalization. The same stress of public correctness is echoed in tongzhi communities. An operator of a lala hotline in Shanghai explained to me why the hotline had an underlying stance of "not showing encouragement to homosexuality" (不鼓勵立場), especially to callers who are students.

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[72] "中國同性戀人群中，有很多具有現代文化素質，追求著高質量的生活和努力體現生命的價值。一些'活得不錯'的同性戀朋友，都是首先以自己在社會上勤奮上進、有所成功，對父母家人作出貢獻後，終於有勇氣說明自己的性取向。有同性戀者認爲：'同性戀'的含義首先是作爲人、擁有人的尊嚴；就尊嚴來說，與是否是同性戀沒有任何關係。

還有同性戀者說：做爲同性戀者，我首先提倡行爲自律。只有在行爲自律的前提下，才有資格向社會和政府提出寬容和善待的問題。如果沒有行爲自律的前提，一切無從談起。一個國家、群體、公民都應有自律的行爲規範，否則很難得到大眾的認同。做爲尚未得到大眾認同的同性戀者來說，更應該注意自身形象問題，樹立一個高尚、健康、向上的良好社會形象尤爲重要。儘管有些規範不一定每個人都能做得很好，但我們可以努力去做。我們首先應該承擔起社會賦予的角色：遵紀守法，陶冶高尚的情操，行爲自律。只有對自己負責，才可能對別人負責，對社會負責，才能得到大眾社會的認同。"

"It's just that we won't say that there is nothing wrong and everything's right, whatever you want to do, you can do it. We usually tackle each problem by each problem. If she introduces herself as a student, we will tell her that she better focus more on her studies because this has nothing to do with her sexual orientation. It has everything to do with her life. If you cannot do well on things that matter to you the most, then how can you bring happiness to another person? [*That is to say, to finish school first?*] You can date when you're still in school but you cannot give up everything for this. If you cannot even focus on yourself and take steps to improve your life, then you cannot give another person a sense of happiness and a sense of security."[73]

Homosexuality is not encouraged if one is not qualified to be a recognized and self-sustained social member. Here we can discover the influence of the deep-rooted social stigmatization of homosexual subjects and the internal regulation of visible/ invisible in the tongzhi community. The politics of public correctness is most elaborated in the community's understanding of coming out and in members' justification of cooperative marriage. Coming out, or to make one's homosexuality known to their parents and society, is generally considered as an *option* rather than a politically correct *obligation*. Some even disregard coming out as a responsible act as it can bring tremendous harm to one's family. To many informants, being a considerate and filial daughter is far more important than being honest to their parents. Coming out is regarded as a process that requires strategic planning and can last for a prolonged period of time. A non-confrontational and well-planned coming out is always preferred over any impulsive and direct ones. And if one has to come out to her family, the quality of her same-sex relationship and her partner, and whether she is economically

[73] "就是說不可能去這樣說你這樣是沒有錯的，完全正確的，你想怎麼樣就怎麼樣。而是就事論事，而且如果她自我介紹她還在上學的話，我們會告訴她最好把學上好一點，因爲這個不是跟性取向的關係了，是人生很重要的一件事情，你自己都不能自己做好的話，不可能可以爲別人帶來幸福。[*就是說唸完書再講？*]你可以在唸書的時候談朋友，但是你不能爲了這個而放棄一切，你自己都沒有辦法認同自己，把自己的生活變得好一點，你不能帶給別人任何的安全感，和幸福感。"

self-sufficient, professionally recognized, will all be taken as prerequisites for the very act. There is an underlying two-step model of coming out. That is to stand up (as a model social member) first and come out (as a less desirable sexual being) later. In other words, this reflects a logic of public correctness: from private recognition to public recognition. It echoes the experts' calling of performing well of one's socially assigned roles before one can demand recognition from family and society. The ultimate goal again is to preserve the surface order and purity of the family and society as a whole. The reasons that were offered by many informants about whether they will come out to their parents are always expressed either through the language of love and duty to parents, or the language of family face. Both point to the maintenance of family's surface order.

