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**Queer Screen Cultures in Chinese Societies:
Stretched Kinship, Sinophone Mobilities, and Social Classes**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Universitas 21 joint degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Media, Film and Television, the University of Auckland, and Culture and Communication, the University of Melbourne, May 2016.

Abstract

This thesis examines recent (post-2008) queer media and screen cultures in global Chinese societies, with China as the intersectional focal point, through focused ethnography in urban queer film clubs and queer communities in China, analysis of autobiographical queer films and videos produced in various Chinese societies, and digital ethnographic study of China-based online and mobile queer social media. I develop my argument along the line of *queer mobilities*—the motions (geographical movements) and emotions (psychological re-adjustments) across the queer/non-queer and the local/non-local borders in domestic and transnational queer migrations. I examine queer mobilities from three perspectives: distanced kinship (a result of domestic and transnational queer mobilities), global migrations and cultural flows (the manifestations of queer mobilities), and the desire for upward social mobility and class migration (the underlying driving force of queer mobilities).

First, I examine the changing queer kinship structures by analysing autobiographical queer films, digital video series, and urban queer film clubs. I argue that today's queer kinship has often been stretched by physical distance between queer people and their families, and also by the rupture between one's sexuality and the hetero-reproductive expectations from the aging parents. Second, I examine queer migrations and cultural flows by investigating recent queer films, transnational digital filmmaking, and urban film clubs established by queer migrants. I argue for queering and destabilising current mobility scholarship and Sinophone scholarship to better address the increasingly frequent and fluid queer migrations and cultural flows in the twenty-first century. Third, I examine social stratification within queer communities by researching online and mobile queer social media, digital video series produced by social media companies, and urban queer film clubs. I argue that it is the underlying desire for upward social mobility that drives people to embark on migration journeys and pursue better education and employment, which results in the distanced queer kinship structure and the social exclusion in today's urban queer communities in China.

This research significantly pushes forward the boundaries of current scholarship, not only by examining recent queer films and emerging forms of new queer screen cultures, but also by developing and theorising multiple new paradigms that both extend and deviate from previous understandings of kinships, migrations, and social exclusions in and beyond queer studies, screen studies, and Asian cultural studies.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis only comprises my original work towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, and due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used. The thesis is within the maximum word limit, exclusive of tables and bibliographies.

Name: Wei (“John”) Wei

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Date: 12 February 2016

Acknowledgements

I dedicate this thesis to Katherine, Audrey, and Fran, my lighthouse in the ocean, my compass in the desert, and my Polaris in the sky. I thank them, more than anything, for guiding me through my doctoral journey.

I am also deeply grateful for my informants and interviewees, without whom this research would be impossible. I write for them, and my heart beats with them.

My gratitude extends to those who helped coordinate my joint PhD programme, to the advisors who mentored my doctoral coursework at the University of Melbourne, and to the rest of my thesis committees at the two universities whose advice helped improve my work.

Finally, a special thanks goes to Dr Xuelin Zhou, who has generously taken over my supervision at the University of Auckland towards the end of my candidature.

Notes on Chinese Romanisation and Translation

In most cases I have used Hanyu Pinyin to romanise the Mandarin pronunciations of Chinese characters, save for heritage terms (e.g. Kuomintang) and for the names of people outside Mainland China (e.g. Hou Hsiao-hsien). Chinese names are presented as surname followed by a given name, unless the persons concerned are already widely known, usually through filmmaking, by their given names followed by family names (e.g. Ang Lee and Stanley Kwan).

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On a bright summer night in 2013, I found myself in a small apartment with twenty people or so sitting in front of a film screen. It was a film club session in Beijing's queer community. *Literature, Auteur, and Same-sex Love: A Film Perspective* was the theme, and the video-clips shown were edited and remixed from a dozen English-language queer films. After the screening, a few people stayed for dinner in a restaurant nearby. Some of them were apparently acquaintances, although they all adopted pseudonyms. Except for the guest lecturer who held the screening session, they all looked quite young and some of them seemed to be college students. They talked about film, literature, musical, opera, etc. This scene struck me as a unique form of queer Chinese cultural practice. With their passion for film and art, these well-educated young men came to network with like-minded comrades and enjoy a night of quality entertainment. The cinephilic euphoria lingering throughout the night served as a strong contrast to what I initially had in mind before putting myself in the field: gay men lurking in parks and public toilets in search of sexual encounters, as depicted in the film *East Palace, West Palace* (*Donggong Xigong*, Zhang Yuan, 1996) and discussed in early gay ethnographies in China (e.g. Li and Wang 1993); and cruising men and women in gay bars, as recorded in Engebretsen's (2014), L. Ho's (2010), and Rofel's (2007) respective fieldworks conducted in Beijing.

This urban queer film club scene, together with other traditional and emerging forms of queer cultures, inspired me to embark on this intellectual journal to investigate recent queer screen cultures in the early twenty-first century, as well as the underlying social changes and social issues behind these screen-related queer cultural practices in today's Chinese societies. I begin this chapter with a background discussion of recent social changes in Chinese societies, which contextualise today's queer cultures on and off screens. I then present my research question (queer mobilities) to examine how queer screen cultures have

been shaping and shaped by the changing queer kinship structure, queer migrations and cultural flows, and social mobility and social stratification in queer communities. I proceed to discuss and critique multiple conceptual frameworks so as to build a theoretical foundation for this research, before I conclude this chapter with an outline of the structure of this thesis.

Background: Chinese Societies in Transition

In this part, I discuss various legislative, economic, technological, and social changes concerning queer people in various Chinese societies, and how these changes have reshaped today's queer screen cultures. The last two decades have witnessed some major legislative changes for queer people in various Chinese societies. Hong Kong, to begin with, was the first Chinese society to decriminalise private sexual intercourse between two consenting male adults in 1991, although it was not until 2006 that the minimum age for consensual sex was equalised between homosexuals and heterosexuals.¹ Mainland China decriminalised inter-male sex in 1997, and then depathologised homosexuality from the *Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders* in 2001.² Taiwan, on the other hand, has never explicitly criminalised sodomy and homosexuality in its legislation.³ Taiwan has also become the first Chinese society that bans discrimination based on sexual orientation in education and at work,⁴ although its attempt to legalise same-sex marriage in 2003 was stalled without passage, while a new round of legislative negotiation is still under way since late 2013. Echoing the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) social activism that has been thriving in the West, such transformations in legislation and medical science in the Chinese world have arguably raised the social visibility of sexual minorities, contributed to the development of native

¹ See *The Formal Record of the Legislative Council Meeting* on 10 July 1991, the Legislative Council of Hong Kong, 2058-69; and *Civil Appeal no. 317 of 2005*, Court of Appeal, The High Court of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

² For more details and comments, see Gao and Jia (2008, 462), Guo (2007a, 51-64), and Wang (2011, 83).

³ See Martin (2003b, 12-14).

⁴ See *Gender Equity Education Act*, 2004, and *Act of Gender Equality in Employment*, 2007, the Legislative Yuan of Republic of China in Taiwan.

queer communities, and underscored the flourishing of queer screen cultures at the turn of the twenty-first century.

This is just the beginning of a series of political, economic, technological, and socio-cultural transitions that have profoundly reshaped the landscape of queer cultures on and off Chinese screens. One decade into its membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO), China has surpassed Japan to become the second largest economy and overtaken America in key benchmarks to become the world's new economic leader.⁵ As the new regional economic engine with a vast and fast-growing domestic market, China has attracted a large number of filmmakers from “the south” (Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other Chinese societies in South and Southeast Asia) to come up north (*bei shang*) to the Mainland for film productions and/or film distribution. The transfer of Hong Kong's sovereignty to China (1997) and the signing of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) between Mainland China and Taiwan (2010) have further tightened such “north-south” connections. These changes have reshaped the production of queer screen cultures—transregional filmmaking across multiple Chinese societies has become increasingly popular. Recent examples include *Soundless Wind Chime* (*Wusheng Fengling*, Kit Hung, 2009) and *Permanent Residence* (*Yongjiu Juliu*, Scud, 2009), both examined in Chapter 4, although queer movies still often fail to pass China's censorship for theatrical release in the Mainland.

Along with the economic achievement and the further opening-up of its film market, China has also put its film regulations and policies in transition. In March 2008, China's State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT) banned cinematic portrayal of *tongxinglian* (homosexuality) in an official announcement, but abolished this announcement

⁵ According to the International Monetary Fund, China overtook the US in late 2014 to become the top economy in the world, although America is still leading the global economy in some other major benchmarks.

in November 2010.⁶ However, this does not mean that same-sex sexuality has become a cinematically representable theme in the Mainland. Abolishing the old regulations, SARFT did not specify whether they had lifted the ban on cinematic homosexuality. On 17 May 2013, the International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia,⁷ independent Chinese queer filmmaker Fan Popo applied under the “Disclosure of Information” (*Xinxi Gongkai*) provision in the film bureau and demanded the disclosure of regulative policies for queer visual content (see CQIF 2013).⁸ This rather political move called wide domestic and international attention to China’s film regulation. The bureau replied that, after abolishing the policy specifically banning homosexual content, the clause in effect reverted to the oldest one from the previous century that banned all kinds of “obscene” film.⁹ What counts as obscene, however, is subject to the bureau’s own interpretation without any clear definition provided to the public.

But this ambiguity does leave a space, however limited, for cinematic portrayal of queer characters on China’s mainstream film screen. *Let the Bullets Fly* (*Rang Zidan Fei*, Jiang Wen, 2010), a box-office hit in the Mainland, has a supporting male character self-mockingly expressing his attraction to the same sex. Albeit not the first gay character on China’s commercial film screens, he is perhaps the first one without effeminate stereotyping, compared to previous portrayal of gay men in popular films such as *If You Are the One* (*Fei Cheng Wu Rao*, Feng Xiaogang, 2008). In a minor storyline of *Finding Mr. Right* (*Beijing Yushang Xiyatu*, Xue Xiaolu, 2013), a critically acclaimed mainstream commercial film, a

⁶ See “SARFT’s Reaffirmation of the Standard for Film Censorship (*Guangdian Zongju guanyu Chongshen Dianying Shencha Biaozhun de Tongzhi*)”, 7 March 2008, SARFT; “The Order of SARFT no. 65 (*Guojia Guangbo Dianying Dianshi Zongju Ling di 65 hao*)”, 12 November 2010, SARFT.

⁷ The International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia is celebrated, mainly in the West, by LGBT people and activists every on May 17th, the day that the World Health Organization (WHO) removed homosexuality from its *International Classification of Diseases* in 1990.

⁸ In March 2013, SARFT merged with the General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP) to establish the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT).

⁹ This was confirmed by the filmmaker Fan Popo himself during my interview with him in late 2014.

Chinese woman in labour is accompanied by her lesbian partner and her American sperm donor. This might be Chinese audiences' first experience of cinematic lesbianism in China's commercial movie theatres. However, this short sequence only shows a gentle kiss-on-the-head between the lesbian couple after the childbirth, with the voiceover "let's bless them" (*rang wo men zhufu tamen ba*); some viewers may not fully understand or realise what they have seen on screen at all. *Sweet Eighteen* (*Tianmi Shibasui*, He Wenchao, 2012), a low-budget production released in China, also implicitly buries female same-sex intimacy in one of its multiple plotlines.

These transitions, albeit on one level minor and trivial, have created a space for the negotiation of queer cultures onscreen. The rapid development of technology and the rise of cyber-culture and social media, furthermore, have also changed the eco-system of queer film production, distribution, and consumption, and profoundly reshaped Chinese queer cultures and communities at the turn of the twenty-first century. The emergence of digital video cameras and editing software has boosted low-budget "grassroots" filmmaking, and the camera-embedded smartphones and tablets have made photo-taking and video-shooting even more accessible and affordable. Moreover, recent smartphones and tablets with dual cameras on both the front and the back make it much easier for people to take photos of themselves (known colloquially as "selfies" in English and *zi pai* in Mandarin) and share the pictures on social media via Wi-Fi connections and 3G/4G cellular networks. These transformations have begun to shift queer cultural productions and consumptions to digital screens.

It is within this context that queer Chinese social networking services have come into being. In February 2010, a social networking service called Feizan was brought online in China. With similar design and functions to Facebook and a particular focus on the gay market, Feizan soon extended to Apple's App Store and Android Market (now known as Google Play), the two major platforms for smartphone and tablet worldwide. Since then,

Feizan has attracted both Chinese-speaking users across multiple Chinese societies and foreigners living in China. Taking full advantage of mobile wireless Internet connections, this social network also departs from its predecessors in rejecting any kind of “obscene content” (*seqing neirong*)—pictures, videos, and texts that are explicitly pornographic for intended for sexual stimulation. This marks queer Chinese people’s conscious departure from local gay cyber-culture previously permeated with explicit erotic materials, as recorded in L. Ho’s (2010) research, and from the public stereotype and the (internalised) social stigma that queer people are only hunting for sexual enjoyment.¹⁰

The Web 2.0 style online service incorporated into smartphones in people’s pockets further blurs the boundary between the online and the offline world. Proclaimed as the largest gay social network in China, Feizan has also become an effective online platform for the organisation and publicity of offline social events and group activities. Numerous social organisations such as LGBT NGOs (non-governmental organisations), college societies, and publishers concerned with the well-being of queer people have created public profiles on Feizan; their followers will receive online notifications of their latest activities including book clubs, social sports, public lectures, free mental-health consultations, and so forth. The film club session I described at the beginning of this chapter was advertised in this way. I was notified about the event on Feizan, and relied on Google Maps and the GPS navigation module on my smartphone to find the venue—a small household apartment hidden in a multi-story building in a gated residential compound (see Chapter 6).

¹⁰ To date, little research has been done on the public stereotyping of Chinese lesbians and gay men. A recent sociological study (Tu and Lee, 2014) forays into this territory with a sample of 226 college students in China, and concludes that the stereotypes these students hold towards homosexuals are mixed but generally negative (994), and that such stereotyping is associated with their use of mass media, especially the Internet (990).

But the stereotypes reported in this study were named and pre-determined by the researchers, and the student-respondents were approached through college lecturers who distributed the survey in the classroom like an assignment. These may have limited the validity of this research. We still need much more future enquiry into the issue of public stereotyping of queer people in China.

In April and August 2013, respectively, Feizan launched two new mobile-device-only applications: ZANK (for same-sex attracted men) and Laven (for women) with which users could share their geolocations and organise their own social events with people in the same area.¹¹ The emergence of locative mobile queer social media in Chinese societies parallels the popularity of gay dating and hook-up apps such as Grindr and Jack'd in the West that have recently caught significant academic attention.¹² Moreover, in this context we cannot overlook the rise of micro-film (*wei dianying*) in Chinese societies and on queer screens. Micro-film, usually low-budget and shot by amateur filmmakers with digital cameras, refers to short-film produced mainly for online distribution through social media and for digital consumption on both computers and mobile gadgets. In Feizan's case, on the one hand, it provides a platform for the circulation of micro-films and for queer filmmakers to promote their works; on the other, the company behind Feizan/ZANK itself has become a major sponsor and producer of gay micro-films and digital video series. From the very beginning to today, Feizan/ZANK has launched a series of influential micro-film and video campaigns to raise the social visibility of queer people and for its own publicity, which accelerates its rise to fame in China and overseas queer Chinese communities.

The widespread of queer micro-film into the public media sphere parallels people's transforming attitude towards homosexuality during recent years, especially in the cyberspace where boys' love (BL) culture flourishes. In East Asia, BL designates a comic, cartoon, and literature genre of male androphilic romance or eroticism mainly fantasised by and created for women.¹³ Centred on the Internet, the BL imagination has demonstrated that male-male

¹¹ ZANK soon rose to fame in the queer Chinese world, whereas Laven failed to attract enough users and has been terminated. Chapter 6 contains more detail and discussion.

¹² See Grov et al. (2014) for a summary and a review of academic research on gay and bisexual men's use of the Internet and online networking services from the 1990s through to 2013.

¹³ Although it sounds like the *slash* genre in the West, *BL* is completely different in its genealogy. It derives from the *shōnen ai/shota* (love between/for boys) manga and anime (Japanese comics and animation). For more

relationships can be as romantic and/or erotic as those between men and women. Chinese BL aficionados in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan have created vibrant online cultures and queer fandoms that have entered the mainstream cyber university and become known to general Internet users. Such BL culture brings “bromance” and homoeroticism to people’s attention and makes same-sex intimacy more socially and conceptually visible to the often indifferent and heteronormative general public—by which I mean those who often see queer people as completely different others living in another galaxy.

The dissemination of BL cultures also contributes to the birth of the term *jiyou* around 2010. As I have argued elsewhere (Wei 2012), *ji* is the English word *gay* in its Cantonese pronunciation, while *you* means *friend* in Mandarin; *jiyou*, literally “gay friend”, is the latest outcome of the interaction between Chineseness and the globalised Western gayness. Inspired by BL cultures’ obsession with inter-male intimacy and initially popular in China’s cyberspace to describe same-sex attracted men, *jiyou* is now generalised to refer to all kinds of intimate relationships between two men, homosexual or not. Although this portmanteau word to some extent remains as a jocular expression, a point to which I shall return in the next chapter, here the male same-sex relationship is for the first time treated as a different form of “friendship”, as the term *jiyou* (“gay friend”) *per se* denotes, rather than something perverted, abnormal, and immoral. As part of the dynamic and fast-changing cyber world, the growing BL cultures in Chinese societies and the popularity of *jiyou* in China have demonstrated a relatively more tolerant attitude towards queer people, especially among the Internet generations.

However, these social transformations in Chinese societies do not suggest equity between queer and non-queer people, nor do they imply a fundamental shift of the social

detailed discussions of *BL* culture in Chinese societies, see Feng (2009), Martin (2008; 2012), Li (2009), Liu (2009), Wang (2011), Wei (2008), Wei (2014/2015), Xu and Yang (2013), and Yi (2013).

ethos concerning transgressive sexualities. Same-sex marriage or civic union, for example, has not been legalised in any Chinese societies as of early 2016. Concealing one's true sexual orientation and marrying the opposite sex is still a popular choice among same-sex attracted people, and quasi-marriage (*xingshi hunyin*, a set of fake heterosexual marriages between a lesbian couple and a gay couple; see Chapter 4) is not uncommon as well, especially in Mainland China. Centred in the Confucian kinship values, filial piety has long been the dominant social discourse rendering hetero-reproductive relationships as both a familial responsibility and a socio-cultural ideal. Sexual minorities are still often stigmatised and marginalised in Chinese cultures, and queer film festivals and LGBT NGOs still face harassment by the authorities in Mainland China.

Here my point is the socio-cultural transitions concerning queer sexualities in Chinese societies, and the resilience of existing familial and political institutions, have both contributed to reshape the landscape of queer Chinese screen cultures. On the macro level, these transitions lead to the increased visibility of sexual minorities in cinemas, cyberspaces, and societies, while the struggle of queer people against the dominant heteronormativity remains a popular theme in queer films and videos. On the micro level, communal events and social groups like the film club I have described are emerging in China's urban queer communities during recent years, while the organisers sometimes have difficulty finding a venue to host the events. If the landlords or neighbours dislike what they are doing, they might be asked to move away. Today, in short, while the changing attitude towards queer people provides a positive environment for queer communities and screen cultures in general, the unchanged sex-related social norms and values remain robust in Chinese societies.

It is in this complex and transforming context that I position my research on queer screen cultures in the twenty-first century and focus on the post-2008 era, as this year marked several historical moments in Chinese societies and arguably opened a new age. In addition

to the Summer Olympics held successfully in Beijing, 2008 was also the 30th year anniversary of China's Reform and Opening-up (*Gaige Kaifang*) that has led to the country's rapid and strong development in three consecutive decades as the world's fastest growing economy. 2008 also marked the beginning of the second decade of Hong Kong's handover to China, and the tightened connections between Mainland China and Taiwan when the Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party) regained its leadership in Taiwan's 2008 Presidential Election and began to ameliorate its cross-strait relation with the Mainland. In a broader context, 2008 witnessed the peak of the Global Financial Crisis that led to the global recession in the following years, under which Chinese societies were also heavily influenced and transregional and transnational funding for film production and distribution became even more popular. It was also in 2008 that Google Android devices first appeared on the market that began to bring affordable smartphones to consumers, vis-à-vis the debut of Apple's more expensive iPhone in 2007, and foreshadowed the popularity of mobile social networking services and locative mobile queer social media thereafter. In short, 2008 is a benchmark that symbolises all these social, political, economic, and technological forces that have reshaped the production, distribution, and consumption of queer screen cultures.

Research Question and Thesis Statement

This study examines post-2008 queer screen cultures in Chinese societies. I define queer screen cultures as the socio-culturally contextualised and contested practices of queer visual content production for, distribution through, and consumption via various screens—big screens in movie theatres, projection screens in film clubs, computer and TV screens at home, and small smartphone and tablet-computer screens in people's palms. In this research project I focus on queer films and digital videos, urban queer film clubs (regular film screenings and discussions in queer communities), and online and mobile queer social media in Chinese societies. These three forms of queer screen cultures are deeply interrelated: queer films and

digital videos are often screened in queer film clubs; most queer film clubs in China have public profiles on queer social networks to advertise their screening sessions and attract participants; queer social media like Feizan/ZANK also play important roles in the online circulations and distributions of micro-films and digital videos, and also sponsor and produce queer films and video series; and some queer filmmakers in Chinese societies also utilise queer social media to promote their works, while queer film viewers often rely on online and mobile social media to receive notifications about communal film screenings, and recur to the GPS locative module on smartphones to locate film club venues.

During my research, I have also identified *kinship*, *migration*, and *social class* as the three key points around which I will develop my arguments, as these three factors frequently surfaced in recent queer movies, in the film club discussions that I participated as an ethnographer, and in the online interactions on social media that I observed as a researcher. These three factors play essential roles in today's queer communities and cultures in Chinese societies. First, filial piety is often at odds with transgressive sexualities, insomuch as this fundamental Confucian principle predominately entails hetero-reproductive marriages to continue the family line. Kinship thus often becomes a central concern of queer Chinese people. Second, queer kinships have been further complicated by increasingly frequent domestic and transnational migrations for education and employment, as a result of China's rapid development and transnational economic collaborations since the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. Third, one's social position and class affiliation largely determine what choice one may have in kinship negotiations and queer migrations. Examining social stratification and class distinctions in queer communities is therefore the key to understand queer kinships and migrations. I have hence developed a more specific research question: in what ways and to what degree are today's queer screen cultures both shaping and shaped by queer kinships, migrations, and class distinctions in Chinese societies?

These three interrelated points constitute *queer mobilities*—the motions (geographical movements) and emotions (psychological re-adjustments) across the queer/non-queer and the local/non-local borders in domestic and transnational queer migrations. First, the increasingly frequent domestic and transnational migrations have separated queer people from the family and inevitably changed today’s queer kinship structure in Chinese societies (the *result* of queer mobilities). Second, the flows of queer cultures and talents on and off screens have become increasingly frequent and fluid across national and geographical boundaries (the *manifestation* of queer mobilities). Third, it is the pursuit of upward social mobility and class migration that drives people to leave home and embark on migrations journeys (the underlying *driving force* of queer mobilities). To explore the roles of queer screen cultures in shaping queer kinships, migrations, and class distinctions is to examine the roles of queer mobilities in shaping recent queer film cultures, film clubs, and social media. My research question therefore has a more concise articulation: how are queer screen cultures shaping and shaped by queer mobilities in post-2008 Chinese societies?

I should note that this research is less concerned with the aesthetics, forms, and styles of specific film and media texts; rather, during the research process, I have been increasingly drawn to the underlying social issues behind various queer screens. My approach to screen cultures in this research is more akin to Graeme Turner’s “film as social practice” (2006) that leaves behind a predominately aesthetic focus in film studies and instead turns to the social meanings of films. The three themes that I have identified from recent queer screen cultures—kinship, migration, and class—are the main “social meanings” of the queer films and media texts that I am eager to explore and examine. In this research, I will spend less time on the formalist aspects of films and videos; instead, I will put much more emphasis on the underpinning social changes and social issues behind the screens. I will return to Turner’s notion of “film as social practice” later in my methodological discussion (Chapter 2).

The last question is which film and media texts and which queer cultural sites (e.g. urban queer spaces and online queer communities) that I should include in this research. To make this decision, I ask myself the following questions: First, which texts and cultural sites interest me most and have inspired my research? This is obviously contingent on my own cultural taste and educational background (discussed in Chapter 2). Second, to which texts and fields that I have access or can acquire access with limited time and research fund? Every research has its boundary and is confined by time and budget. Third, which of them have shown most potential to provide critical and substantial insights into the queer cultures that I investigate, and can potentially push forward the boundary of existing scholarship? Inevitably this entails some subjective judgement, as well as a certain level of familiarity with current scholarship on queer studies. Fourth, which ones are most related to each other, and can be presented coherently within one single research? The case studies that I present in this thesis must share some direct connections among them.

I am not intentionally selecting my case studies based on the origin or the location of these queer texts and cultural sites. I started my research from Mainland China, as I already had almost ten years' experience interacting with local queer communities online and offline, and this was the most accessible field for me to initiate my research. Through this field, I am able to expand my scope and access certain queer cultures produced in or originated from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the diasporic Chinese society in Malaysia, as their producers have chosen Mainland China as one of their cultural production sites. I can hence connect them together in a coherent way with China as the intersectional focal point. I do not have access to equal amount of texts and sites in each of these Chinese societies, nor do I give each society equal amount of attention in this research for the sake of striking a perfect balance. I am more concerned with how each case provides new insight and inspiration. It is certainly not my intention to marginalise other Chinese societies and diasporic communities that are not

included in this research. I either have little access to queer screen cultures in these societies, or cannot connect the cases I have found with other queer texts and sites that I intend to research.

Theoretical Frameworks

To answer my research question, I will now map out a conceptual framework based on my examination and critical evaluation of the relevant social and cultural theories. I begin with queer theory and its application in Asian/Chinese studies. Entering its third decade and having generated a vast repertoire both within and outside gender and sexuality studies, queer theory offers invaluable insights into the social construction of sexual identity categories and the problem of identity politics. However, researchers working under the “queer” banner still need to make clear in what sense they engage with queer theory; after its initial emergence as an analytical and critical tool, the theory itself has become a polyphony chirping in different branches of cultural and social studies.¹⁴ In this project, I define queer theory as a view that draws to attention the social construction of gender and sexual categories, challenges the fixity of sexual identity and identity-based politics, and questions the dualist, naturalist, and essentialist view of gender and sexuality. I also use queer theory to highlight the cultural and conceptual diversity and complexity of marginalised sexualities and cultures, vis-à-vis the dominant heteronormativity. I am aware of the use of “queer” as an umbrella term in social activism and LGBT political agenda, and will fully address such terminological concerns in the next chapter.

Transplanting and implanting queer theory in Asian/Chinese societies and cultures is however often controversial. Queer theory arguably “remains rooted in Western, primarily

¹⁴ The historical background and initial emergence of queer theory is discussed most notably by Annamarie Jagose (1997). The development of the theory from a queer “niche” to a conceptual framework widely adopted by various academic disciplines has been recorded by *The Year's Work in Critical and Cultural Theory*, an annual review journal published by Oxford University Press that has been paying attention to queer theory for more than two decades since 1993.

Anglo-American discourse” (Welker and Kam 2006, 5), and researchers still hold divergent views about “the salience and appropriateness of ‘queer’ as a descriptive term and analytical category” in Asian contexts (Blackwood and Johnson 2012, 442). As Wilson (2006, 2) beautifully summarises,

the term queer appears to represent a loose domain of disparate non-normative genders and sexualities, although it does not solve any problems of English-language hegemony or ethnocentric categorisations of sexuality. It is not a gloss for Asian vernaculars, nor is it necessarily a term of choice for Asian actors.

Sinnott (2010, 20) further notes that the problematic use of queer theory in Asia “may not resonate with local meaning systems regarding sexuality and gender”. As Liu (2010, 296) records, for example, a strong querying of queer theory’s value for the study of Chinese sexualities can be found among certain scholars in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Mainland. But he also notes that connecting Chineseness with queer theory is potentially revolutionary as it links two distant locations of the Oriental and the West and makes them once again intimate, which disrupts the East/West binary (300-3), and reminds us of “the constructedness of Chineseness” (307). Together with Rofel (2010, 283-8), he goes on to argue that such practice itself is “decolonising” the US-based queer theory and culture, and leading us to rethink Chineseness and the semi-colonised Chinese (sexual) modernity.

Such tensions and interactions between queer theory and Asian sexualities have long been a focus of discussion in the trend and pattern of queer Asian studies. Wilson (2006, 6-7) believes that two major approaches have been actively adopted by researchers in this trend: the first one is to recuperate the significance of the local, vis-à-vis the US/West-dominated global, and the second is postcolonial critique of queer Western-centrism, as seen in Liu and Rofel’s argument above. The former approach has often been criticised for nativism and its essentialist view of culture, and the latter for its limited ability to provincialise the West and

prioritise the non-West. Wilson's own conceptual reframing is "critical queer regionalism" or "queering Asia", an alternative frame of reference seeing Asia as both the recipient of Western understandings of sexualities and a geo-political entity with its own sex-related traditions and values. From this viewpoint, Asia should be situated in a nexus of "complex modernities and transnational flows in a global context shaped by political economic asymmetries" (*ibid.*). This standpoint echoes other researchers' discussions about the fluid and unstable, diverse and heterogeneous, multiple and dynamic, and vibrant and complex characteristics of sexualities in various parts of Asia that queer theory as an analytical tool has demonstrated great capacity to penetrate (Bao 2015; Blackwood and Johnson 2012; H. Chiang 2011/2014b; Jackson, Liu, and Woo 2008; Liu and Rofel 2010; Martin 2011; Martin et al. 2008; Peletz 2012; Rofel 2012; Sinnott 2010).

In Mainland China, furthermore, sociologist Li Yinhe heralded the dawn of queer studies in the *fin-de-millénaire* Mainland with her introduction (1998, 410-28) and translation (2000) of Western queer scholarship. Researchers in Taiwan have also tested local queer politics in the contexts of sex education (J. Ho 2000), globalisation (J. Ho 2008/2010), and literature (Huang 2010; Liu and Ding 2005; Liu, Parry, and Ding 2007). I contend that local/global, East/West, and Asia/America are not purely imagined categories (which imply a borderless universe where queer theory circulates without resistance) or absolutely fixed notions based on geolocations (which appear too rigid and static). Such binaries as "queer Asia/America" and "local/global queer" are established upon, but not bound up with, the geositions and geo-proximities of Asia and America and East and West. These "locations" are significantly shaped by their own histories and cultures, as well as by the intermingled local(ising) and global(ising) forces of modernity and sexuality that are often more

complicated than the local/global dualism could adequately capture.¹⁵ Through this lens, I turn to the notion of Sinophone (discussed later) to reframe the territorial and conceptual locations and dislocations of various Chinese societies that queer regionalism has been striving and struggling to address.

Another concept that assumes popularity in studying cinemas of Mainland China is postsocialist filmmaking, first borrowed by Pickowicz (1994/2012) from political science, when traditional socialism went bankrupt in the 1980s' China and modernist, postmodernist, bourgeois, and late imperial frameworks all fell short in capturing the country's changing social, political, and cultural apparatus. In Pickowicz's view, postsocialism is Chinese people's conscious breakaway from Maoist socialism, while still being influenced by its aftermath, in search of better alternatives. In lieu of occurring from the top down, the postsocialist condition was built from the bottom up. Proliferating during the last two decades, however, the postsocialist framework has raised two major issues in reading Chinese cinemas. First, China has undergone tremendous economic, political, and socio-cultural transformations since the collapse of Maoist socialism, and the Chinese cinematic landscape has been constantly reshaped during China's ongoing reform and development. Zhang (2007), among others, has noticed the heterogeneity within postsocialist Chinese filmmaking and remaps postsocialism from "a singular concept governing the entire post-Mao era" to a varied landscape of culture against which filmmakers "struggle to readjust or redefine their different strategic positions in different social, political, and economic situations" (52).

Another dilemma emerged from the postsocialist framework is that it is only suitable for the cinemas of Mainland China. Those of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and diaspora Chinese communities all fall out of the realm of postsocialism, inasmuch as the postsocialist condition

¹⁵ These forces are "mutual effort of sameness and difference to cannibalize one another" and thereby proclaim "the triumphantly universal and the resiliently particular". See Arjun Appadurai (1996, 43) for an in-depth discussion.

can only exist in a society that has previously long dominated by socialism (see Pickowicz, 1994, 81-2; 2012, 296). Transregional and transnational Chinese-language film productions, distributions, and consumptions have also caused further confusion regarding where to locate these films in the postsocialist atlas. The rise of the Internet and social media that potentially bridge Chinese populations around the globe also challenges postsocialism's sole focus on China and its limits in analysing China's interactions with other Chinese societies on digital screens. The Sinophone framework which has attracted wide attention at the turn of the 2010s, in this context, offers a possible way-out to mitigate the current dilemmas.

The notion of Sinophone, or "Chinese/Sinitic-language", delineates a linguistics-based cultural, historical, and political stand that aims to bring diaspora Chinese communities outside China and marginalised Chinese cultures under a single framework (see Shu-mei Shih 2004/2007/2010a/2010b/2011/2014 for her coinage and development of "Sinophone"). It prioritises localised and heterogenised Sinitic-language cultures of Chinese migrants who have put down their roots for several generations in their new home to become more eligible as "local" and less eligible as "Chinese diaspora". Sinophone studies are a paradigm-shift from diaspora studies (with its strong nostalgic attachment to the ancestral homeland of origin) to a linguistic-historical understanding of cultures and people (that is sensitive and subject to spatial and temporal resettlement and localisation of Sinitic-language migrants). Sinophone seeks to rationalise and reinstall "minor" and "inferior" migrant communities overshadowed by the ancestral China as equally authentic and significant Chinese cultures that have long been articulating their own voices through film, literature, and other cultural outputs.

Facing China's rise on the global stage, the Sinophone framework connotes a conscious and timely breakup from the hegemonic China-centrism that often sees continental Mainland China as the superior Chinese society and as the single standard of Chinese cultural productions. Such China-centrism often neglects different constructions and articulations of

“Chineseness” in other Sinitic-language societies. Thus, excluding China becomes *a priori* in the theorisation of Sinophone, and pushing China to the margin is less a consequence than a condition for Sinophone to gain its theoretical and ontological legitimacy. In Sinophone theory, China and marginalised Sinitic-language communities do not share an umbilical relationship as the Motherland and her diasporic children; rather, China is rendered from the ancestral mother to the complete other.

This otherness has generated much debate around the notion of Sinophone. According to Sheldon Lu (2008) and Emilie Yeh (2012), the Sinophone concept is epistemologically limiting in the sense that it creates a dichotomy between China and the rest of the Sinitic-language world. They further note that Sinophone is deeply rooted in postcolonialism (Yeh 2012, 77) by its “phone” connection with other “phone spheres” like Francophone and Anglophone (Lu 2012, 23). With their invocation of the idea of “Sinophone cinema” in 2005, Sheldon Lu (2007/2008/2012) develops the notion of Sinophone along his own line of thought to include rather than exclude Mainland China in the Sinophone nexus. This results in two variations of the Sinophone paradigm that differ in rejecting or embracing China (more on this below). Lu argues that, compared to the concept of national/transnational Chinese cinemas and that of Chinese-language cinemas, Sinophone possesses a “more flexible position in regard to national identity and cultural affiliation” (2007). However, Sinophone theories (in both Shih’s version and Lu’s edition) still remain inadequate in addressing non-Sinitic-language films authored by diaspora Chinese filmmakers, as discussed by Felicia Chan and Andy Willis (2012/2014).

Sinophone’s linguistic foundation, furthermore, presents further questions. Chua Beng Huat (2012, 35) pointedly argues that, while Francophone refers to French speakers and Anglophone to English, to which Sinitic language(s) does the “Sino” in “Sinophone” refer—

Mandarin, Cantonese, Hokkien, or other widely-spoken Chinese dialects?¹⁶ More important, given that both versions of Sinophone theories are coined and developed mainly in English before being translated into Chinese, I wonder whether “Sinophone studies” as an academic discipline counts as Sinophone or Anglophone scholarship. Have Sinophone theories solved, or rather reinforced, the “English-language hegemony” (Wilson 2006, 2) in Asian and Chinese cultural studies and in queer studies? When the linguistics-based concepts of Sinophone refer primarily to English in their theorisation and development, not in any Sinitic languages that Sinophone as a conceptual category potentially encompasses, does Sinophone cast itself out from its own lingua-theoretical ontology? I will further discuss this issue in Chapter 5 in relation to the flows of queer cultures on and off screens between China and “Sinophone societies”.

A more significant problem lies in Sinophone’s theoretical emphasis on spatial and temporal settlement of diaspora. As Nayan Shah (2012, 3-9) comments in a different context, the encounters between immigrants are often transient and temporary, when promises of settlement are only offered by the host states to a selected few. What is recorded in the history and recognised by the state is permanence, not transience, and those who fail to put down their roots to become local are often lost in official histories and soon forgotten by historians. This is also where the notion of Sinophone falls short in fully addressing migration experiences and cultural expressions. Sinophone theories designate fully settled and localised Chinese migrants whose diaspora identity has expired, and favour rootedness and homeness over transience—when migrating routes become post-migration roots, as Shih (2010a, 46) herself puts it. But what about those frequently on the move who never put down their roots to become local, and those whose diaspora identity is never fully settled in the host societies?

¹⁶ Chua (39, 158) also reminds us that Shih’s (2007, 2-8) coinage of “Sinophone” owns to the multi-accented Mandarin dialogues in the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (*Wohu Canglong*, 2000). The linguistic centrism of Mandarin as shown in the film remains an unsolved issue during the subsequent development of “Sinophone”. See Chapter 5 for more discussions.

More important, how local is local enough to count as “localised”, and how long is long enough to be “post-diasporic”? Shih argues that Sinophone studies, albeit comparative and transnational, are “everywhere attentive to the specificity of time-and-place” (29). I wonder, however, whether temporal and spatial markers are sufficient in separating the Sinophone from the diasporic Chinese? For Shu-mei Shih, diaspora has an end date, which is vaguely pinned down at the second or the third generation, when migrant-descendants become localised but still speak their ancestor tongues (45). That means, paradoxically, this localisation process does not allow complete linguistic localisation. This confines Sinophone theories and ontologies in a rather narrow scope, constituted only by those who have erased their diaspora identity but not their diasporic language. Once the migrant-descendants stop speaking the ancestral language, they do not count as Sinophone anymore. Then how do we address them to investigate their struggles and stories, when they are not fully diaspora, not linguistically Sinophone, and not ethnically local?

Furthermore, if localised migrants and their descendants return and settle down in Mainland China, do they count as post-Sinophone, counter-Sinophone, against-Sinophone, or something else that we have yet to theorise? Should Sinophone theories be queered and destabilised to further embrace the mobilities and fluidities in queer cultural flows and in queer cultural productions and reproductions? How can we queer the Sinophone by scrutinising today’s queer migrations and cultural flows across different Chinese societies on and off screens? I will further explore these questions in Chapter 4, in which I analyse queer Sinophone films and transnational queer homecoming, and then in Chapter 5, where I examine queer Chinese migrants without permanent settlement, as well as the counterflows of queer cultures and talents from overseas Sinophone societies back to Mainland China.

Although Sinophone theories appropriate post-diasporic Chinese settlement cultures, positioning such cultures into a single conceptual framework also risks building an “imagined

community” where people speak the common languages with shared historical and cultural expressions, despite the tensions and non-conformities *among* and *within* each and every Sinitic-language society. Such risk has emerged at two levels. At the global level, as Arjun Appadurai (1996, 40) comments in a different context, the sense of nationhood, or that of common belonging, is increasingly transcending state boundaries when the scattered and stretched identities of a transnational diaspora have been activated to imagine a community and a commonality. That is to say, while Sinophone insightfully breaks away from the monolithic view of Chineseness and empowers the marginalised Chinese cultures beyond state boundaries, its overarching coverage of the scattered and stretched Sinitic-language cultures across the globe also constructs an imagined “Sinophone sphere”.

What has emerged through Sinophone is thus a double dualism: a rupture between Mainland China and other Sinitic-language cultures (in Shih’s version of Sinophone), and a binary between the imagined Sinophone sphere and the rest of the world (in Lu’s version). The ideas of imagined community and national imaginary (Anderson [1983] 2006, 6-7; Walsh 1996, 5-17) are initially developed as a critique of nationalism that Sinophone theories have great potential to transcend. However, Sinophone shares with nationalism a tendency to designate heterogeneous cultures in a singular framework—be it a nation or a phonosphere. At the level of any given Sinitic-language society, similarly, a Sinophone community is not a monolithic and essentialist entity, but full of contested articulations of heterogeneous identities and sexualities, social and generational tensions and contradictions, and diverse emotions and cultural expressions.

That said, the Sinophone imaginary nonetheless offers a promising framework to examine Chinese cultures and communities across the globe, and makes possible a less rigid approach compared to the geo-political nationalism and regionalism favoured by early researchers in Asian studies and queer studies. On the other hand, the Sinophone framework

still risks obscuring the non-conformities among and within different Chinese languages, communities, and screen cultures. After her coinage of Sinophone, Shu-mei Shih gradually makes clear that Sinophone studies as a subject is about Chinese cultures and communities “on the margins of China and Chineseness” (2010a, 29), and “on the margins of geopolitical nation-states and their hegemonic productions” (2011, 710). Sinophone studies is hence read by Ari Heinrich as “an inherently queer project” (2014, 3) that, not unlike queer theory, prioritises the socio-culturally marginalised and questions the identitarian essentialism (of sexuality, of Chineseness).

The conceptual connections between Sinophone studies and queer studies thus enable a new theoretical approach described by Howard Chiang (2014a, 19-24) and Andrea Bachner (2014, 201-2) as *queer Sinophonicity*. First, both “queer” and “Sinophone” draw our attention to the fluidity, diversity, and complexity of sexualities and cultures. I agree with Bachner (202) that queer studies and Sinophone studies both have enough conceptual flexibility to scrutinise the unstable and ever-changing sexual practices and contestations in Chinese cultures as “processes of becoming” rather than “states of being”. Second, queer Sinophonicity is a much more nuanced negotiation of the territorial-conceptual locations and dislocations of “queer Asia” and “queer regionalism”, inasmuch as it is based on linguistic-historical (rather than geo-locational and geo-political) understandings of cultures and sexualities. Third, the marriage of queer theories and Sinophone theories empowers sexualities and societies in a marginalised common ground on the verge of heteronormativity and China-centrism—hence a “minor-to-minor alliance”, to borrow Shih’s (2014, 223) own words.

However, the notion of queer Sinophonicity still needs much more refinement. First, the position of China is still under debate and marks the difference between Shih’s and Lu’s definitions of Sinophone. While Shu-mei Shi herself has included Chinese-speaking ethnic

minority cultures inside the Han-dominated China into her Sinophone ontology (2011), Audrey Yue (2012a) suggests that the often marginalised queer cultures inside the hetero-nationalist Mainland China should also be synthesised into the Sinophone. Indeed, there is little point debating China's position in the Sinophone if we treat China simply as a monolithic entity, since in so doing we are trapped in the geographical and geopolitical essentialism that Sinophone aims to transcend in the first place. The cultural heterogeneity within China should be taken into account, and minority cultures inside the country can be empowered by Sinophone theories. China is also the beneficiary of globalised (queer) cultures coming from other Chinese societies and from the West (Yue and Khoo 2012, 9-13), while counterflows of queer cultures and talents from Sinophone societies back to Mainland China bring further questions to China's role in Sinophone cultural productions.

In addition, Sinophonicity might be better termed in its plural form Sinophonicities. The singular form connotes a singular point of arrival of various Chinese languages and cultures, both at the global level and inside any given Chinese society. Such epistemological empowerment, romantic as it is, may blur and flatten the linguistic, cultural, and sexual complexities and non-conformities between and within each and every Chinese community. *Queer Sinophonicities* better address the ever-changing and intersectional landscapes of queer visual practices, further embrace the instabilities and contradictions embedded in queer theories and Sinophone studies, and offer more conceptual flexibility to scrutinise Chinese cultures in their different dislocation and displacement of Chineseness. Finally, if queer Sinophonicities offer “a different genealogy that challenges Chinese studies (with its China-centrism) and queer studies (with its Western-centrism)” (Shih 2014, 223), such marginalised methodological positioning itself testifies for the uneven flows of cultures and people between Mainland China and other Sinitic-language communities, and between the West and Chinese societies. A “minor-to-minor alliance” of queer studies and Sinophone studies does

not necessarily guarantee a stronger methodology, although such a conjunctive method has demonstrated great potential in researching marginalised cultures.

Another concept that underlines my research is that of neoliberalism. In a globalising process during which capital, knowledge, and human resources frequently move across state boundaries, the global triumph of neoliberalism and its influence over Chinese societies cannot be overlooked. Amidst the ongoing debates of whether China is becoming neoliberal in its economy and culture (Harvey 2007, 139-4; Nonini 2008; Ong 2006/2007; Ren 2010), Lisa Rofel (2007) offers a rich analysis of the reproduction of neoliberal Chinese subjects and subjectivities in such domains as TV drama, museum, and gay bars. But neoliberalism is a complicated and increasingly contested concept. When I first began to incorporate neoliberalism theories into this research, what stood in front of me was a set of theories and practices which might be better termed in the plural form of the word “neoliberalisms”. The popularity as well as the ambiguity of “neoliberalism” in today’s Western parlance makes this term hard to define without putting up a good intellectual fight.