A cooperative marriage between a lala and a gay man is the most elaborated practice of the politics of public correctness. It fully appropriates the surface order of the heterosexual family through an extreme form of disguise and acting. Cooperative marriage is not generally supported in the tongzhi community but it is increasingly popular among the generation of lalas who were born in the late 1970s and the 1980s. By the time of my research, they have reached the so-called suitable age of marriage and therefore facing the most organized pressure of marriage from their family. The two lala couples who have engaged in cooperative marriage in this research both told me they did it for the sake of their family. Coming out to their parents was not a viable option to them. The choice of a fake performance of wedding and the hereafter marriage life is what they believed to be the most considerate and responsible way of coping with their respective families. In this way, the family face is preserved as there will not be any embarrassment caused by an over-age but unmarried daughter; and the surface harmony of the

family is also preserved as the daughter does not act against the familial order of reciprocal love between parents and children. In the case of a cooperative marriage, the silent force of repression of contemporary Chinese family is coped with by the same force of silent resistance. Without disrupting the spatial purity of the hetero publics and privates, a cooperative marriage is a survival strategy that is a direct result from the historically specific social context of contemporary China.

**New boundary and space: Cooperative marriage**

I have argued in this chapter that the politics of public correctness is developed during a time when the tongzhi community and the state experts are working together in a normalization project to resist against long held medical and social stigmatization of homosexual subjects in the country. It is also a kind of politics that works to maintain the surface harmony and purity of the hetero publics and privates. It is especially a culturally specific resistance against the silent oppression of the family institution in an era when the state is retreating its direct influence in regulating people's private life. Family has left to be the most effective agent of social control and conformity and the major gatekeeper of the heterosexual institution. The emergence of the tongzhi community since the late 1990s first in the cyberspace and later in the offline space has further intensified the conflict of the desire to have exclusive same-sex relationships and lifestyles and the familial obligation of compulsory heterosexual acting. In the last section of this chapter, I will discuss the political implication of the politics of public correctness to the existence of lalas in the hetero publics and privates.

The obligation of keeping symbolic purity within the boundaries of the family

space points to the very meaning of public correctness, which would eventually lead to the invisibility of sexually deviant subjects in the family space. This is what I have termed as the symbolic erasure of lalas from the hetero privates if the prerequisite of a publicly recognized presence is the cover-up of any non-normative sexual behaviours and identifications. The requirement of being a model social member before one can be qualified to exercise the act of coming out would very likely lead to an intensification of an internal hierarchy of good and bad homosexual subjects, or in other words, a new repressive order of homonormativity. The logic of public correctness – private recognition – public recognition might turn out to be a reinforcement of the repressive order as only those homosexual subjects that are recognized by the very repressive order are allowed to be seen and heard.

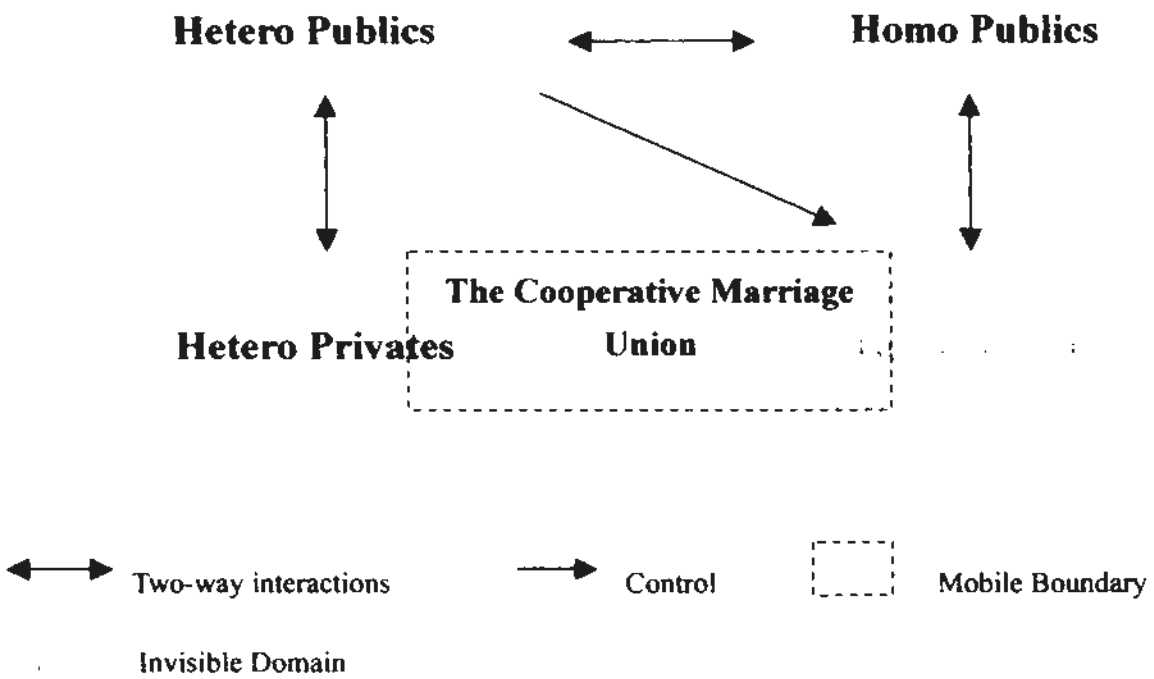
However, the silent resistance against the repressive order and appropriation have also disturbed the boundaries between and of the hetero and homo publics and privates, with a new layer of surface/ space being created. It is useful here to borrow the allegory of the "form-substance" (主體), shadow (景) and the penumbra, or the shade of the shadow (罔兩) as employed by Ding and Liu in their article "Reticent poetics, queer politics" (2005, 2007), and the idea of "surface" as theorized in Fran Martin's article "Surface Tensions: Reading Productions of Tongzhi in Contemporary Taiwan" (2000). The two articles have inspired me to rethink the relationship between the notions of "real" and "fake", and layers of reality constructed in a cooperative marriage. Here I will appropriate the concepts to theorize the symbolic boundaries and in-between spaces of hetero and homo publics and privates in the context of contemporary urban China. I want to investigate in what ways does cooperative marriage disturb the boundary of the

"real" and "fake", or in other words, the positioning of the form-substance and the shadow or shade; and in what ways does it create a new space or surface layer of reality on top of the hetero privates.

The cooperative marriage between lalas and gay men, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is a coping strategy responding directly to the heterosexual policing of family through the language of familial obligation and harmony. It is a kind of silent resistance against the unspeakable obligation in the hetero privates to maintain a surface harmony. It is known to all members in the hetero privates that the surface or visual harmony of the very space will be immediately disrupted if the heterosexual obligation or the heterosexual policing are expressed overtly. The force of silence in the contemporary Chinese family context is most effective in keeping the symbolic boundary of what is visible and what is invisible. Ironically, the violence of this force is always expressed in a language of parental love and filial piety that has long been served as a compulsory order of relationship in Chinese family. The discourse of parental love and filial piety silently but also forcefully confines deviant subjects to a shadowy existence in the family space.

Cooperative marriage has created a mobile or movable counter private against the hegemonic hetero privates. This counter lala space does not eliminate itself from the domains of hetero private, but indeed, it places itself at the centre of it by creating a new homo private that is movable between zones of visibility and invisibility and shifting between reality and performance. It navigates between the hetero and homo privates and constantly shifts between boundaries and roles. I would present in the following diagram the challenge that cooperative marriage poses to the relationships of the hetero and homo publics and privates.