Saad-Filho and Johnston have made it quite clearly that it is “impossible to define neoliberalism purely theoretically” (2005, 1). For Terry Flew, the term neoliberalism is oft-invoked but ill-defined with incompatible uses across various academic disciplines (2014). David Harvey sees neoliberalism as “a theory of political economic practices” characterised by individual entrepreneurial freedom made possible by the state whose sole function is to create, secure, and guarantee free markets (2007, 2). Macdonald and Ruckert, on the other hand, discuss “the death of neoliberalism” and the birth, or resurrection, of what they call “post-neoliberalism” from the neoliberal ashes (2009). Their argument is based upon the left-wing policies recently imposed by some North American and Latin American governments, and this shift-to-the-left is their evidence for “the death of neoliberalism”. Their presumption seems to be that neoliberalism necessarily entails right-wing politics and politicians to secure

a free market, and the “interference” as seen in some left-wing regimes could only lead neoliberalism to bankruptcy. But this assumption has been challenged by other researchers from various perspectives.

Thorsen (2009), in the revised version of his co-authored essay *What is Neoliberalism* (Thorsen and Lie 2007), summarises along with a genealogical investigation into liberalism and neoliberalism that the latter’s major claim is “as much as possible ought to be left to the market” and consequently “as little as possible ought to be subjected to genuinely *political* processes” (16, original emphasis). He also reminds us that neoliberalism, in its nature, is not necessarily a political philosophy or ideology and can be implemented whether the state itself is liberal democratic or not. Philip Mirowski (2013), however, would not completely agree with him. With perhaps the most intensive review of the historical development of neoliberalism, he argues that neoliberalism, besides its obsession with economy and market, is first and foremost *political*; neoliberal thoughts from the very beginning entail a strong state. Freedom and democracy, according to Mirowski, are not the preconditions of and hence not to be confused with neoliberalism. Johanna Bockman (2013), in a much shorter review of neoliberalism, also reaches a similar conclusion. Aihwa Ong (2007), drawing on the examples of China and other Asian countries, suggests that the neoliberal debate should be reframed from “stand-alone micro-analysis” of an all-sweeping neoliberal economic tsunami with fixed structure and predetermined outcomes (7) to a more comparative and transversal analysis of neoliberalism in its “extreme dynamism, mobility of practices, responsiveness to contingencies, and *strategic entanglements* with politics” (3, italics mine).

Although these researchers hold different opinions concerning the role of *the political* in neoliberal thought, their discussions have to a large extent freed the idea of neoliberalism from the constraints of “a hegemonic order or unified set of policies” (Ong, 7) and make sense of the production of neoliberal structure and agency in a society without a liberal

democracy (i.e. China). Neoliberalism is indeed contested in its theories and practices whose meaning is far from consistent across time and space, and it is still under debate whether China's economy is neoliberal. Inspired by Thorsen, Mirowski, Bockman, and Ong, as well as Rofel's discussion on neoliberal Chinese subjects and subjectivities, I use "neoliberal" to highlight the social changes in queer communities and screen cultural productions in China that are closely related to the economic growth of this country (see Chapter 6).

Another point made clear by Rofel (2007) is the significance of the expressive desire in the construction of neoliberal agents and the (imagined) gay spheres in China's cosmopolitan metropolises such as Beijing. The expressively desiring gay men in Rofel's ethnography seem to belong to what we call *quanzi* ("circles", literally) in China's gay communities. Lorrete Ho (2010, 46, 91, 157) notes the use of the word *quan* among her informants in Beijing, and gets very close to differentiate this concept from what we call "community" in English. I contend that *quanzi* in Mainland China is best understood as a slang term for lifestyle-based social circles constituted of sexually hyperactive gay men. Those in the *quanzi* are believed to be more libertine—more likely to seek for casual sex, partake in one-night-stand or promiscuity, and frequent gay cruising spaces online and offline from online gay dating sites to gay bars, saunas, parks, and public toilets.

People outside the circle, on the contrary, are often seen as less liberal on sexual conduct and especially less active in seeking socio-sexual encounters with others. They often see the *quanzi* as in a state of disorder ("*luan*"), as Ho (46, 91) records, and blame those in the circle for their obsession with casual sex and reluctance to commit. More important, people in the *quanzi* often take the blame that their openness to sex further stereotypes and stigmatises the entire gay community among the general public, although the so called "gay community" is a loosely defined social group based solely on the sexual preference whose members vary significantly in class, age, education, occupation, and so forth. Similarly,

quanzi is also a loosely defined “imagined community” that often lacks clear boundaries. In addition, “entering the circle” (*ru quan*) or “quitting the circle” (*tuichu quanzi*) are not uncommon in the vernacular of same-sex attracted men in China; that is to say, people tend to see *quanzi* as a fluid domain where they can join in or drop out at ease. But the politics of *quanzi* as an imagined community remain an important and under-researched area.¹⁷

“One man’s imagined community”, to quote Appadurai out of context, “is another one’s political prison” (1996, 32). The desiring neoliberal subjects recorded in Rofel’s and Ho’s respective ethnography seem to belong to this *quanzi*: the more self-conscious, desiring, liberal/libertine, and expressive gay circles in China. However, their counterparts outside the circles—potentially equally desiring—are often silenced and alienated from this neoliberal euphoria of expressive queer desires. What are the stories of those outside *quanzi*, those who quit the circle, and those lingering and straddling across the “borders”, if such borders ever exist? That, at any rate, is my point of departure. Engaging with Rofel’s idea of “desiring China”, I will analyse the roles of queer film clubs and social media in reproducing desiring queer subjects outside the *quanzi*—those largely overlooked in previous studies of queer cultures in China (see Chapter 6 and 7).

Studies of queer film clubs, however, remain scarce in today’s English and Chinese-language academia. Seio Nakajima (2006/2011/2014) is the first researcher who directs our attention to the rise of the film club culture in China and tries to establish various theoretical frameworks for analysis, although queer film clubs as such have not been covered by his research. My study of queer film clubs in urban China both follows and questions Nakajima’s discussion of film clubs as public sphere (2011), as well as Nancy Fraser and Michael

¹⁷ This usage of *quanzi* is hitherto only evidenced among gay men in the Mainland. In other major Chinese societies and in lesbian groups, I have not accumulated enough empirical evidence or located reliable sources to support a similar usage of this term. I thank Associate Professor Fran Martin for pointing out that in Taiwan’s lesbian communities, for example, *quanzi* and *quanneiren* (people in the circle) are usually not used as stigmatised terms as in the Mainland gay communities.

Warner's ideas of counterpublics. Set against Jürgen Habermas's notion of public sphere, or "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed" (Habermas 1984, 49), Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner argue that sex and intimacy are often mediated by publics, while publics often have an obvious relation to sex (1998, 547, 553). Public, they argue, differs from community or group because "it necessarily includes more people than can be identified, more spaces than can be mapped beyond a few reference points, modes of feeling that can be learned rather than experienced as a birthright" (558).

Based on their definition of public, we can situate public culture in a nexus of signs, symbols, languages, and codes through which their meanings are publicly negotiated and where contestations for meaning take place (Cayton 2008, 4). In this sense, queer public cultures inevitably function as a meaning-making and world-making project against the wider heteronormative public (Berlant and Warner, 558-64)—or rather as queer *counterpublics* "where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser 1992, 123). Warner further develops the concept of counterpublics and further popularises its use in social and cultural theories by emphasising a "subordinate awareness" in counterpublics. He explains that

[a] counterpublic maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status. The cultural horizon against which it marks itself off is not just a general or wider public, but a dominant one. [...] The discourse that constitutes it is not merely a different or alternative idiom, but one that in other contexts would be regarded with hostility or with a sense of indecorousness (2002, 119).

But, epistemologically, why do we consider queer publics "oppositional" to the mainstream? Why not "neighbouring publics"? Does being demographically subordinate necessarily make

queer people “countercultural”? Reading queer film clubs as counterpublics in China, we risk taking for granted that the participants of these queer spaces are in subaltern and inferior social positions against mainstream cultures.

Furthermore, what about virtual queer public spaces formed online and via mobile social media? Writing in a different context, Aswin Punathambekar (2011, 150-1) proposes to use the term “mobile publics” to scrutinise the “fluid and ephemeral nature” of recent public spheres coming into being through media technology. Ten years after the publication of *Mobile Cultures: New Media in Queer Asia* (Berry, Martin, and Yue 2003) and a decade after Loretta Ho’s ethnography (2010) that recorded queer Chinese websites in the early 2000s, we need a more up-to-date examination of online and mobile queer screen cultures and queer publics in today’s China and its diaspora. In this research, I critically engage with previous scholarship on publics and counterpublics to further investigate queer film clubs and online and mobile queer social media as real and virtual queer publics in the twenty-first century.

Chapter Outline

Following the background introduction and the discussions of theoretical frameworks, I now conclude this chapter with an outline of the structure of this thesis. After this introductory chapter, I proceed to discuss my research methods in Chapter 2, and provide a critical reflection on my fieldwork and some notes on terminology. In Chapter 3, I briefly trace back the historical developments of queer screen cultures in various Chinese societies to further contextualise post-2008 queer cinemas, urban queer film clubs, and online and mobile queer social media. I also further rationalise my emphasis on newly emerged queer screen cultures such as film clubs and digital social media, as well as my choice of films for analysis in this study. Chapter 4 to Chapter 6 contain the main discussions and arguments that I have developed under the theme of queer mobilities in the investigation of post-2008 queer screen cultures in Chinese societies, before I conclude my research in the final chapter.

More specifically, in Chapter 4, I draw upon previous scholarship on queer kinships, “coming-out” strategies in Chinese societies, and queer homecoming and homemaking in order to examine the changing queer kinship structures (an outcome of queer mobilities) through autobiographical queer films, queer digital video series, and urban queer film clubs. Queer kinship negotiations under Confucian filial piety is the major challenge facing queer people in today’s Chinese societies, and I put this chapter upfront to address this primary concern among queer Chinese populations across Confucian societies. I argue that the so-called “coming out as coming home” strategy no longer works in today’s Chinese societies, and queer kinships are often physically and emotionally distanced when queer people depart from original familial circles to pursue education and employment through domestic and transnational migrations. I thus develop a new paradigm *stretched kinship*—the kinship ties stretched by domestic and global queer migrations and by the rupture between one’s non-conforming sexuality and the hetero-reproductive expectations from the family—as my original contribution to better understand and address the changing queer kinship structures shaping and shaped by recent queer screen cultures.

In Chapter 5, I engage with mobility scholarship to analyse queer films, digital film productions and circulations through online queer social media, and border-crossing queer migrations between Mainland China and overseas Sinophone societies including Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Malaysia (the manifestations of queer mobilities). I examine various forms of mobilised queer cultural flows related to media and screen cultures to question and to “queer” (i.e. destabilise) the concept of Sinophone. My analyses centre on how queer mobilities (migrations and cultural flows) have influenced as well as been reflected through recent queer cinemas, online circulations of queer visual cultures through social media, and urban film clubs as intersectional mobile publics. I also discuss how the theory of Sinophonicities can be further challenged and mobilised through the flows and the counterflows of queer cultures

and talents between Mainland China and the Sinophone sphere. This chapter on “Sinophone mobilities” and queer screen cultures both extends and deviates from current Sinophone theories, which further contributes to our understandings of queer screens in the twenty-first century Chinese societies.

Chapter 6 deals with social inclusions and exclusions, cultural capital and class distinctions, and socially upward mobilities and class migrations (the underlying driving forces of queer mobilities) in China’s queer communities. Drawing upon insights from sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and post-Bourdieuian scholarship on social distinctions and human capital, as well as academic enquires into the issue of *suzhi* (“individual quality”) and the rising and aspirational middle classes in today’s China, I dig deeper into China-based online and mobile queer social media and urban queer film clubs to analyse social stratification inside queer communities. I argue that the state engineered discourse of *suzhi* has to some extent expired, but the pursuit of individual quality and the desire to climb up the social ladder still shape and regulate queer expressions on digital queer screens and in queer communities. I conclude that the lingering myth of *suzhi*/quality continues to structure queer interactions on social media, the politics of proximity on locative mobile queer media also evokes the issue of social position and class affiliation, and queer communities like the urban queer film clubs are often gated and privileged by class-related cultural taste and capital. The pursuit of upward social mobility and class migrations reproduces larger social exclusions and stratification in both screen-related queer cultural productions and in online and offline queer communities.

Chapter 7, the final chapter of this thesis, functions as an extended conclusion. In this chapter I start by summarising my research findings and the arguments that I have made in other chapters, so as to conclude my intellectual journey investigating queer screen cultures through queer mobilities and making sense of queer mobilities by looking at recent queer

screens. I also further develop and extend some of my arguments in this research and highlight the connections between them. I then proceed to point out potential directions for future studies of the increasingly mobilised queer cultures on and off screens in Chinese societies in the twenty-first century. I conclude the thesis with a brief final remark, which links back to the research process and specifies the potential contribution that this project is able to make to both queer studies in the academia and queer people in today's Chinese societies.

Chapter 2: Research Design and Methodology

In this chapter, I critically discuss the three major approaches that I have adopted in this research project (textual analysis, focused ethnography, and digital ethnography) and how they complement each other in researching different forms of queer screen cultures in Chinese societies. I then take my readers to the research field, and retrospectively examine the strategies and tactics that I adopted in my ethnographic field study. This not only furthers my methodological discussion of my research approaches, but provides certain insight into the screen cultures in question from an ethnographic perspective. I also hope that this part can potentially pave the way for future ethnographers who will conduct their research in similar situations. This chapter concludes with a critical discussion of terminology, in which I scrutinise multiple Western and Chinese sexual identity labels to further shed light on the fluidity and complexity of queer sexualities and queer cultures in today's Chinese societies.

Research Methods

For the three major forms of screen cultures under scrutiny, I adopt textual analysis to examine queer feature films and digital videos, focused ethnography to investigate urban queer film clubs, and digital ethnography to scrutinise online and mobile queer social media. These three methods well complement each other in providing a fuller picture of recent queer screen cultures in Chinese societies for scrutiny. Textual analysis is employed to study filmic representations of queer cultures on screen; ethnographic fieldwork enables me to directly engage in queer communal activities (i.e. film clubs) to gain first-hand experience in the field through face-to-face communications with queer people; and digital ethnography allows me to participate in and observe online queer social interactions and potentially reach a much wider queer demography, including those live in less developed areas where real-life queer social groups and offline communal events are scarce and hence unreachable in traditional ethnographic sites.

I have chosen digital ethnography to study digital queer cultures because this method entails and enables great length and depth for me to experience and understand the screen cultures in question. My approach has been to enjoin a major online queer community as a participatory observer for several consecutive years, so as to both participate in online interactions and observe how a specific virtual queer community develops and declines along the time. In other words, I “live” with other members online for a prolonged period to study a virtual queer society as a site that itself generates queer cultures, instead of a platform merely representing real-life cultures in digital formats (*cf.* Underberg and Zorn 2013, 10) or merely connecting anthropologists with interlocutors in digital networks (*cf.* Collins and Durington 2015, 4-6). This method is of particular importance in a country like China where queer people have very limited chance for queer cultural expressions in public. Many of them only “come out” online in digital queer communities with anonymous identities, while hiding in the closet in real-life situations. That means the cyber world is a central stage for queer social life and cultural production as well as a major site for ethnographic enquiries that cannot be overlooked in this context.

The discipline of digital anthropology (Horst and Miller 2012) has been intensively discussed in the contexts or under the names of cyborg anthropology (Downey, Dumit, and Williams, 1995), networked anthropology (Collins and Durington 2015), digital ethnography (Underberg and Zorn 2013), virtual ethnography (Hine 2008), ethnography for the Internet (Hine 2015), post-human anthropology (Whitehead 2009; Whitehead and Wesch 2009/2012), and so forth (e.g. Boellstorff et al. 2012; Coleman 2010; Gubrium and Harper 2013). The methodological common ground of these approaches, despite their various names, is the incorporation of digital technologies in the understandings of cultures, societies, and human conditions. I chose the term *digital ethnography* because it most concisely captures the core issues in this method, namely the digital and the human. This term highlights my choice of

digital technologies as networks to approach the field, as research tools to collect the data, and as the actual sites for anthropological investigation. It also highlights the prolonged time that I have devoted to this study in order to understand queer people and their cultures in the virtual queer society from an ethnographic perspective.

My digital ethnography originated from 2011 when I first joined in Feizan, and later in various mobile queer social networks, although the formal study only began in late 2013 after I started my doctoral research. It was from online queer social media that I first learned about urban queer film clubs and decided to include this newly emerged type of screen culture in my doctoral research. I have chosen ethnographic fieldwork to examine queer film clubs in China. The ethnographic fieldwork method (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Ingold 2007) has proven fruitful in gay and lesbian studies in the West (Browne and Nash 2010; Lessard 2013; Lewin and Leap 1996/2002/2009) and in Chinese societies (Engebretsen 2014; L. Ho 2010; Kam 2012; Kong 2011a/2012; Rofel 2007). With this approach, ethnographers are able to collect “raw data” and first-hand empirical experience directly from the field for later processing with critical examination. Ethnographic field findings will contribute to the investigations of the represented queer cultures on film screens and the mediated queer cultural productions on digital screens.

My ethnography in China’s urban film clubs contains participatory observation and field interviews with the key informants (club organisers, long-term volunteers, and regular participants). Ethnographic research enables me to partake in the events and closely observe and experience how each club is organised and how attendees perceive the films and interact with each other in the physical queer spaces. From 2013 to 2014, I carried out three field trips and visited five queer film clubs in China—three in Beijing, one in Shanghai, and one in Guangzhou—and participated in more than twenty film club sessions combined, as well as a large number of other social events organised by various LGBT NGOs. For this research, I

have chosen to focus on Beijing, the only Chinese city that has as many as three regularly running queer film clubs with diverse foci and distinctive organising styles, including the oldest queer film club in China and a gay-friendly coffee house and film club established by Sinophone Taiwanese queer activists in the centre of the city.

More specifically, I have chosen the method of focused ethnography to study the film club cultures in three short-term fieldtrips. Focused ethnography is a research method first introduced and theorised by Hubert Knoblauch (published in English in 2005) and developed by other researchers in social sciences (see for example Kühn 2013 and Wall 2015). It refers to a method of conducting short intense ethnographic research in one's own culture to study its certain aspects, when an ethnographer is already (more or less) familiar with the research field but has difficulty securing long-term research stays for fieldwork. This method best suits my research, as I did not have the chance to carry out a long-term field study to completely immerse myself in China's queer film scenes. As an international student completing a joint doctoral programme between Australia and New Zealand, I was bounded by both countries' residential requirements and only allowed very limited time to conduct fieldwork overseas.

Given that I am already familiar with queer cultures in China with almost ten years' experience interacting with China's queer communities, the method of focused ethnography with several short visits to the field is the most suitable and promising choice that I can afford. I have therefore designed and carried out a three-step focused ethnographic fieldwork in queer film clubs in urban China (details below). To compensate for the long intervals between each field trip, I closely followed LGBT NGOs, queer social groups, film clubs, and well-known gay opinion leaders on queer and mainstream Chinese social media. I also kept email communications with my contacts between each field visit, and my correspondence with them has extended through to today. Moreover, the end of my thesis is not the end of my research. My investigation of urban queer cultures in China will extend beyond my doctoral

programme and into my future academic career, and I look forward to returning to the field at some point. In the next section of this chapter, I will further discuss my research in the field, as well as the advantages of focused ethnography over long-term fieldwork.

My focused ethnographic fieldwork started with a “pre-research” in mid-2013. This refers to an informal fieldwork conducted in China before I officially enrolled in my PhD programme and travelled overseas to Australia and New Zealand. My intention was to gather some general and basic information about and gain an initial insight into queer film clubs and other communal events in urban Chinese queer communities, and to build my initial connections with potential interviewees. I also wanted to taste what it felt like to be in the field, in order to better prepare myself for subsequent formal research and to choose fieldwork strategies with empirical and anecdotal reflections. Since this informal pre-research was carried out before the ethics clearance was granted by the university research ethic committees, no interview or formal observational studies were carried out.

The second step was completed in late 2013 after the granting of ethics clearance. I began to collect as much information as possible regarding queer film clubs in different cities to expand my scope and choose which city to finally focus on. Most of my emphasis was put on how different clubs were organised to serve their distinctive purposes, the major themes of participants’ discussions in each of these clubs, and in which ways queer people interacted with other attendees and expressed their feelings and opinions inside these queer spaces. Participants remained anonymous in these sites, and the informal conversations between me and them were not collected as data. Those who might offer particular insight into the research project were invited for formal interview schedule in a later stage. This time I also expanded my network to more queer film clubs and social groups, and acquired permissions for future interviews with some key informants.

The third and last step of my ethnography was carried out in late 2014. I revisited some sites while attending more queer social events across different cities to continue the observational studies. Formal interviews were also conducted with the funding-owners of all the queer film clubs in Beijing, long-term film club volunteers, regular club participants, the owner of a major queer social media and micro-film producer, a couple of queer filmmakers including a queer film festival organiser, and a few other people active in film-related queer social groups and organisations. Most interviewees were selected from my previous field studies, while I also met a couple of additional informants in the film clubs willing to offer their insights. I conducted the interviews in semi-structured forms, each lasting from one hour to two hours (save for one particularly long interview lasting for four hours). These in-depth conversations contributed to my understandings of both the film clubs under scrutiny and other forms of queer screen cultures such as films, digital videos, and social media. The crossover interviews of queer people in different positions across a wide spectrum of screen-related queer cultural productions also significantly aided my analysis of how various queer screen cultures intersected and interacted with each other. I was also able to cross-check the information gained from different interviewees to verify the authenticity.

Before I continue to the textual analysis method, I would also like to briefly talk about the position of the *self* in my ethnographic fieldwork. Every research is confined by the researcher's knowledge and resources, as much as by the time and funds available to the researcher. Completely excluding the influence of the "I" in a study like this is impossible. Moreover, the ethnographic self has been increasingly seen as a valuable source of data and insight in recent scholarship, especially in the newly emerged methodological discipline of autoethnography (Adams et al. 2014; Boylorn et al. 2013; Butler 2009; Chang 2008; Collins 2010; Denzin 2014; Doloriert and Sambrook 2009; Ellis 2003/2008, Jones et al 2013; Muncey 2010). The award-winning autoethnography of closeted gay men (Adams 2011) and

the autoethnography of a Chinese gay man in Sydney (Bao 2013) demonstrate the promise of this method in queer studies. Although my research does not qualify as autoethnography, inasmuch as the “I” is not the major source of the data, my own socio-cultural self is clearly shown through my ethnographic fieldwork. The next section in this chapter contains more discussion on this issue and how it has influenced my research.

The textual analysis of queer films and videos was the last part that I completed during this research. For most of the films and videos analysed in subsequent chapters, I watched them before setting out for the field, but intentionally left the analyses to a later stage after the fieldwork, as the findings in my field research might provide additional insight into the filmic representations of queer cultures onscreen. In so doing, I was able to make a more informed critical analysis of the film texts. Textual analysis appears a somewhat blunt instrument with a lot of researchers adopting it but less people discussing it methodologically. Recent enquires into textual analysis as a research method include Alan McKee’s (2003) concise introduction to textual analysis for beginners, and the four-volume anthology edited by Bauer et al. (2014) that collects previous papers discussing or employing this method from various academic disciplines. In the context of film studies, Kuhn and Westwell (2012) argue that “the term textual analysis is commonly used in looser reference to any more-or-less detailed breakdown or close reading of a film” that has been applied to “a wide range of films of different periods, genres, and national provenances”. They claim that textual analysis is the preferred method in the tradition of film scholarship.

But different analytical approaches to film texts do exist. Early film scholars adopted textual analysis from structuralism, and often isolated the constituent formal elements of a film in small segments so as to describe and examine them (Kuhn and Westwell 2012; *cf.* McKee 2003, 4 and Turner 2006, 105). A major variant from this structuralist textual analysis is to expose the underlying meanings in films, an approach widely adopted in ideological,

psychoanalytic, and feminist (and queer) interpretations of films where the task of theorists is to “reconstruct and reframe the film text in the act of analysis, exposing its subtextual, and even its unconscious, meanings” (Kuhn and Westwell 2012). This interpretational approach echoes what Graeme Turner (2006) calls “film as social practice” (see my thesis statement in Chapter 1) that focuses on the social and cultural meanings of films (109) that are not necessarily found at the structural levels (112). I have chosen this interpretational textual analysis method to study recent queer films and videos, instead of a formalist approach that focuses on the form and style of the visual aesthetics, because my goal is to read out the “unspoken words” deeply buried inside the texts, and to examine the underpinning social forces of queer mobilities as shown through queer kinships, migrations, and class distinctions on and off screens.

Fieldwork Reflections

My ethnography contained three field trips to China, with a focus on Beijing while covering film clubs in Shanghai and Guangzhou (see Chapter 3 for a brief history of queer film clubs in China). My focused ethnography with several short field visits allowed me enough time between each fieldtrip to critically reflect upon my ethnographic strategies, so as to make necessary changes in my subsequent fieldwork when I returned to China. In what follows I discuss three challenging issues in my ethnographic fieldwork: the timing and the methods to approach the gatekeepers and initiate the field rapport; the balance between participation and observation in the ethnographic sites; and the negotiation of the researcher’s identity in the field and how this identity defines and confines the ethnographer’s access to the field. Each of these three factors presented a problem in different stages of my fieldwork. Here I am less concerned about contributing new insights to ethnography scholarship than about shedding further light upon the diversity and complexity of the screen cultures in question, and foreshadowing my subsequent analyses of queer film clubs in urban China.

My field research in China's urban queer film clubs started from online queer social media. I initially learned about these queer social events through Feizan (whose rise to fame since 2010 closely parallels the emergence of queer film clubs in China; see Chapter 3 for discussion). When I first travelled to Beijing, I did not have any personal connections with queer activists, filmmakers, or film club owners in the city who were able to introduce me to the urban queer scenes that I intended to research. I received notifications about queer social events such as film screenings on Feizan, and found the semi-underground queer film clubs tucked away from public eyes with the help of Google Maps and the GPS module on my smartphone. I then began to regularly partake in these communal events, encountering renowned queer activists, NGO leaders, and film club organisers—the “gatekeepers” who later became my field informants and granted me better access to the ethnographic sites under scrutiny.

The first problem I encountered when I started my ethnographic research was how to build a rapport from the ground zero with key contacts to gain access to the field. How and when to reveal my identity as a researcher thus became a tricky question. For this research, a covert undercover strategy would be unnecessary and unethical. But it also appeared rather unwise to directly announce my research intention when I first set foot in the film clubs. Loretta Ho's (2010) experience in Beijing as an ethnographer was still alarming: she was directly taken by an informant to meet with other gay activists in the city, who openly showed their distrust in this newcomer foreign to the local queer circles. More important, for queer social activities organised by or in association with local NGOs, the gatekeepers often have already seen some researchers coming to the scenes for academic purposes. Before I disclosed my identity in a film club, for example, the club organiser mentioned during a session that there were researchers coming to the club to “study them”, as distinguished from real participants coming for films and for mutual peer support. Although he said immediately

that the club welcomed researchers as well, it seemed that an invisible line suddenly emerged in the thin air between researchers (observers and outsiders) and club members (participants and insiders). At that point, I felt that I would immediately become an aliened *other* if I revealed my identity as an ethnographer.

So I chose to be patient. I participated in the discussion to talk about the short films screened in that session, and shared my stories with other participants during the post-screening discussion. The next day I met a new friend in another queer social group who wished to further explore the local queer film scene, so I brought him with me to the next screening in this film club. At the end of that second session I disclosed my identity as a researcher to the organiser/gatekeeper, who later told me that he was emotionally touched when he recalled that I brought a friend to join in the club. In fact I introduced this friend to the club merely because we both had a passion for film. Only when I temporarily retreated from the field did I realise that my conduct unintentionally demonstrated my willingness to contribute to the development of this film club by bringing in new members. In this way, I convinced the gatekeeper that I indeed cared about the film club and wanted my research to make further contribution to its growth. My practice in the research field, merely out of my love for film and my enthusiasm to introduce people to queer cultural scenes in the city, unexpectedly turned into an effective ethnographic strategy to strengthen my rapport with the informants.

Actions always speak louder than words when it comes to building a field rapport, while taking initial steps to observe how things work in particular ethnographic sites may turn out to be fruitful. In my case, furthermore, participating in film club sessions not only demonstrated a certain level of devotion and commitment to these queer cultural spaces, but afforded me the chance to share my stories and feelings in post-screening discussions. Therefore, by the time I revealed my identity as a researcher after one or two sessions, the

gatekeepers and other participants already knew me as a person with stories and emotions, instead of a total stranger coming to investigate them. In the field, this was a conscious choice and I just felt that it was the right thing to do. Only when I began to *write* about my ethnography did my rationale for this field strategy start to become clearer.

I also chose to disclose my identity and build a rapport first with the club owners in private, who would then introduce me as a researcher to other people in the clubs, starting from regular participants and core members. During the early stage of my fieldwork, I met with several other researchers who came to the film clubs to recruit research participants. Their public announcements of their research intention often turned out to be fruitless with few responses from the participants. Announcing “I am a researcher” publicly connotes an unwelcomed undertone that “I am here to study you” and implies a somewhat condescending attitude. What I learned from my early encounters with other ethnographers in the field was that a public disclosure of the researcher’s identity often appeared counterproductive in these queer spaces. My way of building field rapport step by step from the gatekeepers to regular participants and then to other attendees turned out to be more effective and efficient.

This strategy of step-by-step identity disclosure was also to make my observations as unobtrusive as possible, as people might feel uncomfortable with the presence of a conscious researcher-observer. My role in these urban film clubs, that is to say, was similar to a regular participant who would join in the screenings and the post-screening activities. My only “additional” mission, so to speak, was to observe the activities and interactivities in the club, and then I took detailed field notes after the sessions in a way untraceable to any particular participants. In short, I chose the role as a participant-as-observer in my ethnography (see Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 82-5). If people asked me about my occupation before I disclosed my identity, I would honestly revealed my ethnographic intention and confided in them that the purpose of my research was to make contribution to “this community of our

own” (*wo men zhe ge qun ti*). This strategy worked well. People seemed to be understanding, and I also made some good friends in the field. My correspondence with them and other interlocutors continues through to today, with some of them also becoming my followers in the queer social network Feizan.

This role between an insider and an outsider was also an awkward position. On the one hand, I was able to win the trust from other queer people who would see me as a fellow queer comrade sharing the same sexual orientation with them. On the other, however, I was foreign to Beijing’s local queer communities and visiting the film clubs mainly for academic purposes. I often felt that I was lingering on the borders of these urban film spaces that I was studying, neither fully committed as a member nor totally detached as a foreign observer. On an optimistic note, this minimised the risk of “over-rapport” in ethnography (see Hammersley and Atkinson, 87-89) and allowed me to participate in and withdraw from the ethnographic sites with more ease and less emotional and personal attachment. But at the same time this also caused a problem concerning to what extent I should devote to the sites under scrutiny, and how to balance participation and observation in the field.

When I first set foot in queer Chinese film clubs, I was always quite wary about how I should participate in the post-screening discussions. For one thing, I was not sure at the beginning about to what extent an ethnographer should partake in the cultural scenes that he was observing. For another, I was caught in the cultural difference regarding speaking and listening. Having received graduate education in the West, I was accustomed to speak out during group discussions. In Chinese culture and education, however, we were often told by the elders and teachers to “*si er hou yan*” (think to talk) or simply shut up if we did not have a well-thought idea to share. As I will further discuss in Chapter 4, Chinese culture is largely listening-centred (*tinghua*) as the entitlement to speak is often a hierarchical privilege belongs to the seniors (Chia 2003; Gao and Ting-Toomey 1998). As a newcomer to the local film

club scenes, I was concerned that my potential talkativeness would appear aggressive to the more experienced members in the clubs. Listening to what they got to say seemed to better fit my role as an observer and my respect for their seniority.

But gradually I realised that my involvement in the discussions offered a better chance for me to gain further access to the field. Once the club organisers and participants became aware that I had a background in film studies and queer studies, for example, they would become more curious about what I had to say on relevant issues. Some participants indeed showed a strong interest in academic queer studies. Sometimes I did feel the pressure in the field that I had to deliver some critical analyses of queer films and social issues in order to win their trust and favour. Showing a good knowledge and understanding of queer cultures and queer studies thus became one of my ethnographic strategies to approach the field and strengthen the rapport. Later when I theorised and wrote about *gated queer communities*, I started to realise that I actually offered some cultural capital for exchange in the field that earned me the membership in these queer communities gated by knowledge, education, and cultural tastes and interests (see Chapter 6).

The urban queer film club scene is rather diverse in today's China. In Beijing, I participated in Concentric Circle, where each session is organised like group psychotherapy and we are asked to draw out our stories and fantasies (discussed in Chapter 4); Two-city Café, where the choice of topic is often around the similarities and differences between Taiwan and Mainland China (Chapter 5); and the Fellowship of *Tongzhi* Film-lovers, where film itself is always the central focus and the sense of cinephilia is very strong (Chapter 6). In Shanghai and Guangzhou, I participated in some queer films clubs where entertainment and dating often pervade over discussions of films or serious social issues. Same-Love Cinema in Shanghai is the most notable example. Initially established by a gay start-up company, this club soon became a cooperative project with a local lesbian organisation. Participants were

required to register before each screening session with pseudonyms and phone numbers, via text message or the WeChat (*WeiXin*) app on smartphone. The club session started with each participant given a sticker-number to wear on their shirts. After the screening, the host would ask the participant to introduce themselves one by one; if we had some kind of a crush on anyone, we were encouraged to remember his or her number and then ask the organisers for that person's contact details. Sometimes the discussions after the screening had nothing to do with film. Led by a talented host who performed like a stand-up comedian, we were asked to share our recent romantic encounters, our plans to arrange a quasi-marriage, or other queer issues in our everyday life. People only occasionally made reference to film, if their personal stories resonated with the plot of the movie screened in the club. The atmosphere was often much more entertaining than any film clubs I attended in Beijing.

But, such diversity does not suggest that queer film clubs can accommodate a diverse range of queer voices and articulations. These queer film clubs mainly serve young queer migrants who have moved to urban centres not only searching for education and employment but seeking for alternative sense of home and belonging (discussed in Chapter 4). In my field research, I seldom encountered queer people of age in any of these urban queer spaces. Queer publics, both the virtual ones on digital screens and the actual ones in film clubs, attract mainly young participants. Elder queer people, especially those having opted for incognito heterosexual marriage, are often refused by and alienated from the queer social circles full of younger queer expressions. The social exclusion in these queer spaces also extends to female and lesbian women, the urban poor, the less-educated, and other socially disadvantaged queer people—a point to which I shall return below.

This discussion reveals another issue in my ethnography—the negotiation of my own identity in the field. I was fully aware about my own image as young, urban, and educated overseas. This image may well have influenced, if not determined, which queer groups and

individuals were willing to befriend me and whom I was able to establish a strong rapport with. Before my first field trip to Beijing, I already received a master degree in queer film studies from an English-speaking country. In the field with my informants, we engaged in a lot of discussions about queer films, kinships, and “coming out as coming home” (see Chapter 4). My knowledge of English-language scholarship on Chinese queer cultures and politics often became of a point of interest that they were curious about. Together we also visited art-house movie theatres, art galleries, and concert halls in the city. It was at this point that I realised that my key contacts in the field were exclusively young urban gay men who had completed or were *en route* for social and geographical migrations through education and employment. Almost all of them migrated to Beijing from other parts of China, and most of them had college degrees or were studying at elite universities who demonstrated distinctive middle to high-brow cultural tastes.

Thinking retrospectively, the roots and routes of my thoughts have largely shaped my identity in the research field. My own experience of migrating from an underdeveloped small town to Beijing and to the West itself presents a successful story of social and geographical mobilities. My decision to study China’s urban queer film clubs as part of my doctoral research was a result of my own cinephilic cultural interest and my postgraduate training in film and media studies. My very identity as a researcher returning to China from the West indicated privileged social position and advantaged cultural capital that both defined and confined my ability in approaching the ethnographic field. I was able to earn the entry to urban film clubs because my own cultural profile fitted in these *gated queer communities* (theorised in Chapter 6), but in this research I was unable to approach less socially privileged queer people because they were often excluded from these queer cultural spaces. People who have been left behind in geographical and social class migrations, like those who stay in my

hometown, seldom have access to queer social groups and cultural spaces as seen in metropolises like Beijing and Shanghai.

Moreover, lesbian women do not often have an equal presence in these gay male dominated social circles. Even in Same-Love Cinema, a club co-organised by a gay business and a lesbian NGO, female participants were still scant during my visits. In other film clubs I attended in Beijing and Guangzhou, most participants and all the club organisers were male. Concentric Circle often had no female attendees at all—the organisers of this club tried to coordinate a few screening sessions with local lesbian groups, as they told me during my interview with them, but female participants in these sessions were still scarce. Most films screened in these urban queer cultural spaces are selected from a male perspective, as the organisers themselves are often gay men, and so is the marketing strategy. Some of these male-led queer film clubs mainly rely on Feizan (and ZANK) for marketing, but Feizan itself is an online community dominated by gay men with very limited numbers of lesbians and “rotten girls” (*fu nü*, female fans of inter-male romance). Although mobile dating apps for lesbians have emerged in Chinese societies, only gay dating apps and gay male entrepreneurs seem to have attracted large venture capital investment and global media attention so far.

As a male researcher in the field, in addition, I also felt rather awkward when I tried to build a rapport with women in the gay male dominated queer places. Gay men often saw me under a double light—first as their gay male comrade, and then as a researcher. For women, however, I was nothing but an ethnographer sniffing around and peeping into the female world that I did not belong to. Some of my male informants believe that the gap is huge between gay and lesbian communities in today’s China, and lesbian women will feel uncomfortable if a gay man intrudes into their own social and cultural spaces. Despite my intention to cover a wide range of queer social groups and cultural expressions in this research, and my attempt to gain access to female queer spaces in China, I still ended up with

an all-male group of interviewees with only a few female informants who volunteered in LGBT groups or visiting the film clubs for film screening.

Through these discussions, I intend to highlight how the researcher's own identity earns and limits his or her access to different parts of the field in ethnographical research. The researcher's identity can be used to advantage in approaching the field and building the rapport, as much as it can be an obstacle to expand the scope of the research and extend the rapport in the field. I feel rather disappointed when I aimed to speak for the overlooked queer people and social groups on the fringe, but have instead potentially further marginalised some of them with a research like this focusing on gay male dominated queer screen cultures and queer communities. The aged, the rural, the disabled, the non-male, the undereducated, and other more transgressive queer people (e.g. transgender and transsexual) have not been included in this research. If I were allowed more time for my field research, I might be able to cover a more diverse range of socially and sexually marginalised groups. Every research has its limits, and I hope my future study will further this investigation of disadvantaged queer people and cultures in Chinese societies.

Before I conclude this part, I would like to briefly discuss another challenge facing ethnographers who research queer cultures in China: LGBT organisations, social groups, and queer film festivals are closely watched and occasionally harassed by the authorities—not necessarily because they are queer, but because they are independent, semi-underground, and hence out of government control and regulation. As I will discuss in Chapter 3, independent film festivals in China such as Beijing Queer Film Festival often have to operate in a guerrilla style. Before my final field trip to China in late 2014, the Independent Film Festival in Beijing also suffered a major crackdown. I became worried about some of my contacts, and was unsure about whether I should return to China at that point to continue my fieldwork, which might bring unwanted attention to my informants. Later they told me that the Beijing

LGBT Centre, the venue for multiple film clubs and queer communal events, was also raided a few months ago with some film screenings cancelled. The authorities were very vigilant about any potential activism that starts from the bottom up, either in the form of non-governmental organisations or independent film festivals.

Eventually I decided to continue my field research with extra caution, because most of the formal interviews were already scheduled in this final field trip. Some interviewees expressed the concern that queer NGO venues such as the LGBT Centre were monitored by the authorities, and thus we carried out all the interviews in other places scattered around the city. Some of them were also worried that, if they got detained by police for questioning, they might lose their job in state-owned companies. I offered all of them the chance to express their opinions off the record; if still in doubt, they could also withdraw any data traceable to them after the interview. After all, the last thing I ever wanted was to bring any troubles to my contacts. The whole fieldwork became somewhat paranoid, and verged on both sides of the research (the interviewer and the interviewees) losing equanimity. It eventually concluded without any glitches, but if the authorities really intended to intervene, I doubt if my very basic precautions could have protected my informants. Some of my contacts reassured me that, if they got into trouble, it was because what they did, not because I interviewed them. But, as a researcher, I still wanted to do the best within my ability to protect them.

This research, after all, owes a debt to the people who were willing to share their stories, either privately with me or publicly in the film clubs and on social media. My ethnography is not only a study *of* them, but to learn *from* and *with* them. On top of that, I hope this research also serves as a study *for* them. I believe that good ethnography should be mutually enlightening for the researcher and for the interviewees. Some informants told me that the questions I asked during the interviews also helped them rethink their own stories in queer cultural production and community building from a different perspective. Several in-

depth interviews lasting for several hours then ended up in large piles of transcripts each with more than ten thousand Chinese characters. In the post-interview correspondence via email, some contacts wrote to me that they considered the transcripts invaluable records of their past efforts which would also help them develop future strategies. When I compare, synthesise, and study these materials with my own observational findings from the field, I also hope that my research will offer queer people a fuller picture and a better understanding of today's queer cultures and communities in Chinese societies in the twenty-first century.

Notes on Terminology

Terminologically, sexual identity labels such as homosexual or *tongxinglian*, gay and lesbian, queer or *ku'er*, LGBT(Q), *tongzhi*, *membra*, *piaopiao*, *gaizu*, *rayray*, *jiyou* have all been used in and across various Chinese societies, in addition to other terms like same-sex, androphilia or gynephilia, and wo/men who have sex with wo/men (WSW/MSM). Although I have already discussed the social contexts in which some of these terms first emerged, further rationale is in need to clarify the terminological mess surrounding queer identities in Chinese societies. Some terms listed above are only used in certain regions and never widely known if not introduced by researchers—*membra* in Hong Kong (Kong 2011a), *piaopiao* in Chengdu (Wei 2006/2007a/2007b), and *gaizu* in Taiwan (Lim 2008)—and are hence not adopted in this study, unless an informant of mine self-identifies with or describes people using one of these labels. *Rayray*, a portmanteau replacing the first letter of “gay” with “r” as a more implicit description of gay men, is also mainly known within Taiwan. WSW/MSM solely describes sexual conduct and is hence only seen in public health research and HIV/AIDS intervention. In what follows, therefore, I only discuss the following terms: homosexual or *tongxinglian*, gay and lesbian, LGBT, *tongzhi*, same-sex, androphilia, and queer or *ku'er*.

Tongxinglian, to begin with, is a Chinese term translated from *homosexuality* through the medium of Japanese. From the second half of the nineteenth century through to the early

twentieth century, China was conjoined by its neighbour Japan in learning from the West to strengthen and empower the country. According to Tze-lan Sang (1999/2003), *tongxing'ai* (literally “same-sex love”) is a direct adoption of the Japanese word *doseiai*, a term described by Valentine (1997, 100) as the most direct translation of the English word *homosexuality* in Japan’s interpretation of Western sexology.¹⁸ Sang (2003) argues that *tongxing'ai* was less an identity than a modality of love when the term was first adopted from Japanese (118, 292-3, 297), while Dikötter’s research shows that the then Chinese sexologists already saw homosexuality as a mark of the pathological and uncivilised “other” (1995, 143-4). Chiang (2010) believes that *tongxing'ai* in Republican China was equally trapped in the medical and scientific discourse, or what Michel Foucault (1978) calls *scientia sexualis*, to pathologise same-sex desire and same-sex attracted people (see also Chiang 2014a, 28-30).

The now widely used Mandarin Chinese term *tongxinglian*, literally same-sex love, dependence, attachment, obsession, or fetishism, is a later variation of *tongxing'ai* (see Sang 2003, 278) that can be back-translated into English as homosexual and homosexuality. In modern Chinese parlance, to some degree the term *tongxinglian* still conveys the image of marginalised sexual outlaws who deserve medical diagnosis and treatment—in some school textbooks in the Mainland, for example, *tongxinglian* is still described as a disease and homosexuals as “patients” (*huanzhe*).¹⁹ In other words, during the long chain of translations and transformations from the early neologism of *doseiai/tongxing'ai* to the nowadays more derogatory label *tongxinglian*, the pathological connotation of the term has been carried on through the time. Partially due to this connotation, homosexual/*tongxinglian* has gradually lost its popularity, in Western countries and Chinese societies alike, to be replaced by newer

¹⁸ For a detailed discussion of *doseiai*, see also Pflugfelder (1999, 235-85). The English term *homosexual* was also widely used in its transliterated Japanese form *homosekusharu* (McLelland 2005, 82).