**Diagram II: The Counter Private of Cooperative Marriage**




The cooperative marriage union consists of the legitimate marriage partners and their respective same-sex partners. Therefore the marriage union always consists of (at least) four people altogether. On the surface, the heterosexual union in a cooperative marriage is the privileged one in both hetero publics and privates. Any same-sex connections to this heterosexual union are secondary and parasitic. The real same-sex relationship has to be confined forever in shadow. The lala and her gay marriage partner can only appear in the heterosexual family context under the disguise as a real couple. For some, they even construct a fake marriage home space to represent the spatial reality of their union. Wedding pictures, a shared wardrobe with the "husband's" and the "wife's" clothes, a bedroom with a double bed are used as props for the reality drama that will go on as long as necessary. All heterosexual actings are performed for the (shadowy) survival of the homosexual reality. In the symbolic contour of a cooperative marriage, what is actually the real

can only survive within the continual performance of the fake, and the existence of the fake serves only to sustain the real that can only survive in the backstage. In this way, surface harmony is maintained with the clarification of the visual purity of the hetero publics and privates. On the surface, if we apply the allegory of form-substance and shadow by Ding and Liu, the form with substance is the (fake) heterosexual union, while the shadow that attaches to it is the (real) homosexual relationship(s). Yet this "surface reality" is illusionary in the domain of the homo publics and privates. There is another surface of reality that is going on right *inside* the symbolic space of the hetero publics and privates. The "fake" heterosexual couple invades the hetero sphere with their "real" same-sex connections. In this sense, the realness of the heterosexual union that is privileged in the symbolic order in the hetero publics and privates is reduced only as a visual consistency to the spatial law with no substance. The radical faking of the heterosexual law has an effect of displacing the spatial divide of realness, always privileged by heterosexual representation, and illusion, usually referred to homosexual practices. The disturbance of cooperative marriage caused to the placement of real and fake, form and shadow, primary and secondary, significant and insignificant in the symbolic domain of hetero publics and privates points to the constructiveness of the very logic of division. It brings about a new line of enquiry to critically examine the symbolic order and boundary of hetero and homo that regulates the everyday existence of sexual subjects, and the hierarchy of realness in the symbolic order of the heterosexual family space of what constitutes a significant relationship and what is always reduced to be illusionary and insignificant. The marriage performance also actively constructs another surface of reality in juxtaposition to the privileged version of heterosexuality. It not only questions the authoritative demarcation of realness and fakeness, but also the positioning of

object and shadow. One will puzzle over which relationship in a cooperative marriage is shadow and which one is the form with substance? And which version of reality is more shadowy or more real than the other one?

With regard to the existence of lalas in contemporary China, the most urgent questions are: What is the most politically productive strategy to resist against the force of silence that is powerfully executed by the heterosexual family institution? Will the working together or within the logic of surface harmony bring about the ultimate recognition and acceptance in family and society? Or will the politics of public correctness lead only to an intensification of the process of internal exclusion (or the reinforcement of homonormative order) in the tongzhi community? And finally, what can be done to alleviate the conflict between a cooperative marriage and the heteronormative legal system when more and more in the community engage in this strategic performance?

> "I feel this is just part of it. I wish that this so-called (lala) circle, or this community, or this boundary will eventually erode and disappear." (Shu)[74]

I carried this research during the formative period of lala communities in China. This thesis is one of the first extensive qualitative studies of the tongzhi communities in contemporary urban China. It traced the development of the inaugurative period of identity-based lala communities in Shanghai and documented the struggles and strategies of lala women who are the founding members of these emerging communities. This research can provide essential ethnographic and historical information to future studies of tongzhi communities in China, especially to lesbian studies in China which are much needed at the time being.

The research is also one of the first sociological researches of the homosexual population in China that is done by a lesbian identified Chinese researcher. A growing number of sociological studies of the homosexual population and tongzhi communities in China have been carried out after the pioneering attempts of Li Yinhe and Wang Xiaobo in the early 1990s. Among them, Chinese language studies conducted by local academics in China constitute a significant part of this growing body of research. Yet studies done by lesbian or gay identified researchers are scarce and those on the lesbian population in China are unproportionately fewer than those on the gay population. One of the most

[74] "我覺得這是一部分，我希望最後這個所謂的圈子，或者群體，這個邊界…這個邊界會磨蝕掉、消失。"

important contributions of this research is that it offers an insider research account of tongzhi community at a time there is an over-representation of third-person narratives of the tongzhi population, and a significant shortage of academic works on lesbian communities in China.