¹⁹ The English version of *Global Times* (*Huanqiu Shibao*), a state-owned newspaper in the PRC, published a report on 23 May 2013 about homophobic textbooks in today’s China (see Yang 2013).

sexual identity categories such as gay and queer or *tongzhi* and *jiyou*. In this research, I choose to avoid using the pathologised terms homosexual and *tongxinglian* to describe people or their sexual conduct, unless I need to address the lingering pathological views of queer sexualities.

Gay/straight follows the same pattern of categorisation as homo/heterosexual, but moves away from pathology and sexology. What I love about *gay*, and perhaps where some of its power comes from, is the simplicity of the word—three letters, and one syllable. Gay is the shortest and most concise term people can adopt to proclaim their sexuality and declare their position in the sexual spectrum. I remember that lots of online chats I had with same-sex attracted men in China during the last decade began with a tentative question from them—“gay” or simply “g”, followed by a question mark, to confirm that their chatting partner is indeed their sexual comrade. The word *gay* became a popular slang in China to replace the pathologised *tongxinglian* and the two-syllable word *tongzhi* (discussed below). Such *gay/g* identification enables people to share a commonality and communality among them, and perhaps also with their Anglo-American counterparts. In the cyber universe, such simplicity often leads to accelerated and dispersed circulation of the term. However, the word *gay* is also the most problematic one among all the terms under scrutiny.

The gayness conglomeration, simple and powerful as it is, does not mean that those who identify with the term in Chinese societies are fully aware of what it connotes. The term *gay* was first and foremost a synonym of “cheerful” in English, when it first emerged as an alternative and less pathological way to describe homosexuals. It entails a certain level of self-consciousness and pride of one’s own sexuality, and an expressive desire to declare and announce one’s sexual self. But what about those who do not share the *gay*-style sexual pride and self-awareness, or those who do not want to announce their sexual selves? Has the word *gay* confined them, as it has freed others? Also, in today’s English vernacular, when young

people describe their peers as “so gay”, the expression speaks for itself as a stereotype that gay is often understood as a quality of flamboyance, a style of fashionable taste and neatness inseparable from late-modern urban consumerism,²⁰ and perhaps a personality of drama queen or drama king. Then what about those who do not share these characteristics? What about those who do not identify with such culturally marked and self-reflexive body images and gay *habitus*? What about those who dislike the unapologetic, identitarian, and minoritarian conception of gay individuality and sexuality?²¹ Are they gay (cheerful) to be gay?

On top of that, to quote Kai Wright out of context, I understand “gay people to be white people [...] with a proud, self-proclaimed sexual identity” (2008, viii). In Wright’s self-reflection, such intertwined *gayness* and *whiteness* have little to do with what he knows about himself as a coloured same-sex attracted man. And I feel exactly the same. Admittedly Chinese societies are quite different from East New York in Wright’s recounting of queer youth of colour (including Asian) who often feel detached from the “whiteness of gayness” (107) and the “gay euphemism” (77). But if we simply label same-sex attracted Chinese people as gay, we risk assigning them a category that some people can come out with but never fully belong in. Even though some people in Chinese societies self-identify as gay, a lot of them are not aware of the connotations attached to this label. For this reason, I only describe people and screen cultures in Chinese societies with the term gay when that pinch of

²⁰ For a critique of the “gay market” economy and consumerism in America, see for example Katherine Sender (2004, 97). For a short reflection on this issue in the context of queer Chinese cinemas, see Wei (2012, 66).

²¹ I owe this idea and the previous one about late-modern consumerism partially to Dr Fran Martin who, among other people that I am intellectually indebted to, has helped to shape my discussion in this chapter.

The minoritarian self-conception appears to predate the emergence of *gayness*. Eric Garber’s documentation of the Harlem Renaissance as a significant moment in the gay American history sees the feeling of kinship among lesbian and gay men as the beginning of homosexual “minority consciousness” (1989, 329), a term borrowed from Blair Niles’s gay novel *Strange Brother* (1931).

In addition, the open and proud gay culture is in direct contrast to the “furtive and sad” homosexual lifestyle described by some American intellectuals as “not worthy of being graced with the term *culture*”—see Newton’s anthropological recount of America’s first gay and lesbian town (1993, 39, 311). For how the Gay Liberation movement challenged and compromised the “old gay survival methods”, see also Newton (237-8).

cheerfulness and pride, or the minority identitarian self-awareness, is needed to bring out that flavour. I also use the term when my informants self-identify or designate others as gay, although the “gayness” they have experienced in Chinese societies may not be the same as their Anglo-American counterparts.²²

It is also noteworthy that, while in English-speaking countries gay sometimes serves as a non-distinctive term for both men and women, in Chinese societies this English word is often unmistakably linked to male-male bonding. Gender-distinctive terms such as *lesbian* and the Chinese term *la-la* are instead often adopted for inter-female intimacy. Lesbian is a word sometimes attributed to the ancient Greek poetess Sappho who resided on the Greek island of Lesbos and whose poetry proclaimed her love of female (Bonnet 1997, 147-8).²³ In the second half of the twentieth century, most noticeably in the US, there was some debate among feminist over the choice between *lesbian* and *homosexual* as a descriptive term and an identity label (Bonnet 162). That is to say, the history of the term lesbian is much older than that of gay in describing same-sex desire, conduct, and then identity, although today they often appear hand-in-hand in the form of gay and lesbian, lesbigay, or LGBT.

In Tze-lan Sang’s analysis of the emerging lesbian in modern China and the female same-sex intimacy in this country’s pre-modern era, the emergence of Chinese lesbians was contingent on the re-constructed local understanding of women and homosexuality based on imported Western physiology, sexology, and social theory (2003, 15). Furthermore, the label *la-la* in the Mainland and the similar word *la-zi* in Taiwan are the Mandarin nick-name

²² See also “Contextualising Queer Screens” in the next chapter for more discussion on “global gayness”.

²³ The modern meaning of lesbian, however, arrived only in the mid-nineteenth century: when French poet Charles Baudelaire was in trial for his “obscene” *Les Fleurs du mal*, a volume of erotic verses initially considered by the poet to be titled *Les Lesbiennes* (“*The Lesbians*”), this word began to be known by the educated public, in France at least (Bonnet 157-8). A decade later in 1869, journalist Károly Mária Kertbeny published his coinage of the terms heterosexual and homosexual, a dualism soon picked up by sexologists and psychoanalysts to categorise human sexualities. Later in a 1904 French dictionary, the feminine form of homosexual (“*homosexuelle*”) is found with its masculine grammatical gender form (“*homosexuel*”), which implied a gender-distinctive understanding of homosexuality already came into being (Bonnet 160).

variants of lesbian, as the Chinese word *la* puns on *les*, which derive from the character *La-zi* in the renowned Taiwanese lesbian novel *The Crocodile's Journal* (Eyu Shouji, see Martin 2003b, 224-36). In this research, as far as terminology is concerned, the word lesbian is used in a similar way as gay is used when I intend to highlight the influence of Western lesbianness over Chinese societies or when my informants use this term to identify themselves or others. Once again, the cultural expressions of “lesbianness” in Chinese societies may not be the same as their Western counterparts.

Now I move on to LGBT, or LGBTQQIAAP.²⁴ I will not go into details with each identity category in this tasteless “alphabet soup” (I hear a long exhalation of relief from my readers). In the cultural and political war fighting for the rights of sexual minorities, we need to emphasise the similarities for unification, despite the actual differences among and within each and every minority sexual category. However, grouping different sexual expressions in a single alphabet mixture potentially compromises the political centripetal force that people have been seeking for in the first place, insomuch as the needs and the interests often vary between and within different sexual minority groups. Above all, how many identity labels are enough? As we continue to create more categories along with our sexual and socio-cultural practices and theoretical discussions, we may eventually run out of English alphabet and end up with an A-Z conglomeration of “non-normative” sexualities, which is likely to be still incomplete to cover every sexual expression. This has already happened in gender identity politics. From February 2014, for instance, Facebook began to offer 56 options for the users to choose from as gender identification, one of which is “other”—55 categories still fail to cover the full “spectrum”, and people are allowed to choose “other” if they do not fit in these categories or do not want to label themselves.

²⁴ LGBTQQIAAP means Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Allies, and Pansexual. Corrêa et al. (2008, 7-8) describe this kind of naming as “throwing together a wide range of sexual and gender identity categories into one alphabet soup”, the taste of which I personally dislike.

But perhaps I should not have reduced LGBT to a political tool. This kind of naming nevertheless brings together bisexual and transgender/transsexual with lesbian and gay; in so doing, it draws our attention to other sexualities potentially marginalised in the liberation of gay and lesbian. However, my question is the same: what about those who do not identify with any of these labels or fit into these categories? When the word *queer* first entered from the theoretical and academic realm into the social and political discourse of LGBT activism, people were quite optimistic about its potential to become an umbrella term encompassing all other forms of minority sexualities. However, once an analytical weapon in the theoretical arsenal has been reduced to a simple capital letter Q in social activism, it becomes yet another label that some people may not be comfortable to identify with. Then we are forced to add more labels and cultivate a tortuous and torturous LGBTQQIAAP, or a classification of 55+1 gender categories. In this study, I only recur to LGBT(Q) to analyse the influence of Western-style identity politics over Chinese societies, while acknowledging both its power in socio-political activism and its inherent flaws in naming and categorisation.

While these Western creations never fully fit in Chinese cultures, *tongzhi* and its (less popular) gender-distinctive feminine form *nü tongzhi* have flourished in Chinese societies since the early 1990s. *Tong* literally means “same”, while *zhi* can be understood as *zhixiang* (goal, aspiration, ambition, or intention). *Tongzhi*, a fixed iamb meaning “the same goal”, was first used in *The Discourses of the States (Guoyu)*, a collection of historical records dated to the fifth to the fourth century BC (Tang and Qu 2008, 270). The modern meaning of *tongzhi*—people who share the same political ideology and aspiration or who belong to the same political party—is borrowed from the West at the turn of the twentieth century through Japanese translation of the English word “comrade” (*ibid.*). Its popular use can be traced to the dying wish of the founding father of Republican China Sun Yat-sen (“revolution is not yet accomplished, *tongzhi* still need to work hard”) that has been frequently quoted in the

studies of modern Chinese histories and queer sexualities. After the establishment of the PRC (People's Republic of China) in the Mainland, *tongzhi* was also widely adopted as a friendly, politically correct, and gender ambiguous honorific title to address each other in everyday life (see Bao 2011a; Chou 2000).

The appropriation of *tongzhi* for same-sex sexuality was introduced in 1989 by the organisers of the inaugural Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in Hong Kong (Chou, 2), and soon disseminated to Taiwan (Lim 2008, 237) and then to the Mainland during the mid and late 1990s (Tang and Qu, 271). Chou (1-9) has offered a detailed analysis of how this term implies the “sameness” between the pathologically divided homosexuals and heterosexuals, and potentially transforms the former from sexual perverts to equal citizens who share the same feeling of love and intimacy as the latter. *Tongzhi* has indeed assumed its popularity in Chinese societies as a new same-sex identity since the 1990s, but what I intend to emphasise is that the term *tongzhi* is inherently political from the very beginning, as discussed above, and even more so in the Mainland. Back in the mid-1990s' Mainland China—speaking from my childhood memory—when I went to shopping malls with my parents, they still addressed salesmen and saleswomen as *tongzhi*, since this was the correct honorific title in everyday life to follow the ideology of socialist equality that people were all “comrades”, regardless of their gender and occupation (see also Bao 2011a). Although it soon lost its popularity in daily usage at the turn of the twenty-first century, *tongzhi* is still used in today's official documents as perhaps the only politically correct form to address government officials and Communist Party members in the Mainland.

Celebrating the birth of such a native same-sex identity, I am also deeply concerned with such political implications of *tongzhi*. For people who grew up in Mainland China before and during the 1990s, for instance, it still feels rather uncanny to apply this word to same-sex attracted people. This local term may also cause confusion in international liaison

between local and overseas LGBT organisations. Beijing *Tongzhi* Center, a prestigious NGO well-known in local queer communities, has therefore chosen Beijing LGBT Center as its official English name. In this study, my strategy is to use *tongzhi* only when my informants describe queer people or films as *tongzhi* or *tongzhi* film. I do not, however, simply adopt this word as a synonym for gay or homosexual, since they are quite different and distinctive in their denotations and connotations. Due to the political core of *tongzhi*, furthermore, this word has gradually lost its charm among younger generations to new labels such as *jiyou*, which I discuss below.

Same-sex, a term seemingly neutral, is also a socially constructed notion with its own genealogy. The view seeing men and women as two opposite sexes was an eighteenth-century construction, according to historian Thomas Laqueur (1990), vis-à-vis the previous anatomical understanding seeing men and women as two mirrored forms of “one sex”. If we agree with Laqueur, we can argue that modern understandings of sexuality are completely based on the two-sex model, rather than on the idea of mirroring/neighbouring sex. In this research, I use *same-sex* as a non-label to circumvent the connotations of other categorical terms that may not be appropriate in Chinese contexts, but it is noteworthy that *same-sex* itself has its unique historical background that can be easily overlooked.

This is perhaps why we need *queer*—as an analytical tool, not an umbrella term. The power of queer critiques lies in its revelation of how gender and sexuality classifications are discursively constructed and dichotomised.²⁵ That said, I do not mean that *queer* can be used as an overarching term to blur the material-bodily and psycho-sexual differences, but that it has enough intellectual flexibility to address the diversity and nonconformity of genders, sexualities, erotic interests, sexual attractions, and so on. Queer theory departs from naturalist

²⁵ However, the deconstruction of fixed sexual identity categories among gay and lesbian intellectuals predates the birth of queer theory. Anthropologist Esther Newton, for example, reports a conference she attended in 1985’s Toronto where the focus of debate was whether the gay identity should be deconstructed (1993, 10).

views of sexuality, and refuses to reduce the complexity of human sexualities into monochromic binaries or monolithic categories. I agree that this standpoint is undeniably postmodern (Sinnott 2010), insofar as “its umbrella-like inclusion of an unbounded range” of individuals, bodies, feelings, desires, interests, attractions, texts, and images transgresses and transcends both real and imagined borders of gender and sexuality. But queer theory is also found entering the traditional domains of psychology and psychoanalysis during recent years, as its insight offers possible explanations for some clinical findings.²⁶

As I have discussed earlier, however, queer theory as a Western coinage has long been under debate for its appropriateness in Asian contexts. As much as terminology is concerned, the word queer and its Chinese transliteration *ku'er* are still mostly used by artists and scholars in a way that often has little appeal to average people. As a researcher I follow Wilson (2006) and Sinnott (2010) and use this term as academic shorthand throughout this study, but I also believe that, where possible, researchers should not rush to wrap people up with terms and ideas of foreign origins. I have titled my research *Queer Screen Cultures*, but I would like my readers to be aware that *queer* is not the common vernacular in Chinese societies. I use this term as shorthand not only for the convenience of articulation, but for its epistemological liberating power. I agree with Blackwood and Johnson’s rationale that we use *queer* in Asian contexts since it “effectively highlights the possibilities and constraints of different systems of gender/sexuality” and “makes explicit our concern with the relative instabilities inherent in and productive of both normative and transgressive bodies and practices” (2012, 442). And, adopting the word queer, I do not ignore the differences among individuals, communities, societies, cinemas, and screen cultures. In fact, queer and all the

²⁶ See Joel et al. (2013) for an example of queer theory’s implication in psychology, and see Dean (2003) and Watson (2009) for discussions about queer theory and psychoanalysis.

other terms discussed here are by no means monolithic; rather, these terms themselves have long been the site of resistance and negotiation in the global flows of sexual discourses.

The last label that deserves our attention is *jiyou* (“gay friend”), a recent coinage in the Mainland. This neologism changes the Cantonese transliteration of gay (“*gei*”) to its Mandarin pronunciation (“*ji*”), and then bridges it with the Mandarin character *you* (“friend”, literally). In Cantonese-language areas, *gay men* are often called *gei-lo*—*lo* denotes “male” but also connotes “men from the lower social classes”, and hence the term *gei-lo* is classist and sexist (neglecting same-sex attracted women) at the same time (Chou 2000, 79). Another pair of terms becoming popular in Mandarin-language regions with the same linguistic root is *gao-ji* and *jiao-ji*, both translated from Cantonese term *gaau-gei*. In these terms *gao* implies “doing something indecent”, and *jiao* denotes “to disturb/annoy” as well as “to mix/mingle with”. The new portmanteau *jiyou*, however, wipes off both the classism of *gei-lo* and much of the derogatory meanings of *gao-ji* and *jiao-ji*. The Mandarin word *you* (“friend”) in this new portmanteau relocates homosexuality into the register of “friendship” and frees it from pathology and sexology, and from the Western-style *gay* euphemism and the *tongzhi* politics.

Jiyou has soon become a term encompassing any kind of intimate inter-male bonding in both online and offline vernacular, often in the form *hao jiyou* (literally “good gay friend”). There also emerges a gender-distinctive feminine label *hao liyou*—literally “good beautiful friend” and also the name of a Korean food company well-known in China for its cupcake. This set of terms is adopted by young generations to describe and make sense of same-sex intimacies, albeit sometimes used in a jocular way. Emerged recently at the dawn of the 2010s, *jiyou* is better understood as an outcome of the complicated interactions among sex-related values and traditions, the influence of Western gayness, vibrant cyber cultures, and the (con)fusion between English, Cantonese, and Mandarin. In this sense, the term itself has become a site to negotiate sex-related desires and ideas in the global nexus. When the

social visibility of queer people in China is slowly but gradually increasing, the term *jiyou* has emerged that pictures same-sex relationships as a craving for intimate bonding between “friends”. When this term is generalised beyond the scope of homosexuality, furthermore, *jiyou* becomes less an identity-label than a new way to understand more diversified human relationships in the twenty-first century.

Finally, I would like to offer some personal reflections to sum up my terminological discussion. I am fully aware of my deep scepticism of sexual identity politics, my discontent with stereotyping and sexual dualism, and my preference for fluidity over rigidity in the descriptions of sexualities. I often avoid labelling myself, as much as I dislike labelling other people, but I still position myself as a queer theorist and adopt *queer* as my intellectual, epistemological, and critical shorthand. The purpose of this section has been not only to rationalise my own terminological choice, but to shed light on the complexity of sexualities, identity politics, real and imagined borders of the local and the global, locations and dislocations of Chineseness, and the power and empowerment as well as the limits and limitations of “labelling”. None of these labels can singlehandedly capture the complexities of sexualities and the fluidities of enculturation. In sex-related Chinese cultures, homosexual or *tongxinglian*, gay and lesbian, LGBT, *tongzhi*, same-sex, queer, *jiyou*, and whatever comes up next each has its own role to play and cannot be used simply interchangeably. This section, I hope, has been able to clear up the terminological ground for my subsequent analyses of queer screen cultures in Chinese societies.

Chapter 3: A Brief History of Queer Screen Cultures

Although this thesis focuses on the early twenty-first century, it is certainly not my intention to cut off today's queer screen cultures from their own histories and traditions, or from the history of same-sex intimacies in China at the socio-cultural level. Therefore, this chapter starts with a discussion of the changing social discourses contextualising queer sexualities and cultures in Chinese societies, and then maps out the historical development of queer cinemas, film festivals and clubs, and social media and micro-films (short film produced for distribution through social media) in Chinese societies. I trace the history of queer Chinese cinemas produced across the globe, and a critical discussion of the New Queer Cinema framework in a Chinese context is also presented. I then analyse the plight facing queer film festivals and festival-goers, and argue that queer film clubs emerging at the turn of the 2010s have become a new focal point of queer screen cultures in urban China. The chapter continues with a foray into the territory of the newly emerged queer social media and micro-films in Chinese societies that are largely under-researched. Overall, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a concise historiography to further contextualise the screen cultures in question in this thesis and to review previous literature on the study of queer screens in Chinese societies, as well as to further justify my choice of these types of screen cultures for scrutiny.

Contextualising Queer Screens

Let us begin with the deep-rooted and long-lasting *same-sex tradition* originating from pre-modern China. As Michel Foucault (1978) reminds us, it was not until the late nineteenth century in the West that the term *homosexual* was coined and sexuality was taken into the medical discourse which categorised people into the homo/hetero dichotomy. China presented a similar case in its pre-modern times. Ancient China did not have a pathologised medical term to categorise those attracted to the same sex. Intimate same-sex bonding was

visible throughout recorded Chinese ancient history, but such relationships were often described with poetic metaphors in lieu of any fixed identity categories or what we call sexual orientation today (see Xiaomingxiong [1984] 1997; Hinsch 1990; Vitiello 2011; Wu 2004).¹ That is to say, there was a time in both China and the West when same-sex relationship and intimacy were not bound up with modern identity politics, or regulated by medical/scientific discourse on same-sex sexuality.

As I have summarised elsewhere (2012), in ancient China, people getting involved in same-sex relationships were often able to maintain a hetero-reproductive marriage at the same time; same-sex desire and hetero-reproduction were not viewed by Chinese people as mutually exclusive, at least not until the importation of the dualistic sexual identity categories, as discussed below. In this context, both same-sex bonding and the social stigmas around it were based on people's sexual acts and conducts, rather than on an innate sexual essence or preference. This is however irreducible to "the prevalence of bisexuality over exclusive homosexuality", or experiencing hetero and homosexuality at the same time, as Hinsch (11) believes. Rather, it demonstrates a nuanced way in pre-modern China to balance between one's familial/patrilineal responsibility for reproduction and the object-choice of one's sexual desire, before any modern medical classification of sexualities came into being. This kind of sexual conduct is better understood as a more fluid way to negotiate one's social and sexual relationships. Such traditional same-sex practice, or pre-modern same-sex tradition, was intrinsically a border-crossing experience, if such a border ever existed.

However, the nuanced and fluid same-sex tradition was reduced to silence when the imperial period came to an end and Chinese society underwent enormous social changes and

¹ I should note that *Xiaomingxiong* (a.k.a Samshasha), Hong Kong's first gay activist, believes that Hinsch's *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: the Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (1990) heavily borrows from his Chinese-language work *The History of Homosexuality in China* (first edition 1984) without due acknowledgement. For more information about this alleged plagiarism, see an interview of Samshasha conducted by McLelland (2000) and a discussion by Leung (2007).

transformations from the mid-nineteenth century through to the first half of the twentieth century. Humiliated at the hands of Western colonists in the first Opium War (also known as the first Anglo-Chinese War) which led to the cession of Hong Kong to the United Kingdom in 1842, China began to undergo a series of social upheavals aiming to reform and strengthen the country.² The last imperial sovereignty (the Qing dynasty) was overthrown in 1912, which marked the end of the Chinese empire and the beginning of the republican era. The dawn of the twentieth century witnessed a complex love-hate relationship between China and the West, during which the local same-sex tradition was reproduced by the modern, Western discourse of homosexuality.

More specifically, from the mid-nineteenth through to the early twentieth century, especially during China's Self-Strengthening Movement (*Yangwu Yundong*, 1861-95) whose slogan was "learning the Western strengths to strengthen ourselves" and the New Culture Movement (*Xin Wenhua Yundong*, 1915-21) that valued democracy and science as China's major salvation, Chinese people began to frantically cast away traditional cultural values for a new society established in a Western paradigm. At the same time, sexology in the West began to construct new medical knowledge on homosexuality, which was then imported by Chinese intellectuals who were looking at the West for modern science to modernise China. The traditional Chinese same-sex social discourse was therefore reshaped, reproduced, and to a certain extent replaced by the imported Western homosexual discourse (Wei 2012; see Bao 2010; Chou 2000, 249; Hinsch 1990, 139, 161, 166; L. Ho 2010, 122-3; Kang 2009/2010; Wu 2004, 3-5). Since then, Chinese same-sex discourse has been pinpointed in the constant negotiation and contestation between what remains from the pre-modern same-sex tradition and the imported dichotomous Western understanding of sexual classification.

² See Lü (2012) and Stockwell (2003), for example, for more detailed accounts of this transformative period.

Slightly departing from other researchers in the field, Kang (2009/2010) reveals that the spread of Western sexology into China was also contingent on the similarity between local and Western understanding of same-sex relationship in the first half of the twentieth century.³ My understanding is that the previous social stigmatisation of same-sex bonding based on sexual conduct found its modern “scientific” ground from the imported Western sexology. This argument helps to explain Hinsch’s (165-71) astonishment that the imported Western sexual norms have taken the dominant position in China within a rather short timeframe, and become shockingly strong and robust that even today’s more advanced sexology from their source of origin (the West) cannot overthrow them in China. Since the importation of Western sexology, Chinese people began to use *tongxinglian* and *yixinglian*, direct translations of *homosexual* and *heterosexual*, to label people into fixed sexual categories.⁴ In other words, the traditionally conduct-based sexual practice was replaced by the modern scientific discourse that criminalises and pathologises non-normative sexualities.⁵

When the native same-sex tradition was cast away together with other traditional values, the Chinese Civil War (1927-50) led to the establishment of the Marxist-socialist regime in the Mainland and the retreat of the Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party) to Taiwan. During the Cold War, socialist China was for most of the time cut off from the West—the origin of the imported sexology and where knowledge of sexuality continued to develop. More important, the umbilical Chinese traditions were further cut off in the nationwide pursuit of Maoism and rejections of “obsolete” pre-modern values in various

³ My concern, however, is whether such similarity was merely historical contingency and coincidence, or was born within the transformations of local sexual morality and sex-related values caused by China’s increased interactions and tensions with the West. I agree that Kang’s argument is well-grounded and insightful, although further research in a broader historical context is needed.

⁴ *Tongxinglian* means “same-sex love”. But, as discussed in the previous chapter, it is a direct translation of *homosexual* when Western sexology was imported into China via Japanese translation.

⁵ Chinese societies are not alone in this process. With case studies from Asia, America, and Europe, Julian Lee observes that contemporary state policies and regulations “commonly seek to prevent certain forms of sexuality from being expressed, even when, as is often the case, the country concerned has a rich history of diverse and socially legitimate sexual conduct” (2011, 2).

social upheavals in China, including the massively destructive Cultural Revolution (1966-76). During this process, what remained from the pre-modern same-sex tradition was further denied and despised (Wei 2012; see also Bao 2010). Therefore, as Hinsch (165-71) observes, when China once again opens up to the world, the obsolete sexual norms imported half a century ago are often taken for granted as “native” Chinese sexual moralities vis-à-vis the now more advanced Western sexology. The intolerance of non-conforming sexualities imported from the West is now widely deemed “traditional” Chinese values, adopted by homophobic individuals and social groups in China against the influence of today’s liberal LGBT activisms and same-sex marriage legislations in Western countries.⁶

However, this paradigm shift from conduct-based to identity-based understanding of sexuality has been questioned. In a Western context, Eve Sedgwick (1990, 44-48) criticises that the historical search for the so-called “Great Paradigm Shift” (e.g. David M. Halperin’s work in 1990) may have over-stretched Michel Foucault’s periodisation of sexuality (1978) and obscured the present conditions of sexual identities. In his later work, Halperin (2002, 13) himself notes that the assumption of a simple, epochal “shift” lacks reflexivity on our current attitudes to the past, takes for granted the connection between modern and pre-modern non-heterosexual formations, appears inadequate in addressing homosexuality within its own history, and implies “a Eurocentric progress narrative” potentially rendering non-Western and non-white sexualities as “backward”, if not primitive and innocent. Following Halperin and writing on queer Sinophonicities, Chiang (2014a, 24) criticises this “paradigm shift” as a linear and reductionist view of “a broader rearrangement of earlier patterns of erotic organisations” in the late nineteenth-century. Chiang (28) further warns us against the

⁶ This process, the loss of the same-sex tradition from the ending of the imperial period to China’s Cultural Revolution, is vividly captured in the film *Farewell My Concubine* (*Ba Wang Bie Ji*, 1993). Another film *East Palace, West Palace* offers an accurate account of Chinese people’s attitude towards non-normative sexualities in the late twentieth century that demands policing, punishing, and curing transvestites and homosexuals. See Wei (2012) for a detailed analysis of these films along with the discussion of the loss of tradition and the transition of local same-sex social discourse in the twentieth century.

inadequacy of this assumed linear progression (from “acts” to “identities” of erotic desire) in recognising the epistemological factors in this shift, such as the importation and translation of Western medical sciences and the rise of *scientia sexualis* in the late imperial and early Republican China (see my terminological discussion in Chapter 2).

Chinese societies, furthermore, are not isolated from the globalising process during which the boundary between the Western and the Eastern worlds are increasingly blurred—or, as Rofel (2007, 91) reminds us, the “West” and the “East” themselves are in the first place imagined locations constructed upon geo-politics. The mobilised flows of queer migrants and cultures have a long history between Chinese and Western societies. Xiaomingxiong, the first Chinese gay activist to have emerged in the British colonial Hong Kong in the 1980s, completed his tertiary education and became a college lecturer in the US during the 1970s when post-Stonewall Sexual Revolution and Gay Liberation permeated the country (see McLelland 2000). Returning to Hong Kong, he became the first Chinese researcher on the history of local same-sex culture and on homosexuality in modern Chinese societies. In Taiwan, Chuang Hui-chiu published *Chinese Homosexuals (Zhongguoren de Tongxinglian)* in 1991, and queer studies emerged in the 1990s under the influence of Euro-American queer scholarship (see Martin 2003a, 1-22). In Mainland China, the now-renowned sociologist and sexologist Li Yinhe and her late husband Wang Xiaobo, both trained at the University of Pittsburgh, published the first book-length research on same-sex attracted Chinese people in 1993 (revised in 1998), which initiated homosexuality studies in Mainland China.⁷

⁷ Two turning points can be identified in the studies of same-sex sexuality inside China: the first was marked by the publication of Li and Wang’s ground-breaking research in 1993, and the second led by the depathologisation of homosexuality in 2001. In the pre-2001 era, however, the sample size in quantitative research was usually small and gay people were often indifferently othered by the researchers. See Chen (2008, 31), Gao and Jia (2008, 462), Wang (2011, 83, 91), Wei (2011, 55), and Wei (2012) for summaries and comments.

Albeit long marginalised, scholarship on queer sexualities, cultures, identities, and communities is now increasingly diversified in the early 21st century in China’s academia—see Guo (2007a/2007b/2008) and Zhou (2009) on the legal rights and status of *tongzhi*, Fu and Wu (2010) and Wei (2011) on urban spatial politics of

These US-trained researchers have not only laid the foundation for the studies of Chinese same-sex cultures and communities, but also, among other people returned from the West, have contributed to the flows of Anglo-American gay cultures and gay right discourses into Chinese societies. Such global mobilities of talents and migrants who concern with queer issues contribute to the increasingly intermingled Chinese and non-Chinese queer social discourses. Taking Mainland China as an example: when Li and Wang (1993) interviewed same-sex attracted people in Beijing in the late 1980s, none of their informants self-identified as *gay*. But in the revised edition of their book (Li 1998) which includes a follow-up research, many interviewees directly used the English word *gay* as self-identification while describing heterosexuals as *straight*, and the author also began to introduce queer theory and Foucault's theories to local readers. As part of the globalising world, Chinese same-sex communities once again turned to the West for new sexual norms and identities, and Chinese researchers for new gender and sexuality theories. The importation of the Western gayness into Chinese societies also pinpoints local queer people as part of the imagined global gay community (see below) where they share a single unique gay identity. The changing identitarian designation of same-sex attracted people (see my analysis in Chapter 2) also shows how Chinese people embrace a more self-conscious sexual identification that enables the once criminalised and pathologised homosexuals "to be cheerful and gay" (pun intended).⁸ Simultaneously, the gay/straight binary has also become rooted in Chinese same-sex discourses.

This "global gayness", most notably theorised by Dennis Altman (1996/1997/2001), leads to many academic debates concerning its adoption in Asian and Chinese queer studies.

local same-sex community, and Tong (2005a/2005b/2007) on self-identification, local slang, and the formation of native male same-sex community, to name a few.

⁸ This comes from the old English idiom "work while you work, play while you play, that is the way, to be cheerful and gay" in which the word "gay" holds its original meaning as a synonym of "cheerful".

I owe this pun to the late sci-fi writer Sir Arthur C. Clarke who often told the journalists that he was "merely mildly cheerful" when asked about whether he was gay—while the journalists were curious about his sexual orientation, he took the word "gay" in its original meaning to avoid straightforward discussions about his same-sex conducts that were known to his friends and to the public (see Jonas 2008 and Moorcock 2008).

Rofel (2007, 85-110) considers the notion of “global gayness” inadequate in addressing the cultural and historical specificities of “Chinese gay men” and the formation and articulation of local same-sex desire; in a broader context, she also remains sceptical about an imagined global gay community of “horizontal comradeship” (110). Chiang (2014a), on the other hand, describes Rofel’s approach as “cultural particularism” (27) that claims what it represents is unproblematically authentic and genuinely different (36). Chiang thus proposes to pair up gayness/queerness and Chineseness (e.g. “queer Sinophonicity”) as *mutual generative forces* instead of arguing for a “Chinese gayness” completely marking itself off from the “global gay identity” and crying for its uniqueness against the global flows of gay texts and images.⁹

These arguments reveal that, the nonconformities between local cultures and imported gay cultures, or between Chineseness and gayness, have become a major issue of concern in Chinese societies and the studies of them. The emergence and popularity of *tongzhi* as an indigenous label further diversifies and problematises local sexual identity politics and same-sex social discourses in the global matrix. Along with the *tongzhi* identity there also emerges a non-confrontational social discourse that brings same-sex relationship into the register of familial kinship—Chou Wah-shan’s (2000/2001) famous “coming out as coming home” strategy—in comparison with the confrontational “coming out of the closet” strategy in the West.¹⁰ Regional same-sex identities also come into play in various urban areas such as Hong Kong, Chengdu, and Taiwan (see Chapter 2). The hybrid *jiyou* identity blending together English, Cantonese, and Mandarin slangs, as discussed earlier, presents the latest variation of the increasing diversified and contested local sexual identity politics and social discourses.

⁹ Arjun Appadurai has a more nuanced description of such local and global, homogenising and heterogenising forces as “mutual effort of sameness and difference to cannibalize one another and thereby proclaim their successful hijacking of the twin Enlightenment ideas of the triumphantly universal and the resiliently particular” (1996, 43).

¹⁰ For discussions and critiques of Chou’s “coming out as coming home” strategy, see Bao (2011b), Liu and Ding (2005), and Wei (2012). More discussion on this strategy and the changing queer Chinese kinship structures is offered in the following chapter.

Demonstrated by the changing same-sex social discourses is the demand for a non-Western, non-dichotomous, and perhaps non-confrontational understanding of same-sex sexuality that resonates more with Chinese culture and philosophy, and with the remote but more fluid and nuanced Chinese same-sex tradition. In today's Chinese societies, the residue of the pre-modern same-sex tradition, the imported old Western sexology, the more recent Western-style LGBT activism, and various forms of local understandings of queer sexualities all have their roles to play in the polyphonic local and global, regional and national, liberal and neoliberal, and traditional and modern sex-related cultures and global queer mobilities.¹¹ This diversity parallels today's vibrant queer cultures in Chinese societies beyond the mere convergence or contestation between Chineseness and Western gayness. This section presents a backcloth against which today's queer Chinese screen cultures can be better situated and understood.

East Palace, West Closet: Queer Cinemas

East Palace, West Closet is the title of my previous writing on queer Chinese cinemas to highlight their connections and tensions with Western queer cinemas and queer politics (2012). Queer Chinese feature films have already been widely written about under the names of Chinese cinemas, Chinese-language cinema, transnational and pan-Chinese cinema, and most recently Sinophone cinema (see Lu 2012). Although some of these concepts are recent coinage, queer cinema as an ontological category has a long history in China societies (see Shih 2007, viii). Same-sex elements can be found lurking sub-textually in some Chinese-language films since the 1970s, as Wei (2010) observes, but the first major cinematic “blowout” of queer-themed Chinese feature films started only in the 1990s. This timeframe

¹¹ For more discussions of the diversified same-sex identities, communities, and cultures in various Chinese societies, see also Bao (2011a/2012), Chen, Wang, and Liu (2010), Erni and Spires (2005), J. Ho (2010), L. Ho (2010b), Hu and Wang (2013), Huang (2010/2011), Kong (2011b/2012), Leung (2011), Li (2006), Liu (2010), Martin (2003b), Rofel (2007/2010), Wei (2012), Wong (2008), and Wong (2010).

paralleled the decriminalisation of consent male-male intercourse in Hong Kong (1991) and in the Mainland (1997) as well as the World Health Organization's removal of homosexuality from its *International Classification of Diseases* (1990).

Explicitly queer-themed Chinese cinemas emerged with several globally acclaimed masterpieces produced in various Chinese societies from the early 1990s to the early 2000s. *Farewell My Concubine* (*Ba Wang Bie Ji*, Chen Kaige, 1993), a historical epic set in China, marks the first Chinese queer film classic (C.Y. Chiang 2011; Dai 2000; Lau 1995; Leung 2010; Metzger 2000; Wei 2012; Xu 1997; Zhang 1999); *East Palace, West Palace* offers the only vivid feature-film depiction of police harassment facing cruising gay men in urban China at the turn of the 1990s (Berry 1998; M. Chiang 2011; Lim 2006; Wei 2012); and *The Wedding Banquet* (*Xi Yan*, Ang Lee, 1993), winner of Berlin International Film Festival and a box-office hit in Taiwan, portrays cross-racial gay relationship in the Sinophone America (Chiang 1998; Chua 1999) and is often compared by researchers (Dilley 2007; Leung 2008) with the director's later masterpiece *Brokeback Mountain* (2005). The list continues with Wong Kar-wai's iconic *Happy Together* (*Chun Guang Zha Xie*, 1997) shot in Argentina (Grossman 2000; Tambling 2003); *Lan Yu* (2001), a film directed by Hong Kong filmmaker Stanley Kwan that puts a same-sex tragedy in China's tremendous social upheaval in the late twentieth century (Chan 2008; Eng 2010b); and *Fleeing by Night* (*Ye Ben*, Hsu Li-Kong and Yin Chi, 2000), a movie set in 1930s' China and America that presents an early queer Chinese melodrama (Chan 2008).

Shot in different locations with different foci, this cluster of explicitly queer-themed feature films marked the emergence of queer Chinese cultures on film screens. These films often situate same-sex relationships in special historical moments or social environments. *Farewell My Concubine* begins with the collapse of the Qing dynasty and the dawn of the Republican era, and traces the story of the two male characters across half a century through

the Second World War, the Chinese Civil War, and the Cultural Revolution. The individual struggle under various social upheavals is one of the major themes running through the movie. *East Palace, West Palace* is set in the pre-decriminalisation period and focuses on male-to-female transvestites cruising in a public park in Beijing. *The Wedding Banquet* takes us to Sinophone America and features a Taiwanese-American gay couple, at the time when Chinese cinematic gayness was still scarce. *Happy Together* came out when the sovereignty of Hong Kong was transferred back to China, with two male characters positioned in South America and distanced from both Hong Kong and the Mainland. The story in *Lan Yu* evolves along the enormous social changes in China from the 1980s to the 1990s, as well the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. Set in the early Republican period, *Fleeing by Night* centres on same-sex romance on the Chinese Opera stage in Republican China and America in the 1930s.

Moreover, from the very beginning, queer Chinese cinemas have shown a strong inclination towards transnational and transregional production and distribution. *Farewell My Concubine* was shot in the PRC by a Mainland director, starring iconic Hong Kong singer and film-star Leslie Cheung, and attracted global attention as the only Chinese film to date crowned with Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. *East Palace, West Palace* gained its fame first in Europe and other Sinophone communities outside China, when it was smuggled by the director's friends to overseas film festivals without the Chinese authorities' permission (Lim 2006). The US and Taiwan co-produced *The Wedding Banquet* (see Lee and Schamus 2004) stages gay love in America with a leading character from Sinophone Taiwan and a supporting character from Mainland China. *Happy Together* is a Hong Kong film set and shot in Argentina, *Lan Yu* is made by a Hong Kong director with Mainland Chinese actors and producers, and *Fleeing by Night* received funding from Mainland China and Taiwan and depicts characters coming back to China from America.

In other words, these films were mostly co-produced and co-funded across different Chinese societies. The distribution of the films often crossed the borders within and outside the (imagined) Sinophone sphere and reached both Chinese and non-Chinese audiences. Also, most of these queer filmic offerings were banned from theatrical release in the PRC, although some of them were shot in Mainland China featuring local talents. On the other hand, however, these films have nonetheless circulated back to China, often as legal and illegal copies of DVDs and digital video files shared online, which further destabilise the borders between the PRC and the Sinophone sphere. The hegemonic official productions of hetero-nationalist cultures in China (and in other Sinophone and non-Sinophone societies alike) are also questioned by the queer themes of the films as well as by the border-crossing productions and distributions of these movies.

Explicitly queer-themed feature films have since then proliferated and diversified in Chinese societies, especially in Hong Kong and Taiwan where filmmakers have turned to the youth genre to attract young filmgoers. Handsome young male characters, who have proven popular among both gay men and straight women, have gradually come to dominate queer Sinophone screens, starting with Hong Kong director Yonfan's 1998 film *Bishonen* (*Mei Shaonian Zhi Lian*, literally "Love of the Beautiful Boys"). In Taiwan, *Blue Gate Crossing* (*Lanse Damen*, Yee Chih-yen, 2002), *Formula 17* (*Shiqisui de Tiankong*, Chen Yin-jung, 2004), and *Eternal Summer* (*Shengxia Guangnian*, Leste Chen, 2006) all follow the same recipe targeting young audiences. Such a marriage between youth film and queer film is not merely a coincidence, but deep-rooted in local cinematic concerns with teen issues, the Chinese same-sex tradition, and girls' love of androphilic romance and eroticism as part of the modern boys' love (BL) culture.

Taiwan cinema has a long tradition in portraying youth with a deep solicitude for young generations, exemplified most notably by such Taiwan New Cinema masterpieces as

Dust in the Wind (Lian Lian Fengchen, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, 1986) and *A Brighter Summer Day* (Gulingjie Shaonian Sharen Shijian, Edward Yang, 1991). After the emergence of queer films, this genre was soon picked up by filmmakers to generate the more mainstreamed queer-youth formula. As Taiwanese filmmaker Pan Chih-yuan puts it, when the queer-youth movie becomes a popular genre and a reliable investment, Taiwan's commercial film market seems to be left with only two genres: homosexual film and non-homosexual film (Yuan 2007; see also Shiao 2008 for a critical discussion). He argues that overcapitalising on the queer-youth genre may exhaust the audience, so he has made a non-queer youth feature *Da-Yu: The Touch of Fate* (Zhijian de Zhongliang, 2006). However, in this very film he squeezes in a shot of the teenage protagonist naked, which carries little narrative weight but rather resembles the cherishment of young male body in the queer-youth genre. The value of young boys' corporal beauty echoes the Chinese male same-sex tradition that favours juvenile charm and delicate youth corporeality (see Wei 2012), and also intermingles with the boys' love fandom that is popular in East Asia and originates from modern Japanese manga and anime (see Wei 2014).

Sinophone lesbian films have also flourished in commercial film markets. Yonfan, director of the aforementioned queer-youth film *Bishonen*, situates female intimacy in his historical drama *Peony Pavilion* (*Youyuan Jingmeng*, 2001). France-based Chinese director Dai Sijie offers *The Chinese Botanist's Daughters* (*Zhiwu Xuejia de Nüer*, 2006). In Taiwan, Zero Chou's *Spider Lilies* (*Ci Qing*, also known as *Mandala*, 2007) took home the Teddy Award for Best Gay/Lesbian Feature Film at the Berlin Film Festival, followed by her well-crafted *Drifting Flowers* (*Piaolang Qingchun*, 2008). Other films focusing on lesbian women or with female homoerotic/romantic elements have also made to commercial film and TV screens in various Chinese societies (see Martin 2010 and Khoo 2014 for discussions), although these works often catch less attention than those authored by award-winning

filmmakers. In Mainland China, explicit portrayal of lesbianism cannot pass the state's film censorship, and local filmmakers have to implicitly bury lesbian elements in the storylines if they want their films to be commercially released in the local market.

In addition to the themes of male youth and female intimacy, queer cinemas have indeed seen more diversity during the past decade or so in Chinese societies, such as the drag-queen spectacular *Splendid Float* (*Yanguang Sishe Gewutuan*, Zero Chou, 2004), the Singapore, Hong Kong, and Australia co-produced family drama *Rice Rhapsody* (*Hai Nan Ji Fan*, Kenneth Bi, 2004), and young queer migrant's coming-of-age story *Innocent* (*Zhi Ai Moshenren*, Simon Chung, 2005). Similar to previous queer-themed Chinese cinemas, these newer films are often banned from the PRC for theatrical release, where the audiences have to rely on alternative (online or offline, legal or illegal) distribution channels to view them. These films also share some common characteristics. First, compared to their predecessors, these newer movies put much more emphasis on ordinary queer life in contemporary urban environments. What the queer characters have to confront in these films are often their own identity crises as urban queer youth, rather than large-scale social upheavals. Second, these movies also mark the emergence or re-emergence of some filmmakers as queer auteurs, such as lesbian-identified director Zero Chou who was initially famous for her work in mainstream documentary. Also, unlike early queer Chinese cinema, these films seem to attract much less attention from researchers, despite their much more diverse portrayal of queer sexualities.¹²

Early and newer queer-themed feature films in Chinese societies also share a lot in common. First, transregional/national funding and production are always popular. Second, some films (*Farewell My Concubine*, *Fleeing by Night*, and *Peony Pavilion*) intensively engage with cross-dressing performance in Chinese opera cultures (Wei 2012; see also Chou

¹² For individual case studies of these movies, see for example Hu (2005) on *Formula 17*, Shiao (2008) on *Eternal Summer*, and Yue (2007) on *Rice Rhapsody*.

1997 and Li 2003). Third, these films often demonstrate a tendency to re-write Western same-sex identities in relation to Chinese understandings of family and kinship (Berry 2001): same-sex relationships on queer Chinese screens tend to “come back” into the kinship system, rather than “coming out” of the familial register. Fourth, young male characters onscreen often appear as sad, lonely, sensitive, and mentally fragile (Berry 2000)—the queer image of the “sad young man” described by Richard Dyer (2002, 116-36). Last, same-sex intimacy in these films is often entangle with heterosexual relationships onscreen (Wei 2010).

While big-screen queer films are on the crest of waves in Sinophone film markets such as Hong Kong and Taiwan, queer cinema in China is another story. Without state subsidy or commercial investment, queer films in China are still often independently funded, shot under the radar with no license granted by the film bureau, “smuggled” overseas for film festivals without the authorities’ permission, and then “distributed” in China mainly as illegal DVD copies and digital video files online. This was the case for *East Palace, West Palace* in 1996, and remained largely true for *Spring Fever* (*Chunfeng Chenzui de Yewan*, Lou Ye) in 2009. One major difference was that when *Spring Fever* received the Best Screenplay award at the Cannes Film Festival, mainstream media in China was able to report the news and explain in details about how this film was made without the authorities’ permission. Back in the 1990s few underground films could enjoy such media exposure, even though they were acclaimed overseas. *Spring Fever*, under the pressure of authorities, has however been taken off from *Mtime*, a major film website in China which intensively reported the film’s tour in Cannes.¹³

When queer cinematic waves travel across Sinophone societies but often bounce off government censorship and film regulation in China, “alternative” queer filmic practices have

¹³ The news reports are still available on *Mtime*, but the movie has been removed from the director’s repertoire.

gradually emerged. While queer feature production is financially and politically risky in the PRC, low-budget and self-funded digital filmmaking has proven to be a practical way out. Director Cui Zi'en is one of the most renowned filmmakers in this underground digital film movement, with about 20 works officially under his name including short film, feature-length drama, and documentary. He is the most frequently discussed queer DV (“digital video”) filmmaker in English-language academia, most recently by Spencer (2012), Yue (2012a), and Zhou (2011/2014), and is widely considered a queer auteur (Berry 2004). A renowned queer activist, writer, filmmaker, and a professor at Beijing Film Academy, Cui Zi'en is not only a director but a widely known public icon in the queer Chinese film circles.

Other DV filmmakers who do not share Cui's high profile, however, appear to spark much less curiosity for scholarly investigation, although their works are often distributed through the same (underground) networks as recorded by Spencer (2012) and discussed by Cui (2010) and Yue (2012a). More specifically, independent DV films, including those made by Cui, are often circulated within small queer film circles (e.g. queer film festivals) and consumed at much smaller scales (at film salons, for instance). Compared to the queer-youth genre in Hong Kong and Taiwan which often features rising young movie stars, these underground films seldom attract media attention and often remain in the uncandled darkness, never becoming known outside the queer film circuits, even to local queer communities in China. However, these digital works nonetheless constitute a brook of non-mainstream queer visual narratives paralleling other cinematic currents that flow into the ocean of queer screen cultures in Chinese societies.

But there still awaits an epistemological myth that needs to be exposed: should we regard the aforementioned experimental DV films, together with some other newer queer movies discussed above, as the Chinese equivalent of Anglo-American New Queer Cinema? New Queer Cinema, or NQC, is a notion often credited to film scholar and critic B. Ruby

Rich. Her 1992 articles in *The Village Voice* and *Sight & Sound* first proposed the idea of NQC to celebrate the emergence of fresh independent queer movies portraying contemporary gay and lesbian life in its own right. The concept of NQC soon conquered the realm of film studies and become *de rigueur* in queer film criticism. As time marches on, this notion has accumulated great influence as a conceptual framework for analysis and an intellectual tool for critique, and assumed wide popularity along the way: the edited anthology *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader* came out in 2004, before B. Ruby Rich herself published *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut* in 2013 to celebrate the “coming of age” of this theory.

However, the notion of NQC *per se* has never been fully settled regarding which films count as NQC. When this concept has dispersed into numerous cinematic cultures and film scholarship across the world, the clear boundaries that mark NQC off from other queer cinematic practices have also become blurred. Zhou (2011/2014) categorises the avant-garde works crafted by Cui Zi'en as part of this global New Queer Cinema movement, because these films fit NQC's common characteristics summarised by Michele Aaron (2004): NQC speaks for the “sub-subgroups” such as queers of colour and gay sex-workers, remains unapologetic about their characters, focuses on contemporary queer life and defies the sanctity of the homophobic past, and deviates from conventional cinematic aesthetics. I am, however, not fully convinced by Zhou's categorisation. I contend that, if we are to fly the NQC banner, we need to first shake off its dust and scrutinise its historical context and initial usage, before we sail to trace its intellectual voyage.

As Rich ([2000] 2013, 131) reminds us, NQC “owes its genesis not to money but to repression, namely the savage attacks by U.S. right-wing politicians on government funding” for queer filmmaking at the turn of the 1990s. Although the very idea of NQC has been developed by other researchers into polyphony, Rich appears to be quite sceptical towards today's “mainstreamed” queer cinemas, and remains nostalgic for community-based queer

filmmaking popular at the time when she first theorised NQC. Moreover, she insists that New Queer Cinema should be “fresh, edgy, low-budget, inventive, unapologetic, sexy, and stylistically daring” (*ibid.*). As a concept, NQC may have proven promising for fruitful intellectual analyses of queer cinemas of these characteristics, but its wholesale application from the context of American politics to Chinese societies nonetheless risks cutting off queer Chinese cinemas from their own traditions and histories.

More specifically, what NQC tells me about the Chinese cinemas under scrutiny is how independent, edgy, inventive, and daring they could be, and what similarities they share with their Anglo-American counterparts. What NQC fails to address is how these films resonate with the rich history of Chinese same-sex tradition and film production, in which ways they are grounded in local economies, politics, aesthetics, and communities, and where to situate these films in relation to previous and subsequent queer cinematic offerings in Chinese societies. Perhaps NQC as a film movement can “defy the sanctity of the past” (Aaron 2004, 4), but we as researchers cannot. Again, it is certainly not my intention to propose a dichotomous battle of China versus the West, or the local versus the global; rather, what I attempt to point out is that the NQC framework is epistemologically liberating and limiting at the same time in Chinese screen studies.

Finally, I would like to introduce some recent (post-2008) queer films in Chinese societies. In addition to the emergence of micro-film along with the rise of queer social media, which will be discussed later, the realm of queer feature film has also seen some exciting development. In the PRC’s mainstream film market, as I have discussed, we have seen some (deep-buried) minor plotlines featuring female same-sex love (e.g. *Finding Mr. Right* and *Sweet Eighteen*) and some supporting gay male characters without effeminate stereotyping (e.g. *Let the Bullets Fly*), although explicitly queer-themed features are still often banned from commercial release. In the Sinophone Taiwan, youth and queer-youth

genres remain popular, and more diverse queer cinematic explorations such as midlife-crisis melodrama *Will You Still Love me Tomorrow* (*Mingtian Jide Aishang Wo*, Arvin Chen, 2013, banned in the PRC from theatrical release) have also made to local and international screens.

Furthermore, UK-based Cambodia-Chinese filmmaker Hong Khaou has offered his first queer feature *Lilting* (*Qingqing Yaohuang*, 2014) staging iconic Chinese actress Cheng Pei-pei and British film star Ben Whishaw. Shown in quite a few queer film clubs in China (in the form of digital video-files ripped from DVDs and shared online), *Lilting* is however mainly an English-language film set in London with limited Chinese-language dialogue. In Sinophone Malaysia, young generations of digital filmmakers like Desmond Bing-yen Ti have also emerged and turned their eyes to micro-film and queer social media (discussed in Chapter 5). More established Chinese-Malaysian film directors include Tsai Ming-Liang and Yen Tan, globally acclaimed for their cinematic portrayal of same-sex erotica across their repertoires. But Yen Tan makes most of his films in America with English-speaking characters, and whether such films count as Chinese or Sinophone cinemas is still under debate (see Chan and Willis 2012/2014).

Among the newly emerged queer auteurs on Chinese screens, queer filmmakers based in Sinophone Hong Kong have made perhaps the most noticeable and notable presence in recent years: Kit Hung (also known as Hung Wing-Kit) has directed his first feature production *Soundless Wind Chime* (*Wusheng Fengling*, 2009), winning multiple awards in international film festivals, after producing several short Chinese-language queer films in the past decade. Entrepreneur-turned filmmaker Scud (also known as Yun Xiang) self-funds and directs his ambitious queer film trilogy *City Without Baseball* (*Wu Ye Zhi Cheng*, 2008), *Permanent Residence* (*Yongjiu Juliu*, 2009), and *Amphetamine* (*Anfeitaming*, 2010), followed by his experimental film *Love Actually Sucks* (*Ai Hen Lan*, 2011) and another feature-length production *Voyage* (*You*, 2013). These two directors have both emerged in Hong Kong as

independent directors with strong and open self-identification with cinematic gayness, and their works are all explicitly queer-themed from the very beginning. Their own career paths and films have also demonstrated a strong international background, a point to which I shall return in Chapter 4.

Compared to the passionate clinches of early queer Chinese cinemas with historical upheavals and later filmmakers' experiments with various genres and styles, newly-emerged directors like Hung and Scud opt for large-scale multinational production to directly portray contemporary cosmopolitan queer life through a proud and confident cinematic retelling of their own stories. The autobiographical films *Soundless Wind Chime* and *Permanent Residence* turn out to be Hung's and Scud's most acclaimed works. The main characters in their films, furthermore, are often much more self-conscious with and confident about their sexualities and body images, although the "sad lonely young men" struggling to confront their own queer identities still have a stage in these movies. However, these fresh cinematic contributions from Hung and Scud on queer Chinese screens have not yet caught wide academic attention (save for Wei 2012 and Yue 2015 on *Permanent Residence*), and my subsequent investigation of queer screen cultures will focus on these post-2008 cinematic offerings, together with urban queer film clubs and digital queer social media.

From Film Festivals to Film Clubs

Queer film festivals have played an important role in the development of queer cinemas in the West (Richards 2013) and in Asia (Kim 2007), as well as in the history of queer Chinese cultures as well. The term *tongzhi* as a popular same-sex identity, as discussed in Chapter 2, originated from the first Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival (HKLGF) in 1989, and was introduced into Taiwan in 1992 when the prestigious Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival featured a special section of gay and lesbian film (Lim 2008, 237). The HKLGF has continued for more than 25 consecutive years to today, and so does its early

legacy, namely the *tongzhi* identity. The Golden Horse also features a queer film section each year, now under the name “Gender-Crossing” (*Xingbie Yuejie*), while the Taiwan Woman’s Film Festival also has a similar queer screening section each time. The first Lesbian Film Festival concluded in 2005 in the Sinophone Taiwan, and the first Taiwan International Queer Film Festival (TIQFF) was held in September 2014. Echoing the popularity of the queer-youth genre in Hong Kong’s and Taiwan’s commercial film markets, queer-related movies are also seen in other film festivals that are not specifically queer-themed.

The scene of queer film festivals in the PRC is a completely different story. As I have discussed, due to state regulation and censorship, explicitly queer-themed films are not allowed to be produced, theatrically released, screened in local film festivals, or exported for overseas screening. Queer and other independent or underground film festivals in China have to fly under the radar while risking government harassment. A vivid description of such underground film scenes can be found in a recent account of the 9th Beijing Independent Film Festival: the organising office was abruptly (but not unexpectedly) shut down by the local authorities, and the film screening was allegedly terminated but actually moved to secret venues, the locations of which were only shared through word of mouth among audiences. Whenever the participants in these secret venues heard people or cars passing by during the screenings, they would become very wary as if people from the Public Security Bureau were coming to check on them (Ma 2012; see Berry 2009 for an earlier account and Wu 2013 for the latest; see also Hjort 2012, 15 for a discussion of film and risk in a different context).

Beijing Queer Film Festival (BJQFF) is very much a similar case. Founded in 2001, BJQFF has been held seven times as of early 2015 and almost every time was a “guerrilla

war” against the authorities.¹⁴ Constantly facing the risk of government harassment for over a decade, BJQFF has developed a whole set of techniques and strategies to minimise and re-distribute the risk. The 6th BJQFF held in June 2013 was a good example. The organising committee chose to keep a “low key” and opted for little to no publicity; the only information they revealed to the public was a blog post on April 24, saying the festival would be held in Beijing and they were “recruiting” audiences, especially those from inland and rural areas in China.¹⁵ This very cautious strategy was a sad irony: film festivals usually seek maximum publicity to get as much media and public attention as possible; based on their judgment of risk, however, the organisers of the 6th BJQFF chose to recruit and hand-pick audiences to avoid drawing too much attention from the authorities.¹⁶

For queer people in China and those interested in queer films, another way to partake in the festivals is to make acquaintance with someone working in the organising committees. In a public lecture held in Beijing LGBT Centre in mid-2013, for example, I ran into an independent queer film director who happened to be in that year’s BJQFF committee. I introduced myself as a researcher, and was then invited by him to the festival. I left my email for him so he could send me more information, but only three days before the opening ceremony did I receive the invitation and the programme from him. In his email dated on 16 June 2013, he specifically asked us not to share any information online about the festival. In the official invitation enclosed in his email, the organising committee further stated that “any information concerning BJQFF should not be openly circulated”, and “please pretend that you do not know anything [about BJQFF] and you are not there [at the festival]”.

¹⁴ They even made a documentary called *Our Story: BJQFF's Ten-Year Guerrilla War (Wo Men de Gushi: Beijing Kuer Yingzhan Shinian Youjizhan)*. This film was showcased in the opening ceremony of the 5th BJQFF in 2011.

¹⁵ See BJQFF (2013a).

¹⁶ My analyses in this part find inspirations from the sociological theorisation of risk and uncertainty, especially by the works of Douglas (1985/1990/1992), Lash (2000), Lupton (2013), Tulloch (2008), and Zinn (2008) on risk and culture, and that of Hjort (2012) on risk and film.

Such incognito and underground operation is not the sole risk management strategy adopted by the festival committee. To re-distribute contingencies and uncertainties, they brought different partners and sponsors to the 2013 festival. The screening sessions were not only convened in local bars, cafés, and film-fan salons, but were also held in and sponsored by the French Embassy, the Dutch Embassy, and the Beijing American Centre (part of the US Embassy in China). One session on 23 June 2013 was even held on a moving bus (see BJQFF 2013b). Such venue choice arguably made it difficult for the local authorities to interrupt the screenings or to terminate the festival. Their tenacious efforts successfully led to a queer film festival held in the centre of Beijing “without incurring any government interference”, for the first time in its 12-year history, although it was still under the surveillance of the authorities (BJQFF 2013b).

But every year has been a different situation. In the 7th festival running from September 2014 through to the end of the year, the organisers were asked by the local authorities before the opening ceremony to terminate the festival, and the bus company was prohibited by the Public Security Bureau to rent any vehicle to the festival (Wu 2015). The moving-bus screening had to be relocated onto a train travelling from the centre of Beijing to a small town on its outskirts. More important, the three-day intensive screening typical of the festival in previous years was forced to be extended to a four-month weekly or fortnightly screening-marathon inside and outside Beijing, so that the audiences would not flood into a few venues within a few days which would much more likely to attract the authorities’ attention. In other words, this queer film festival had to turn itself into a regular queer film club (discussed below) in order to survive. Once again, the publicity in 2014 was kept to a minimal level to avoid catching too much attention, although the authorities still got hold of the festival plans even before it started (Wu 2015).

Ma (2012) argues that such guerrilla-style independent film festivals in China have enhanced “a feeling of collaboration” and collusion against the hegemonic production of official cultures. If her observation is accurate, then queer film festivals such as BJQFF should also contribute to a stronger sense of community and belonging among sexual minority groups and queer film enthusiasts in urban China. However, I contend that such a hypothesis needs to be further examined in a risk-focused context. During my field research in 2013, for example, one anonymous informant told me that, despite his interest in queer films, he did not attend the latest BJQFF after he learned that the festival had a long history of being harassed by the government. He was afraid that if police interfered, the audiences in the screening venues might be held for questioning and end up with a record with the Public Security Bureau. Such a record may put an end to one’s career, and it may cause a conflict in one’s family.

This is not the only reason that people see attendance at a queer film festival in China as risky. For those who are attracted to the same sex but have not yet “come out of the closet”, partaking in such an event risks exposing their sexual orientation and queer identity to others. Even if the festival runs smoothly without government interference, like the 2013’s BJQFF, attending screening sessions in foreign embassies requires presenting a valid photo ID, often a passport, which could be a problem for those who do not want to openly reveal their identities. Such risk calculation results in some potential viewers withdrawing from the festival and to some extent being alienated from a queer film scene that is supposed to build a stronger sense of community. During my subsequent field trip in 2014, furthermore, some festival screenings were held on weekend nights, at the same time as local queer film club screenings. When I interviewed a filmmaker in the festival committee, he told me that on the previous night the screening did not attract any audiences at all other than the festival organisers and volunteers. But in the film club I chose to attend on the same night, we had

almost two dozen participants and a very good discussion about queer films. This might be an isolated case, but underground queer film festivals in the PRC can be less appealing to local queer people, compared to the smaller-scale and less political queer film clubs.

While independent film festivals often face harassment from the local authorities, and the Chinese word “*jie*” (festival) itself has become a politically sensitive term that is often replaced with the word “*zhan*” (exhibition) by the festival organisers, a decentralised and more flexible nationwide queer film tour has been established by China Queer Independent Films (CQIF). Founded in 2008 by queer artists, cineastes, and activists, CQIF has named the project “*xunzhan*” (exhibition-tour) but translated it as “film festival tour” in English, implying that the tour is designed as an alternative to queer film festivals. In lieu of a festival typically held during a short period of time and often in fixed locations, which is more likely to attract the authorities’ attention, CQIF’s tour is carried out throughout the year in different cities across the country, which appears to be a more sophisticated and effective “guerrilla” strategy. CQIF has also taken Chinese queer films to overseas Sinophone communities (e.g. the screening of two queer Chinese documentaries in New York City on 16 February 2013) and introduced queer visual culture to students in rural and suburban areas (e.g. the January 2014 school tour in less developed north-western China).

However, the “film festival tour” is usually carried out on isolated occasions, with only a few films screened before the tour moves to the next city. The guerrilla-style mobility across the country requires a lot of time and effort to find suitable venues and ship films (and sometimes filmmakers as special guests) to different regions across the wide expanse of Mainland China. Therefore, screenings are often held once every one or two months during recent years, and the tour seldom revisits the same city or the same venue. Similar to my experience with Beijing Queer Film Festival, the information about the film tour is often posted on the CQIF blog only a few days before each session, making it really hard for

people not in the region to participate. As an ethnographer I am able to gain access to the screenings through a friendly “gatekeeper” working in the committee, but traveling across the country each time to a different location (with very long intervals between screenings) makes it impossible for researchers to accumulate enough data within limited timeframe. In addition, this guerrilla-style film tour might be able to build a strong connection between those who organise the tour at the national level and those who facilitate the events at local levels across a vast geographical area of China, but its ability in cultivating local queer communities is curtailed due to its very short stay in each location with limited interaction with local audiences.

While the brave and determined queer cineastes and activists have been playing “hide-and-seek” with the authorities, with some success during recent years, a different type of social queer film event is emerging in urban China. In Guangzhou, one of the three largest metropolises in the PRC, an LGBT social society first tried in late 2008 to run a film screening session and cooperated with CQIF later to introduce queer films to local audiences. A club-style film screening series has been established since 2009 as a communal event for local queer people, sometimes running irregularly with numerous interruptions in school vacations each year since this society is located in an area crowded with universities and colleges. In February 2009, a queer film club was initiated in Beijing and has kept its weekly operation through to today without major interruptions. Since then, queer film clubs have been blossoming in urban China; as of early 2015, at least nine queer film clubs are running weekly or fortnightly in six different cities (Table 1).

Location	Name	Active since	Owners	Current Status
Beijing	The Fellowship of <i>Tongzhi</i> Film-lovers (<i>Huo Ying Tong Ren</i>)	13 Feb 2009	freelance cineaste with NGO	running regularly without major interruptions
	Concentric Circle (<i>Tongxinyuan Qinyinghui</i>)	19 May 2012	psychoanalyst with NGO	
	Two-City Café (<i>Shuangcheng Kafei</i>)	15 Dec 2012	Taiwanese café owners	
Shanghai	Same-Love Cinema (<i>Tong Ai Yingyuan</i>)	26 Jun 2013	gay group with lesbian NGO	running regularly with interruptions from 15 Aug to 17 Oct 2013 and 7 Dec 2013 to 4 Jan 2014
Kunming	<i>Tongzhi</i> Film Talk (Tong Ren Ying Hua)	25 May 2013	LGBT NGO	running but occasionally irregularly
Shenzhen	Queer Film Salon (<i>Ku'er Yingxiang Shalong</i>)	24 Mar 2013	LGBT NGO	terminated after 10 May 2014 with the NGO still operating other queer social events
Nanjing	Same-Sky Cinema (<i>Tong Tian Yingyuan</i>)	28 Aug 2010	LGBT NGO	running regularly with interruption from 27 May 2012 to 21 Mar 2014
Hangzhou	MOTSS Cinema (<i>Maoci Yingyuan</i>)	8 Dec 2012	university-based queer society	running regularly except during school holidays
Guangzhou	Film & Snack for <i>Tongzhi</i> (<i>Tongzhi Ying Shi Hui</i>)	8 Aug 2009	university-based queer society	terminated after 29 June 2014 with the society losing its venue in early 2015

Table 1 An Incomplete List of Queer Film Clubs in China

This list of queer film clubs is by no means exhaustive; rather, I intend to highlight some patterns I found about these clubs in China as shown in the table. First, all the clubs are located in large metropolitan areas—municipalities Beijing and Shanghai, provincial capitals Kunming, Nanjing, Hangzhou, and Guangzhou, and the high-tech economic centre Shenzhen (a.k.a. China's Silicon Valley). These cities often attract large numbers of migrants from rural and less-developed areas for education and employment. Queer social groups and communal queer film screenings may well exist in other urban areas of China, but long-term regular queer film clubs seem to have only emerged in large national and regional economic centres. Also, the clubs in the list all started quite recently after 2008; before that, queer film festivals and other screening events already came into being, albeit often in underground operations.

Second, when I introduce my research on queer film clubs to overseas researchers in academic conferences, they tend to assume that these clubs are underground activities flying under the radar. But I would rather describe the film clubs as semi-underground queer public spaces. Almost all these clubs are operated by or in association with LGBT NGOs, queer social groups, and university clubs and societies. Most of these organisations are in fact legally registered with local authorities under different categories such as public health and HIV/AIDS intervention. In addition, all these film clubs or the groups behind them have public profiles on online queer social networks such as Feizan, as well as their own blogs, microblogs, or WeChat (*WeiXin*) accounts on mainstream online and mobile social media. Each screening session will be publicly announced online in advance through social media and their own sites, compared to queer film festivals whose operation often has to be kept in secret facing the risk of authorities' crackdown. Even there exist some film clubs completely hidden from public eyes, I wonder whether they operate more like small cinephilic groups instead of clubs, insomuch as a long-term regular film club has to attract enough participants

with a certain level of renown in local queer communities in order to develop and remain in operation.

Third, some queer NGOs do face pressures from local authorities and may be temporarily shut down during important national politic events and conferences. That is often because they have actively engaged in social activism fighting for gay rights, instead of the small-scale communal activities they organise such as film club, speed-dating, karaoke, and board games. Also, some screening venues (e.g. NGO offices) are hidden in large residential compounds without any sign outside to avoid potential public hostility, but in fact none of these film clubs entail a strict membership. A lot of participants are casual members who otherwise have little personal ties with the clubs or the queer social organisations behind them. Only when the screenings continue for an extended period do some attendees become loyal members and does a sense of community emerge (further discussed in subsequent chapters). Because of these reasons, I define the film clubs of concern as semi-underground queer publics in urban China for regular film screenings and discussions in local queer communities.

I choose Beijing for my case study after visiting five film clubs in three different cities, as I have discussed earlier, because this city has as many as three queer film clubs each with a different focus and a distinctive organising style, including the oldest club in China running for more than six consecutive years. The emergence of a gay-friendly coffee house and film clubs owned by two Taiwanese gay activists in the centre of Beijing also presents an interesting case to analyse queer cultural flows and counterflows between Mainland China and overseas Sinophone societies. I will discuss one queer film club in Beijing in each of the following three chapters, respectively under the theme of queer kinship, queer migrations, and queer social classes, as well as in relation to other forms of queer screen cultures such as

cinema and digital social media. Other film clubs in the list that I have visited were briefly discussed in Chapter 2.

Regular queer social interactions in film clubs, to conclude, have greater potential as ethnographic sites for research that are more pertinent to queer people's everyday life and leisure, compared to the guerrilla-style film festivals and tours. The emergence of queer film clubs in China marks the birth of a different kind of queer screen culture and a new variation of queer screen Chineseness/Sinophonicities. Distinctive from the politically sensitive queer film festivals, and the highly mobilised film tours with limited local-level commitment, some clubs have been operating for several years in the communities along with local NGOs' hard work over years or decades to gain queer people's trust. While some attendees have become regular participants in film clubs, others have also been offered and afforded the opportunity to develop an interest in queer cinematic cultures. Queer film clubs demonstrate that queer film cultures can be circulated in a way that cumulatively reaches more audiences in local queer communities than film festivals and tours. With the birth of queer film clubs, more important, queer Chinese people can finally enjoy the movies for the first time as participants, not as guerrilla warriors.

Digital Screen Cultures: Queer Social Media

When I started writing the first section of this chapter on the history of queer Chinese cinemas, I found a great amount of literature for critical review. When my search continued on to social queer film events, I found a few writings on underground film scenes in China. Now that I attempt to write about queer Chinese social media, I find that very little research has been done in this field. Queer social media is a relatively new phenomenon, both within and outside the Chinese world. Online and mobile queer social media emerged only recently along with the popularity of mainstream social networking services like Facebook and Twitter (and their various Chinese counterparts), and with their "migration" from desktop

computer to mobile devices such as smartphone and tablet-computer with wireless internet connection. Fast 3G/4G network and the proliferation of domestic and public Wi-Fi hotspots have made an always-online mobile digital lifestyle possible, and checking social-media updates and broad-casting one's locations through locative mobile media have become a new digital ritual that makes online BBS (Bulletin Board Systems), email, and even blogs look somewhat obsolete.

In this context, on the one hand, mainstream social media have become new rendezvous points for queer people in various Chinese communities. During my ethnographic interview I was informed by an interlocutor that Facebook groups have proven popular among queer people in, for example, Sinophone Malaysia (more on this in Chapter 5). The enthusiastic reception of Facebook also makes it a promising platform for queer communities and LGBT activism in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau.¹⁷ Queer social network users and NGOs in China have also been actively contributing contents and networking with their peers on Renren (since 2009) and Sina Weibo (since 2011),¹⁸ the local Chinese equivalents of Facebook and Twitter (both blocked in the PRC). But on such mainstream social media queer people and activists are still marginalised subcultural groups. In the PRC, in addition, social network participants are now required to register with their real names and mobile phone numbers, potentially alienating those who do not want to reveal their identities online.

Thus, on the other hand, online and mobile queer social media that are specifically tailored for sexual minorities have emerged, most noticeably in the PRC. As I briefly

¹⁷ See for instance Taiwan's local NGOs Loving Parents of LGBT (<https://zh-tw.facebook.com/Parents.LGBT>) and LGBT Pride (<https://zh-tw.facebook.com/Taiwan.LGBT.Pride>), Macau's LGBT Rights Concern Group (<https://zh-tw.facebook.com/lgbt.macau>), and Hong Kong's Pride Parade (<https://zh-tw.facebook.com/hkpride>).

¹⁸ Renren was formerly Xiaonei ("on-campus network") that, like early Facebook, was only open to college students registered with tertiary-education email accounts. In August 2009 it changed to its current name Renren ("everyone") aiming to attract more users outside its narrow college circle. Similarly, Sina Weibo had an early version starting in 2009, and changed to its current domain name in April 2011 and has since then accumulated more registered users and greater social influence.

discussed in Chapter 1, Feizan was brought online in China in February 2010 and soon extended to mobile devices through Apple's App Store and Google Play. This is one of the earliest and largest Facebook-style queer social networking services in Chinese societies that is still running and attracting new users, with over one million members as of early 2015. This platform requires registration to view other people's profile, but no personal information such as name or phone number is needed. However, Feizan's client-software on mobile devices only allow users to access its web-based service with limited location-based functions, similar to the mobile lesbian social network Butterfly in Hong Kong and mobile gay app GuyFones in Taiwan. All these web-based services with mobile accessibility look somewhat obsolete and technologically less-advanced than the new generations of location-aware mobile dating and hook-up applications on smartphones.

Now that the GPS module has become *de rigueur* in mobile devices, location-based dating and social networking have taken digital queer scenes by storm. Mobile apps such as Jack'd and Grindr, the most popular mobile gay dating and hook-up app with millions of users across the globe, first became popular in the West at the turn of the 2010s and expanded very soon to Chinese societies. These mobile apps can automatically read a device's GPS data and search in the area for other app users nearby, and then list these users in geolocational proximity. People are also allowed to contact others directly via these mobile services. Inspired by Jack'd, a similar service Blue'd was brought online in China in late 2012 as a Chinese version of the emerging global queer mobile screen cultures. In the same year, *G-you* (G-friend) was released by a different company. Later in 2013, Feizan launched two locative mobile apps ZANK (for men) and Laven (for women, later terminated). A new mobile app Aloha was brought online in late 2014 by a Beijing-based company, directly targeting both local and overseas queer Chinese populations in the global market. Locative mobile social apps for lesbians such as LesPark, LESDO, and TheL have also emerged in

Chinese societies, while Tofu came into operation as a mobile networking service for BL “rotten girls” (*fu nü*, female fans of real and fantasised inter-male romance and erotica).

While these mobile queer social media have started to emerge in the early 2010s, 2014 was the year that marked their major development. Not only did a number of queer Chinese mobile apps initiated their services in that year, but ZANK, Blue’d, and G-friend each attracted a large amount of venture capital investment that caught wide domestic and international attention of China’ rising and neoliberalising pink economy (see Chapter 6). The blossoming of queer mobile social networks also intertwines with the recent emergence of queer micro-films and digital video series in China. While queer feature films often cost a fortune to produce and face censorship in the PRC for commercial release, short micro-film and video series produced in digital format are much more affordable and easier to circulate online. Blue’d and Feizan/ZANK have already become major funder-producers of queer micro-films and digital video series. Moreover, as I have discussed, queer film clubs have all landed on queer online or mobile social networking platforms for publicity. That is to say, traditional and new forms of queer screen cultures (from cinema to film club, and from digital video to social media) are increasingly intersected with each other.

More important, the emergence of online and mobile queer social media not only parallels the technological advancements in digital media and communication, but is deeply rooted in the recent social changes in Chinese societies, especially in Mainland China. With the world’s largest population, China potentially provides the most promising market for the pink (queer) economy enhanced by digital technology such as locative mobile queer social media. The rapidly neoliberalising economy of China cultivates a fertile soil for digital queer cultures to grow and flourish. The increasing social mobilities in the nationwide pursuit of *suzhi*/quality and the state-led expansion of China’s middle classes (both discussed in Chapter 6) have also produced large numbers of domestic queer migrants desiring of social

networking through queer social media and communal queer events such as film clubs in their new urban homes to forge peer connections outside the family of origin. I will further develop these arguments in subsequent chapters.

In addition, studies on locative media have emerged during recent years (Evans 2015; Farman 2012; Frith 2015; Gudelunas 2012; Hjorth and Arnold 2013; Katz and Lai 2014; Wilken and Goggin 2014) and the most popular gay dating and hook-up app in the West, Grindr, has attracted wide academic attention (Atman 2014; Batiste 2013; Blackwell et al. 2015; Brubaker et al 2014; Burrell et al. 2012; Chiou 2012; Fox 2014; Gibbs and Rice 2016; Hartman 2013; Holloway et al. 2014; Landovitz et al. 2012; Licoqque et al. 2015; Martinez et al. 2014; Miller 2015; Penney 2014; Quiroz 2013; Race 2015a/2015b; Rendina et al. 2014; Su et al, 2015; Sun et al. 2015; Winetrobe et al. 2014). But queer social media in Chinese societies have not been critically analysed, and academic studies of queer social media in the West often separate them from traditional screen cultures such as films and videos. In this research, I situate online and mobile queer social media in the contexts of queer screen cultures in Chinese societies, so as to examine how different forms of queer screen cultures shape and condition each other in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion: Past, Present, and Prospects

This chapter, in conclusion, has reviewed the history of queer Chinese cinemas, queer film festivals, tours, and clubs, and online and mobile queer social media, in order to map out a socio-historical context against which more critical examinations of recent queer screen cultures can be conducted in subsequent chapters. Queer Chinese cinemas have a long history with contested theorisations and different framings of conceptual references; in later chapters I will further analyse how post-2008 queer films echo with and deviate from previous queer cinematic traditions and conventions on screens. Queer film festivals have been proliferating in Hong Kong and Taiwan during the recent decades, leaving a rich *tongzhi* and queer

cinematic legacy. In the PRC, queer film festivals are often pushed underground by the authoritarian state, while queer film clubs (on which little research has been done) have emerged during recent years potentially as better alternatives. Online and mobile queer social media on digital screens, on the other hand, have a rather short history in both screen cultures and academic studies. In what follows, I carefully investigate these changing and intersecting queer screen cultures in Chinese societies under the theme of queer mobilities, as shown in queer kinship structures (Chapter 4), flows of queer cultures and talents on and off screens (Chapter 5), and queer upward social mobility and class migrations (Chapter 6).

Chapter 4: Stretched Kinship

In my investigation of the history of queer screen cultures in Chinese societies, and in my research of queer films, urban film clubs, and social media in the twenty-first century, *kinship* is a major theme of queer films and videos, a widely scrutinised issue in the studies of queer Chinese cultures, and one of the most frequently discussed topics in today's queer communities online and offline. I have developed a strong interest in the issue of queer kinship during my research, and have chosen to first examine this theme in my thesis. This chapter begins with a discussion of the “coming out as coming home” strategy and why “home” has often become an impossible location for Chinese queer people to fully return. Then I develop the idea of *stretched kinship* to examine and explore the recent changes in Chinese queer kinship structures. What I call stretched queer kinship refers to kinship ties stretched by domestic and global queer migrations and flows, and by the rupture between one's non-conforming sexuality and the hetero-reproductive expectations from the family, particularly the aging parents.

I develop this new paradigm of stretched queer kinship structure based on previous scholarly discussions on queer kinships and China's internal migrations, my textual analyses of autobiographical Sinophone films, my ethnographic studies of urban queer film clubs in Beijing, and my empirical observations during my research. I theorise the notion of stretched kinship by discussing different forms of queer kinship constructions and negotiations that are “stretched” across physical space (separations), psychological distance (emotions), and lineal and collateral family ties (relations). I then further develop this paradigm through the lens of “coming out to the Sinophone”, as shown on Sinophone film screens, and “alternative kinship circles” forged through urban queer communities, such as queer film clubs in China. With these analyses, I intend to highlight how recent screen cultures are shaping and shaped by the changing queer kinship structures as an inevitable result of the increase in queer mobilities.

Impossible Home: When “Coming Out as Coming Home” Fails

Since the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss ([1949] 1969) and David Schneider ([1968] 1980/1984), the two most famous anthropologists in kinship studies, the view of kinship structures as symbolic socio-cultural systems rather than purely biological blood ties has dominated kinship scholarship (see Menget 2008). This turn from consanguinity to symbolic social connections in kinship studies has enabled a shift of focus from procreative to non-procreative kinships in this field of research (see Shapiro 2010). It is against this backdrop that studies on queer kinship have emerged in the West since the late twentieth century to make sense of what “kinship” means for queer people whose sexual practices seldom serve the purpose of reproduction. According to historian Heather Murray (2012), in the 1950s gay people in North America were able to live in discretion, as a means to protect their sexual preference without offending their families. But, during the more liberal and radical gay liberations in the 1960s and the 1970s, more queer people started to detach themselves from their families for increased individual sexual independence.

At that time, comments David L. Eng (2010a, 3) in his book *The Feeling of Kinship*, gays and lesbians were “decidedly excluded from the normative structures of family and kinship”. John D’Emilio (1983) argues that the urban gay life detached from the family is a result of capitalist economy and the free market that reproduce independent single bread-earners outside the family of origin. “Moving out” often becomes “coming out” to the larger world out of the kinship circle for queer people, and vice versa, while the childhood home has often been seen in queer mobility scholarship as an antithesis to queer desires that has to be left behind and abandoned (Fortier 2003, 115-6; *cf.* Brown 2000; Cant 1997; Lewis 2012; Maddison 2002; Plummer 1995; Weston 1995). Motion and emotion are hence central to queer kinship negotiations in the process of leaving home and building a new home of their own outside the family, where “home” is both the origin and the destination (Fortier 116-7).

The issue of movement is deeply embedded in the attachment to and detachment from the family in the process of leaving home, returning home, and homemaking for queer people.

In her acclaimed *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* ([1991] 1997), Kath Weston observes that family-detached queer people often establish a strong rapport among themselves as their own “chosen family” outside the family of origin. It was not until the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s did queer people once again become integrated to their families—HIV infected gay men were allowed back into the sympathetic family to die at home (Murray 2012, 136-78). Formal national PFLAG movements (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) also took hold in the 1980s’ America (108-34)—a further hint of reunion between transgressive queer desires and the normative families. Since then, non-normative queer sexualities have gradually re-entered the domain of familial kinship in social practices and academic studies. Gay marriage legislation in a growing number of Western countries since the turn of the twenty-first century further pinpoints queerness in the domain of family/kinship formation that is largely based on a heterosexual model.

Academic discussions of queer kinship first and foremost centre on a *queer mobility* that, often enabled by the market economy, drives queer people to leave the family in search of sexual independence and to build chosen families of their own out of the original kinship circle. In this sense, this kind of queer mobility functions rather as a process of homing or homemaking (Brah 1996; Fortier 2000/2001; see also Hannam et al. 2006, 10; Mai and King 2009, 298) that creates family-like queer peer connections beyond the blood-tied kinship, so as to complete the spatial, temporal, and psychological journey of “uprooting and regrounding” (Ahmed et al. 2003; Fortier 2003). It is in this sense that studying queer kinship often becomes an enquiry into queer mobilities that separate queer people from the family, with or without subsequent reconciliation contingent on whether the family accepts the transgressive queer children. Furthermore, towards the end of the twentieth century, coming

out became a ritual for Western queers to complete in defining and declaring their sexual selves and renegotiating kinships with the family (Murray 180).

Paradoxically, coming *out* has therefore become an essential process for queer people to become accepted and integrated *in* their families. The “coming-out/coming-in” dilemma is however more complicated in Chinese societies. Kinship often presents a troublesome issue for queer Chinese people facing the Confucian obligation of filial piety. Filial piety is the standard English translation of the Chinese term *xiaoshun* that designates “a prominent Confucianist moral idiom generally associated with the obedience, respect and/or support” that “children *owe* to parents as a return for the ‘gift of life’, so to speak” (Santos 2006, 288; emphasise mine). Giving birth to and raising up the children are traditionally understood in Chinese societies as a great bestowment of life and kindness, that is to say, to which the children must *return* by fulfilling their filial piety through reproduction to continue the cycle of the bestowment of life and to extend the family line.

This moral idiom of filial piety is a foundation of Chinese societies (Santos, 288) that underlines a strong and powerful familism (280) and a cultural fascination with kinship (277-81). In pre-modern China, same-sex relationships often coexisted with hetero-reproductive marriage, which did not endanger the continuity of the family lines (see Chapter 3). Since the importation of the dichotomous Western sexology at the turn of the twentieth century, homosexuality and heterosexuality have turned into mutually exclusive conceptual categories. While in practice people still hide their sexual preference for hetero-reproductive marriage, homosexuality itself designated by the imported sex-related pathology has become a threat to the fundamental social order of procreation. Queer children in today’s Chinese families often face a central dilemma between their filial piety for reproduction and their non-procreative queer sexual practices. This is further complicated by the confrontational coming-out strategy that has disseminated from the West to Chinese societies in a globalising world.

In this context, Chou Wah-shan in *Tongzhi: Politics of Same-sex Eroticism in Chinese Societies* (2000) proposes the idea of “coming out as coming home” as a local, cultural-sensitive, and non-confrontational strategy for queer people to mitigate this dilemma. The essence of this strategy is for a person to introduce a gay partner to the family as a good friend, and then this “friend” will frequently drop by to join in family activities and daily chores. Gradually, the family will accept this friend as a family member, whether or not the same-sex intimacy is subsequently disclosed. This strategy does not involve a confrontational declaration such as “Mom, Dad, I’m gay”, nor does it necessarily entail the disclosure of one’s attraction to the same-sex; rather, it aims to bring transgressive queer relationships back into the register of familial kinship. Although this strategy *per se* does not solve the problem of reproduction, it at least functions inside the structure of family, and appears much less challenging to the parental authority and familial hierarchy.

This strategy came from Chou’s observation and interviews with queer people in the 1980s and the 1990s, mainly in Hong Kong. According to Chou, this strategy often led to the family’s silent acceptance of the same-sex relationship when the intimacy between the child and the “friend” gradually became more obvious to the family. For Chou, and lots of people he interviewed, this was an effective way to achieve familial harmony without scarifying one’s real sexual preference. The confrontational coming out, on the other hand, was observed by Chou as often leading to direct familial conflicts in Chinese societies. However, the ambiguity of one’s sexuality centred in the “coming home” strategy may not always lead to positive outcomes. Liu and Ding’s (2005) critique of Chou’s theory, for instance, points out that “coming home” can be an endless journey that one may not be able to complete before familial conflicts break out. Their discussion reveals that the “coming home” process lacks effectiveness and efficiency compared to the confrontational coming out strategy.

This “coming home” approach presents further problems when the kinship structures in Chinese societies are undergoing rapid and dramatic changes at the turn of the twenty-first century. Fluid and frequent redistributions of human resources, to begin with, have become *de rigueur* in today’s neoliberal economic blueprint, where the flow of talent often plays an important role. In the case of China, the rapid economic growth has resulted in significantly unbalanced developments between different areas across a large span of China’s territory. One of the most visible results has been a huge increase in migration from the agricultural countryside to the relatively industrialised urban areas, from small towns to larger cities and regional economic centres, and from the remote and less developed interior to the coastal provinces of the country (Gaetano and Jacka 2004, 1-2). Over 100-million internal migrants or “floating population” in today’s China (*ibid.*) have constituted “the Long March to the city” (Dong 2011) in search of better life (see also He et al. 2015; Li and Roulleau-Berger 2013; Li et al. 2015; Nyíri 2010; Wallis 2013; Wong et al. 2015; Zhang and Duncan 2014). Nationwide higher education expansion led by the state since 1998 also leads to a dramatic increase in education-oriented migration since the turn of the twenty-first century, while the college degree has become an entry ticket to urban middle-class employment (Goodman 2016, 7). More families who have benefited from China’s economic growth can also afford to send children overseas for education (see Slethaug 2010), or to Hong Kong and Taiwan after local universities opened to Mainland Chinese students recently.

That means it has been increasingly frequent for young adults to embark on domestic and transnational migration journeys in search of education, employment, and more dynamic cosmopolitan urban life. What becomes the new normal in such domestic and global flows of young migrants is a new kind of long-distance kinship: people who study and work in another city or another country often have very limited chance to go back home visiting their family. Public holidays are often the only options for family reunion, but lots of people in Chinese

societies only go back to their family once a year, usually during the Chinese New Year. Long geographical distances combined with financial hardship or thrift often makes young people reluctant to travel home, and the pressure they may experience from their parents (e.g. for marriage) can also turn the annual family reunion into an ordeal (more on this below). The process of homecoming has therefore become increasingly difficult for today's queer people to fulfil.

Hence, the closely tied kinship structure has often been diluted and stretched to a long-distance familial bonding that separates young people from their parents and only allows limited chance for reunion. This kind of *stretched kinship* is fundamentally different from traditional Confucian doctrine "*fumu zai, bu yuanyou*"—do not travel far if your parents are still alive (so you could stay with them and offer your service whenever they need). Today's parents in Chinese societies are more willing to encourage their adult children to undertake educational and occupational migrations, both to honour the family and to create a better life for themselves and for future generations. This new form of family kinship often entails year-long separations that cut people off from the Confucian filial piety to accompany and look after their parents, and that cut parents off from closely mentoring (and controlling) their sons and daughters with their wisdom.