I also locate this research in an emerging feminist historical and ethnographic study of the private spheres in modern and contemporary China. This research focuses on the self-narratives and ethnographic accounts of women in the private sphere in China. It discusses extensively of how sexually non-normative Chinese women negotiate their gender and sexual positions and create alternative spaces for survival in their heterosexual families, and the nature of family policing and "tolerance" of homosexual subjects in Chinese context and most importantly, the coping strategies of sexual dissidents. The private is argued to be as important as the public (if not more) in contemporary China as a major source of heterosexual policing. Its nature of control against non-normative sexual subjects, for example, through the language of familial love and harmony, is yet to be fully examined.

Lastly, the Shanghai case study can be an essential reference for tongzhi studies of contemporary urban China, or for other Chinese or non-Chinese societies that are under similar political, social and economic environment to understand possible modes of repressions and also new possibilities of existence. Also, the research can offer a model of tongzhi existence that is based on the cultural context of a Chinese society. It can be a source of information for future comparative studies of tongzhis in different Chinese societies.

**The four research areas**

The major research area of this thesis is to demonstrate how lalas struggled to exercise agency and create spaces of survival in a social context where increasing public recognition of homosexuality juxtaposes with a silent denial of homosexual subjects in the family. Based on in-depth interviews of lalas, participant observation of the lala communities in Shanghai and supplementary textual research of community, official and semi-official publications on tongzhi or homosexuality in China, my central argument is, in a society of increasing public recognition of homosexuality and a growing awareness of individual rights and choices, there is a persistent denial of lala subjects in the family sphere. The denial is two-fold. As women, they are culturally considered as sexual non-subjects without sexual agency. As non-heterosexual beings, their existence is denied in the family context where heterosexuality is the prerequisite of membership.

In the following paragraphs, I would return to the four areas of inquiry of this thesis and summarize my findings and arguments.

The first area of inquiry is: *How do lalas negotiate their newly acquired public recognition and identity brought about by the formation of tongzhi communities, changes in official treatments of homosexuality and public discussions with their roles in the heterosexual family and marriage?* It is evident from the experiences of my informants that either breaking away from families or disguising as a heterosexual according to the heterosexual norms are two most popular ways to cope with the conflict. But neither of these two ways disturbs the surface order of the heterosexual family. The law of familial harmony and filial piety has kept

non-normative sexual subjects invisible at the surface of family, despite the fact that many of homosexual subjects are increasingly visible in public discussions and everyday public spaces in China. In other words, there is a discrepancy of the treatment of homosexual subjects in the public and in the family. Homosexual subjects are only allowed to be shown in "public" under media spotlight, in scholarly studies, in hospitals and private clinics, through tongzhi hotlines, public health campaigns and police crackdowns. Their presence in the hetero privates is highly invisible. Runaway daughters, daughters and wives in exile, and acting wives in cooperative marriage are forms of lala existence that has resulted directly from the discursive and physical exclusion of homosexual subjects in the hetero privates.

The second area of inquiry is: *how do lalas, as an active and non-heterosexual female sexual subject, situate themselves in the context of Chinese family and marriage which ideologically denies female sexuality and any non-heterosexual subject positions*. It is found that almost all informants refer to the language of parental love and filial piety when they accounted for their strategies of self-alienation (that is, physically and/or emotionally leave their families or marriage) and heterosexual disguise. The spatial distance between themselves and their parents or conjugal families, and their obedience of heterosexual rules in the family space are consciously maintained and carried out to preserve the surface order of family where love is considered as an organizing principle of relationships. The preservation of the spatial harmony aims to preserve the "face" (mianzi) of the family as a whole to the outside world. Therefore, love and face are two major concepts that were frequently referenced in informants' accounts of their relationship with family. Love is the internal organizing principle of