In such separations, "home" often becomes an impossible location for queer people to complete the "coming out as coming home" process. The partner-as-friend method reaches a dead end when the time required for the "friend" to become a family member no longer virtually exists. When queer people and their same-sex partners are half-the-country or half-the-globe away from their families of origin, "coming home" is a mission hard to accomplish. "Coming out as coming home" is largely contingent on the close geo-proximity between queer people and their families, and works best only when both sides of a queer relationship have the chances to complete the time-consuming "coming home" processes in their families.

For this to work in today's stretched queer kinship structures, one has to complete the process before the separation, or invite their parents to live in the same area, or return and settle down back in their hometown. Nevertheless, a positive outcome (i.e. the family's acceptance of the same-sex relationship) is still not guaranteed. This is why I argue for a new paradigm of stretched kinship to better scrutinise today's changing queer kinship structures.

Stretched Kinship: A New Paradigm of Queer Kinship in Confucian Societies

The idea of "stretched kinship" first came to my mind when I was watching Scud's *Permanent Residence* (examined below). I further developed this notion during my fieldwork in China and subsequent research on queer Sinophone screen cultures. Stretched kinship emerges from various respects and works on multiple imbricated levels. First, it relates to the physical distance and separation across time and space that underline the struggles and negotiations between one's sexuality and the family's heteronormative expectations. In this sense, staying away from the family potentially becomes a convenient way for queer people to delay, or to be better prepared for, the moment of disclosure of their sexual preference. This is arguably a very practical strategy, insofar as it potentially offers queer people the opportunity to become financially independent in case they are disowned by their parents and cut off from familial financial support if they come out. Chinese or Western, confrontational or non-confrontational, there does not exist a universal way to come to terms with one's sexuality in relation to one's family; being physically detached from home hence leaves a space for people to further explore their sexual self, contemplate their sexual identifications, learn experience from other queer people, and make long-term plans for disclosure or eternal concealment.

More important, for people who migrate to populated metropolises, the possibilities to meet gays and lesbians are statistically much higher. LGBT NGOs, university queer societies and groups, and queer peer support are often much more developed in metropolitan urban

areas. Thus, the flows towards the “queer cities” potentially offer young people a chance to acquire and secure a sense of belonging that they may not be able to enjoy at home. They can also observe and experience various queer lifestyles and vibrant urban queer scenes that may not be available in the hometown (gay bar, sauna, LGBT centre, gay-friendly coffee house, *tongzhi* bookshop, book club, film club, gay social sports, queer consulting services, to name a few from the findings of my ethnography). Even for those who have little interest in queer social events or queer activism, populated metropolises are often a better place to stay invisible and conceal one’s sexual preference, or to enjoy a generally more tolerant social environment for sexual minorities. Additionally, queer migrants to larger urban centres also have more chance to access and learn from others’ experiences in coming out, building a same-sex relationship, arranging quasi-marriages, overseas migration for gay marriage, and so forth. People who travel from one Chinese society to another, or from one country to a different culture, also have the opportunity to experience and learn from local understandings, traditions, and articulations of queer sexualities.

At the physical and geographical level, stretched kinship refers to the distance between queer people and their family that potentially allows more time and space for them to acquire financial security and plan for subsequent strategies in kinship negotiation through domestic or transnational migration. These negotiation strategies include coming out to the family, arranging a fake marriage, completely concealing one’s sexuality and marrying the opposite sex, and so on. The geographical distance in the stretched queer kinship structure significantly reduces immediate familial pressure for heteronormative behaviour, marriage, and reproduction, and gives queer people a chance to breathe and a space of their own to navigate through their own life at their own pace. For those who are not so sure about their sexualities, the more queer-populated metropolitan areas also provide better chances for them to further explore their sexual selves. In this scenario, however, intimate familial kinship has

been stretched thin, and physical connections between family members have been stretched to virtual connection through letters, phone calls, and online chat. The familial support and closeness are hence often reachable only remotely. If concealing one's sexual preference from the family is already difficult, then the long-term physical separation stretches kinship ties even thinner. What have been stretched are not only physical distance but one's intimacy and openness with the family. A significant aspect of oneself, namely sexuality, is put separately in another physical and mental space thousands miles away from home.

This mental and emotional detachment is the second key factor in my theorisation of stretched kinship. While the geographical separation weakens the physical closeness of the family, on the one hand, the stretched distance may intensify the underlying mutual longings between family members, and potentially tightens their mental and emotional connections. On the other, however, this underlying emotional longing does not solve the conflict between non-procreative sexualities and filial piety, nor does it make it easier for queer people to come out to their family. Moreover, when kinship becomes stretched, not only the separation but also the reunion with the family could be a "stretched" experience. As I have discussed above, for some people, coming back home to the family during the Chinese New Year could be a rather intense and exhausting experience.

Chinese parents often use their children as weapons for comparison, as vividly depicted in *The Joy Luck Club*, a 1993 film adapted from Sinophone-American novelist Amy Tan's best-selling fiction. The New Year Festival often means an annual gathering of all the family members and relatives, and the elder generations often compare the achievements of the young people in the family, usually measured by individual income, promotion at work, and relationship or marital status. For queer people, one major source of pressure and embarrassment during the family reunion is all the relatives asking why they are not in a relationship (known as the "annual interrogation"). The elder family members will then

enthusiastically match them together with other young people in larger family circles for heterosexual dating. In such occasions, complete frankness about one's sexuality is often not plausible, and queer people tend to make various kinds of excuses to explain their current status of being "single", even some of them are already in a same-sex relationship.

When such embarrassing interrogation and awkward explanations have become an essential part of queer people's reunion experiences, physical closeness with the family does not solve the problem of the stretched psychological distance and the detached queer mentality from the family's hetero-reproductive expectations. One episode of the *Nine Gay Men* video series produced by the queer social media Feizan/ZANK released before the 2014 Chinese New Year was titled "Nine Gay Men Teach You How to Go Home for the New Year" (*Jiuge Gay Jiaoni Guonian Huijia*). In this video "tutorial", the characters introduce some strategies for queer people to more sophisticatedly deal with the family's annual interrogation about their relationship status. The comedic *Nine Gay Men* series is mainly produced for entertainment and for the marketing of the mobile gay-dating app ZANK; however, this episode nonetheless demonstrates a deep sense of frustration among today's queer people in the Chinese world caused by the physically and mentally stretched relations with their family. How to go home for annual family reunion becomes something queer people have to "learn" in order to cope with the stretched feelings from the family's hetero-reproductive expectations, and something that a local queer social media company can capitalise upon to produce a video tutorial.

As reported on the BBC, moreover, a local video documentary depicting queer kinship negotiations in China attracted over 100 million views online during the 2015 Chinese New Year.¹ Produced by the national Chinese PFLAG organisation (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), the documentary brings into attention the "New

¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-31549731>.

Year plight” facing queer people, as well as young gay men’s dilemma between fulfilling filial piety and coming out to their family. In the stretched queer kinship structure, “home” often becomes a point of departure instead of a point of arrival between the family’s heteronormative assumptions and the undercurrent queer desires. In the early twenty-first century, the issue of stretched kinship as well as family separations and reunions has become an increasingly popular theme on recent queer film screens in Chinese societies, and I will analyse two autobiographical queer Sinophone films later in this chapter.

However, stretched kinship is not to be understood as purely disruption; rather, it is a different form of connection and negotiation. In the Chinese-language world, people also say “blood is thicker than water” (*xue nong yu shui*), and stress on one’s filial responsibility for and connection to parents and the family of origin. The essence of stretched kinship is not to break up with the family, but to keep that stretched tie connected and resilient—imagine you are stretching pasta dough in the kitchen to make it resilient without breaking it apart. That is to say, in terms of family relations, stretched kinship functions as a special connection bridging queer people and the family across physical and psychological distance. This is the third perspective from which I theorise stretched queer kinship. When neither “coming out” nor “coming home” can be achieved, the stretched kinship tie always implies a nuanced situation that is balanced and maintained, however precariously.

Stretched kinship entails mutual dependence—mentally, emotionally, and sometimes financially—that often crosses physical distance to forge a stretched but resilient connection. To maintain this tie, the family to some extent has to forgive the adult children for being “single”, and the child has to think about the next move when the family gradually loses patience and increasingly demands a hetero-reproductive marriage. From this point of view, the stretched kinship structure never remains in a stable state of being, nor is it merely confined in fragmented and isolated moments of separation and reunion; rather, it functions

as a *dynamic process of becoming* that requires careful and constant negotiations between the two sides. Once the stretched balance is established, it will not remain static, but constantly tighten or loosen its tension as people closely or remotely negotiate their non-conforming sexualities with their family in various ways. Previous understandings of queer kinship structures often appear somewhat static with expected outcomes—from Weston’s ([1991] 1997) “chosen family” outside the original kinship circle in Western contexts to Chou’s (2000) “coming out as coming home” expectation in Chinese societies. My theorisation of stretched queer kinship, however, is concerned more with the resilience in and the process of queer kinship negotiations, often with uncertain outcomes and possibilities.

In some cases when the family loses patience, the situation will often become an ultimatum—“bring back a boyfriend/girlfriend or do not come home for the New Year”. When that happens, people have a choice to make: fake it (bring back a fake partner), break it (completely cut themselves off from the family once and for all), or make known their sexual preference to the family. The first choice will continue and further stretch the balance, and one has to fake it forever or at some point reveal the truth. The second option is against the fundamental Confucian piety and a choice that most Chinese people will not even consider. The third strategy seems wise but is often risky, which may end up with success, failure, and all kinds of possibilities inbetween: the family may understand and accept the child with love and support, may disown the child, may insist on medical or psychological treatment, and so forth. The whole situation might be further stretched and become a longer battle between the child and the family. It is not only the kinship ties, but the queer people themselves who have been stretched thinner and thinner facing the dilemma between the filial responsibilities and their own sexualities; the time allowed for stretched kinship negotiations always continues to become narrower for the aging parents and for queer people themselves.

So far I have cast the family as conservative, parochial, refusing, and repressing, often as an antithesis to the happiness of queer people. However, in some cases the family can be tolerant, forgiving, understanding, and supporting—even within the hierarchical Confucian family order. The queer kinship structure in today’s Chinese societies, no matter how stretched it appears, still functions within the register of the familial system. In addition, the family is not a monolithic entity, but multiple articulations of different values and beliefs from various members in both the lineal and the larger collateral families that are constantly shaped and reshaped by the changing situations within and outside the familial kinship circle. One family member’s attitude is not equal to the whole family’s refusal or acceptance of a queer child, although at some point the family (especially the parents) often has to reach an agreement about the child’s sexual preference.

But even for an understanding and supporting family, stretched kinship also has its roles to play. Whether the stretched balance can be eased is still contingent on the degree to which the family has accepted the child and on how large the familial circle to which the parents are willing to share the information. In the first instance, the acceptance of a queer person into the family often takes some time, and acceptance is not necessarily equal to pride and support. Moreover, for people who have come out to the family, the situation facing them might be “*haizi chugui, fumu rugui*”—when the child comes out of the closet, the parents walk into the closet—which means the parents are often reluctant to disclose that they have a gay child to the larger family circle. Thus, during family reunions, the “closeted parents” often have to take up the role to make excuses for their children of being unmarried, and to face the interrogation from other and elder family members (e.g. grandparents).² The larger

² Along with stretched kinship, “closeted parents” is an emerging phenomenon that well deserves our attention, when coming out has become relatively more popular during recent years in major Chinese societies. As a researcher I often question the “coming out” strategy in Confucian societies (as well as the efficiency and the longevity of local strategies such as “coming home”). But I acknowledge the increased influence of the coming-

collateral kinship structure has therefore also been stretched and a new dynamic balance established. This problem was intensively discussed in one of the queer film clubs that I participated in Beijing as an ethnographer, to which I will return later in this chapter. More important, the distanced physical stretch across the geographical space remains the same after the children come out to the parents, and queer migrants still lack the immediate closeness and intimacy with the family.

Stretched kinship also has an additional dimension in queer homemaking and family formation: marriage. First, for queer people who choose to conceal their sexual preference for hetero-reproductive marriage, the relationships between them and their heterosexual partners can be also understood as a form of stretched kinship. This argument echoes a new Chinese term emerged in recent years, *tong qi*, which means “*tongzhi de qizi*” or literally “gay-men’s wife”. It refers to the women who find out only after the marriage that their husbands are actually attracted to men. Such marriage does not involve mutual sexual attraction, and the kinship established on this is often stretched to a dangerous status that may break at any time. The most severe case occurred in China in 2012 when a woman committed suicide when she found out that his husband was attracted to the same sex.³ The issue of *tong qi* has since then attracted much public attention.

Concealing one’s sexual preference for heteronormative marriage is not an entirely new phenomenon, but during recent years the situation facing queer people has gradually changed in the Chinese world. Globally, more countries have legalised same-sex marriage, which appears tremendously encouraging for queer people and activists in Chinese societies. Combined with the rise of queer social media, the development of local queer activism, and the increased self-consciousness of queer rights and equality, queer people and activists in

out discourse in Chinese areas that is often seen by local queer people as significant in self-recognition, in increasing the social visibility of queer people, and in promoting queer/*tongzhi* activism.

³ For TV news report and discussion, see for example <http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/jg2NRQbj-OA>.

Chinese societies are making a far more visible social presence that is increasingly known to the general public. It is becoming increasingly difficult to hide one's sexual preference, especially when he or she gets married heterosexually and establishes a stretched kinship tie with the partner and the entire in-law family. People today are more sensitive about such deceived marriage. During my field research, a few informants complained that recent global and local queer activism had raised the public awareness of gay presence and made it harder for them to hide under the cover of heterosexual marriage. Their complaint resembles that of the elder gay men in post-Stonewall America who were unhappy about the exposure of the previously underground gay world to the public.⁴

Second, the controversial practices of queer family formation in China that evoke the issue of stretched kinship include lesbian and gay contract marriage, also known as quasi-marriage, cooperative marriage, or proforma marriage (*xingshi hunyin* or *mingyi hunyin* in Mandarin). This notion designates a set of fake marriages between one gay couple and one lesbian couple who pretend and get married as two straight couples (see Engebretsen 2014, 104-23; L. Ho 2010, 39; Kam 2012, 84-86). This appears to be a relatively more ethical option, because the fake marriages are arranged with the consent of all the participants, but also a more risky one since as many as four families become involved in one single set of quasi-marriage. A fake marriage like this stretches the kinship connections to an even more intense level, where one part breaks down will lead to a series of consequences that concern with four interrelated in-law families. In addition, issues such as reproduction and the upbringing of children still present major problems for people in quasi-marriages, and they still face the possibility that one day they may get tired of their fake heterosexual partners and/or lose interest in their real same-sex partners.

⁴ See for example Esther Newton's *Cherry Grove, Fire Island: Sixty Years in America's First Gay and Lesbian Town* (1993, 237-8).

Another emerging form of stretched queer kinship is for people to get legally married on foreign soil. In late 2013 when I was conducting my field research in Beijing, a queer film club invited an agent from Hong Kong who initiated a business bringing same-sex couples from various Chinese societies to New Zealand and Canada for legal gay marriage, although these marriages will not be recognised by their home states in Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia. But for some people it is still an invaluable chance to get their same-sex love legally certified. This emerging form of queer family formation and marriage-oriented global queer mobility is not the main focus of this current study, but it demonstrates a novel type of queer kinship that needs to be stretched to a foreign soil so that it can be established with legal recognition. Gay adoption and surrogacy agencies have also come to people's attention in Chinese societies during recent years, but the actual process often occurs in Western countries such as the U.S., given that same-sex adoption and surrogacy are not legally recognised by any Chinese states.

In summary, I have developed the notion of stretched kinship as a new analytical tool to add to our theoretical arsenal in addressing today's changing queer Chinese kinship structures. Stretched kinship manifests in three major aspects: the physical distance and separation between queer people and the family across time and space; the psychological and emotional detachment of queer desires from the familial hetero-reproductive expectations; and the dynamic and resilient kinship negotiation in both lineal and larger collateral families. Another significant dimension of stretched kinship in queer homemaking includes incognito heterosexual marriage, fake gay-lesbian contract marriage, and overseas legal same-sex marriage, each of which further stretches queer kinship toward a different direction. The idea of stretched kinship, I argue, better reveals and embraces the uncertainty and fluidity in queer kinship negotiations, which functions as a resilient and dynamic process of coming and becoming instead of a static state of being. The "stretched" metaphor also resonates with the

central theme of this research, namely queer mobilities. The changing queer kinship structure in today's Chinese societies is an inevitable outcome of queer mobilities that relocate people across geographical spaces and initiate the "stretched" balance in queer kinship negotiations. In what remains of this chapter, I will further test and develop my theory of stretched kinship by examining two recent autobiographical queer Sinophone films and one urban queer film club in China.

Homecoming/Homemaking: Reading Autobiographical Queer Sinophone Films

In this section I read two recent autobiographical queer Sinophone feature films through the lenses of stretched kinship in transnational homecoming and homemaking. I recur to the queer cinematic offerings from Sinophone Hong Kong filmmakers Kit Hung and Scud to examine stretched kinship and queer homecoming and homemaking against the backdrop of transnational queer migrations. I focus on queer migrants and cultural flows between various Chinese societies such as Mainland China and Hong Kong, as well as the transregional queer experiences across Chinese societies in Asia and non-Chinese societies in the West. On top of that, I hope my discussions of transnational queer homecoming and homemaking in this part through recent Sinophone screen cultures will extend my examination of the changing queer kinship structures in Chinese societies which, as I have argued, are often stretched by domestic and transnational queer migrations.

The transnational and transregional flows of queer characters onscreen and of queer filmmakers offscreen have a long history in queer cinemas in Chinese societies. Early queer Chinese films emerged at the turn of the twenty-first century already showed a strong tendency towards multinational production and international distribution among and beyond Chinese societies (see Chapter 3). This tradition has been carried on through to recent queer cinematic practices, only to an even larger scale. Recent queer Sinophone feature film productions, especially those directed by Hung and Scud, are often shot in multiple locations

across the globe with the theme of transnational flows of queer migrants and desires. Although their films are mainly set in Hong Kong, transnational queer migrations often play an important role in the storylines, especially in the protagonists' own coming to terms with their sexualities and in their negotiations of kinship and individual identity. In their movies, transnationalism and multilingualism not only function as an underlying premise for the plotline, but often serve as the leitmotif of the films.

In a broader context, large-scale and multi-locational film production also echoes the increasingly frequent and fluid global flows of culture, capital, and talent through the medium of film. For newly emerged Sinophone queer filmmakers like Huang and Scud, this is also evident in their own career paths as filmmakers: Hung received his film education in Hong Kong and the US, and has been working in China and Europe for over a decade in the film industry. Scud was born in the Mainland, grew up in Hong Kong, moved to Australia as a successful businessman, and then came back to Hong Kong and started his own film business. They both have experience living and working in different Chinese and non-Chinese societies, which is clearly reflected in *Soundless Wind Chime* and *Permanent Residence*, their respective autobiographical films. As part of the transnational flows of queer talents, Hung and Scud are apparently unafraid to depict transnational queer cultures through multi-locational visual storytelling based on their own experiences as “queers on the move”.

This kind of film-related global queer mobility is different from previous filmmakers such as Ang Lee (*The Wedding Banquet* and *Brokeback Mountain*) and Dai Sijie (*The Chinese Botanist's Daughters*). Early makers of Sinitic-language queer films like Lee and Dai often migrated from one major Chinese society to a Western country, and then built up their repertoire and rose to fame in their new home. For recent queer film directors like Hung and Scud, before their filmic debut they already have much empirical experience of queer cultures and film productions in multiple Chinese societies (e.g. Hong Kong and the PRC) as well as

in non-Chinese countries (e.g. Switzerland and Australia). Such experiences—as global citizens, global filmmakers, and global queers—accordingly lead to a fresh way of queer filmmaking in the Chinese cinematic landscape. This new approach includes the filmmakers directly adapting their own real-life stories for films, initiating their professional careers with explicitly queer-themed works, carrying out large-scale multinational shooting, and centring transnational queer homecoming and homemaking in the plotlines of their films.

Hung's multi-award-winning *Soundless Wind Chime* is shot in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Switzerland with characters speaking German, English, Mandarin, and Cantonese. Ricky, one of the leading characters in this movie, travels to Switzerland after his Swiss boyfriend (Pascal) died from an accident in Hong Kong. Half of the movie focuses on how Ricky traces Pascal's past in Europe and contemplates on his own past with his now deceased partner. During this journey, Ricky meets and gets close to another Swiss man, Ueli, who shares some uncanny resemblance with the deceased Pascal and seems to be the latter's brother (played by the same actor). But their connection is temporarily disrupted when Ricky returns from Europe to Hong Kong, and then to the PRC to look after his mother dying from cancer. Ueli follows Ricky's route to China, although their reunion is not directly portrayed onscreen when the film concludes.

One significant part of this story is Ricky's background: he is a young migrant from rural China to Hong Kong and works as a waiter and a delivery-boy in a small restaurant. When he talks to his mother over the phone, he reassures her that he is working in finance and introducing clients to Hong Kong's stock market, and suggests his mother see a doctor in the city for her illness since "the hospital in the city is better". This scene is not uncommon in today's Chinese world, when young people migrate from rural to urban areas (and from one Chinese society to another) with the dream for better job and brighter future, only to find that they do not have enough training and education to take up a good job with a decent salary in

the host societies. The worst part is that they are reluctant to disclose their situation to the family—partially to save face and partially to reassure their parents—and “white lies” of imagined urban fantasies hence become common to deceive their families, albeit with good intentions.

The kinship tie is hence further stretched when young people live in the gap between the host city’s refusal and the family’s expectation, and between their real situation and the imagined life they describe to their family over the phone. A stretched kinship like this is essentially a misplaced kinship, when the two sides of the family tie are physically separated across spatial and temporal distance, and the remote connection (e.g. via telephone) is filled with unreal imagination and psychological detachment. The kinship connection is placed in a mutually imagined and constructed picture of exotic foreign urban life—a picture that the family may not often have the chance to see and in which young migrants are in fact often marginalised and struggle to make a living. In *Soundless Wind Chime*, Ricky’s family kinship connection is stretched across two Chinese locations, *viz.* rural China and postcolonial Hong Kong, and further intermingles with the life trajectory of his boyfriend Pascal.

Pascal is a Swiss man living in Hong Kong as a pickpocket. He steals Ricky’s wallet but only seems to find some loose change in it, for which his Caucasian partner is unsatisfied and enraged. Physically abused and raped, Pascal leaves his partner and once again runs into Ricky. He recognises Ricky and returns the wallet. The kindness then becomes mutual when Ricky shares his food with the homeless Pascal and takes the latter to his small apartment, and their romantic relationship begins but soon reaches an end when Pascal dies in a car accident. In later flashbacks, we learn that Pascal left his hometown at a very young age, before he eventually settles down in Hong Kong. When Ricky travels to Switzerland after Pascal’s death, what awaits him is an old abandoned house that seemingly belongs to Pascal’s family, a cemetery which seems to be the place where Pascal’s parents rest in peace, and an

antique shop operated by two unidentified characters who are presumably Pascal's brother and sister.

But the film does not disclose if they are indeed Pascal's siblings, nor does it explicitly reveal if Ricky has confided Pascal's death and their intimate relationship to them. We track Pascal's past in Switzerland through Ricky's eyes, but the traces of his early life are hard to find and identify, and his lost kinship hard to retrieve. Ricky's journey to Switzerland is a trip returning to Pascal's estranged home-space, a process that he wants to complete for his now deceased partner to make up for the latter's unfulfilled reunion with the family. However, this process of homecoming is never visually or narratively achieved onscreen. In the movie, the symbolic image of "home" has been rendered as deserted (the old house), deceased (the cemetery), and discontinued (one of the shop owners tries to sell family antiques). Home, in this film, has become an impossible physical and mental location and destination that neither protagonist can fully return to.

Not unlike Ricky's kinship tie with his family stretched between two Chinese regions, the kinship connection between Pascal and his family has also been stretched too far and too thin by geographical and temporal separation. Pascal's connection with his family is now only traceable through remote and vague memories—short flashbacks onscreen in which young Pascal waved farewell to his mother on a gloomy winter day, when everything surrounding them was covered by snow. In a later flashback towards the end of the film, we see Pascal's mother walking home alone after her son's departure, when two names appear onscreen with their respective dates of birth and death. This scene implies that Pascal's parents have both passed away before they had the chance to see Pascal again. More important, this is also a tribute that the director pays to his boyfriend's parents in real life. According to director Kit Hung, *Soundless Wind Chime* is adapted from his own story with his Swiss boyfriend who came out to his parents with Hung's encouragement; the parents

showed great support, but passed away not long after the coming-out.⁵ This film is Hung's own lament for his deceased "parents-in-law", where mourning and grief are conveyed through Ricky's unfruitful journey looking for Pascal's family in the unreachable and impossible "home".

This film reminds us about one more significant dilemma in stretched queer kinship: when young generations are making long-term plans to reveal or conceal their sexual selves, their parents are getting old and may not have enough time to wait for the final revelation or a quasi-heterosexual marriage. One major Confucian doctrine regarding filial piety is "*zi yu yang er qin bu dai*"—when children have the ability to better serve their parents and improve their life quality, the parents may not have enough time to enjoy such a better life provided by the children before they pass away. Thus, in a stretched queer kinship relation, how much time is allowed for further negotiation of one's sexuality is often a major problem facing queer people. Such dilemma often leads to what I call a "queer filial panic". The parents may pass away without knowing the true sexual preference of their children, if the disclosure takes too long, which is a huge shame for some people. Or the parents may not live long enough for a quasi-heterosexual marriage to be arranged and the grandchildren to be born, which is against the fundamental Confucian doctrine and can be a tremendous moral burden for young people. From this standpoint, stretched queer kinship is essentially a kinship of unease, full of various kinds of tensions and contradictions between the familial expectations and one's sexual preferences across both time and space. It resides in the gap between one's sexuality and filial responsibility, when the kinship connection has been stretched long and thin from the distanced aging parents.

⁵ See an interview with Kit Hung published on the third issue of *Gay Spot* (Zhao 2009), a Beijing-based and self-published gay magazine: http://www.danlan.org/dispArticle_24890.htm.

Such dilemma and panic further reveal one of the essential issues in the stretched queer kinship system: temporality. Recent decades have witnessed the rise of the knowledge economy and the shift in the global job market to a more skill and knowledge-intensive field, which often demand longer periods of education and training. Combined with the traditional Chinese preference for education, these changes mean that young generations are often expected to complete tertiary education and perhaps graduate school, or receive formal training for qualifications to further boost their career. The longer period spent on education and training often delays the time that they first start a full-time job and become financially independent. Such delay adds to the tension of the stretched kinship negotiation, insomuch as people often already reach the expected age of marriage when they first start their career. For young queer people, this leaves them even more limited time facing the hetero-reproductive expectations from their aging parents. A similar situation could be found in the increasingly frequent transnational and global flows of people in search of better education and job opportunities in a globalising world—a process often risky and time-consuming, as seen in *Soundless Wind Chime*.

When Pascal left his hometown in Switzerland, he might not foresee that one day he would end up as a pickpocket in Hong Kong; when Ricky came to the same city from rural China, what awaited him was also not the fancy job he later imagines and describes to his mother. But, as young migrants, they also show great agency to navigate and negotiate a new life together in the gap between their left-behind hometowns and their hardship in the host city. After Pascal left his violent Caucasian partner, and after Ricky moved out from the apartment where his aunt works as a prostitute, they are able to rent a small place to live and build an intimate same-sex bond with mutual support. Pascal also finds a new job with Ricky's encouragement. As queer migrants, they are able to build both an ontological family (secured by housing and employment) and a symbolic family (safe-guarded by love and

intimacy) outside their left-behind original kinship circles (Figure 1). In this sense, their transnational homemaking as queer migrants is rather successful. They might even had a very happy life thereafter in the home-place that they built together for themselves, if Pascal did not die from an accident and Ricky did not return to Mainland China to look after his mother.



Figure 1. Ricky (left) and Pascal in *Soundless Wind Chime*

When stretched kinship meets transnational homecoming and homemaking, the kinship connection is however further complicated. The extra effort and time invested in the process of uprooting from the family and regrounding in the new homeland potentially add more tensions to the stretched kinship ties, when young people migrate alone and become separated from their families to build a new life and a new home on their own. Both the characters in the film have eventually lost the chance to introduce each other to their respective families, when Pascal's parents have passed away in Switzerland and Ricky's mother is dying from cancer in rural China. Learning about her worsening illness, Ricky abandons his job in Hong Kong and comes back to the Mainland. He labours in what seems to be a suburban area under rapid development to earn money for his mother's medical expenses. Toward the end of the movie, Ueli, the man who is supposedly Pascal's brother, comes to China to look for Ricky. Ueli finds Ricky's mother, but has not yet seen Ricky

when the film concludes. We have no idea about whether Ueli can be accepted into the family as Ricky's partner, or if Ricky comes out to his mother before she dies of cancer. For Ricky, similar to Pascal, "home" is also an impossible destination to which he is unable to fully return. His intimacy with Ueli/Pascal never enters the domain of the family, and nor does his real sexual self.

In addition to Hung's *Soundless Wind Chime*, Scud's queer films also put a strong emphasis on transnational migrants and cultural flows. His feature film debut, *City without Baseball*, portrays a Hong Kong baseballer with his Taiwanese coach, Mainland girlfriend, and local same-sex lover. Scud's acclaimed autobiographical film *Permanent Residence* is shot in six different regions across three continents, in which travelling and migrating among and between Chinese and non-Chinese societies presents a major part of the protagonist's coming-of-age story and coming-to-terms with his sexuality. In this film, the transnational and global mobility also affords the protagonist opportunities to rethink and temporarily escape from his much-troubled and on-again-off-again relationship with his boyfriend. This movie is followed by *Amphetamine* in Scud's queer film trilogy, which depicts a tragic love story between two queer migrants (analysed in Chapter 5). Scud's recent filmic offering, *Voyage*, is another ambitious multi-locational production that is shot in Malaysia, Germany, the Netherlands, Australia, Hong Kong, and China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

Here I choose *Permanent Residence*, Scud's autobiographical film, to further discuss the intermingled stretched kinship and transnational homecoming and homemaking. Ivan, the character based on Scud's real-life archetype in this film, was born in Mainland China and raised up by his grandmother. He then moved to Hong Kong and worked in the blossoming local IT industry before migrating to Australia. Ivan/Scud then returns to Hong Kong to start independent queer film production, as self-reflexively portrayed at the end of the movie. The film *Permanent Residence* contains two significant homecoming scenes that depict Ivan's

journeys to visit his grandmother back in China, who is suffering from Alzheimer's and can hardly recognise people. During his first visit, Ivan brings back a female colleague (a self-identified lesbian) as his fake girlfriend in order to reassure his grandmother that he is in a relationship, before it is too late for her to recognise his own grandson.

In the beginning of the scene, the camera waits inside the front yard of the grandmother's house and anticipates Ivan and his quasi-girlfriend. Ivan asks the latter to "act well", since "grandma is smart" and may discover the truth. The woman responds with "I'll try my best" before having an awkward tumble in the yard. Ivan's comment is "worse than Mrs Thatcher". His comment refers to the then Prime Minister of the U.K. Margaret Thatcher who in 1982 tripped and tumbled down the steps of the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, where the leaders of the two countries negotiated the future of Hong Kong. In Chinese regions, Mrs Thatcher's tumble is often seen as a symbol of China's diplomatic victory and Britain's "fall and fail" over the issue of Hong Kong, and is used in this film as a hint for the subsequent failure of the "fake-it" strategy adopted by Ivan to negotiate the stretched transnational kinship connection.

When the woman introduces herself as "Ivan's girlfriend" to the aged grandmother, the latter is confused about who Ivan is. The quasi-girlfriend does not realise that Ivan only uses his English name in Hong Kong, the former British colony, but not in his hometown where Cantonese is the only accepted everyday language. In this sense, transnational queer homecoming is shaped and reshaped not only by Chinese cultures but also by non-Chinese ones, especially in postcolonial Chinese societies such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and part of Mainland China where the colonists' linguistic and cultural legacy has to various extent survived through to today. Once the grandmother confirms that the young woman is her "granddaughter-in-law", she becomes thrilled and immediately gives the girl a jade bracelet as a gift: "I have been waiting too long for this day to come!" In the stretched

queer Chinese kinship structure, the elders in the family often have high hopes for the young generations' marriage, but such expectations are often stretched thin and long spatially and temporally. In Ivan's case, his grandmother who took the parent role in his upbringing becomes the person for whom he has to fulfil his filial responsibility and homecoming; after the prolonged "procrastination", he has to bring home a quasi-partner before it is too late for his grandmother to see, as his voiceover reveals before the scene.



Figure 2. Ivan and his fake girlfriend visiting his grandmother in *Permanent Residence*

But the elder generations' wisdom is not to be underestimated. When the young girl leaves the room, the smile soon disappears from the grandmother's face: "My grandson, you shouldn't have chosen this woman. She hasn't looked at you since you walked into the room. She doesn't really love you. You shouldn't marry her." Her observation is also evident in the cinematography, which often puts Ivan and his grandmother in tight and intimate frames and leaves the girl alone in separate shots. Even when they are portrayed in the same shot, the fake girlfriend is positioned in the far-right in the composition, detached from the intimate family on the left side (Figure 2). The quasi-girlfriend is never visually permitted and invited

into the family. Clearly if Ivan wants this “fake-it” strategy to work, he needs much better preparation with his pseudo-partner. But he does not have a second chance. His grandmother passes away when he is travelling with his boyfriend; his subsequent return only brings him back to her cold motionless corpse and to her wheelchair empty under the pale moonlight.

While Ivan’s transnational homecoming to Mainland China only ends in death and sorrow, his homemaking with his boyfriend turns out to be equally troublesome. Immediately after his grandma’s funeral, his boyfriend Windson leaves him to marry a woman. Windson has been struggling to cope with his own attraction to Ivan and his self-identification as a heterosexual man who has dated a girl for a prolonged time. He tells Ivan that he has to build a family through heterosexual marriage once he reaches a certain age to fulfil his filial piety as the only son in his family, even if he does not really want to marry the girl. After they break up on that night, Ivan tries to commit suicide in his own apartment, a home-like place where he and his boyfriend have had some great times together. Earlier in this film, Ivan was thrilled when he bought this apartment with hard-earned money in Hong Kong, after he left his grandmother and had to work hard to support himself since his high school years. This apartment, both a physical shelter (ontological family) and a home that Ivan has made for himself and his boyfriend (symbolic family), now becomes a place where he tries to take his own life. That night is also Ivan’s birthday. A celebration of life turns into a heart-breaking and nerve-wracking break-up and a suicidal attempt in the very home-place he has made to accommodate his love and intimacy with Windson.

Ivan eventually survives the break-up, and continues to care for Windson’s mother who is dying from terminal illness. He pays for her expensive medical expenses, and then her funeral and cemetery after she dies. Windson’s mother treated Ivan as her own son, and Ivan treated her as his own parent, but he and Windson never revealed their intimate relationship to the mother in this shared and stretched kinship connection. Before long, Windson’s father

also leaves the world. Coming out, or “coming home”, have both become impossible for Ivan and Windson to fulfil. They then separate from each other. Six years later, they meet again unexpectedly in Australia. Ivan proposes to the now divorced Windson—he may not have married his girlfriend in the first place, as he is ambiguous about this during their reunion—but Windson chooses to take his own life, since he is overstressed by his sexual attraction to Ivan vis-à-vis his own heterosexual identification (see Wei 2012 for my previous discussion on this). As Audrey Yue comments (2015, 289-90), Windson’s death is a punishment less for his homosexuality than for his failure as a son (the failed homecoming) and as a husband-to-be, whether with his girlfriend in China or with Ivan in Australia (the failed homemaking). Despite their various and continuous attempts in Hong Kong and in Australia, Ivan and Windson never really succeeded in making a home of their own.

In this case, that means, both transnational homecoming and homemaking have failed and disappointed Ivan, who is left with a broken heart and a lonely life. From the physical separation and psychological detachment from his own family and from his grandmother’s hetero-reproductive expectation in Mainland China, to his failed attempts to save Windson’s mother in Hong Kong and marry Windson in Australia, stretched queer kinship always has an essential role to play throughout his life as queer. Not unlike Ricky’s story in *Soundless Wind Chime*, the homecoming is ultimately impossible for Ivan, while the homemaking that once appears promising eventually fails. Ivan’s troublesome floating life reaches an end in the last scene of the film, where the director Scud predicts Ivan’s death in 2047, and imagines an ocean cemetery where the coffins permanently float above the motionless Dead Sea. The cast list then begins to roll out onscreen, and each name has an arrow pointing to a floating coffin, indicating that this is the way that Scud/Ivan has chosen for himself and for his film crew to rest in peace. Death is paradoxically the only permanent residence—an argument that I will further develop from the perspective of queer mobilities in the next chapter—and perhaps the

only feasible ending to the stretched kinship negotiations over which queer people like Ivan have struggled throughout life.

Ricky's and Ivan's transnational homecoming and homemaking stories in *Soundless Wind Chime* and *Permanent Residence* provide two resounding autobiographical notes that closely resonate with my theorisation of the stretched queer kinship structure. The migrations of Ricky and Ivan in these two films follow a similar route from Mainland China to Hong Kong and then to Western countries, with each step bringing them new possibility for their coming of age and coming to terms with their own sexualities. While the migrations from the Mainland to Hong Kong enable Ricky and Ivan to more freely explore and express their same-sex attractions, such queer intimacies and sexualities are isolated in a different time and space far away from home. When they return back to the Mainland, their real sexual selves have to be left behind in Hong Kong and cannot be taken back to their own families of origin. When Ricky travels to Switzerland and Ivan to Australia, the former becomes close to another Swiss man, whereas the latter publicly announces his intention to marry his boyfriend in an Australian bar and enjoys a round of cheer and applause from other people in the bar. In this sense, moving to Sinophone Hong Kong and to overseas Sinophone communities functions as a "coming-out" process for both of them. However, this process also creates a double-stretched kinship connection, first from their families of origin and second from the ancestral motherland of China.

In these films, Mainland China is often depicted as a conservative motherland (aging and dying) with very limited tolerance for queer desires, while Hong Kong and Sinophone communities in the West are queer paradise where Mainlanders like Ricky and Ivan (young and desiring) can come out with ease. But this "coming out to the Sinophone" also involves certain risks concerning stretched familial kinship—Ricky almost loses the chance to say a proper farewell to his mother who was left behind in rural China and dying from cancer,

while Ivan indeed misses his opportunity when his beloved grandmother dies without him around. In addition, Ricky's partner dies in Hong Kong, while Ivan's boyfriend eventually commits suicide in Australia. Both their homecomings and homemakings as global queer migrants have miserably failed. If stretched queer kinship is a kinship of unease in Chinese societies, then queer migrations also evoke certain risks and uncertainties that may not lead to positive outcomes. I will further investigate this issue and problematise the queer migration optimism in the next chapter, *Sinophone Mobilities*, drawing on recent mobility scholarship and Sinophone scholarship. In what follows, I turn my focus to a queer film club in Beijing to further discuss stretched kinship and alternative urban queer family.

Alternative Kinship: Digital Video Series and Urban Queer Film Clubs in China

When familial kinship is stretched, alternative forms of kinships start to form among young queer people who live alone and away from their hometowns. Years ago, say, from the 1990s to the early twenty-first century, queer websites and online forums rose to popularity and served as virtual queer communities and spaces in Chinese societies such as Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Sinophone Malaysia. In today's Chinese world these cyber communities are still functioning and generating a sense of belonging among participants. But during recent years they have been gradually overshadowed by online and mobile queer social media, gay dating and hook-up apps, and communal events in physical queer spaces. In what follows, I discuss recently emerged forms of alternative queer kinships through the lenses of queer sit-com and queer film clubs, with a major focus on the latter.

The conglomeration of domestic and international immigrants in metropolises often boosts the local real-estate market where house prices escalate. It becomes increasingly unaffordable for young Chinese people to buy a house or to rent a property alone without familial financial aid. Co-tenancy hence becomes a popular solution for young generations. The early forms of queer co-tenancy meant people merely sharing housing information via

online queer forums and looking for gay flatmates or housemates, which to some extent still remains popular today. However, with the rise of social visibility and public awareness of queer existence and conglomeration in urban areas, shared-tenancy becomes increasingly diverse (and queer) which does not only include gay people, but sometimes takes forms as gay-straight co-tenancy with mutual awareness of each other's sexual preference.

The theme of shared accommodation arrangements in metropolitan areas has been picked up recently by the Beijing-based queer social media and dating service provider Feizan/ZANK. In addition to the aforementioned *Nine Gay Men* video series, it has also sponsored and co-produced *Rainbow Family (Yi Wu Zan Ke)*, the first queer Chinese sit-com video series set in a shared urban household. After the first episode was released online on 29 October 2014 in China, *Rainbow Family* has become a multi-season video series distributed and subtitled in six different languages through YouTube. Although this digital video series mainly serves as a marketing and publicity tool for the mobile gay dating application ZANK (discussed in Chapter 6), the content of this sit-com nonetheless echoes the experience of queer migrations and urban co-tenancy, or *alternative queer family*.

Rainbow Family (Figure 3) is set in a household in Beijing, whose inhabitants include the young gay house-owner, a straight woman who agrees to be his quasi-girlfriend, a gay tenant and his ex-boyfriend, and one temporary houseguest different in each season. The temporary guest is often an athletic-looking young man who comes to Beijing for job search (season one), or returns from postgraduate education in the West to look for jobs in China (season two). In each season, both the gay house-owner and his quasi-girlfriend will have a crush on the temporary houseguest. A “rainbow family” like this is inherently a queer family formed through domestic and transnational migrations. Young migrants, both gay and straight, reside in this shared urban household, or “alternative family”, across stretched spatial and temporal distance from their own families of origin. They have formed an

intimate bonding with each other and made a family of their own in the host city—an alternative form of kinship not connected by blood ties but by mutual understandings of each other’s sexual preference and the shared experience of migration. This form of urban homemaking transcends the mere queer peer support (*cf.* Kath Weston’s “chosen family” [1991] 1997), and connects gay and straight, local and non-local, and temporary and long-term tenants under the same roof in the mobilised domestic and transnational flows of migrants.



Figure 3. *Rainbow Family* (season one promotional poster)

This alternative queer family brings us back to one of the central questions in queer kinship: what is home and where is home for queer people? In my theorisation of stretched queer kinship, homecoming often appears stressful and unsuccessful, while homemaking in the host cities better affords young queer migrants the chance to build an ontological and symbolic alternative family (physical shelter and senses of home-like belonging), however precarious and transient. This sit-com arguably offers us a possible way to further look into alternative queer kinships as such. Urban co-tenancy enables queer people to once again

acquire and secure a sense of family-like closeness and openness within a household. They are able to maintain an intimate tie with each other through sharing the common living space and expenses to build a new life together. This alternative kinship system also potentially establishes camaraderie among its members who often face the same issues in their daily lives—the refusal and indifference of the host city, and the increased hetero-reproductive expectations from the aging parents, for instance. But an alternative kinship like this does not solve the problem of queer people’s stretched connection with the family of origin, although a quasi-heterosexual partner as seen in *Rainbow Family* may come in handy for such situations as family reunion and annual interrogation.

The alternative family in the queer sit-com is rather a temporary utopia for young people to escape from the heteronormative family and society in building a gay-friendly household. This household does offer them protection and flexibility to cope with different life situations, and provide family-like support and understanding—seemingly a kinship at ease, in short. However, this kind of alternative kinship may further stretch the original kinship tie, insomuch as it further mentally and physically isolates young people from their real families into a small urban queer utopia where sexual diversity is not only tolerated but shared and celebrated. The utopian alternative family still has to conceal its queerness from parental and public eyes, and sometimes from the temporary houseguests, as portrayed throughout the series. An alternative family like this is inherently a stretched and fragile structure that may not last long. At some point its members have to come out of this alternative kinship, and go back to the original family in order to fulfil their filial responsibilities.

Alternative kinship is however not necessarily an antithesis to the original kinship connection, but rather a different variation of the stretched queer kinship structure that both extends and deviates from the familial kinship tie. For those who already have the support for

their queer sexual preference from the family, they can still have an alternative and additional home in the host city to extend such understanding and support to their queer flatmates. The alternative queer kinship structure established through co-tenancy is thus not only a means to share rent and other living costs, and not only a temporary escape from the family's pressure for hetero-reproductive marriage. Rather, it potentially bridges the families of all the tenants—if one tenant has an understanding and supportive parent, this parent could perhaps talk with other parents about accepting a gay child as well. A similar structure to this at a greater social level is the PFLAG organisations (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) that aim to connect the families of queer people in a larger social network (see Murray 2012, 108-34). This is evident most recently in Chinese societies with the establishment of PFLAG China (*Tongxinglian Qinyouhui*) in 2008 and their aforementioned documentary campaign in 2015 about queer people's "New Year plight" that has caught wide domestic and international attention.