relationships among family members while face is the external marker of this internal harmony to the outside world. The inter-dependence of love and face constitutes the repressive force of Chinese family over its sexually non-normative members. The surveillance that is carried out through the language of love and harmony has become the most effective mode of social control of sexual non-conformity in contemporary China after the demise of danwei system and community surveillance, which were used to be the two most dominant and effective systems of everyday control over one's public and private lives. When the family is still upheld as an exclusively heterosexual space and its surface harmony is the ultimate goal that is imposed on every inhabitant, and when running against these spatial principles is considered to be a betrayal of the law of love and a threat to the collective well-being (or face) of the family unit, the family turns easily into a repressive space and the love it upholds acts as just another form of regulating mechanism over non-conformist members. The feelings of shame and guilt, and the regret of not being able to reciprocate their parents' love and to fulfill their expectations that were so commonly expressed by homosexual subjects in China are the effect of the discourse of familial love which aims at keeping "deviants" in line with dominant heteronormative order. In other words, heterosexuality (in its monogamous form) is upheld as the only norm in the family space by keeping any other non-heterosexual subjects out of sight and at the same time by inducing within themselves the emotion of guilt that can keep them further in place with the dominant order of heteronormativity.

The dilemma of public inauguration, including the emergence of the homo cyber and offline publics, and private invisibility of lalas in China is a major area of investigation for this research project. While there is more space to manoeuvre in

the public, the domain of the family is the final bulwark of heterosexuality. Coming out to family is not a viable option if the very act will lead to consequences that one cannot afford. Homosexual subjects in China are still silenced in the family context. A logic of public correctness is widely considered in the tongzhi community as the most effective strategy of eliminating the deep-rooted homophobia in the family context. Concerning the third research inquiry of *what are the political implications of the dominant community belief of seeing public correctness as a way to gain private recognition and eventually public recognition*, to almost all my informants, being a socially and economically correct social members, which always implies material success, will enable them to be recognized as a model homosexual (that is, healthy and positive) by their families and the society as a whole. This logic has inspired a form of community activism that promotes positive representation and engages in active cooperation with experts especially from the health, legal and academic sectors in the normalization project of homosexuality in China. At individual level, cooperative marriage is the most extreme manifestation of this politics of public correctness. Marriage partners work together to fulfill their familial and social duties by forming a heterosexual conjugal family. By doing so, they successfully maintain the "face" of their families and hence the surface harmony of hetero privates. They are publicly correct in every aspect according to the monogamous heterosexual model. Although recognition comes with a further elimination of the homosexual subjects from the domain of visibility, cooperative marriage has experimentally created an alternative space for same-sex couples to survive the familial and societal pressure. The cooperative marriage union is able to navigate between the hetero and homo privates with the protective shield of marriage. Its spatial mobility enables the marriage partners and their same-sex lovers to create a

counter private for themselves. This counter private is a highly movable and elastic one. It fits itself into the hegemonic hetero privates and publics without disturbing the surface harmony of both. Its survival strategy is by nature similar to the homo publics as they are negotiating their existence both in the cyberspace and the offline world. The expanding homo cyber public and its offline extension are a good example of how a mobile counter public negotiating its existence with the hegemonic hetero publics. The flexibility of cyberspace and the nomadic existence of lesbian public spaces such as parties and social gatherings in Shanghai (as discussed in Chapter 3) have allowed the homo publics to penetrate into the hetero publics. The mobility of cooperative marriage and the homo publics allows them to survive the everyday boundary policing of the hetero privates and publics.

The formation of the homo publics and privates in China, such as the spaces created by cooperative marriages and other forms of lala family and the rapidly expanding cyber worlds of lalas and gay men, has demonstrated how counter publics, or even counter privates, can challenge the spatial order of the dominant publics and privates, and the transformative potential they can have on people's private lives. *How do lala's forms of existence within the Chinese family and society enrich the theoretical discussions of the public and private, and the negotiations between them* is the last question I have raised in Chapter 1. From the experiences of informants, we can see that the dramatic transformation that homo publics, especially the lala and gay cyber publics, has exercised on one's self-identifications and their imagination of alternative forms of private life. The homo publics function as a critical counterpublic to the dominant heterosexual ones. They challenge the normative models of gender and sexuality and propose

new forms of existence. The emerging model of cooperative marriage, as an extreme form of heterosexual acting, functions as a creative counter private to the normative model of heterosexual monogamous marriage. It creates a formerly impossible space for lalas and their same-sex partners to live out their desires and preferred lifestyles without upsetting the spatial order of the heterosexual family. It is a counter private that is able to inspire alternative discourses and forms of existence without confronting directly of the authority of the dominant privates while at the same time it is able to act as a counter force against the hegemonic regulation of family and marriage.