But a PFLAG social group mainly consists of parents and family members who have already realised that they have young queer people in their families. What about those people who still maintain the stretched mental distance from their family, and struggle between disclosure and concealment of their sexual selves? As I have discussed earlier in this chapter, moving into metropolitan areas often means higher possibilities to encounter other queer people to learn from their experiences, and join in queer social groups whose services and communal events may help people in queer kinship negotiations. In this sense, a queer film club operated by a NGO or a LGBT social group has the potential to become a site for kinship negotiation or even an alternative kinship system. This type of alternative kinship is established among participants and organisers through the visual medium of film, as seen in the case of Concentric Circle film club.

In the third chapter, I mapped out a brief history of queer film clubs in China. In this section I focus on the themes, the contents, and the organising styles adopted in Concentric Circle, a queer film club in Beijing, in negotiating queer kinships through visual mediums such as movies and sketching. As part of the larger Concentric Circle brand, a series of social events initiated by a psychologist for queer people, this film club puts great effort into encouraging people to open their hearts and speak their minds on such issues as queer sexualities and queer kinships. They offer a space for queer people to talk about the difficulties facing them that are not usually discussable in other social occasions and in their own families of origin. This club only shows short queer films and video clips in order to leave more time for post-screening discussions, and potentially all the participants will have a chance to share their opinions and experiences that are related to the films screened in the club sessions.

Each session of the film club starts with people sitting in a round circle and briefly introducing themselves, often in pseudonyms, which is similar to group psychotherapy. The organisers will then introduce the theme of the session, which is often based on the visual materials that they are able to collect and group together between each session. Then two or three short films or video clips will be shown to the participants. The audio-visual materials include domestic and foreign short documentaries, dramas, TV shows, and amateur videos pertinent to queer issues (such as LGBT rights) that are circulated online through local and global video-sharing websites and social media. The screening is followed by a short round of free discussion during which everyone is allowed to share their thoughts on the visual content just screened. But the most special part of this queer film club is that, after the free discussion, each participant will be allocated a piece of paper to draw out their stories, experiences, or fantasies that are most relevant to the theme of that screening session. Then each attendee will hold up his or her sketch, led by the organisers or frequent participants, to

tell and share their stories or dreams about that specific topic. The organisers will also ask the participants to sign their paintings in pseudonyms, and then upload them to the public photo album of the Concentric Circle film club on queer social media platform Feizan (examined in Chapter 6).

This procedure has been carefully designed by the organisers with the help of the founding psychologist. They initiated the club in May 2012 as the psychologist became increasingly dissatisfied with the Fellowship of *Tongzhi* Film-lovers, the oldest queer film club in the China, for its exclusive cinephilic focus (also see Chapter 6). He intended to start a different filmic social event to shift the focus from film *per se* to people's psychological needs. The basic idea was to organise a regular communal activity structured as group-psychotherapy through the medium of film, after a similar Concentric Circle book club had enjoyed enthusiastic reception in local queer communities after 2010. The film club first started with a few sessions each running for more than three hours, showing a feature film with a long discussion, which proved unpopular. They soon shortened the duration of each session and shifted from feature to short films, and added in the drawing round after a cartoon-themed session received very enthusiastic feedback. The organisers also found that people often became more willing to share their stories when they held their own painting in their hands, as they told me during my interviews with them which echoed my observation as well.

This organisational procedure has been adopted since then, with each session offering all the participants at least three rounds of opportunities to tell their stories in the circle: the self-introductions at the beginning, the post-screening free discussions in the middle, and the explanations of their own paintings at the end. This process is deemed crucial by the club organisers and the psychologist as an invaluable opportunity for the participants to share their thoughts and feelings in a safe and non-judgemental environment that is not often available in

queer people's daily life and in their own parental families. What they aim to build and maintain is a friendly atmosphere in the club with mutual understanding and support from each club member. Such a safe environment is deemed by the club organisers a much needed and much valued space for queer people in a migrant city like Beijing with a large floating population separated from their own families, upon which the club is able to maintain its popularity in the local queer community.

For queer people, furthermore, only when they travel to large metropolises do they have access to such services as queer psychotherapy groups and such queer spaces as film clubs. But people still often need encouragement to participate in such communal events and open their heart to a group of strangers in sharing their stories. In my interview with the founding psychologist of the Concentric Circle, he attributed people's reluctance in opening themselves largely to the strict Confucian hierarchy and the traditional parenting style in the Chinese world. In Confucian familial hierarchy, upbringing is deemed a kindness bestowed by the parents upon the children, as I have argued based on Santos's (2006) review of Chinese kinship studies, and children are in life-time debt to their parents and hence have to unconditionally obey the latter. The Confucian Chinese culture is also quite listening-centred ("*tinghua*"), because the entitlement to speak is often a hierarchical privilege only belongs to the seniors (Chia 2003; Gao and Ting-Toomey 1998). Although modern eras have seen a lot of changes in parenting styles in Chinese societies, such ancient doctrines and traditions have to some extent survived to today with lots of people growing up accustomed to listening to the elders and keeping their own feelings to themselves.

The situation is worse in Mainland China where most people grow up without siblings due to the one-child policy enforced nationwide by the state between 1979 and 2016—other than the parents whom they must obey and listen to, children hardly have anyone else in the immediate family to share their feelings with. In the socialist PRC, people are also educated

in the state-controlled education system from a very young age with a socialist collective ideology that every individual is a small screw (*luo si ding*) in the society whose sole function is to ensure the operation of the great machine of socialism. “Screws” do not need feelings and personalities, and individuals only need to fit in the social machine and serve for the society’s functionality. In this context, it is even more difficult for queer people to talk about their transgressive sexualities which neither correspond with hetero-reproductive Confucian expectations nor fit in the large socialist blueprint engineered by the state with little tolerance for “out-of-order” screws.

This is why a film club like Concentric Circle has become a valuable alternative family to accommodate the queer expressions that fall off from the register of family kinship and from the standardised production-lines of good socialist citizens. People who do not feel at ease with their own sexualities in the family of origin and in the larger society finally find an alternative home in an urban queer space like this. The organisers of this film club have carefully designed the three-round procedure to encourage the participants to express their often neglected queer feelings and desires in the family and in society. According to the organisers who had operated the film club for two and half years when I interviewed them, a lot of people are reluctant to spontaneously participate in the discussions; however, once encouraged and offered the chance to talk, they often have many stories that they want to share with others. This is more common for nervous first-time attendees who may need more encouragement. Therefore, the club organisers believe that it is their responsibility to help people overcome their anxiety and the habit of concealing personal feelings and opinions. They understand that people need some time to get used to talking about their sexualities and queer issues, given that a lot of them grow up in Confucian families and come of age in a society that emphasises on order and social stability rather than differences and diversities.

It is in this sense that a film club also becomes a form of alternative kinship that enables such queer articulations often muted and silenced in the original familial kinship circles and in larger societies. Film clubs like Concentric Circle as alternative queer families differ from other queer social groups and “chosen families” of queer peers in three different ways. First, a film club organised as group psychotherapy offers a chance for mediated queer narratives and story-telling. As Ken Plummer argues in *Telling Sexual Stories*, the very act of story-telling replaces the voices of authorities with personal histories that creates a sense of intimacy through the making and the telling of the story (1995, 151-60). Unsettled queer desires detached and stretched from the heteronormative family and society find a home in the intimate queer story-telling via the visual and oral narrative therapy. Mutual support and care engendered during this intimate process are “as strong as any family, maybe stronger because they are chosen rather than simply given” (154).

More important, this film club is established by the psychologist for the participants to expose their deepest feelings and vulnerabilities, following the three carefully designed steps of film screening, sketching, and story-telling. The sense of intimacy generated in this club is particularly strong when the mutual queer peer connections have been established at deeper psychological levels between the club members. This alternative queer kinship tie is therefore even stronger than everyday social and familial relations in which people often hide their deep-buried queer feelings and desires. A film club like Concentric Circle transcends regular queer cultural events and social groups by providing extra psychological support that enables deeper connections among the members, and differs from professional queer psychotherapy services in offering a less serious and more light-hearted and entertaining environment. For queer people who feel uncomfortable seeing professional mental health counsellors, the club can be a less intimidating alternative choice for them to further explore their own mental world and acquire better peer support in a more relaxed setting. In this sense, queer film clubs

like Concentric Circle have even greater potential in reaching more queer people than therapeutic services or film groups alone.

Second, the Concentric Circle film club also puts much emphasis on coming to terms with one's sexuality and coming out to the family. Although each session has a different topic, queer family and kinship have been a major thread running through the film club sessions. A few months after its establishment in 2012, for example, the club organised a session titled "Home without Closet" (*Wu Gui Zhi Jia*) showing short videos about coming-out stories, with the participants drawing pictures to juxtapose queer kinship relations inside and outside the closet (concealing or revealing one's sexuality to the family). This session turned out to be quite popular, and since then the club has frequently chosen family and kinship as the topic, including Father's Day, parental love, family reunion on Chinese New Year, *Modern Family* (American TV comedy), and so forth. In late 2014, one film club session also showed the aforementioned queer sit-com *Rainbow Family* to the participants. Between 2013 and 2014 when I participated in this club as an ethnographer, kinship issues often surfaced during the post-screening sketching and story-telling as well. Intimate queer story-telling is every bit akin to the stories of the family, as Plummer (152-3) reminds us, for gays and lesbians to share in their chosen alternative families (such as the film club).

The club organisers also believe that the film club is encouraging a life that a *tongzhi* should live: be true to oneself and to the family about one's sexuality. Hence coming out to the family is often discussed favourably in the club, while other strategies such as complete concealment and cooperative marriage are often questioned as less ideal ways that people should avoid. Joining in the sketching and story-telling as an observer and a participant, I also frequently heard coming-out stories that were successful, disastrous, or unsettled, as well as troubled experiences of total concealment of one's sexual self and of incognito heterosexual marriages. The organisers believe that the participants are able to accumulate more "samples"

when they hear more about other people's stories, based on which they can make a better informed choice regarding their own strategies in stretched queer kinship negotiations and in their own homemaking process as queer migrants and urban dwellers.

This focus on family and kinship, I argue, temporarily relocates kinship negotiations from the family *per se* to an alternative urban queer home. Plummer contends that mediated queer story-telling (in the form of published books) creates a "sensed community" of support that is not based on locale or any direct face to face contact but shared by the readers and consumers of the story (44-5). A community that comes together through film clubs, however, entails and enables both ontological direct human interactions in the physical queer space and in the symbolic exchange of stories and intimacies as a family in the post-screening story-telling. Listeners and story-tellers in turns take each other's roles in building this community of alternative family, and urban queer film clubs inevitably function as transient alternative kinship circles participated by long-term members and occasional visitors in the unsettled and floating flows of queer migrants in and out of Beijing. This alternative family-community can never replace the role of the real family in Confucian societies, but it better prepares queer people in stretched kinship negotiations with its recurring theme of family in film screening, sketching, and story-telling.

Third, this film club is a highly mediated alternative queer family that comes together through multiple mediums. The therapeutic film club connects passive film-viewing with active visual creations of sketching and doodling, through which people can not only experience queer visual cultures on the projection screen but draw out their own stories and fantasies on the small "screen" (i.e. blank paper) in their own hands. The virtual album of the Concentric Circle on social media Feizhan also becomes a home online that accommodates and archives hundreds of sketches authored by the participants in a few consecutive years. The combination of film-viewing, sketching, and online picture-sharing all together further

strengthens the mutual connections in this alternative queer family through different forms of screen and media platforms across the physical space and the virtual cyber universe. The oral story-telling enhanced by visual mediums (film and sketch) contributes to a unique intimate alternative queer home through explicit visual mediation. This amply demonstrates the power and the significance of screen cultures in alternative urban queer homemaking and in today's stretched queer kinship structures.

The organisers' emphasis on coming-out as the ultimate strategy in stretched kinship negotiation, albeit with kind intentions, is however problematic. Revealing one's sexual self is often pictured by the organisers as the most essential step to happiness that can be achieved only through a non-apologetic and confrontational way based on the Western paradigm. After all, coming out has been a dominant narrative in the West in gay affirmative psychotherapy (Johnson 2012), in psycho-sexual identity development (Klein et al. 2015), and in queer story-telling since the 1960s and the 1970s (Plummer 57, 82). During my field research in three Chinese cities with multiple queer social groups and film clubs, I noticed that they often adopted media materials directly from the West as samples or templates for local queer people to follow in stretched queer homecoming and homemaking. When lots of local LGBT NGOs have strong overseas connections and receive funding from their Western counterparts, and numerous Western countries are indeed pioneering LGBT rights and same-sex marriage legislation, I completely understand that queer activists in Chinese societies have turned their eyes to these more advanced models. However, intensively following the West may obscure and marginalise other possibilities for queer activisms and strategies that are more sensitive to local cultures and traditions.

The Concentric Circle also has to deal with other difficulties. Visual materials like short documentaries and video clips are often hard to find and collect between each session. When local queer visual contents are rather scarce on screen, the film club has been largely

relying on foreign materials available online with Chinese subtitles. The organisers thus only have limited choices and sometimes have to recycle and reuse certain video clips. Furthermore, the two organisers both have full time jobs and can only work for the club during their spare time. The club does not generate any personal income, and they have not been able to find other people for long-time commitment to co-organise the film screenings. The screening venue that belongs to Beijing LGBT Center may also become unavailable when the city is hosting national or international political conferences or other major social events, and the authorities want to temporarily shut down all the non-official organisations. Due to these issues, the film club has experienced interruptions from time to time.

The participants also present another issue for this alternative kinship circle. Queer film clubs in China are often not based on membership but open to all potential participants. Some people have become long-term members who frequent the club, some only show up occasionally, and some “one-timers” will drop out after the first participation. During my field research, I noticed that frequent participants often behaved more actively and more at ease in the club, whereas other people were prone to be more nervous or cautious when they first joined in. This is a common problem facing most communal queer events: frequent participants often unconsciously form a stronger bonding among them—a smaller circle within a circle—that is hard for outsiders (newcomers and occasional visitors) to penetrate. Once formed, such a small circle of acquaintances and friends within a club potentially makes it difficult for new attendees to join in the “family” and acquire a sense of belonging. People strange to the scene, already nervous, are often left with insufficient time to express their opinions and let others learn more about them, when the frequent participants become very active during the discussions. This leads to some people dropping out from participation once they are unable to acquire and secure the sense of family-like belonging (i.e. alternative kinship) that they are searching for.

But, as any queer social space, the organisers cannot fully control or determine how people utilise and make sense of the film club, once it has been established. The emphasis on visual cultures and narrative therapy does not mean that people all come to the clubs for films and story-sharing; in fact, a lot of participants are utilising the film space to meet new friends and potential lovers. It is not uncommon that people exchange contact details in the club after a screening session, and I was also approached quite a few times by other participants during my field studies in various queer film clubs across three Chinese cities. Sometimes they did want to further discuss films or talk more about film studies and theories, but in most cases they looked forward to future possibilities to start a relationship. I assume that hook-up for casual sex is also a possible option for some people after a screening session but, in any case, that is often negotiated privately and remains unknown to others.

This also explains the reason that a film club is a more reliable space than gay dating and hook-up apps to socialise with other queer people. It is not that people are connected through the medium of film, but that face-to-face interpersonal communication can never be replaced by virtual interactions through online and mobile social media. More important, if people are willing to go through all the trouble to find the club venue (often hidden in a residential compound without any signs outside) and participate in a two or three-hour screening and discussion, this often implies that they are patient and prepared for serious commitment and long-term relationship. The discussions about films and queer social issues also give people an invaluable chance to identify those who have similar cultural interests, or those who are more knowledgeable and more organised in visual and verbal articulations, as one's potential dates or lovers. This process is much more focused on the deeper mental and intellectual connections between people, and much different from random encounters in a gay bar or on a mobile app for quick dates or hook-ups. I will further develop this argument in Chapter 6, with references to cultural capital, social exclusion, and individual quality.

In a sum, when queer kinship has often been stretched by domestic and international queer migrations and cultural flows, and homecoming and homemaking become impossible or uncertain for queer people, urban co-tenancy as in *Rainbow Family* and queer community like the Concentric Circle film club demonstrate new forms of alternative queer families in urban areas. I argue that queer film club as a newly emerged form of queer screen culture in today's China presents a unique variant of alternative queer family. Queer film clubs also have the potential to bridge transnational flows of queer cultures and queer talents, and to generate a cinephilic sense of community for people who are passionate about films. These aspects will be further discussed in subsequent chapters with case studies of different film clubs, through which I also point out other problems and dilemmas centred in the club-style queer screen cultures in the twenty-first century Chinese societies.

Conclusion: The Changing Queer Kinship Structure

In this chapter, I have argued that “home” has often become an impossible physical and mental location for queer people to fully return to, and queer kinship has often been stretched by the growing domestic and transnational queer mobilities and migrations for better education and employment. Stretched queer kinship, more specifically, refers to the kinship ties stretched by domestic and global queer migrations and cultural flows, and by the rupture between one's non-conforming sexuality and the hetero-reproductive expectations from the family, particularly from the aging parents. Stretched kinship manifests at three interrelated levels: the physical separation of young queer people and the family of origin across time and space, the mental detachment of transgressive queer desires from the familial heteronormative expectations, and the resilient and dynamic process and balance in queer kinship negotiations with lineal and collateral families. In terms of queer homemaking, incognito heterosexual marriage, gay-lesbian cooperative marriage, and overseas legal same-sex marriage registration present three more forms of stretched queer kinship.

I have further tested and developed the notion of stretched kinship in examining recent queer Sinophone films, queer sit-com series produced by queer social media companies, and urban queer film clubs in Mainland China. Through the lens of stretched kinship, I have developed the notions of transnational homecoming and homemaking (between different Chinese societies and between Chinese and non-Chinese societies), “coming out to the Sinophone” (queer emigrations from Mainland China in search of more queer-friendly Sinophone societies and communities across the globe), and alternative queer kinships (as urban queer co-tenancy in *Rainbow Family* and as the family-community in the Concentric Circle film club). These types of kinship negotiations amply demonstrate new changes and challenges in today’s changing queer kinship structures in Chinese societies. These types of stretched kinship negotiations are characterised by physical and mental placement, displacement, and misplacement of queer sexualities, as well as location, dislocation, and relocation of family-like intimacies.

With my discussion of these concepts, this chapter explores the increasingly dynamic and vibrant queer kinship negotiations and recent screen cultures in the Chinese world. The paradigm of stretched kinship is full of generational tensions and interactions, concealment or revelation of one’s sexualities, familial acceptance or rejection of queer children, and mutual trust and mistrust as well as understandings and misunderstandings between family members. I believe that stretched kinship will continue to function as the fundamental queer Chinese kinship structure in the twenty-first century, when domestic and transnational queer flows become increasingly common and frequent. The idea of stretched kinship also provides an analytical lens through which future researchers can further scrutinise the changing queer cultures and kinship structures in other Chinese and non-Chinese societies and communities. In the next chapter, I will continue to examine the underpinning cause of stretched kinship, namely queer migrations, to further my discussion of queer mobilities on and off screens.

Chapter 5: Sinophone Mobilities

In the previous chapter, I wrote about stretched queer kinship as an inevitable consequence of increasingly frequent spatiotemporal migrations and movements of young generations in search of better education and employment. In this chapter, I turn my attention to this underpinning queer mobility *per se*, in order to further scrutinise its role in shaping and reshaping contemporary queer Chinese cultures on and off screens. Here I define mobilities from three perspectives: first, the physical/geographical and emotional embodied movement of queer migrants across different locales; second, the earnest endeavour of sexual minorities to overcome social and state homophobia so as to claim equal citizenship; and, third, the mobilised transgressive queer desire to cross and destabilise the borders between queer and non-queer, locals and migrants, and Mainland China and overseas Sinophone cultures. Based on these three interrelated forms of queer mobilities, in this chapter I research three forms of queer screen cultures: queer Sinophone feature film, transnational queer Sinophone digital filmmaking, and film club established by queer Sinophone migrants in China.

Mobilities, in both the physical and cultural sense, have long fascinated scholars and intellectuals across the humanities and social sciences. Since the “mobile turn” or “global turn” in the late 1980s, researchers have recast mobility from a sideline “epiphenomenon of more basic material, social or cultural formations” (D’Andera et al. 2011, 150) to “an evocative keyword for the twenty-first century and a powerful discourse that creates its own effects and contexts” (Hannam et al. 2006, 1). In recent decades, the issue of mobilities has been written about in the names of cultural flows (Appadurai 1996), speed and politics (Virilio [1977] 2006), the network society (Castells [1996] 2009), global complexity (Urry 2003/2007), and liquid modernity (Bauman 2000). A sculpting and ordering force in contemporary life, from micro-level daily commuting to macro-level transnational flows of

capital and cultural products, mobilities have become less an option than an obligation (see Gössling and Stavrinidi 2015; see also Cresswell 2006; Hannam et al. 2006; Kaufmann 2002; Urry 2000).

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, gender and sexuality issues have entered mobility scholarship and caught increasing attention from researchers in both fields (for example, Agustín 2007; Ahmadi 2003; Brennan 2004; Crenshaw 2003; Huang and Yeoh 2008; Joseph 1999; Pain 2001; Pain and Smith 2008; Plummer 2008; Walsh et al. 2008). Queer theory, in its anti-fixity propagation for more fluid and flexible sexual expressions and experiences, finds an intellectual alliance with mobility studies in its anti-sedentism (for example, Bryson et al. 2006; Fortier 2001/2003; Gopinath 2005; Gorman-Murray 2007/2009; Kunstman 2009; Luibhéid 2005/2008; Manalansan 2006; Oswin 2014; Puar 2002; Waitt and Gorman-Murray 2007/2011a/2011b; Yue 2012b). In the editorial for a special issue of the journal *Mobilities*, which is conspicuously titled *Love, Sexuality and Migration*, Mai and King (2009) argue for both a “sexual turn” and an “emotional turn” in the interrogation of mobility experiences. They see love and sexuality as two critical, if not decisive, forces in the imagination and enactment of the choice to migrate (296), which are still under-researched in recent mobility scholarship. For them, a shift of focus to sexuality is crucial in understanding mobilities.

The “emotional turn”, on the other hand, highlights the lived experience in mobility and migrancy, encompassing feelings, desires, intimacies, memories, and narratives along the routes of spatiotemporal movement. This turn is akin to the emerging academic discipline of “emotional geographies” (Davidson et al. 2005), a field of enquiry that locates emotions in the geographical movement of the body, which in turn echoes a growing scholarship on queer geographies and geographies of sexualities (Bell 1991; Brown 2000; Browne et al. 2007; Gorman-Murray et al. 2008; Gorman-Murray 2012; Johnston and Longhurst 2010; Knopp

2007; Oswin 2008). This emotional approach, argues Gorman-Murray (2009, 441-7), should find its embodiment, insofar as queer bodies function as the carriers of feelings and desires in the pursuit of love and comfort along the migration journey. This is how I have defined the first aspect of queer mobilities, namely the emotional embodied movement along time and space. Later I will follow Gorman-Murray and other geographers of (queer) sexualities in examining “intimate mobilities” or the emotional embodiment in queer migrations, only with a critique of the current scholarship on this issue.

The emphasis on emotions and intimate connections in human geographies parallels the growing interest in mobilities and intimacies in media and communication studies. Raiti (2007) argues in an Asian context that *mobile intimacy* is “the ability to be intimate across distances of time and space” through new media technology. In 2012, *Feminist Media Studies* put together a set of articles in a special issue titled *Mobile Intimacies*, in an attempt to better research the meanings of mobile technology for women and for gender relations. In her study of Chinese gay filmmakers, furthermore, Yue (2012a) also argues that digital filmmaking and film consumption on small-scale cellphone screens contribute to a mobile intimacy in new social networks of cultural participation and production. “Intimate mobility” and “mobile intimacy” have become increasingly contested and complicated notions across geographical mobility, emotional embodiment, oral and visual narratives, and digital technology. I will extend this approach by analysing the role of queer social media and video-sharing websites in facilitating transnational flows of queer migrants and screen cultures, as well as in creating Sinophonic cultural conjuncture (intimacy) and disjuncture (estrangement).

The second point from which I define queer mobilities lies in the overcoming of social and state homophobia for queer people to claim equal citizenship and nationalist belonging. Intellectual discussion on queer/sexual citizenship is blossoming since the *fin-de-millénaire*, showing growing interest in regional and global queer mobilities and border-

crossing queer migrations (e.g. Bennett 2009; Berlant 1997; Cohler 2010; Luibhéid and Cantú 2005; Cruz-Malave and Manalansan 2002; Phelan 2001; Provencher 2007; Yue and Zubillaga-Pow 2012). Jasbir Puar's (2007/2013) theorisation of homonationalism most insightfully catches the longing of queer people for the nation-state and for equal sexual citizenship. Such homonationalist *longing*, however, is further complicated by the need of migrants for the sense of *belonging*. Their desire to overcome homophobia and become equal citizens in the host country shows a new kind of queer mobility (Yue 2012b) that needs to be further interrogated. My point of departure, furthermore, is to recast the issue of homonationalist longing/belonging in a Sinophone context, and investigate what insights we can gain by looking at the intersection of queer Sinophone studies and mobility studies.

The third aspect of queer mobilities, the transgressive desire to cross the boundaries between queer/non-queer, local/non-local, and China/Sinophone, largely develops from my own field research in queer film clubs in urban China. Beside "alternative kinship" or queer peer circles established through film clubs, which I discussed in Chapter 4, I wonder how film clubs also embrace emotional embodied queer mobilities and accommodate mobilised queer desires and articulations. My intention, in other words, is to put ethnography into geography, visual narrative, and the media sphere, so as to better interrogate queer mobilities structured through queer public spaces. I am curious about how mobilities have sculpted today's film club scene, and in which ways the queer film publics have also become mobilised rather than sedentary and static. I wonder whether queer film clubs in China are counterpublics (Fraser 1992; Warner 2002) or mobile publics (Punathambekar 2011), as I first asked in Chapter 1, and what kind of "counterflows" are circulated within and beyond such queer spaces. I will proceed to answer this question later in this chapter.

Overall, based on a substantial amount of mobility scholarship in transnational Asian contexts (e.g. Cruz-Malave and Manalansan 2002; Gopinath 2005; Manalansan 2006;

Robinson 1996; Walsh et al. 2008; Yue 2012a/2012b; Yue and Zubillaga-Pow 2012), I propose to connect the newly emerged Sinophone scholarship with mobility studies to explore in which ways they are mutually enlightened and in what sense they problematise each other. I will look at queer mobilities through the lens of Sinophone, and question and queer Sinophone theories by analysing different kinds of mobilities through the medium of screen cultures. In what follows, I present three case studies to research queer Sinophone mobilities: Mainland to Hong Kong queer migrants on Sinophone film screen, transnational migration and queer Sinophone digital filmmaking across China and Malaysia, and queer cultural flows between Mainland China and Taiwan through urban queer film club.

Lost in Migration: Queer Sinophone Mobilities on Film Screen

In the previous chapter, I cast migration and mobility in a generally positive light, arguing that migrations often open up new possibilities for queer people to explore their sexualities, build peer rapport, and become fully independent queer individuals. I argue that migration to another geolocation often turns into a homemaking process (Brah 1996; Fortier 2000/2001; see also Hannam et al. 2006, 10; Mai and King 2009, 298) that creates alternative kinship ties to complete a journey of “uprooting” from the family of origin and “regrounding” into the host societies (Ahmed et al. 2003). I also coined and developed the idea of stretched kinship, or the tensions and negotiations between one’s sexual self and one’s Confucian obligation of filial piety. I analysed two autobiographical Hong Kong films, *Permanent Residence* and *Soundless Wind Chime*, to discuss how queer kinship is physically and emotionally stretched, and why home often becomes an impossible location to return to.

As I have discussed, filmmaker Scud’s own personal migration from Mainland China to Hong Kong and Australia (and then back to Hong Kong) is a perfect example of queer mobility. As reflected in his autobiographical *Permanent Residence*, life is a process of migration from one place to another, constantly in search of love and a better life. When the

main character in the film, Ivan, tries to commit suicide after a breakup with his boyfriend, a phone call from his Israeli friend saves his life. Invited by this friend for a Mediterranean trip, Ivan gives up on his suicidal thoughts and embarks on a journey to Jerusalem. His choice of mobility rescues him from the place of sorrow and from his attempt to end his own life. Mobility not only serves as a salvation to a broken love and a broken life in this film, but becomes a necessity for people like Scud/Ivan to keep alive and active.

In this case, migration itself is a permanent process, while settlement often appears temporary and transient. The only true “permanent residence”, as shown in the last scene of the film, is death—coffins float permanently over the lifeless Dead Sea. The end of mobility is the end of change, growth, development, and transformation, and hence the end of life. *Permanent Residence*, as well as Scud’s other films shot transnationally across different continents, warmly embrace his own experience as a queer migrant and his desire to keep a mobilised and floating life. In this section, I continue to discuss this leitmotif of migration and mobility, with a focus on *Amphetamine* (2010), a later movie in Scud’s queer film trilogy. Although the story in this film is largely fictional, it is better understood as a sequel to Scud’s autobiographical journey to recount his personal life story cinematically. The two characters in *Amphetamine*, discussed below in more detail, serve as a pair of doppelgänger of Scud himself. The movie also includes conscious intertextual references to Scud’s early films, a point to which I shall return later.

More specifically, in this part I will develop my analysis based on three main points: First, instead of love and comfort (Gorman-Murray 2007/2009), the intimate emotional embodiment also has an intimidating aspect: violence and trauma. Mobilities may lead to intimacy, but can also result in alienation and disorientation. Second, for rootless queer migrants, it is not only the homeland, but also the host society that can become an impossible location to fully settle in. Third, for some people, migration is always a *route*, a never-ending

process of becoming, without a final destination or a final chance to put down the *root* to become local (see Chambers 2001, 188; Shih 2010a, 46). What I aim to achieve in this part, by closely reading the film from these three perspectives, is to shift the focus of emotional embodiment in current mobility scholarship to its long overlooked dark side.

Andrew Gorman-Murray (2007, 111), to begin with, argues for the significance of individual migrants and the queer body—defined as “the site of sexual identity-formation and the vector of movement” (106)—in the study of queer migrations. He sees the body as “a more appropriate *scale* for analysing the complexity of queer migration” (2009, 444; original emphasis) to downsize the grand narrative of the national and the transnational (2007, 111). As Gibson and Argent (2008, 136) point out, national census of queer migrants has curtailed ability to capture the full complexity of migration. The oral and visual narrative of a life story at an individual level potentially reaches deeper and farther in recounting and revealing the lived and embodied experience of mobilities. Moreover, argues Gorman-Murray (2009, 443) after Michel Foucault (1978), sexuality lies primarily in the body and its pleasure. In my own observation, the body is the frontline carrier of feelings and desires in the motivation and the enactment of migration, and every migrating experience is an embodied experience. What we call migration is essentially a relocation of the *body* and everything it carries along. It is in this sense that “body is simultaneously located and mobile” (445), and hence a “mobile location” in itself.

More important, this shift of focus to the body enables a more thorough interrogation of both the physical/material and mental/emotional factors in queer migrations and mobilities. Gorman-Murray further argues that bodily comfort in a safe environment for queer people and emotions of love, intimacy, and joint homemaking made possible by migration constitute the major motifs in queer mobilities. Following his analysis of individual narrative and oral history, I treat *Amphetamine* (Figure 4) as Scud’s visual narrative in a Sinophone Hong Kong

context to examine comfort/body and love/emotion in queer mobilities. The two protagonists in the movie, Kafka and Daniel, constitute two parts of Scud's own life trajectory. Kafka moves to Hong Kong from Mainland China and lives in poverty through his childhood. Daniel, a high-achieving Hong Kong elite, migrates to Australia and then comes back to the city-state of Hong Kong. The two stories together precisely parallel Scud's own migrating route; what Scud does in this film is breaking his own migration experience in half, and letting Kafka carry his childhood memory and Daniel his adulthood story. The embodied emotions of the two characters thus hold the key to unlock the mobilised migrating queer experience portrayed through the screen.



Figure 4. *Amphetamine* (official poster)

Kafka Tam, the first protagonist, is a personal trainer and a model working in Hong Kong. His own migration story is not told in details onscreen, but the film has left enough clues for audiences to complete the jigsaw of Kafka's past. Born in 1982, he probably migrated to Hong Kong from Mainland China at a young age with his family. His father died when he was still a child, and his older brother was unemployed and addicted to drugs. His

mother, appears only briefly onscreen in his illusions, has been hospitalised and dying from illness. Kafka grew up almost alone in Hong Kong's suburban slum, looking after himself and his family. He started to learn martial arts when he was young in order to become physically strong, because nobody could protect him but himself. Now a personal trainer with a well-toned body, he sometimes provides sexual services to gay men coming to the gym, as depicted at the beginning of the film, to make occasional extra money. But bodily strength cannot solve every problem. His family still lives in poverty, and his mother dies of illness half-way through the film. Furthermore, his physical power also fails to fully protect him, as seen in a traumatic flashback in the movie.

When Kafka saw a Mainland Chinese girl being sexually harassed by a local gang, he stepped up to save the girl and fight the gang single-handedly. Outnumbered by the criminals, he was beaten up and then violently gang-raped. Since then, he begins to use amphetamine to both ease the lingering physical pain in his body and escape from the long-lasting mental wound. He starts to have hallucinations, partially due to the side-effects of the drug, where his memory with his mother resurfaced in a painful way. He cries and blames himself for not being able to save his mother from illness, and for not have provided her with a happy and affluent life. The girl whom he saved from the gang arguably serves as a reminder of his mother, a Mainland woman in Hong Kong facing local people's hostility and abuse. Kafka may have failed to save his mother, but he has indeed saved the girl from the gangsters, albeit at the expense of himself being gang-raped. This girl he saved has then become his girlfriend, out of gratitude for his heroic (yet tragic) sacrifice, but this relationship does not last long.

Travelling back to the Mainland, Kafka conceals a small amount of amphetamine in a bottle of chewing gum, which results in him and Daniel, his current boyfriend, being arrested at a security checkpoint in China. In an interrogation room, both Kafka and Daniel are stripped naked and thoroughly body-searched for any possible drugs concealed. The duo is

portrayed in absolute helplessness, going through anal-probes in full nudity by a group of police. This scene sharply resembles the flashback in which Kafka was violently gang-raped in what seems to be a suburban wasteland in Hong Kong. That is to say, both sides of the law (gangsters and cops) and both sides of the border (Hong Kong and Mainland China) have abused him equally brutally. Daniel is released thereafter because he has an Australian passport. Kafka, however, is detained in Mainland China, before Daniel rescues him with the help of a lawyer.

As a result of the violent rapist penetration, first by the gang and then by the cops, Kafka has issues with same-sex intercourse. On the first night he slept with Daniel, as seen in an early scene, he was actually unable to have sex with him. He had a terrible nightmare that Daniel forced him to have sex, and he fought back by throwing Daniel out of the window using his martial arts skills; out of immediate regret and guilt, he jumped after Daniel, and ended up killing both his boyfriend and himself. Awakening from this nightmare, he suffered from a severe nervous breakdown and shouted to Daniel that he would never be able to perform sexually with a man. As Maddison (2002, 157) points out, completing the journey to perform and confirm one's sexuality inevitably involves "getting laid"; the body and its pleasure determine and are determined by one's ability for sexual performance. Kafka's inability to act on his sexual desire and intimacy significantly curtails his comfort-seeking and love-seeking journey. He told Daniel that everyone who loved him had left him, while the latter reassured him that he would never leave him alone. But Kafka's dysfunctional body only led to a disorientation regarding his attraction to men and his struggle over his sexuality. He could not explain why his mind was wholeheartedly in love with Daniel but his body failed miserably. His emotional intimacy with Daniel was disrupted and frustrated by his incapability of building a physical-bodily connection with the object of his attraction.

Kafka's subsequent attempt to motivate himself in overcoming his physical and mental trauma did not pay off, either. He tried to learn from gay pornography about how to have sex with a man, while the explicit sex scene onscreen only resurfaced his traumatic memory from the deep corner of his mind. After his release from the detention centre and his confession about his past to Daniel, he tries again to have sex with the latter. This time it is Daniel who stops him and refuses to act upon the desire. Daniel believes that Kafka needs more time to recover, and to find his inner comfort and security in a deeply wounded body/mind. But the physical disruption and disconnection between the two only weakens their emotional attachment. Kafka constantly questions his attraction to Daniel and becomes increasingly disorientated: his intimate desire toward Daniel is interrupted by his traumatised embodiment, and his sexuality is hopelessly detached from his emotions and feelings of love.

Kafka, a tragic queer figure, represents those migrants whose emotional embodiment is deeply troubled along the migrating routes. His first migration experience, from Mainland China to Hong Kong, only resulted in a broken family, a life in struggle and poverty, and a traumatic experience of being gang-raped. His second migration, temporarily from Hong Kong back to the Mainland, resulted in an equally traumatic and violent experience. He has been physically and mentally tortured by both sides of his migrating routes, refused and rejected by the host society, and repulsed and repelled by the home state. If both sides of the law and both sides of the migrating border disdain his body and his emotion, then where could he put down his roots and make a place to call home? In the host city, Kafka is treated as an object for local sexual consumption (in the gym) and rapist penetration (in the slum). In the Mainland, he is seen as a drug addict carrying highly restricted amphetamine. He is neither embraced by Hong Kong nor tolerated by the Chinese "motherland". Just like the collapse of his own family and the death of his mother, his personal sense of home-belonging is never fully settled, whether in Hong Kong or in the Mainland. Instead of emotional

embodiment of comfort and love made possible by queer migration and mobility, as Gorman-Murray (2007/2009) and other scholars have repeatedly highlighted, Kafka is embodied with trauma and violence along his routes. His body is less a carrier of pleasure than an endurer of pain.

Even the name Kafka functions as a metaphor of homelessness and hopelessness. This name comes from Haruki Murakami's novel *Kafka on the Shore*, in which the 15-year-old protagonist leaves home to embark on an exilic journey in order to escape from an oedipal curse that he would murder his father to marry his mother and sister. The Kafka in the film, seen reading Murakami's novel, apparently considers himself the same exilic queer figure as the Kafka in the fiction. In both cases, moreover, Kafka is not a real name, but a reference to the writer Franz Kafka and his fiction *The Metamorphosis*. In the film, Daniel points to a poster of a theatrical adaptation of *The Metamorphosis*, and asks Kafka whether his name comes from the author of this masterpiece. In Franz Kafka's original story, a traveling salesman (another reference to mobility) mysteriously metamorphoses into a monstrous insect-like creature, a queer and uncanny embodiment repelled and rejected by his own family. His feelings and emotions (as human) are detached from his physical appearance (as non-human), while his own family and the society treat him with inhuman indifference and resentment. Kafka in *Amphetamine* carries a double-embodied metaphor as a homeless and loveless queer figure, similar to both Murakami's and Franz Kafka's characters who are mentally traumatised or bodily dehumanised.

Towards the end of the film, Kafka is body-painted and installed with feather wings in a party, and then jumps out from the rooftop, probably under the hallucinating effect of amphetamine. His "flying" is depicted as apparently suicidal, before the camera reveals that there is another balcony in the lower level of the building which Kafka lands on and avoids death. Shot in slow motion and edited into different parts across the whole film, this flying

scene shares some uncanny resemblance with Alan Parker's film *Birdy* (1984). In *Birdy*, a war-veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder believes that he can fly like a bird and jumps off the rooftop. Seen as insane and suicidal by his friend, he also lands safely on a lower level of the mansion. The imagination of and the enactment upon fly/mobility in both films function as an escape for their protagonists from their mental trauma: if humans have engendered more harm than good to these characters in their lives, then dehumanisation and bird-like embodiment become a legitimate transgression for them to move on from past wounds caused by other humans.

The traumatised and dehumanised emotional embodiment of Kafka in the film also implies the plight facing queer migrants like him. When Daniel first met Kafka, he describes the latter as "the loneliest person" who does not seem to belong to this world at all. Unlike Daniel who migrated to Australia from Hong Kong and returned as a successful financial advisor, Kafka is stuck at the bottom of Hong Kong's capitalist society with little chance for upward social mobility. He is the outcast in this global financial centre, straddling between legal and illegal borders in his identities (migrant and drug user) and his professions (personal trainer and sex worker). Self-reflexively, Kafka tells Daniel that he was once casted in a local film called *Illegal Migration*, which is in fact Scud's earlier film *Permanent Residence*. His self-mocking implies his deeply buried identity anxiety that he is a migrant without legal residency in Hong Kong. His identity is never fully settled, and he never finds his place in this world. He dies from amphetamine overdose at the end of the film, aged 26 with a never fulfilled dream of love and home. Similar to the ending of *Permanent Residence*, death is paradoxically the only permanent settlement for queer migrants like Ivan and Kafka.

My point is that queer migrants like Kafka are seldom allowed the chance to fully settle down and become localised in the host society. Not unlike Ricky and Pascal in *Soundless Wind Chime* (see Chapter 4), these unskilled and undereducated migrants often

reside in the lowest level of the social hierarchy, doing hard-labour and illegal jobs to make a living in the host state. Facing both homophobia and xenophobia, they either return to the homeland with a shattered dream (e.g. Ricky) or die as migrants at a young age (e.g. Kafka and Pascal). For them, settlement is often temporary and transient, while the label of migrant is rather permanent. The original Chinese title of the film *Amphetamine* is *An Fei Ta Ming*, both a transliteration of the drug's name and an archaic way to say "settlement is not his fate". Disadvantaged and underprivileged, people like Kafka are often soon forgotten by the host states, and missing in both official state history and migration scholarship, as Nayan Shah (2012, 3-9) points out in a different context.

In Chapter 4, I argue that home has always become an impossible location for queer people to fully return to. In Kafka's case, however, not only the home state but the host society has become impossible. Hong Kong is a place that never truly accepts him or gives him a sense of home-like belonging. He never has the chance to find the support he needs, or to build an alternative family in the host city. Even his boyfriend, Daniel, is a high-achieving elite in the capitalist Hong Kong whom he can only admire but never catch up with. His love, that is to say, is dislocated in an impossible place where he can never become a true resident. The dislocated love symbolises his dislocated and unsettled identity—as queer, as sex worker, as drug addict, as rootless migrant, as victim of crimes, as physically consumed and abused, and as mentally wounded and traumatised. Just like the promise of permanent settlement is only provided by the host state to a selected few, the promise of a better life through migration is also a dream that does not always come true.

While Kafka's migrations only result in him being physically and mentally tortured by the gang and by the police, Daniel migrated back to Hong Kong just before the peak of the Global Financial Crisis which suddenly put his company at risk. He returned to Australia in 2008 with a broken heart (the death of Kafka) and an uncertain future in his career. In the

previous chapter, I cast queer mobility in a positive light; in this film, however, migrations often end up in trauma and heartache. The promise of a better queer life in the host city is an unattainable fantasy; migrations turn out to only replace old sufferings with new agony, and add new trauma to old wound. If migration is a trip searching for home and searching for love, it may well end up in a trek that is homeless and loveless. It is always an uncertain and uncanny queer journey, hopeful as much as hopeless.

In *Amphetamine*, furthermore, one of the major shooting locations is an unfinished harbour bridge under construction. Built from both sides of the harbour, the bridge is waiting to be connected in the middle. Daniel tells Kafka that the day the bridge is connected would be the day they cross the gap between them to build a long-term relationship. The metaphor of the bridge is a promise for both connectivity and mobility, in the sense that it links two separated parts together and enables people to move from one side to another. But this bridge has never been connected in the film, and Daniel and Kafka cannot build a stable relationship when the latter struggles over his drug problem and his disconnected body and emotions. The behind-the-scene footage included in the DVD reveals that the working title of the film was *Love of the Broken-Bridge (Duan Qiao Zhi Lian)*, which symbolises a broken queer romance without a future and an interrupted migration process without settlement. Just like the nomadic gay cowboys in *Brokeback Mountain*, both Kafka and Daniel are passengers, instead of settlers, in the home-searching and love-searching migrating journeys. Their encounters cannot but look temporary and transient, without any fully settled connections between the two. For people like them, migration is always a route but never a root.

Kafka and his family, I argue, also serve as a microcosm of a large number of Mainland Chinese migrants exiled to Hong Kong from the communist regime since the mid-twentieth century. Some of them have successfully settled down in the then British colony, whose descendants have become post-diasporic and local-born Sinophone Hong Kongers. On

the other hand, a large number of Mainland to Hong Kong migrants have remained at the bottom of the society, unable to fit in, secure a decent job, or achieve true settlement to become local residents. A lot of them, as illegal migrants, have to struggle under the localist indifference and rejection. Unwanted in their homeland and unwelcomed in their host society, people like Kafka and his family never really have a chance to become localised post-diasporic Sinophone. Alienated and discarded in the localist cultural and sexual hierarchy, they remain *en route* with a hope too slim to permanently put down *roots*. In the journey to become post-diasporic Sinophone, they are dead on arrival. Their trip ends before it even starts.

As I have argued, the issue of migration and mobility is central to Sinophone's theory and ontology. Sinophone's major concern is post-diasporic Chinese cultures and societies, where immigrants have put down their roots to become local, and their diaspora identity has expired and evaporated. Hitherto, Sinophone theories are more concerned with settlement and rootedness—when migrating routes have become post-migrant roots (Shih 2010a, 46). But, as I have argued after Nayan Shah (2012), promises of settlement are in fact only offered by the host states to a selected few. Temporary migrants who do not put down their roots in the host societies are excluded from Sinophone theories and ontologies. The current emphasis of Sinophone theories is on settlement and localisation as the outcome of mobility; however, I contend that the actual process of migration and the migrating routes themselves are equally meaningful sites of queer cultural expressions and reproductions.

This is also why I am sceptical about current scholarship on queer mobilities. Recent scholarship has exhausted how mobilities come to represent inequality and exclusion (more on this in the next chapter) across race, class, age, gender, power, and the ability to move (Bauman 1998; Cass et al. 2005; Cohen and Gössling 2015; Gössling and Stavrinidi 2015; Urry 2005/2011; Urry and Larsen 2011). These issues constitute what Tim Cresswell (2010)

has theorised as the entangled “politics of mobilities” that concern with the production and distribution of power through movements and migrations. However, even social analysts like Gorman-Murray (2009) acknowledge both the positive and the negative experiences in embodied migrating emotions, most people get enrolled in their studies are those who have succeed in migration. Those failed, lost, or dead along the way often do not have the chance to articulate their story and make their voice heard in the society and the academe. The emotions and embodiments in failed or interrupted migrations have not caught enough attention in (queer) mobility studies.

Thus I argue that both current Sinophone scholarship and current mobility studies should further turn the spotlight to the contested and complicated migrating *process* (motions and emotions, and pleasure and pain), instead of the *result* of migration (settlement and localisation), for a richer and fuller examination and appropriation of mobility experiences. Not everyone has reached the point of permanent settlement along the routes, but those who have lost, failed, wounded, or deceased have nonetheless generated unique and heterogeneous voices of mobilities. Routes and roads are equally important sites of cultural reproductions and emotional embodiments as home and destination; rootlessness is no less salient than roots in the examination of mobilities and migrations. We should further look into non-settlement migration and further embrace the stories like Kafka’s and Daniel’s in Sinophone studies and mobility studies.

Between the home and the host society, and between the origin and the destination, there always exists a plurality of histories and stories, constituencies and contingencies, and experiences and expressions that are powerful and meaningful in understanding the migrating process. Echoing my argument is the view of Iain Chambers (2001) that home is not a fixed structure but a contingent passage (26) between the rooted conservatism and the endless faring of movement (188). Moving and mooring, uprooting and regrounding, mobility and

immobility, and stability and instability all have their roles to play in the imagination and enactment of migration. The embodied queer emotions and desires are precisely born in the transitions between roots and routes, in the negotiations of contingencies, and in the gap between sedentism (immobility) and anti-sedentism (mobility). These emotions and desires are also “mobilised”, so to speak, along with the bodily carriers in queer migrations. In this regard, the very dualistic categories of root and route should also be questioned, inasmuch as they are often mutually conditional and convertible in the mobilised experience of migration. I will further this argument in the next two case studies—a Sinophone queer film director in China and Malaysia, and a Taiwanese gay-friendly coffee house in the centre of Beijing.

Longing/Belonging: Queer Sinophonicities, Sexual Citizenship, and Digital Filmmaking

Previously I have coined and developed the idea of “coming out to the Sinophone”—a “coming out migration” (Brown 2000; Cant 1997; Fortier 2003; Maddison 2002; Plummer 1995) from Mainland China to more queer-friendly Sinophone societies like Hong Kong. In this sense, becoming Hong Kong, or becoming Sinophone, is a process to pursue sexual modernity and freedom that may not be allowed in the PRC. The Sinophone thus becomes the object of China’s (queer) desire. But, arguably, not every Sinophone society is more tolerant and friendly towards queer cultural expressions. In this part, I present a case study in a Sinophone Malaysian context and focus on the migration story of Desmond Bing-yen Ti, an emerging director who has produced and distributed digital queer films in both China and Malaysia. Academic studies of Chinese cultures today often include Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan; in this research, I choose to include a Sinophone Malaysian example to shed further light on queer mobilities and screen cultures in the twenty-first century.

I choose this example because it best fits the four criteria I outlined in Chapter 1 in selecting what data to include in this thesis: inspiration for my research, accessibility within limited time and budget for research, potential contribution to the scholarship, and coherence

with other data in my thesis. First, Desmond Bing-yen Ti's digital films have inspired me to examine transnational migration and filmmaking in a wider Sinophone context beyond Hong Kong and Taiwan. Second, I met Ti online during my digital ethnographic study of Feizan (see the next chapter) when he was based in Beijing and promoting his films via this queer social networking site. That means I was able to directly access his films and approach him for interview in China. Third, Ti's case will provide unique insight for the studies of queer mobilities and screen cultures, inasmuch as it provides a rare intersection between queer China and queer Malaysia via digital filmmaking and online film distribution. Fourth, this example is most coherent with other case studies that I have presented in this research—it is connected to Mainland China, the main site for my fieldwork, and to the online queer social networking site Feizan, where I started my digital ethnography—not to mention that the issue of migration is centre to this case. In what follows, I start my analysis with a discussion of how his films have often crossed borders to reverse sexual hierarchy and queer/non-queer narratives onscreen. Then I turn to Malaysian Sinophonicities to discuss the mobilised queer homonationalist desires in overcoming local state racism and homophobia to claim equal (sexual) citizenship. Finally, I foray into Sinophonic conjunctures and disjunctures between Malaysia and China to further examine queer Sinophone mobilities.

Born in Kuala Lumpur, Desmond Bing-yen Ti completed his tertiary education in film production in Malaysia and China, and currently works as a filmmaker in his hometown. What brings him to attention is *Exchange 2012* (*Tong Chuang Yi Meng*, 2011), a two-part short film debut blending together his own real-life story and a fantasy of heterosexuals becoming minorities while homosexuality becoming normal. This work won a short film award in an international art festival in Malaysia, and enjoyed enthusiastic reception in China after Ti came to Beijing. *Exchange 2012* has reached over one million viewers combined in several Chinese video-sharing websites and generated many more comments from local

Chinese viewers than from their Malaysian counterparts, according to a statement posted by Ti (2013b) on queer social media Feizan. He has directed more than a dozen short films since then, with a batch of music videos, short documentaries, docudramas, and adverts, many of which are queer-related. Most of these visual creations were produced in Malaysia, whereas a few were made in China.

Ti's filmic voyage unmistakably demonstrates multi-layered queer mobilities: first in the border-crossing themes in his queer films, second in his pursuit of equality as an ethnic/sexual minority in Malaysia dominated by Muslim Malays, and third in his migrating routes between China and the Sinophone. His filmic debut *Exchange 2012*, to begin with, imagines that the mass population turn into homosexuals, while queers turn into straight on the alleged 2012 Mayan Eschatological Day—hence an “exchange” and a reverse of the heteronormative sexual hierarchy. Ti also adds another twist to the storyline: people who were born on that day will not be changed. The two male protagonists in the film thus remain their old sexual inclinations, respectively toward the same and the opposite sex. The heterosexual man thus suddenly becomes an outcast in the new sexual order, while his best friend and secret-lover has become part of the new normal.

The tension between the two unravels and reaches a climax when they confront each other with their innermost feelings. This scene is shot with jerky hand-held camera, in a cloudy day with a thunderstorm about to come, through which we can feel the tensions bursting out of the shaking frame. Only when one character (Jin Ren) begins to confide his deep-buried private feelings to another does the camerawork returns to steady—the self-revelation seems to be a huge relief that the camera also cools down to visually find its inner peace and give audiences a few moments to breathe (Figure 5). This is, however, not simply a coming-out scene. When the sexual hierarchy between homo and heterosexuals has been reversed, who is coming out in this scene—the gay man or the straight man? Who is the

queered *other* in this film? They are both left over by the exchange when other people have unknowingly altered their sexual preference, and mobilised by this sudden reverse of sexual hierarchy to expose their deep-buried emotions to each other.

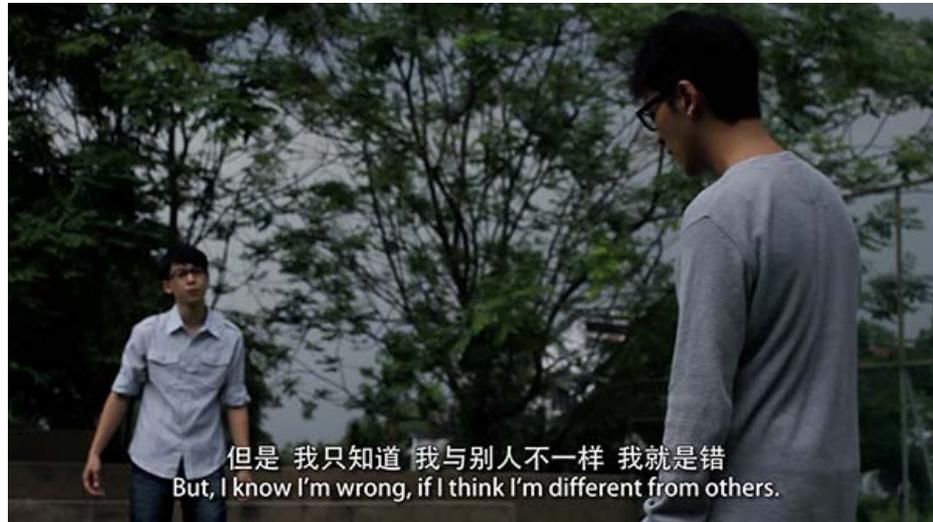


Figure 5. The confrontation scene in *Exchange 2012* (courtesy of the filmmaker)

This intense scene, furthermore, intercuts between the current confrontation and the flashbacks of their intimate memories before the Exchange, where the boundaries between homosexual and heterosexual, normal and abnormal, past and present, and real and fictional have been frequently transgressed. After *Exchange 2012* won the film award, Ti continued to produce a docudrama recounting the behind-the-scene story of the film. In this docudrama he plays a minor role (a journalist), whereas the character based on his own real-life prototype is played by another actor. In addition, he is the director of both this docudrama and the film *mise-en-abîme*. In this case, the borders between fictional and non-fictional and between the narrator and the narrated are further blurred, through which an uncanny queer feeling derives. Ti loves to open his films with seemingly heteronormative characters and stories, before taking a dramatic turn to reverse the role of queer and non-queer, or overturn their positions in the socio-sexual hierarchy. His works often cross the borders between fantasy and reality, and between the seemingly rigid and dualistic gay/straight dualism. Most of the drama and

tension in his films derive from a mobilised queer desire to declare that gay and straight are equally normal, as much as equally queer, by destabilising the boundaries between them and frequently reversing their roles onscreen.

This mobilised transgressive queer desire to transcend fixed sexual boundaries and narrative conventions has since then frequently manifested throughout Ti's repertoire. In Ti's later comedy *Valentine's Package* (*Qingren Taocan*, 2013), for example, two heterosexual couples turn out to be two queer couples, while a straight man is mistaken by them as gay. Ti then directed *Same Love* (*Tong Fu Tong Qi*, 2013) in Beijing, a short film based on a video that had gone viral in China's cyber universe. In the original video, a Chinese woman suspected that her husband was cheating on her, and tried to catch him and his mistress. Having her friend shoot the whole process with a video camera, she caught her husband cheating on her not with a woman, but with a man. A conflict then bursts out in front of the camera, and the recording of this real-life drama was then uploaded online and widely circulated through local social media and video-sharing sites in China. This video parallels the increased public awareness and concern of *tong qi*—"gay-man's wife" or a woman who finds out her husband is gay only after the marriage—as I discussed in Chapter 4. Ti adapts this story in *Same Love* with a twist: a woman catches her husband cheating on her with a man, only to reveal that she herself is a closeted lesbian.

While the original video casts the gay man in a rather negative light as both sexually deviant and morally degraded (to marry a woman and to cheat on her with a man), Ti's film interestingly reverses the story from an intense conflict and confrontation to a process of mutual coming-out and mutual understanding. In his film, a seemingly heteronormative marriage turns out to be deeply problematic, and a heterosexual couple turns out to be both queer. More important, the viewers' heteronormative expectation is aroused but contradicted, and people who may point fingers at the gay man surprisingly find both sides of the marriage

cheating on each other and faking their sexual orientations. Then who is condemnable in this story: the man, the woman, or the robust homophobia in the society that drives the two both into the closet? This interpretation also directs us toward the original real-life story captured in the video—if homosexuals were not stigmatised and pathologised, if same-sex marriage was legally recognised, would the gay man marry a woman in the first place? Overturned in Ti's film is not only the woman's sexual identity from straight to queer, but also the gay man's role from the sole target of condemnation to an equal victim of the heteronormative pressure.

In this way, Ti's film has also turned a potentially homophobic video into a call for equal love and equal nuptial rights. The real-life conflict thus becomes a bitter-sweet satirical queer comedy, in which homosexuality paradoxically functions as the ultimate salvation to a hopeless quasi-heterosexual marriage. From *Exchange 2012* to *Same Love*, Ti has often mobilised real-life homonormative characters and stories into something queer and border-crossing, and uncanny and unconventional. The audiences' heteronormative assumptions are often challenged and overturned alongside the development of the narratives. Although Ti told me during my interview with him that he did not have a single theme running through his works, most of his films unmistakably demonstrate a mobilised queer desire to transgress the gay/straight boundaries and reverse queer and non-queer roles and relationships onscreen. His short films produced in Sinophone Malaysia and Mainland China clearly present a border-crossing queer mobility to challenge the fixity of sexual hierarchy and destabilise the rigid sexual categories.

Ti's signature queer mobility onscreen further echoes Ti's own real-life mobility as a queer Sinophone filmmaker. As a Chinese descendant born in Malaysia, Ti shows a very conscious awareness of a localised Malaysian identity. His self-introduction on Chinese gay social media Feizan begins with "I am Bing-yen Ti, Malaysian" (2013a). When I approached

him for interview via WeChat, a mobile chatting app popular among Chinese-speakers since 2011, his profile concisely and conspicuously states “Malaysian” alongside his name. All these practices presumably avoid any confusion caused by his Chinese name and his Mandarin proficiency about his nationality and self-portrayed national identity. Along his migrating route between China and Malaysia, Ti demonstrates a very clear post-diasporic identification that Sinophone theories have warmly celebrated—that the label of Chinese exile/diaspora has expired, and the Chinese descendants have become fully localised in the new country of residence. This strong sense of nationalist belonging also runs through Ti’s works. Some of his (non-queer) films have a more native Malaysian focus and require local knowledge to understand. *Pray for Beng Hock* (*Quanjiafu*, 2013), for instance, is based on the tragic and suspicious suicide of a Sinophone Malaysian journalist and councilman-aide Teoh Beng Hock. Through this film, Ti calls for further investigation into Teoh’s death. Ti’s 2014 short film *Young Man* (*Nianqing Ren*) is produced in memory of Yasmin Ahmad, a late Malay film and advert director whose own films and alleged transgender/transsexual/intersex past have been studied recently through the lens of queer Malaysian Sinophonicities (Hee and Heinrich 2014).

Therefore, to understand Ti’s story through the lens of queer Sinophone mobility, we must first understand the unique queer Malaysian Sinophonicities. Since its independence in 1957 and the establishment of the state religion Islam in 1963, Malaysia has witnessed a gradual revival of Islamic doctrine, ethics, and (sex-related) values (Teh 2008). Since then, non-conforming genders and sexualities have been socially, legally, and religiously oppressed, alienated, and silenced by the increasingly heightened Islamisation (Offord 2013; see also Baba 2001; Lee 2011; Williams 2009; Yue 2012b). The religious situation in Sinophone Malaysia is more complicated. The latest census in Malaysia has confirmed the

popularity of Buddhism and Taoism, in lieu of Islam, among its Chinese population.¹ But even most Sinophone Malaysians are not bound by the Islamic law, they are still subject to the secular law that punishes homosexual conducts (Williams 2009, 6-7). Moreover, if the dominant political and legislative principles are built on the religious ones, no one is bulletproof from religious dogmas and doctrines. The non-Islamic Sinophone Malaysian culture potentially leaves a less restricted area for visual explorations of queer sexualities, as seen in Ti's case, but queer emotions and sexualities in Malaysia are still confined under its religious, legal, and political ceilings.

A former British colony 30% of whose population is ethnically Chinese and Indian, as a result of transnational migrations in the past century, Malaysia's hybrid ontology arguably marks its plight in defining a monolithic national identity.² The state's economic, cultural, and religious policies established since the Sino-Malay sectarian strife in 1969 have been further marginalising ethnic minorities. Today's Malaysian state shows a strong favouritism of *bumiputera*—literally “sons of the soil”—a political term that privileges Malays and other indigenous Malaysians over ethnic minorities of foreign origins (Yue 2008, 251; see also G. C. Khoo 2005/2006; O. Khoo 2003; Lee 2012; Gabriel 2015). Bing-Yen Ti's nationalist identification with the country rather manifests as a Sinophone or multicultural Malaysian identity situated between longing and belonging, as distinctive from the Malay-centred state nationalism and racism. This is less an identity than a position—“a position of in-betweenness”, as Kai-man Chang (2015, 255) comments in his writing of Sinophone Malaysian queer filmmaker Tsai Ming-Liang. Similar to the queer Malaysian migrants in Australia studied by Audrey Yue (2012b), Ti's mobilised homonationalist desire towards the

¹ Department of Statistics, Malaysia (2011).

² According to the latest census conducted in 2010's Malaysia, Malays account for 60.3% of the total population with 22.9% Chinese and 7.1% Indians—at its peak Chinese used to make up 45% of the population in the late 1950s, but while they have multiplied in absolute numbers, the ratio they account for has been dropped significantly during the second half of the twentieth century (see Mahari 2011 for more on this).

nation-state between longing and belonging is inextricably tied to the marginalisation of Sinophone Chinese descendants in Malaysia.

Malaysian Sinophonicities, as Hee and Heinrich (2014) point out, often take the form as a negotiation and a resistance against the *bumiputera* privilege and the (heteronormative) racial harmony pictured and imagined in state propaganda. In the long history of Chinese emigration to Southeast Asia (see Lockard 2013), Chinese migrants and descendants have been struggling for over a century in Malaysia against a “dual domination”, a concept developed by Ling-chi Wang (2006) to study Chinese migrants overseas. This dual domination comes from both Malaysia’s state racism and the Chinese cultural essentialism, and from both the local nation’s refusal and the increased pressure from China’s rise in the regional and the global stages (see also Shih 2010a, 48; 2011, 714). Ti’s clear nationalist identification with Malaysia and his local focus in filmmaking demonstrate a strong longing and craving for the nation to claim local Sinophone filmmakers as equally genuine and socially responsible Malaysian citizens. As Yuen-Beng Lee (2012) reminds us, today’s digital filmmakers like Ti who are urban-born and educated overseas at the tertiary level often show a strong willingness to tell local stories and express their discontent about social and sexual inequity in Malaysia. Seldom before seen in the local film history, the ethnic and cultural diversities of the country are directly portrayed in their films (see Muthalib 2007). Bing-yen Ti’s border-crossing films, in this context, become a mobilised site of negotiation and resistance to claim for ethnic and sexual citizenship—that both sexual minorities (as queer) and ethnic minorities (as Chinese) are equal citizens in Malaysia.

This queer Sinophone longing for a homonationalist belonging has the potential to destabilise the *bumiputera* ethnocentrism and heteronormativity, and mobilise a queer Sinophonic cultural articulation facing state racism and homophobia. Ti’s claim for equal love and equal nuptial rights in his films not only voices an activist demand, but articulates an

implicit call for the state's acceptance (love) and recognition (equality) of ethno-sexual minorities. Today's queer Malaysian Sinophonicities inherently entail crossing the state-regulated racial and sexual borders, as reflected through Ti's films, and destabilising the rigid ethno-sexual categories for more flexible and inclusive racial and sexual relations. Queerness and Sinophonicities are mutually mobilising and empowering in this case as a "minor-to-minor alliance" (Shih 2014). Sinophonicities, from this point of view, are essentially a mobilised border-crossing desire to mediate and mitigate state discrimination against local Sinophone descendants, and to challenge the heteronormative racial harmony imagined in state propaganda.

Queer Sinophonicities have also demonstrated the ability to cross the border between China and the Sinophone sphere to challenge another side of the dual-domination, namely the China-centrism. Studying film production in Beijing, Ti not only made the aforementioned *Same Love* with a local team, but brought his Sinophone Malaysian films to China. The enthusiastic local reception of his films shows that a young filmmaker from a "peripheral" and "marginal" overseas Sinophone community is fully capable of making his voice heard in the ancestral Chinese motherland. As a Sinophone Malaysian director, his migration between the two countries allows him fresh opportunities for film production and distribution, and also allows Chinese viewers to directly experience queer Sinophone Malaysian culture onscreen. His post-diasporic Sinophone root, that is to say, has once again become a mobilised migrating route. China has accordingly become a site where queer Malaysian Sinophonicities find an audience and generate a voice.

However, in Ti's case, the border-crossing queer mobility in geographical migration and online film distribution also reveals a Sinophonic conjuncture and disjuncture that further problematises Sinophone' phonic/linguistic root. As Ti told me during the interview, Sinophone Malaysians often have trilingual literacy in Malay (the official language), English

(a postcolonial residue), and Chinese (a post-diasporic legacy). But here “Chinese” as a lingual category encompasses a large number of different dialects spoken by the Chinese population in Malaysia. In Ti’s case, he speaks fluent Mandarin along with basic Cantonese and Hokkien, two major Chinese dialects popular in the Sinophone sphere (See Kane 2006, 94-8 for more discussions in a lingua-historical context). The romanisation of his surname (“Ti”) is actually based on the Hokkien pronunciation, while in China his surname is spelled and pronounced in Mandarin as “Zheng”. People in China’s queer film circle have thus only heard about Binyan Zheng, but not the Hokkien name Bing-yen Ti, which indicates the first hint to a Sinophonic disjuncture in border-crossing migrations and queer cultural flows.

The language used in most of Ti’s films, furthermore, is actually Malaysian Mandarin characterised by its unique accent and lexicon that are different from the Standard Mandarin (*putonghua*), the official language used in today’s PRC. Film viewers in China, myself included, sometimes still need subtitles to fully understand the dialogues in Ti’s works. On YouTube, moreover, his films have received comments written in Simplified Chinese (used in today’s China, Singapore, and Malaysia), Traditional Chinese (used in Hong Kong and Taiwan and popular in overseas Sinophone communities), and English (a postcolonial legacy in Malaysia, Hong Kong, and other Asian countries). The websites in China, however, appear to attract only local viewers commenting in Simplified-Chinese. In addition, on Chinese queer social media Feizan and prestigious film-review website *Douban*, lots of comments from local viewers focus on the unfamiliar Malaysian-accented Mandarin in Ti’s films, while this linguistic attribute is seldom mentioned by the viewers on YouTube. If the reception of Ti’s films outside the PRC demonstrates a multilingual mobility across different written and oral languages, then Mainland China rather presents a monolingual immobility isolated in the global circulation of queer cultural products.

That is to say, Chinese film viewers are apparently unfamiliar with other accented Chinese languages such as Malaysian Mandarin. Sinophone Malaysian films thus become a queer linguistic *other*, easily identified by Chinese audiences as different and foreign to China and to local understandings of Chineseness. This linguistic version of China-centrism is worsened by the cyber-isolationism enforced by the Chinese state,³ and strongly contrasts Ti's own multilingual proficiency as a Sinophone descendant, as well as YouTube viewers' diverse lingua backgrounds. This phonic disjuncture reminds us about why we need the concept of Sinophone in the first place to challenge such monolingual and monolithic construction of Chineseness. The Sinophonic language (Malaysian Mandarin) used in Ti's films, from this perspective, potentially challenges both the Malay/English lingua-privilege in Malaysia and the *putonghua* ("Standard Mandarin") lingua-centrism in China.

On the other hand, Ti's multilingual background and the online comments on his films written in different languages also demonstrate that the Sinophone itself is full of such phonic/linguistic contradictions and displacements among various Chinese dialects and accents. As I asked in the first chapter after Chua (2012, 35), to which languages does the "Sino" in the Sinophone refer to? In his recent book chapter "The Voice of the Sinophone", Song Hwee Lim (2014, 72-4) questions the very linguistic centring in the theorisations of Sinophone, and calls for a more inclusive scope (verbal and non-verbal, diegetic and non-diegetic, and aural and visual) in the study of Sinophone cinemas. In so doing, argues Lim, we are able to undo the "Sino" linguistic root in the Sinophone—and to further embrace today's border-crossing cultural flows and filmmaking, as seen in Ti's case.

³ In Malaysia, Ti uploads all his films to YouTube and shares them on Facebook. Since YouTube and Facebook are blocked in China, he has switched to local video-sharing sites and queer social media for film distribution and promotion. China's blocking of these websites offers an opportunity for local online social media to grow, but inevitably creates self-confined and isolated cyber islands in the global and transnational flows of information. In Malaysia, however, Ti has to rely on Facebook and YouTube to circulate his films where these platforms are censored but still accessible; to his knowledge and to mine, local versions of queer social media (like *Feizan* in China) are still nowhere to be found in today's Sinophone Malaysia.

But Sinophone theories still face a linguistic crisis, as seen in this study and in my interview with Ti completed in English and Mandarin. The translation and understanding (as well as plausible mistranslation and misunderstanding) between Ti and myself reveal an even more deep-rooted linguistic dilemma in Sinophone studies. Regardless of the languages that Ti has adopted for his films and I have chosen for my interview, every finding of this research and every piece of information under scrutiny have to be presented in English, if I publish this research in the realm of international academia. The very concept of Sinophone, as I have argued, is first and foremost theorised and developed in English, not in any Chinese language that Sinophone as a category encompasses. Sinophone studies as a discipline often presents itself in Anglophone scholarship and casts itself out from its own linguistic territory, when this lingua-concept has to rely on a foreign tongue to articulate its voice. Sinophone does not solve the issue of English-language hegemony in Asian studies and queer studies, nor does it make Chinese cultures more presentable on the global stage in their own language.

Nonetheless, Sinophone's marriage with queer theories enables a unique lens to scrutinise mobilised cultural flows, as seen in Bing-ye Ti's case. As a non-Malay Malaysian filmmaker and a non-Chinese Chinese descendant, Ti speaks up with his border-crossing queer Sinophone filmmaking against both sides of the dual domination: the *bumiputera* heteronormativity and ethnocentrism in Malaysia, and the China-centrism that often neglects Chinese cinemas and languages outside the PRC. Situated between longing and belonging, and between China and the Sinophone, Ti's mobilities put a sound Sinophonic note to today's queer Chinese cultural flows on and off screens. But one question remains unanswered in my analysis: when people come back from overseas Sinophone societies to China and choose the latter as a queer cultural production site, how can we further address and analyse today's border-crossing queer mobilities across the unsettled and unstable boundaries between China and overseas Sinophone societies, if such borders ever exist? Other than the homonationalist

Sinophone longing and belonging, is it possible to generate queer cultural articulations out of and in-between national and nationalist identities? I will continue my discussion in the following section.

A Tale of Two Cities: Taiwanese Coffee House and Queer Film Club in Beijing

In this section, I investigate the counterflows of queer cultures from the post-diasporic Sinophone sphere back to Mainland China, a reverse process to Shih's (2010a) theorisation of Sinophone, by analysing urban queer film space as "mobile public" (Punathambekar 2011) and community of intimate strangers (see Wilken 2010; Shah 2012). In this part, I turn my focus to a gay-friendly coffee house and film club, Two-City Café (*ShuangCheng Kafei*), established by two Taiwanese gay activists in 2012 in the heart of Beijing. I will discuss this interesting case by looking at how queer and non-queer, as well as the Sinophone Taiwan and China, find their cultural intersections in this very special queer cinematic space. Through my discussion, I highlight Mainland China as a platform for Sinophone cultural reproductions, and how mobilised queer cultural expressions have been articulated in this urban film club. I argue that the queer space *per se* is a mobilised location accommodating geopolitical and emotional embodied queer and non-queer mobilities.

The story of Two-City Café first started more than a decade ago from the Sinophone Taiwan, when *tongzhi* and other social activism concerned with identity, lifestyle, and culture blossomed in Taiwan (Sang 2014, 52-3 has more on this). Two good friends and enthusiastic gay activists A-Jer (Lai Jeng-ger) and Yeh-tzu (Yeh Chien-te) travelled to New York in the 1990s, visiting its gay scenes and soaking themselves in American gay cultures. Inspired by a gay bookshop in NYC, A-Jer returned to Taiwan and founded Gin-Gin Bookstore in 1999, the first LGBT bookshop in the Chinese world. Gin-Gin soon became an icon in Taiwan's gay activism in the following decade, and A-Jer remained in charge until early 2011. In that year, Yeh-tzu just left a restaurant he was operating, and the duo decided to continue their

travelling which they left behind more than a decade ago, this time to Japan. When they flew over the strait that separates Taiwan from Mainland China, they joked that perhaps they could then fly to Beijing from Tokyo, as the Chinese names of the two cities have a same character (*jing*) in them. They did, and decided to settle in Beijing to run a gay-friendly coffee house in the city centre. Intrinsicly a story of mobility, their queer tour of the world led to today's Sinophone Taiwanese cultural articulation inside China.

This story was shared with me by Yeh-tzu, when I interviewed him and talked to A-Jer in their tastefully decorated coffee shop in Beijing. This place used to be a local bar, and the previous bar owner revealed himself as a gay man after renting this place to the Taiwanese duo. This further made A-Jer and Yeh-tzu believe that they were destined to settle in Beijing. Yeh-tzu had visited this city twice at the turn of the twenty-first century, and was impressed by how rapid Mainland China was growing. He also learnt that Beijing had gone through a lot of changes since the 2008 Olympic Games and was eager to see its recent development. Since the Nationalist Party regained its leadership in Taiwan's 2008 election and began to ameliorate its relationship with Mainland China, the two sides have reached a number of agreements to facilitate cross-strait flows of capital and talent (see Rosen and Wang 2011). These are the underlying reasons behind the sudden interest of A-Jer and Yeh-tzu in the capital city of the PRC. They made their decision to start a new life in Beijing, and opened the coffee house in late 2012.

A-Jer and Yeh-tzu operate this coffee shop around two themes, namely Taiwan and *tongzhi*, because they self-identify as *tongzhi* from Taiwan. They not only serve Taiwanese coffee and drinks with large numbers of Taiwanese books and magazines for local customers, but invite intellectuals and scholars from Taiwan for mini-seminars and book launches, sometimes with a focus on gender and sexuality issues. They also organise club-style weekly film screenings, many of which have a queer and/or Taiwanese theme. In late 2013, for

example, the coffee house grouped together a few movies around the theme of HIV/AIDS, and a lot of discussions after the screenings extended to queer issues such as gay and anti-gay social activism. In a screening session I attended, A-Jer and Yeh-tzu shared with us their observations of Taiwan's anti-gay social movement and commented on a major anti-gay parade in Taipei. This apparently challenged local people's romantic imagination of Taiwan as a more tolerant and gay-friendly Sinophone society for queer sexualities, and pictured what may happen next in the Mainland if local queer activism continues to arouse public attention and risk provoking more local conservatism against queer people.

As a significant other to Mainland China, that is to say, Taiwan serves as a mirror for local queer people to learn from Taiwanese experiences and better prepare themselves for future strategies. A Taiwanese film club and coffee house in the heart of Beijing offers an invaluable opportunity for cross-strait queer communications and interactions like this. In this sense, China becomes a site for Sinophone Taiwanese cultural articulation and reproduction through regular film screenings and group discussions. Meanwhile, the café itself turns into an object of China's gaze and desire when local (queer) consumers come to the coffee house with a querying eye for Taiwanese cultures. Marketed as "the closest window to Taiwan" for local customers and "the first stop of Taiwanese visitors to Beijing" for travellers, Two-City Café has become a popular "transfer station" for migrants and tourists between these two Chinese societies. Itself an outcome of cross-strait mobility, the coffee house has connected the two capital cities Taipei and Beijing in a network of mobilities—a point to which I shall return shortly—that situates in the increasingly frequent flows of people and capital across Taiwan and Mainland China and in larger networks of transnational East Asian migrations (Chan, Haines and Lee 2014; Fielding 2016; Rosen and Wang 2011).

However, the coffee house is gay-friendly, but not gay-exclusive. There is no sign whatsoever in the exterior or interior of Two-City Café that announces its connection to gay

culture or queer activism. People in Beijing's gay circle have either heard about the coffee house through word of mouth, or learnt about its film screenings through local queer social media. A-Jer has a personal profile on queer Chinese social network Feizan, and then on its mobile version ZANK, to post the latest events such as weekend film clubs and small-scale art exhibitions in the coffee house. This is the only channel through which the owners have played the gay card. As a commercial space, in addition, its survival still largely depends on its ability to make stable profit from consumers, not only from gay film club participants. Having a background respectively in architecture and urban planning, A-Jer and Yeh-tzu also intend to follow the continental European tradition to establish a salon-style public space that is inclusive rather than exclusive, as coffee house traditionally played an important role in European cultures for public intellectual discussions and for the formation of public spheres. This coffee shop, they hope, harbours diverse bodies and intimacies with different gendered and sexual embodiments. They aim to design a space where various interpersonal encounters, long or short, keep flowing when people feel free to display their desired body-images and share their stories and struggles, queer or not, in this intimate space.



Figure 6. The interior of Two-City Café in Beijing

When Yeh-tzu told me about this during the interview, I had a strong feeling that I was talking to a scholar instead of a business owner. His conversation with me illustrated sophisticated critical thinking around the coffee house as a queer public space in China. He stated that, in the context of globalisation, inter-city mobilities (between Taipei and Beijing, for instance) have become common experience, and Two-City Café should directly embrace such mobility and fluidity across time and space. Today's Beijing is a migrant city whose inhabitants are embodied with different memories, stories, and emotions from different parts of the country and of the world; the city is in itself an urban metaphor of migrant bodies with a wide range of experiences, identities, and desires. Diversity and inclusiveness thus hold the key to the cultural and financial success of a coffee house in a city like Beijing and in the age of mobility, and these are what Two-City Café has warmly celebrated so far.

It is precisely from this perspective that, I argue, a queer film club like Two-City Café is hardly a queer counterpublic. As I pointed out in the first chapter, from the very beginning the theorisation of counterpublics designates subordination, opposition, and counterculture in

queer public spheres. Queer counterpublics are often understood as subaltern and marking themselves off from the mainstream cultural horizon (Warner 2002, 119), “where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses” (Fraser 1992, 123). The notion of counterpublics pinpoints queer public spheres in a rather inferior and subordinate position, and largely denies their ability to grow and transgress queer/non-queer boundaries or interact and intersect with broader cultures and values beyond the so-called queer “counter-discourses”. What I have found from my ethnographic research, however, is that queer spaces like Two-city Café are by no means subordinate or counter-cultural. Rather, the coffee house stands on the frontline of mobilities and cultural interactions and circulations, bridging Beijing and Taipei, queer and non-queer, and film lovers and regular customers (more on this below).

Thus I propose to adopt the notion of “mobile public” to better analyse queer spaces like Two-City Café. This idea is developed by Aswin Punathambekar in the context of public participation of media events facilitated by mobile technology. He argues that the central focus of mobile public is not technology *per se*, but the “fluid and ephemeral nature” of such public spheres (2011, 150-1). This approach questions the sedentary construction of public spheres as fixed and static, and calls into attention the mobilised dimension of fluidity and flexibility in the cultural politics of time and space. I define mobile public as a public sphere founded through mobility/migration that mobilises embodied emotions and intimacies through cultural intersections and transgressions, and caters to micro and macro mobilities and movements in both spatiotemporal and sociocultural senses. Through this lens, a queer public space like Two-City Café is inherently a mobilised location embodied with cross-strai(gh)t mobilities and intimacies, from where a mobile queer public arises.

A mobile queer public has great potential to build a community of intimate strangers (Wilken 2010; Shah 2012) or rather an intimate network of mobilities. This is a *geographical*

and *social* network of *intimate strangers*, of which the queer film club lies in the centre. Geographically, Two-City Café as a mobile public becomes a focal point in local inner-city queer cultures, and situates in an intersectional geographical network of queer mobilities. Like most film clubs I have attended in China, Two-City Café is located in a convenient location near a major subway line. In “Roads and Anthropology: Ethnographic Perspectives on Space, Time and (Im)Mobility”, Dalakoglou and Harvey (2012) argue that roads and routes are significant ethnographic sites for cultural-spatial critiques. A substantial part of my fieldwork in China included commuting on the roads to several queer film clubs every week, which meant a long journey in Beijing’s notoriously crowded public transportation network across busy bus or subway lines. I assumed that the ordeal of commuting, sometimes during peak hours (e.g. Friday nights), would discourage queer film club goers from regular participation, but I was often amazed that a lot of them were willing to travel from different corners of this huge metropolis to join in weekly film screenings. The film club as a mobile public becomes a temporary but regular intersection for inner-city queer mobilities, and a central point in the inner-city geographical network that connects queer people together.

The intimate network of mobilities that Two-City Café has forged also enables *social* bonding among the participants who share the common experience of mobility. In some screening sessions I attended in 2013 and 2014, for instance, the discussions extended from comments on the films to our memories and stories in migrating to Beijing. In one session, we started to talk about Beijing’s localist discrimination against migrants from other parts of the country and from the other side of the strait. Along the migrating routes searching for home and for love, we shared a deep connection in our embodied emotions and experiences of migration. We opened up to share our feelings, and that discussion became a transient yet intimate moment for the participants, before we left the film club at the end of that night and returned to our own corners of the world. A mobile public situated in an intimate network of

mobilities is both a physical and an emotional space for fluid flows of encounters and contingencies. It may never be a destination, but provides an important place to temporarily accommodate and connect our past and present stories, memories, and intimacies in a social network.

In this geographical and social network of mobilities, however, we are all intimate strangers who barely know each other and often adopt pseudonyms in discussions, but are willing to go through the trouble commuting to the club and get together with each other as a group. When I returned to the field to finalise my research in late 2014, for example, I met again with a long-time regular participant of this Taiwanese film club. We could not recognise each other's faces, but once I told him the pseudonym I used in the club from one year ago, he immediately recalled who I was. Film club participants like us share a very special queer bonding where we are strangers but intimate and connected in a network. Between each screening and discussion, we travel back to our own life in our own world; beside the shared yet transient moments in a temporary film group, our paths seldom cross and our roads barely intersect. However, a mobile queer public like Two-City Café brings us together and functions as a focal point in mobilised and networked queer intimacies. Whenever we travel back to the scene, we will see some familiar faces or hear a few familiar names. We are all passengers travelling through the queer space, yet carrying the embodied memories and intimacies that are mutually recognisable as we go. Our connections are constantly forged and forgotten, built and rebuilt, grouped and regrouped, and visited and revisited in this mobile queer public.

A spatiotemporal station in cross-strait and inner-city mobilities, Two-City Café as a mobile public also caters to and accommodates mobilised queer desires born from within. Yeh-tzu shared with me a story about a local gay man who proposed to his boyfriend in this coffee house. The man asked A-Jer and Yeh-tzu for help in advance, and together they

designed and rehearsed a romantic proposal beforehand. Then, during the discussion after a film screening, A-Jer asked the man and his boyfriend to share their stories and feelings, and started to play a love song and served up a cake to the couple. The gay man then proposed to his boyfriend, and this intimate story had a happy ending. A-Jer also asked other customers onsite to share their impressions of this romantic proposal, and offer their good wishes for the gay couple. Some people were invited in advance, while others were just customers who happened to be in the coffee house on that night. Hosts and guests, participants and onlookers, queers and non-queers, the invited and the unsolicited, these people to various extent became involved in the scene as part of a live queer narrative. It is mobilised encounters and interactions like this that have constantly rewritten and redefined the meanings of a mobile public where mobilised queer desires find a voice.

Echoing this analysis is Yeh-Tzu's account that the film club is not only a cinematic space, but an intimate space brought to life by those stories occurring within it on a day-to-day basis. This is apparently different from other queer film clubs in Beijing such as the Concentric Circle, organised as a psycho-therapy group (see the pervious chapter), and the Fellowship of *Tongzhi* Film-lovers, operated with a strong cinephilic emphasis (discussed in the next chapter). Film is never the central focus of Two-City Café, nor is psychological support for queer people. Rather, a mobile queer public like the coffee house serves as a platform for networked intimate encounters, both queer and non-queer, and the establishment and extension of human connections, both long and transient. A commercial coffee house also offers a much more comfortable and enjoyable environment for dating and socialising than other film clubs located in small NGO offices that are hidden in residential compounds. In China, moreover, a commercial space like this is also more likely to survive state regulation and censorship, compared to the often politicised local LGBT NGOs.

The coffee house as a mobile public also brings together production, consumption, and circulation of queer film and screen cultures. When local queer social media company Feizan/ZANK initiated the popular *Nine Gay Men* video series, the production team chose Two-City Café to shoot an episode. That is to say, a coffee house frequently screens Taiwanese films and showcases Taiwanese cultures turns into a site for local queer cultural production. With the release of the video, furthermore, Two-City Café itself has become part of a visual product consumable onscreen through online and mobile social media. A physical queer space has been visualised and mobilised to enjoin the chain of queer cultural production. The coffee house is hence not only a transfer station in the intimate network of mobilities, but itself transforms into a mobilised location that has been imaged, reproduced, circulated, and consumed on queer screens via online and mobile queer social networks Feizan and ZANK, of which I will present an in-depth analysis in Chapter 6.

Yeh-tzu and A-Jer often look forward to such collaborations with local queer organisations and media, with the belief that Mainland China and Taiwan are mutually empowering and mobilising in the developments of queer cultures. He made it clear during my interview that the two sides across the strait should overcome and transcend the dualistic rivalry, aiming together for a better queer tomorrow. The coffee house, as a mobile queer public, also speaks to this problematic relationship between the Sinophone Taiwan and Mainland China. Today's China is both open and localist, and both friendly and harsh to its Sinophone others. The Taiwanese accent of the café owners, for example, presents a phonic *other* both cherished (as exotic) and mocked (as falling off Standard Mandarin) by customers on local review website *Mass Comment (Dazhong Dianping)*. A café from Taiwan is both a consumable object of China's (queer) desire, and an other on the phonic and cultural fringe of Mainland China and continental Chineseness.

Contrary to the PRC's geographical and cultural historical position in the centre of the Asian continent, Taiwan has long been a geo-politically marginalised entity on the periphery of the Asia-Pacific. The marginality of Taiwan mirrors the marginalised position of queer people in the heteronormative social hierarchy, as Yeh-tzu observed, which strongly echoes my theoretical positioning of queer Sinophonicities that connect queer cultures with the Sinophone. He also pointedly and thoughtfully reflected that, although Taiwanese people were often seen as others by local Beijing residents, if he fell in love with Beijing and chose to stay in this city for a prolonged period, would he become a local? More important, as I have asked earlier in this research, if post-diasporic Sinophone descendants return back to Mainland China, do they count as post-Sinophone, against-Sinophone, counter-Sinophone, stretched-Sinophone, or something else? In Sinophone studies, I contend, we need to start examining the counterflows of (queer) cultures from Sinophone societies back to China, so as to better make sense of the mobilised Sinophone cultural productions and reproductions.

Audrey Yue (2012a) points out that Mainland China also resides on the receiving end of overseas Sinophone cultures, and my analysis of queer Sinophone cultural counterflows has further testified against a clear separation between China and the Sinophone sphere. In "Transnational Queer Sinophone Cultures", Fran Martin (2015, 43) pointedly argues that

Mainland China is more and more interlinked into the transnational networks of Sinophone cultural flows, both of broader popular culture and specifically of queer texts, practices and identities. Hence, in a practical sense, it becomes harder than ever to conceive of mainland Chinese queer cultural life as sealed off from that of Sinophone queer communities outside China.

What Martin describes as "queer Sinophone networks" and "queer Sinophone media circuits" across global Chinese-language locales and screens are shaped and conditioned precisely by

the queer migrations and cultural flows/counterflows that I have discussed in this chapter, both in theory and in practice. The coffee house film club as a mobile queer public presents a direct critique for any attempt to completely detach the Sinophone from China, or China from the Sinophone, when they are deeply connected not only in histories and cultures but in a growing intimate network of mobilities.

The Taiwanese coffee house film club, together with the emerging queer Malaysian filmmaker discussed above, amply demonstrates that Mainland China also offers possibilities for queer Sinophone cultural articulations and interactions. China itself as a place of queer Sinophone cultural production further indicates the dislocations and relocations of migrants, emotions, and embodiments in queer mobilities. Two-City Café, in other words, is more than a place feeding the growing consumerist appetite in Beijing, but a mobile public transgressing and destabilising the borders between queer and non-queer, local and non-local, and the Sinophone Taiwan and Mainland China. It bridges these often oppositional dualistic categories, and makes them once again intimate and mobilised. Through this case study, I believe that Sinophone theories should also take into account the counterflows of queer cultures and talents from Sinophone societies back to Mainland China, when migration and mobility have become a leitmotif of the twenty-first century, and when mobility scholarship and Sinophone scholarship have found an intimate queer connection.