The homo counter public and counter private are discursive and actual spaces that embrace both of the forces of counter *and* cooperation. For example, as I have discussed earlier, the counter homo publics (both online and offline) have to cooperate with the hetero publics in many ways so as to survive and also to gain further public recognition and visibility. State experts in many different disciplines are working hand in hand with the tongzhi community in China to promote a more scientifically sound and socially inclusive understanding of the homosexual population. Emerging discourses developed from the homo publics have begun to overflow into the hetero publics. Examples include the popular interest of tongzhi subcultures which leads to the surge of media coverage to the subcultures of lesbian and gay subcultures. Yet the homo publics in large remain to be a counterpublic to the normative hetero ones. Their participants are aware of their marginal positions in society and they rely on the homo publics for the provision of counter discourses of gender and sexuality. The flexibility that is resulted from the mobile boundaries between hetero and homo, such as those of the homo cyber and offline publics and the "movable" cooperative marriage households, allows

lalas to survive and expand in an otherwise impossible territory of severe inter-personal and familial surveillance. It shows that lalas' negotiations between the public and private, the dominant and the subordinate, can be carried out by actively appropriating the spatial order of the dominant spheres while at the same time offers alternative models of public and private existences. As I discussed in Chapter 7 on the politics of public correctness, the spatial strategies (which include a total spatial break with their natal or conjugal families and the creation of new spaces such as an independent household with one's same-sex partner) that lalas used to negotiate with their families can have the effect of further jeopardizing their visibility and legitimacy in the family space. Alternative spaces can be created to accommodate their same-sex relationships or desires. But sometimes the newly gained space and freedom is at the expense of visibility.

**Implications for future studies**

How one interprets life stories, what will be heard, seen or sensed in the field, and which group of informants can be accessed are all dependent on the positionings of the researcher. Among the various positions, gender and sexuality are two of the major factors that determine what will be seen and heard by a researcher in the researched field. Researchers with different gender, sexuality and socio-cultural backgrounds will induce divergent or sometimes even contradictory observations and findings. Being an ethnically Chinese female and lesbian identified researcher, I am able to gather a kind of intimate knowledge that might be difficult to obtain by researchers with different gender, ethnic or sexual identifications. Yet my position as a gender and sexual insider, but a geographical outsider to my informants, also requires me to be even more reflective of the numerous

methodological and ethical concerns during the research process. This research, like many others, is a limited representation of lalas in Shanghai. Participants in this research shared certain similar demographic characteristics. They were the group who benefits directly from the social changes that have been taken place during the economic reform period, such as the increasing population mobility, changes in residential condition, the breaking down of a neighbourhood control mechanism, and the decline of danwei as a form of state control on private life. It is not surprising to find that women in their mid twenties who have an economically viable occupation and who own or can afford to have a living space of their own are the most visible group in the lala community and they constitute the majority group of my informants. The life experiences and aspirations of this group of women became the dominant voices in the community. The major challenge to them as a lala is the conflict between public recognition and the private dismissal of homosexuality.

The homo privates are taking shape in urban China as witnessed during my research. Lala families and kinship networks are developed rapidly in major metropolitan centres in China such as Shanghai. Daughters who left their families across the country re-orient with each other in new forms of family that are organized by same-sex love and friendship. Women who feel trapped in heterosexual marriage seek asylum in a foreign city that is away from their conjugal homes and familial obligations. More and more women from the post one-child policy generation are engaging in the self-directed heterosexual performance of cooperative marriage. Private invisibility remains to be the reality for many lalas in China. But the rapidly shaping homo privates, with its most experimental form cooperative marriage, lala parents by DIY artificial

insemination (that is, lesbian women impregnated by a self-chosen male reproductive partner without seeking help from any official reproductive units), extended lala family of intimate and emotionally attached friends and couples, and with more and more women being able to lead a life with exclusive same-sex relationships, has introduced new ares of research of lalas in China. Along with the increase of lala households, we can definitely foresee a not so far away future of the emergence of diverse family forms and a critical revision of the heterosexual institution that has forced so many women to be symbolically erased and physically alienated.

**Huang's story**

I would like to conclude this thesis by the story of Huang, one of my supplementary informants. Her story indicates how one can take an active role to create a space for herself away from the pressure of marriage and a disapproving family, and how important is the tongzhi community to individual lalas. She represents one of the many runaway daughters that I have met or heard of in Shanghai who took up a spatial strategy to pursue a way of life that is outside the framework of heterosexual marriage norm. In Huang's story, we can also learn from the experiences of her and her female lover how intense the pressure of marriage can be on women. Some choose to conform to social norms and to find ways to accommodate their same-sex desire or relationship in a marriage, like what Huang's female lover did. And some choose to break away entirely from her prescribed social roles as a wife and mother, like what Huang did. They represent two major ways of survival of lala women in China.

Huang was a new comer to Shanghai when I first met her in 2005. She has just run away from her family in her hometown in the South. Her family has arranged a marriage for her after waiting for years in vain for her to get a boyfriend. Huang was at her late twenties when she ran away to Shanghai. She lied to her family that she was planning to stay in Shanghai for a few months looking for business opportunities. But in fact she was going to stay as long as she can. Within months after she arrived in the city, she happily joined the local lala community and has started to live with a few lala friends and together they set up a lala family.

Huang once had a ten-year relationship with a woman. She was her first love. They met as classmates in school when they were only sixteen years old. As Huang's girlfriend got older, she began to face increasing pressure from family to get married. The girlfriend's family remained adamant about introducing potential boyfriends to her. Each time a matchmaking meeting was arranged, Huang would be there to make sure everything is okay for her girlfriend. It was a common understanding to both Huang and her girlfriend that if Huang did not like the potential boyfriend, Huang's girlfriend would respect her wishes and turned down the man as well. Huang felt strongly that the male partner should at least be a person of liking to her. Then she can "handover" her girlfriend to this man. The next boyfriend introduced by the family was a gentle man. Huang accepted the man and agreed to have both of them dating. Later, her girlfriend announced to Huang that they were getting married. Huang did not attend the wedding. After the wedding, Huang remained in touch with her girlfriend.

Huang and her girlfriend tried many times to think of a solution. They have cried many times over it. Thinking back, Huang felt that her girlfriend was very brave.

They thought of running away but where can they turn to? What can they do? Also, how can they leave their parents? They believed that love will hold them together.

Not long after, Huang faced pressure from her own family on getting married. Her parents arranged dating opportunities and matchmaking meetings time after time. One day Huang heard firecrackers going off downstairs in front of her house. Her family arranged a marital engagement between Huang and a young man whom she grew up with in childhood. Huang's parents were acting according to their familial traditions and decided on the month of October to be the wedding date. Huang escaped and left for Shanghai in July. I came to know Huang in Shanghai the same year in the month of December. She has already escaped from marriage for more than six months. She has become a part of Shanghai's lala community.

Huang's story is not only a personal account of being a T in a small city in China, but is also an account of a life that is so familiar to be heard in the lala communities. In a society that is so obsessed with marriage and a normative way of living, runaway daughters like Huang and acting wives in cooperative marriages will continue to be the only two viable options for lalas in China.

The quotation at the beginning of this chapter is one of the informants' wish of the future of lalas in China. Twenty years ago, the gay respondent writing to Ruan Fangfu yearning for a world where homosexual people can get in touch with each other and not be left alone. Twenty years later, people with same-sex desire united with each other with public identities and visible communities. Finding each other is no longer a pressing issue. The yearning is not shifted to the question of space and boundary. The right to inhabit and be seen in certain spaces, such as the family,

and the right to cross certain boundaries, such as the public/ private, the hetero/ homo, are what the more pressing issues for lalas today.

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