Conclusion: Unfinished Journeys

This chapter has been concerned with queer Sinophone mobilities as shown in emotional embodied movements and migrations, in the homonationalist desire for the nation-state to claim equal sexual/racial citizenship, and in mobile publics such as the gay-friendly coffee house film club. In the first part, I took my readers on a migrating journey with Kafka and Daniel between Mainland China and Sinophone Hong Kong, which only ends in death and sorrow. I argue that emotional embodiment in migrations and mobilities not only carries

comfort and love, but also trauma and wounds. If mobilities lead to intimacy, they may also result in alienation and disorientation. For queer migrants like Kafka and Daniel, as well as their real-life prototype Scud, settlement often appears temporary and transient, while migration is a permanent process and unfinished journey. They are always *en route*, a never-ending process of becoming, without the chance to put down a permanent root. Their identities are never fully settled, and not only the homeland but also the host society has become impossible for settlement. If migration entails a search for home and for love, it may well end up in a homeless and loveless purgatory. When love and home are both impossible, only death, the ultimate end of mobilities, is the only truly permanent residence.

Moving on from the violently abused body and traumatised migrating experience in *Amphetamine*, the second part of this chapter situated post-diasporic Chinese descendants between homonationalist longing and Sinophone belonging to transgress state racism and homophobia. Studying the films produced by Sinophone Malaysian filmmaker Bing-yen Ti and his own migration journey between Malaysia and China, I argue that his works so far have demonstrated a mobilised queer desire to cross the queer/non-queer borders and reverse the sexual hierarchy onscreen. With a discussion of (queer) Malaysian Sinophonicities, I consider Ti's border-crossing filmmaking a negotiation and resistance against both sides of the dual domination, namely the state racism in Malaysia and the cultural essentialism in China. Ti's case demonstrates an ongoing and unfinished journey for queer Sinophone descendants to claim equal racial and sexual citizenship in the host nation-state, and to make their voices heard in the ancestral China. I have also analysed the phonic conjunctures and disjunctures between China and Malaysia through Ti's film distribution and reception, so as to further examine and question queer Sinophonicities and mobilities.

Similar to Ti's migration from Malaysia back to China, two well-seasoned Taiwanese gay activists have established a coffee house and queer film club in the heart of Beijing,

which I examined in the third part of this chapter. I argue that this very special queer space is hardly a counterpublic, but a mobile queer public and an intimate network of mobilities. It is built through and designed for cross-strai(gh)t mobilities that connect queer and non-queer, local and non-local, and China and the Sinophone Taiwan. Catering for both local consumers and queer film club goers, the café itself has become a consumable object of China's desire, while China turns into a place for queer Sinophone cultural expressions and reproductions. I describe the movements of capital, culture, and people from Sinophone societies back to Mainland China as counterflows that challenge our current understandings of Sinophone mobilities. Post-diasporic Sinophone settlement should never be the end of mobilities; roots can once again become routes, while migrations do not necessarily have an ultimate destination. I hence propose that Sinophone scholarship and mobility scholarship should shed more light on each other to study (queer) migrations as unfinished and unsettled journeys, and the imbricated mobility/immobility and cultural flows/counterflows between roots and routes, and between China and the Sinophone.

Above all, my mission in this chapter has been to further develop the conceptual framework of Sinophone in queer migration and mobility studies, and problematise mobility scholarship through the lens of queer Sinophone cultures on and off screens. While Heinrich (2014) and Shih (2014) celebrate the marriage between queer theory and Sinophone studies as a minor-to-minor alliance promising in its "volatility", I intend to further queer and destabilise Sinophone scholarship to better address the increasingly fluid and volatile queer cultural flows in today's Chinese world. My investigation of Hong Kong, Malaysian, and Taiwanese Sinophoncities in this chapter, through the medium of queer screen cultures, further destabilised and mobilised Sinophone theories and ontologies to include a more diverse range of queer mobilities and intimacies. Sinophone scholarship, in this sense, is in itself an unfinished journey, which needs to be constantly scrutinised and negotiated against

different theoretical and ontological backdrops in future research. In the next chapter, I proceed to investigate the underlying driving force of queer migration: the desire for improving individual quality and for upward social mobility.

Chapter 6: Social Distinctions

In Chapter 4, I argued that the “coming home” strategy has often become impossible and queer Chinese kinships are often physically and emotionally stretched across time and space. The stretched kinship structure is a result of the increase in domestic and global queer migrations for better education and employment. In Chapter 5, I further developed my argument to address emotional embodied queer migrations and mobilities, so as to further analyse the mobilised queer cultural flows on and off screens. However, one question remains unanswered in my previous analyses: who have the ability to migrate across geolocations and social classes, and what drives them to move? In this chapter, I approach this question through the lens of upward social mobility, with a focus on the rhetoric of *suzhi* (quality) and its lingering influence over queer Chinese communities, by examining China-based online queer social networking site, mobile gay dating and hook-up apps, and urban queer film clubs. I argue that, although the *suzhi* discourse itself has to some extent lost its popularity, the *suzhi*-style pursuit of quality, cultural capital, and class mobility still plays an important role in today’s post-socialist queer China.

More specifically, on the one hand, it is the desire to improve individual quality and pursue upward social mobility that drives people to leave the family and embark on migration journeys for education and employment. On the other, often those who already come from socially advantaged families are more likely to embark on and succeed in such migration. In the case of China, the strong and consecutive economic growth in recent decades has also produced rising and aspirational middle classes who desire to climb up the social ladder. Moving from rural to urban and from less to more developed areas through education and employment has become a common path in social class migration and in the pursuit of quality. The myth of *suzhi*/quality not only underlies and underlines queer migrations and distanced kinships, which echoes and extends my analyses in previous chapters, but also

reproduces larger social stratification and exclusion among sexual minority populations, which is central to the understanding of today's queer Chinese communities.

Translated into English as “individual quality”, the term *suzhi* has been a subject in the study of post-socialist Chinese society (Anagnost 2004/2008; Bakken 2000; Goodman 2014; Hsu 2007; Kipnis 2007; Tang 2013; Tomba 2008/2009/2010/2014). In Lisa Rofel's early ethnography conducted in Beijing's gay community (1999, 466-7), she noted that the urban Chinese gay men used the term *suzhi* to distinguish themselves from rural-to-urban migrant “money boys” (gay prostitutes). The prostitutes were degraded by urban queer people as low-*suzhi* migrants who “polluted” Beijing's gay scene and gay culture (Rofel 1999; see also Kong 2011b). Since then, the myth of *suzhi* has become a ghostly discourse haunting the studies of China's queer cultures and communities as seen in Bao (2011a, 135), Ho (2010, 89-97), Rofel (2007, 85-110; 2010, 453), and most recently Chiang (2014b, 364). As Goodman (2014, 109) points out after Anagnost (2004), however, the term *suzhi* is hard to define given its wide use in various social and political domains with changing connotations and unstable boundaries.

Suzhi is a fixed term in classical Chinese with a long genealogy. *Su* refers to a white or light colour, and *zhi* means texture or quality. The word *su* also connotes purity and originality, as seen in the term *su yan*, describing a pure, original, and undisguised face without wearing make-up. The most famous example of *suzhi* is seen in ancient poet Du Fu's verse *White Silk (Bai Si Xing)* which mourns that, once the silk is dyed with colour, it loses its original whiteness and pureness—what the poet calls *suzhi*. His lament is directed not only to the dyed silk, but also to people who lose their natural purity in society. In this sense, *suzhi* refers to the original quality and character of a person or a thing that has not been altered, dyed, and polluted. As Ann Anagnost (2004, 190) observes, however, *suzhi* was conjoined by the Chinese state with the country's population issue during the post-socialist economic

reform: state documents of the 1980s attributed China's previous failure to modernise the country to the general "low *suzhi*" (low quality) of its large population. The political parlance of "population quality" (*renkou suzhi*) in the 1980s and 1990s presented a shift in state policy from regulating births to improving the *suzhi* of the general population—hence "a shift from quantity to quality", according to Anagnost (*ibid.*).

That means, in the PRC's socio-political discourse, *suzhi* has lost its initial meaning of natural quality and become something that can be learned and improved. This argument is evident in the popular rhetoric of *suzhi jiaoyu* ("*suzhi* education") with the belief that people can improve personal qualities through learning, training, and pursuing culture (*wenhua*). The issue of quality thus suddenly becomes an individual problem. Being "low quality" (*di suzhi*) means that one does not work hard enough for self-improvement and hence lacks "culture" (*mei wenhua*); being "high quality" (*gao suzhi*) shows a person working hard for upward social mobility, and for civilised and refined enculturation (*you wenhua*). *Suzhi* is hence often used to "legitimate social exclusions and inequalities engineered by the Chinese state" (Bao 2011a, 135; see also Goodman 2014, 109-10), when differences in individual qualities are often caused by larger systematic problems such as unbalanced development and uneven distribution of educational resources.

This analysis explains why people in China often associate high-*suzhi*/quality with urban upbringing, tertiary education, a decent job and income, exquisite cultural taste, tidy and clean appearance, and fluency in Standard Mandarin (*Putonghua*, see Chapter 5). On the other hand, rural-born, undereducated, unemployed or poorly employed, culturally dubious, unkempt, and accented men and women are often labelled "low *suzhi*" with a deplorable lack of quality and attractiveness (see Tang 2013, 70). Because the post-socialist state propaganda in the past few decades has effectively relocated *suzhi* from nature to culture, in addition, untamed and unregulated biological-sexual desires and practices are firmly pinpointed in the

opposite direction of “quality”. Culture is understood in the *suzhi* discourse as something can be learned and cultivated, while sexuality is primitive, coarse, and unrefined. The stigma around sexually hyperactive gay men in the *quanzi* (“circles”, see Chapter 1) precisely owes to the fact that unregulated sexualities fall off this symbolic *suzhi* discourse in producing and reproducing “high-quality” and sexually self-governed good citizens.

However, recently the term *suzhi* has been losing its popularity in various social registers, especially among the rising (queer) middle classes. This word is still adopted for self-mockery or in discussions of education or public etiquette, but largely out of use in describing interpersonal relationships. Today’s gay men seldom say “high *suzhi* people” or “low *suzhi* prostitutes” any more. This term already sounds slightly obsolete in daily parlance and also too judging and cynical in everyday conversations regarding dating and relationship. The term *suzhi* itself has almost expired, the reason for which I will further consider later in this chapter, but the logistics behind it still play a significant role in today’s queer cultures, only of a deeper and more implicit level. The general understanding of “quality” in today’s China is less akin to the previous state propaganda of *suzhi*, but increasingly turning towards class-structured cultural taste and various forms of capital that one possesses for exchange.

In what follows I analyse the lingering myth of *suzhi*/quality, social inclusion and exclusion, and class mobility and immobility among China’s queer populations across three domains of screen cultures: online queer social media, mobile gay dating applications and video series, and urban queer film clubs. Methodologically, in this chapter I adopt digital ethnography (social media), textual analysis (videos), participatory observation (film clubs), ethnographic interview (social media and film club founders), class analysis (social stratification), and critical discourse analysis (the *suzhi* rhetoric). My discussions in this part centre on cultural capital and *habitus*, the rising queer urban middle classes in China, and queer communities gated by cultural tastes and class distinctions. I draw upon theoretical

insights from Pierre Bourdieu's classic study *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* ([1984] 2010) as well as the post-Bourdieuian discussions and developments of his thesis in cultural and social theories of class and capital. I also engage with recent scholarship on China's rising middle classes and gated communities, in the context of queer mobilities and cultures.

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu has made a set of observations and arguments about how and why cultural taste functions as a strong indicator of social classes. For Bourdieu, cultural products and practices are “classified and classifying, rank-ordered and rank-ordering” ([1984] 2010, 218). Economic capital (wealth) is often conjoined by “cultural capital”, or class-specific knowledge and training, in the class hierarchy. As such, cultural capital is accumulated and augmented particularly through family upbringing and education, to various levels of nobility and seniority, or what Bourdieu calls “cultural pedigree” (55). Of particular importance is the concept of *habitus*, which Bourdieu situates between “the capacity to produce classifiable practices and works” and “the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste)” (164). *Habitus* is a Latin term meaning “a habitual or typical condition”, or a set of general principles instilled by our life experience that structures and underlines our *taste*, or “why we like what we like”, in day-to-day actions and decision-makings (Stewart 2014, 58-9). In others words, the *habitus* is a “structuring structure” of cultural taste and judgement, as well as the very system of classification of cultural practices, in both cultural production and appreciation (see Maton 2014 and Costa and Murphy 2015 for two recent summaries of *habitus* and its applications in social and cultural studies).

Since Bourdieu, material wealth is no longer the sole marker of class; rather, cultural capital plays an increasingly important role in class analysis. Bourdieu's accounts of cultural capital, taste, and *habitus* have found a wide academic audience in gender, sexuality, and queer studies as well—from “Queering the *Habitus*” and lesbianism (Ross 2004) to “Queer

Habitus” and bodily performance (Merabet 2014), and from commercial LGBT media and market (Sender 2003/2004; Henderson 2013) to a substantial feminist scholarship on gender and class (Adkins 2000/2004; Christin 2012; Lizardo 2006; Lovell 2000; Moi 1991; Skeggs 1997/2000/2004). On the other hand, a growing literature challenges Bourdieu’s findings, and argues that today’s consumers of high-brow cultures often show less aversion towards and more interest in middle-brow or popular cultures, and hence become less “snobbish” and more “omnivorous” in cultural tastes (Bennett et al. 2009; Bunting et al. 2008; Chan, 2010; Chan and Goldthorpe 2007; Coulangeon and Roharik 2005; Goldberg 2011; López-Sintas and García-Álvarez 2002; Peterson 1992/2005; Peterson and Kern 1996; Peterson and Simkus 1992; Roose et al 2012; van Eijck, 2001; van Eijck and Lievens 2008; Warde et al. 2007).

But the “cultural omnivore” thesis has certain gaps in it. First, the softening of class boundaries in cultural taste appears to have occurred only from the top down and not from the bottom up: the lower level residents down the social hierarchy have not shown a significant growth of interest in high cultures (Peterson 2005). In other words, the cultural capital of high-status social elites have diversified, but that of lower social classes remains at the same limited level. Second, Warde et al. (2007, 160) point out that omnivore is hardly a homogenous category but encompasses a diverse range of cultural interests and different ways to pursue them. Third, and more important, an increasing body of studies has constituted a “qualitative counter-attack against the statistics-based thesis that [cultural] tastes are increasingly ‘omnivorous’ in character” (Atkinson 2011, 169), all of whose findings have re-confirmed Bourdieu’s original thesis and debunked the “cultural omnivore” argument.

The likely reason behind such debate on class and cultural taste, as the inaugural omnivore theorist Richard A. Peterson points out in his early article with Kern (1996, 905-6), lies in an increase in educational, geographical and social mobilities and in the massification,

industrialisation, and liberalisation of arts and cultures. This echoes Beverley Skeggs's critique in *Class, Self, and Culture* (2004, 47-61) that recent scholarship on class conflicts and social stratification often retreats behind the discussions of mobilities and individualism in neoliberal economies. Capitalist market forces have swept through the whole cultural hierarchy from mass to elite levels, and arts and aesthetics often become accessible with a price tag attached across both cultural production and consumption. Bourdieu's own *market* metaphor of cultural *capital* therefore continues to shed light on social and cultural theories, and eventually leads to the birth of two new conceptual categories in sexuality studies: sexual capital and erotic capital.

The term sexual capital initially emerged in Robert T. Michael's (2004) discussion of sexual health. Martin and George (2006) first theorised sexual capital along Bourdieu's thoughts, echoing Gonzales and Rolison's (2005) and Koshy's (2004) respective discussions of sexual capital among African and Asian Americans. Adam Green (2008a/2008b/2014) furthers this sex/market metaphor with more emphasis on the issue of the "sexual field", which also derives from Bourdieu's theory. The notion of sexual capital soon finds its global resonances outside the West in academic enquires of cross-racial sexuality in Shanghai (Farrer 2010) and sex workers in Southeast China (Ding and Ho 2012), to name but two studies in the Chinese context. Farrer synthesises previous scholarly discussions and defines sexual capital as "a person's resources, competencies and endowments that provide status as sexual agents within a field" (75). Ding and Ho continue to define "sexual currencies" as bodily beauty/performativity, sexual and emotional sophistication, and sex-related knowledge and skills (50). The authors of both studies have highlighted the *convertible* nature of sexual currencies in exchange for economic, social, and cultural capital.

The so-called erotic capital, however, derives only recently from the scholarship on sexual capital. Siobhan Brooks adopts this term in *Unequal Desires* (2010), but appears to

only use erotic capital as an equivalent to sexual capital. In the same year, British sociologist Catherine Hakim presents a full theorisation of erotic capital as a fourth personal asset in addition to economic, cultural, and social capital (2010). This argument has brought Hakim to wide attention and led to her publication of two highly controversial books, *Erotic Capital: The Power of Attraction in the Boardroom and the Bedroom* (2011a) and *Honey Money: The Power of Erotic Capital* (2011b). Working along and against Bourdieu, she argues that erotic capital has long been overlooked because “the elite cannot monopolize it, so it is in their interest to marginalize it” and to degrade those who employ it (2011a, 17). Perhaps Hakim’s most insightful contribution is to picture erotic capital as independent from class origin (and cultural pedigree), and hence a potentially equalising tool that enables people to cash in erotic assets for other forms of capital to climb up the social ladder.

However, the idea of erotic capital has not fully grown into a well-grounded body of scholarship. First, Hakim’s blueprint of erotic capital overlaps with the existing category of sexual capital. She defines erotic capital as a broader category encompassing both sexual and social *habitus*, and sees sexual capital as a narrower concept confined in the realm of sexuality (129-30; 253). However, sexual capital is in fact also deeply situated in socio-economic values and practices, so as to become recognisable and convertible through social exchange. Second, Hakim overtly states that her project focuses only on the “heterosexual majority” (129) and has not been tested and examined in queer studies or in non-Western contexts. Third, she believes that women generally “have more erotic capital than men because they work harder at it” and “are well placed to exploit their erotic capital” (2010, 499), and this further pinpoints women as objects of erotic exploitation. My point of departure is to treat erotic capital as a particular form of sexual capital that explicitly presents and provokes sexual attraction and erotic desires. I define sexual capital as both physical (e.g. beauty and appearance) and symbolic (e.g. sex-related knowledge and values) that functions

in social domains, while erotic capital concerns more with bodily-sexual and psycho-biological desires.

In addition to social, economic, cultural, and sexual capital, the moral dimensions of social judgments have not been given equal weight in Bourdieu's scholarly repertoire. Ignatow (2009) proposes to revise the Bourdieusian concept of *habitus* to account for the moral judgments shaped by cultural influences in social settings, while researchers in political science have developed the notion of "moral capital" to analyse the public images of politicians (see for example Brown 2006; Kane 2001; and Sison 2003). In this research, I treat "moral capital" as an additional form of human capital that is measured by social and cultural judgement of morality and convertible to other forms of human capital in queer communities and social mobilities. I will develop this notion along the lines of Katherine Sender's (2004) analysis of morality in gay market and media, as well as Pow's (2009) study of moral politics and social classes in China, although the judgement of morality is not my major focus in discussing quality and queer communities.

Overall, Bourdieu's concepts of capital provide certain insight into the myth of quality. Tang (2013, 69-70) sees *suzhi*/quality as a Chinese variation of cultural capital, while Anagnost (2008) refers the discursive figure of *suzhi* to "the formation of human capital" (512) in class aspiration, cultural taste, educational attainments, consumer consciousness, and urban residence in gated communities (509). I define *suzhi*/quality as class-structured and class-structuring human capital that is embodied and invested through upbringing, education, and professional training in the pursuit of upward social mobility. This *suzhi*/quality mostly manifests in the form of cultural capital (what one knows), which is inseparable from and often convertible to economic capital (how much one owns), social capital (whom one knows), and sexual capital (how attractive one is) in the state-engineered reproductions of class-related advantage and privilege. By the "myth" of quality, I refer to a lingering popular

belief and social discourse of *suzhi* that is effectively cultivated by the Chinese state in the past few decades and a recurring theme in queer Chinese studies which has not been thoroughly investigated in a recent context. This belief/theme embodies an institutionalised hierarchy between high and low-*suzhi*, an individualised capital that one can cash in for class mobility in China's neoliberalising market, and a state-led social ideal that celebrates quality over quantity, and civilised culture over unregulated human nature.

In a more recent context, the discourse of *suzhi* has often extended to the expansion of middle classes in China that is both recognised and encouraged by the state since 2002 as a growing force of economic progress and social stability (Goodman 2016, 4-5). This has been conjoined by nationwide higher education expansion (*kuozhao*) admitting tens of millions more tertiary students in China since the turn of the early twenty-first century (7), which has significantly boosted up education-oriented geographical and social class migrations among young generations (and resulted in the stretched kinship structure that I theorised in Chapter 4). An increasing number of educated urban and urbanised queers have emerged as part of the rising and aspirational middle classes in China. As Tang observes, being middle class is now seen by Chinese people as a privilege and “doing better than ordinary people”, compared to the West where middle class is generally the majority class (2013, 68). Although research-based estimations of the size of China's middle classes varies significantly (Goodman, 9), the expansion of middle classes in China closely overlaps with the state-engineered pursuit of *suzhi*/quality in reproducing good citizens and upward social mobility (see Goodman 2014; Hsu 2007; Kipnis 2007; Tang 2013; Tomba 2008/2009/2010/2014).

In what follows I focus on this lingering myth of *suzhi*/quality through three case studies: a major queer online Chinese community, mobile gay dating applications and video series, and urban queer film clubs. I investigate how and why the desire for and the pursuit of “high quality” and upward social mobility continue to sculpture queer media, cultures, and

communities in the post-socialist (and post-*suzhi*) China. I centre my argument around the lingering social discourse of *suzhi*/quality on the four significant forms of human capital (cultural, economic, social, and sexual capital) with a particular focus on cultural tastes and interests. An additional form of human capital, moral capital, will also be briefly discussed in relation to the public image and social visibility of queer people in China. My analysis of individual human quality extends to the quality of digital queer social media as well (e.g. the design, function, and management policy of the media platforms). I also draw insights from existing scholarship on China's rising middle classes (Chen 2013; Chen and Qin 2014; Cheng 2010; Chen and Goodman 2013; Goodman 2013/2014/2016; Hsiao 2014; Liu 2014; So 2013; Tsang 2014), and gated communities (Pow 2009; Tang 2013; Tomba 2004/2014; Wu 2005; Zhang 2010).

The Myth of Quality: The Rise and Fall of an “Upward” Online Queer Community

My investigation starts with queer social media. In this section I analyse a major queer online community and how it evokes the myth of quality and reproduces social exclusions and class privilege. I first set foot in China's cyber queer universe more than a decade ago to explore the virtual queer spaces tucked away from public eyes. The rise of the Internet indeed changed queer people's life in Chinese societies. First, cyberspace potentially provided maximum anonymity, and online interactions were often detached from people's real-life identity. Cyber cruising was also more private, when cruising gay men in public parks were still harassed by police, as previously depicted in the Taiwanese fiction *Crystal Boys* (1983) and vividly captured in the Mainland film *East Palace, West Palace* (1996). Second, fast online communication more efficiently brought together people in networked forums and activist groups. Some of my interviewees in China, for example, first started their devotion to queer activism through university BBS and other online forums. Third, World Wide Web potentially bridged closer queer Chinese populations across the globe, and the

flows of queer-related knowledge and information also became accelerated between the East and the West.

Gay dating and hook-up websites soon emerged in Chinese cyber spheres, and some large sites such as BF99 in the PRC and *Tuo Wang* in Taiwan remain popular through to today. But these dating services are often designed with very simple functions, only allowing users to upload a few photos with short descriptions of basic information such as age, height, body weight, location, and so forth. These online dating sites resemble a supermarket where customers choose unfamiliar products only by the pictures and the small print on the package, while the actual quality of the products remains unknown. This kind of online dating presents several issues. First, with limited information, finding an ideal date takes a lot of guesswork. Gay dating platforms often carry the stigma of being “hook-up centres”, inasmuch as the simplistic online profiles are only sufficient to identify a desirable sex partner, but insufficient to identify a potential soulmate. Second, these sites often have curtailed capability for online interactions, and users often approach desired targets through mobile phones and Instant Message software outside the dating platforms. Third, with simple web design and very basic functions, most gay dating sites look rather shabby (or “low in quality”), compared to today’s sophisticatedly designed social networking websites with rich functions to intensify digital social interactions.

More recently, the thriving development of Facebook and Twitter (as well as their various Chinese equivalents) have profoundly changed the ways people utilise Internet and foreseen the birth of queer social media in the Chinese world, most noticeably in China. For a queer social networking service to be born, the society that hatches it must have a large number of queer people as potential users. A country with the largest population in the world and potentially with the largest queer community, China offers the most promising soil for queer social network to grow and blossom. Furthermore, on the frontline of China’s fast-

developing digital technology and neoliberalising economy, techno-media such as online and mobile social networks often attract considerable investment from venture capital. The state's blocking of Western social media also leaves a gap for local businesses to fill. In addition, the Chinese authorities hardly allow explicit queer cultural expressions in public, which further push sexual minorities towards virtual digital spaces for queer social networking and cultural interactions. In less-developed areas across a large territory of China where queer social groups and gay-friendly cultural and commercial spaces are scarce, people also have to rely more on the Internet for queer social interactions.

Therefore, large-scale online and mobile queer social media have been blossoming first in Mainland China, not in other supposedly more queer-friendly Sinophone societies such as Hong Kong and Taiwan. In this context, the Beijing-based queer social networking service Feizan has caught wide attention. Its story began in the Chinese New Year in 2010 when Ling, the founding-owner of Feizan, travelled overseas with his boyfriend for holiday. They took the chance to browse some foreign gay websites and found them generally well-designed to a high quality. These foreign sites contrasted sharply with the very shabby online forums and gay dating platforms in China, which motivated Ling to create a high-quality digital public for Chinese queer people. A graduate in computer science from one of the top Chinese universities, Ling soon brought together a team and established Feizan.

This ground-breaking project offers the first well-designed and fully functional social networking service for Chinese queer people. Feizan allows users to create personal profile, upload photos, post up articles, update status, follow others, chat online, send private message, join in interest groups, organise and publicise social events (e.g. film clubs), and design and participate in short surveys on queer-related issues. The rich functions that Feizan provides are conjoined by the sophisticated web design completed by IT professionals in Ling's team, which offers a concise and clear webpage layout similar to that of Facebook.

That is to say, in terms of function and design, Feizan's technological and aesthetic infrastructures are constructed to a high quality, which mark a major departure from other shabby-looking underground gay sites in China with very limited functions. The early development of Feizan also demonstrated an intensive engagement with Beijing's local queer communities. Some early users came from Ling's personal social circles, and the company behind Feizan also frequently organised queer social events in Beijing including gay dating, film screening, and social sports. In the first year, Feizan only saw a slow increase in the number of registered users to ten thousand; in other words, this site first started as a rather small online queer community led by Ling with a focus on Beijing.

The intimate sense of community was strong in Feizan's early development. When I joined in the site in 2011, Ling would leave a message in the newcomers' profiles to welcome them into the community. People could also contact him directly with questions and feedback. In this way, the site members had the chance to contribute to the construction of this virtual queer kingdom. Other than organising social events in Beijing, Feizan also invited and attracted well-known gay public figures to join in the site—figures whom others can look up to and learn from their experience in dealing with common difficulties facing queer people in everyday life. Interest groups established by users also covered a wide range of topics from film and music to fashion and sport. Feizan soon became a renowned queer social network, not only for its well-designed infrastructures, but for the strong sense of community and for the high-quality original content generated by its users.

Feizan's success lies in its consistent insistence on quality, in other words, not only in the site design but also in the culture it aims to cultivate. Early gay websites in the PRC were often permeated with pornographic content (Ho 2010b, 100-9). Feizan, however, significantly differs from these predecessors in its anti-obscenity policy. One of Feizan's early slogans was "browse Feizan in the office", meaning this site had nothing pornographic and could be

viewed even in the work place. Ling told me during my interview with him that he designed Feizan with the hope that queer people could showcase diverse *interests* (read: cultural capital) on this platform, instead of merely sharing erotic contents as often seen in other Chinese gay sites. The sites overloaded with erotic contents often leave an impression, as well as a stigma, that queer people are only seeking sexual enticement and enjoyment. Facing China's strict censorship, erotic gay sites have to operate in an incognito fashion, such as regularly changing URL addresses to escape the authorities' crackdown, and this further intensifies the stigma that queers only belong to the underground world. Feizan, on the other hand, aims to prove that vibrant queer cultures can be and should be bathing in the sunlight.

Feizan directly targets the downside of the underground queer cyberspace that often renders people as mere sexual objects, and it proposes a more positive, upward, optimistic, and confident queer image seldom before seen in China's queer cyber universe. The name Feizan means flying (*fei*) and compliment (*zan*), connoting a clear departure from the underground gay sites toward a new queer public "up in the sky". This upward image fulfils queer people's desire to break away from the (internalised) shame and stigma in search of more positive queer social visibility online (Figure 7). Feizan's upward culture has attracted large numbers of "high-quality users" (*gao zhiliang yonghu*), a term favoured by the IT industry to describe social media enthusiasts who actively generate original content and attract new users to join in the virtual communities. These active content contributors constituted a large portion of Feizan's early residents. As Ling put it during my interview, those joining Feizan at that time truly "treated people as humans" (*ba ren dang ren kan*)—respecting instead of objectifying each other, and willing to invest time and effort in creating original contents and socialising with others, rather than utilising this platform simply for sex trade or gay porn exchange.



Figure 7. “Let love fly” and “find love on Feizan”: Feizan’s frontpage logos from 2013 to 2015

(High-flying balloons up in the sky have been a major theme across these logos)

My interest in Feizan leads to what has become an over four-year and is still ongoing digital ethnographic study of this community, where I have been an active participatory observer. Now, temporally retreating from this digital field and writing about my research findings, it becomes increasingly clear that Feizan’s early members, including myself, rather represent a certain social class who possess particular cultural interests, taste, and capital, as well as social mobility and individual quality. Ling’s personal story as a rural-to-urban gay

migrant who graduated from an elite university and pioneered queer social media in China served as a microscopic example of Feizan's early success. Starting from Ling's own social circle and the vibrant migrant city of Beijing, Feizan was first established and developed by those who have already succeeded in educational, geographical, and social class migrations against the backdrop of China's thriving economy and increasing domestic mobility. This demography of a small group of socially successful queers with relatively advantaged social, cultural, economic, and educational capital set the tone for the early growth of Feizan. Feizan's upward cultural inclination is both a consequence and a condition of an upward social mobility that it was born within and aims to further cultivate among its users.

Allan Bérubé (1997, 60) comments that the so-called queer communities, politics, and studies are often built by middle-class and college-educated (white) gay males "around a belief that homosexuality could and should stand alone as the organizing principle", as if homosexuality was not shaped by other issues such as gender and class. Similarly, Feizan as an online community was also established by a group of well-educated urban and urbanised gay males with social, economic, educational, and cultural advantage. Interviewing Ling in late 2014, I asked him whether Feizan's upward inclination and upmarket cultural taste potentially led to a "queer elitism" (that reproduced and reinforced larger social exclusion). Ling responded that queer media and cultural products in China generally remained low in quality, compared to their Western counterparts; it was too early to talk about "elitism" at this stage in queer China when the basic demand for quality was still not met.

Ling's emphasis on quality is first and foremost a strategy, whether consciously or unconsciously, to accommodate and augment the cultural tastes and interests of this particular demography that Feizan's early members represent, and cater to the growing appetite of an aspirational queer middle classes in China. This emphasis on cultural capital is measured in a culture-focused rubric that evokes the myth of quality through users' participation and

interaction on Feizan. First, the members must have non-erotic interests (i.e. cultural capital) to contribute to this community. Feizan's departure from pornographic underground gay sites in building an upward and high-quality queer community inevitably entails online exchange of cultural capital (*xingqu* or interests) among its members. Second, as explicit erotic contents will be censored and deleted, any public display of sexual capital online must take a non-erotic and refined form (such as sex-related knowledge) that "elevates" the sexual-nature to the level of symbolic-culture. Sexual capital is thus often deployed and exchanged in a self-regulated and self-governed form.

More specifically, the exchange of cultural capital occurs through online interactions around pictures (*tupian*), articles (*rizhi*), status-update (*dongtai*), and interest-groups (*qunzu*) generated and established by the users. Feizan allows each member to create multiple online photo albums, and as many as six albums will be publicly displayed on the frontpage of one's profile. In addition to personal photos, large numbers of themed-albums have emerged on Feizan and these conspicuously indicate the members' cultural interests: paintings (fine art), CD covers (music), film posters (cinema), comic characters (manga and anime), scenery pictures (travel), urban landscapes (architecture), photos of fine-dining or home-cooking (cuisine), book covers (literature or professional/academic readings), and so forth. The diverse range of picture collections on Feizan sharply contrasts other gay sites in China that often only include selfies and seductive photos; members of Feizan are hence allowed a much fuller self-portrayal beyond merely sex-driven online display of physical attractiveness.

Feizan also allows and encourages members to post up long articles, including self-introductions, opinion essays, social comments, film/music reviews, fictions, real-life stories, poetic verses, and so forth. The most commented articles will be automatically listed and ranked on the frontpage of the site, while non-original content re-posted from elsewhere will be filtered. Furthermore, every time a member uploads a picture or an article, or someone

“likes” or comments on a photo or a post, an automatic status-update will be generated on the frontpage with the picture or the article’s title enclosed. This function further facilitates and accelerates the flows and exchanges of cultural capital through online content-sharing and commenting on Feizan. People can also choose on the frontpage to only view the status-updates from the same geographical area, so as to identify potential friends, dates, and partners with similar interests and cultural tastes in the same region.

In claiming membership in the Feizan community, that is to say, one has to possess and provide some cultural capital for exchange. If other gay websites in China invite users to cash in (erotic) sexual capital for hook-up and casual sex, then Feizan makes it possible for people to cash in cultural capital for dating and building same-sex relationship. But this does not mean that Feizan is a desexualised space; in fact sexual capital is often in high demand and also in high supply in this online queer community. The circulation and exchange of sexual capital on Feizan often takes a more refined form, such as medical knowledge of sexual health, skills to increase the pleasure of sexual intercourse, and tips in skin care or gym workout to enhance one’s physical beauty and strength. Personal pictures indicating one’s sexual assets (e.g. youthfulness, facial beauty, or bodily fitness) in non-erotic ways are also quite popular on Feizan. In other words, the flows of self-regulated sexual capital on this website resonate with the lingering myth of quality in reproducing self-governed good sexual citizens.

But Feizan has since then expanded into a large empire. Despite the slow growth in the first year, Feizan’s good reputation has boosted the snowball effect that led to a hundredfold increase in the number of registered users to over one million as of late 2014. Long being an active member, I have encountered people from all across the world on Feizan: foreigners in China, Chinese students overseas, queer migrants in Sinophone Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia, and mostly local Chinese gay men across a large

territory of the PRC. Invited or unsolicited, a Beijing-based gay choir, a Hong Kong queer bookshop, a Taiwanese gay-friendly coffee house, and various LGBT organisations have all landed on Feizan to publicise their services, businesses, and social events. No longer able to organise social activities on its own across the country and around the globe, the team behind Feizan has redefined the role of this website from a small online community to a large social network through which queer NGOs and social groups can coordinate different types of public events, such as queer film clubs.

Accordingly, the growth of Feizan has dramatically changed its demography from a community of socially advantaged and culturally exquisite aspirational queers to a more class-inclusive and culturally diversified mini-society. The conglomeration of cultural capital on early Feizan has been largely diluted by its changing demography. As a result, Feizan's attempt to maintain a high-quality queer community free from erotic content is no longer equally respected by the newcomers as by the early members. Recent years have seen an increase in users challenging the anti-obscenity policy by uploading pornographic content. Because of user-generated erotic content, Feizan has been blocked several times in the 3G/4G cellular networks operated by China Mobile, a state-owned telecommunication enterprise and the world's largest mobile-phone carrier. As Ling confirmed during my interview, as long as they deleted the "obscene" content on Feizan, the ban would be lifted and users could once again access the website. Queer social media in China still face strong state censorship, and Feizan cannot change its regulative policy to allow erotic content sharing. This is why Feizan, like other legally registered web services in China, has to enforce strong self-censorship and censor inappropriate content, so as to ensure the very survival of this online network and also reinforce its culturally enriched upward image distinctive from primitive sexual temptations. Some users have shown a strong and consistent support for the anti-obscenity strategy to keep

Feizhan safe as a high-quality and “pollution-free” paradise, while those more interested in exchanging erotic capital have either chosen to leave or been ostracised from Feizhan.

The distinction between cultural and erotic orientations leads to a major split between those who actively pursue cultural capital (e.g. cultural interests, intelligent conversations, and mental and spiritual connections) with those who care much more about the erotic forms of sexual capital (e.g. physical beauty, sexual vivaciousness, and erotic attractions). This split is not entirely new and not exclusive to Feizhan; to a significant extent it has sculpted and structured today’s queer social interactions and communities in China on and off screens. This major split reveals a deep-buried question about *suzhi* and human capital in queer China: why has the desire for erotic sexual capital and that for cultural capital have generated two distinctive queer social discourses often at each other’s throat? As I have discussed earlier in this chapter, China’s state propaganda has relocated *suzhi* from the realm of nature to that of culture; the pursuit of quality thus inevitably entails an embracing of culture and a degrading of anything purely natural, primitive, and biological. In order for sexuality to enter the *suzhi* discourse, it must be regulated and refined in the name of culture—knowledge, medical science, and public health, to name a few. *Suzhi* has been pinpointed by the state as individual improvement through hard work, in addition, and sexual self-governance and self-regulation hence become a necessity to reproduce socially responsible “high-quality” citizens (see also Henderson 2013, 48-9). Erotic capital that specifically exploits and evokes sexual pleasure accordingly turns into a kind of “low-quality capital” undesirable in the nationwide pursuit of the symbolic cultural *suzhi*/quality.

More important, previously same-sex attracted Chinese people often had to conceal their sexual preference for hetero-reproductive marriage, and hence websites and other online social platforms were mainly used as outlets for sexual desires including porn-sharing and online cruising for sexual encounters. The frequent online circulation of erotic capital led to

the public stigma discussed above that did little help to improve the social position and public image of queer people. When queer social activism in China is developing during recent years and gays and lesbians enjoy higher social visibility, a growing concern over sex-related queer morality and public image is shown both on Feizan and in wider queer Chinese communities online and offline. Katherine Sender (2004, 222) points out that stigmatised social groups are more likely to raise their social position with high “moral capital” by investing in and producing positive and often desexualised public images; this is to compensate for the fact that transgressive sexuality already falls off the public consent of good sexual citizenship. Both inside and outside Feizan, a growing queer advocacy has been calling for a higher standard of sex-related morality so as to compensate for the already degrading public image of queer people in China, which is also deeply rooted in the state discourse on self-governance of sexuality to improve *suzhi*/quality.

On top of that, when people have more chances to accumulate economic, social, and cultural capital in today’s China, and when queers generally have more choices other than retreating into closeted hetero-reproductive marriage, a new post-*suzhi* split in cultural tastes and interests continues to structure, classify, and rank-order different queer social groups. In today’s queer social communities, displaying and capitalising on non-erotic cultural tastes and interests often indicate one’s higher social position, or demonstrate one’s ability in augmenting cultural capital and one’s aspiration in climbing up the social ladder. People in these categories are more desirable, insomuch as higher economic, educational, social, and cultural capital often implies more recourse to expand life options and deal with common challenges facing queer people such as stretched kinship negotiation, overseas marriage and migration, and international surrogacy or adoption. The ability to display such qualities and capitals thus testifies for one’s previous success and future potential for a better queer life.

At the same time, furthermore, those who only exploit erotic sexual capital in today's queer Chinese communities often carry the stigma that they have nothing to show except for their body. The exclusive self-portrayal of physical and sexual attractiveness often connotes a desire for casual sexual encounters without commitment, as opposite to showcasing a range of cultural interests which indicates one is looking for a committed partner with similar cultural tastes. Over-capitalising on erotic capital thus often implies that one lacks sufficient resource and capital to maintain a long-term queer partnership, and hence eagerly capitalises on the body for as much sexual pleasure as possible before he reaches a certain age and has to obey the familial expectation for hetero-reproductive marriage. That is to say, those who carry on the habit from erotic gay sites and continue sharing erotic content intensively on Feizan appear to have failed in cultivating cultural capital and climbing up the social ladder for upward quality and mobility.

That is to say, the type of capital that one is able to capitalise upon in China's queer communities often indicates one's potential ability to choose between committed same-sex partnership (honesty and happiness) or closeted hetero-reproductive marriage (disguise and depression). This means the most cherished "quality" in today's queer Chinese communities is not cultural taste *per se*, but the very ability to build a promising queer relationship with a future and a better queer life in a country like China. This ability has little to do with one's erotic attractiveness; rather, it is mainly enabled and enhanced and also measured by the possession of advantaged cultural, social, educational, and economic capital in the pursuit of individual quality and class mobility. As Sender (2004, 222) reminds us, often those who are more socially privileged "can afford to indulge in greater sexual transgression", whereas others are more subject to heteronormative social/familial pressure and public scrutiny. Queer sexuality is never only about sexual desire and deviance, but deeply intermingled with issues of class and privilege in the larger socio-cultural hierarchy. It is this kind of quality that

divides queer people on Feizan and in larger queer Chinese communities: while erotic capital caters to sexual consumption, other forms of human capital determine the possibility of maintaining a queer life outside the heteronormative socio-cultural reproduction of family.

But the divide between the cultural and the erotic orientations has been increasingly challenged, especially in online queer communities where participants of one large social network like Feizan often come from a wide span of social classes. From 2012 to 2015, for example, network-wide debates frequently broke out on Feizan about the importance and appropriateness of cultural capital and erotic capital in both individual choice of same-sex partners and collective queer activism for social visibility and equal rights. One side of the debate strongly advocates for education and self-improvement, commitment in relationships, and an upward queer public image, while the other emphasises physical attraction, sexual emancipation, and individual choice. Feizan has often become a battlefield where these two sides frequently and constantly fight against each other, with various degrees of support from people sandwiched in between, as if what they are fighting for are mutually exclusive.

These debates indicate some new changes in the lingering *suzhi* discourse and in the measurement of individual quality, as suggested by those who favour the display of erotic capital on Feizan. Firstly, they argue, erotic capital is an integral part of individual quality and an asset convertible to other forms of human capital. Secondly, the physical beauty that one was born with also needs careful “cultivation” (e.g. skin care and fitness routines) that entails money, knowledge, determination, and hard work. If the cultivated cultural capital is cherished, then erotic capital accumulated through individual effort should be equally celebrated. Thirdly, hook-up for casual sex may well initiate a serious relationship, and a casual exchange of erotic capital may turn into a long-term commitment. On top of that, displaying cultural or erotic interests (or both) is ultimately an *individual choice*, of which neither the state nor other people have the right to judge whatsoever.

This desire to define one's sexual life within the domain of *individual choice* is precisely why the term *suzhi* has lost its popularity in various social registers. Nowadays speaking too much about *suzhi* paradoxically shows low *suzhi*—pointing moralistic fingers towards other people's personal choices. In addition, Chinese people have to various degrees benefited from the country's strong economic growth in more than three consecutive decades, and enjoyed more social mobility through education and migration in the nationwide pursuit of *suzhi*. That is to say, nowadays *suzhi* is less a privilege than a mass possession, although the ability to inherit and cultivate different forms of human capital still varies significantly from individual to individual and from family to family. When the overall quality (economic and cultural capital) of the population is increasing, speaking too much about *suzhi* once again shows low *suzhi*—thinking too high of oneself as if other people cannot improve their quality. In the recent decade *suzhi* has been increasingly turning into an arrogant accusation and a vehicle for naming-and-shaming; queer moral capital in the name of *suzhi* has often become a negative moralistic or immoral capital unwelcomed in today's queer communities.

On the other hand, however, it is this very increase in social class mobility and in “population quality” that has extended the *suzhi*-style social exclusion and class stratification, although the term *suzhi* itself has expired in various social domains. The counter-discourse of *individual choice* that I have observed on Feizan in the past few years strongly parallels the rise of the increasingly individualised and privacy-conscious middle classes in China (Liu 2014, 142; So 2013, 162). The middle-class queers are themselves produced by the state-led neoliberalising privatisations of economy, market, real estate, house ownership, property, health care, and education (Chen and Qin 2014; Goodman 2013/2014/2016; So 2013; Tsang 2014). The rising and aspirational middle-class queers increasingly demand sexual privacy free from public moral scrutiny; if they do not want their own individual lifestyle to be judged, then they can no longer judge others in the name of *suzhi*, at least not publicly. What

has changed is never the class-structured and class-structuring distinctions between symbolic culture and unregulated sexual nature, but a middle-class *habitus* to keep one's opinions to oneself (which itself shows high quality) and to keep the exchange of sexual capital at a more private level.

However, privacy is a privilege, as I argued above based on Sender's observation. It is not that the rising middle-class queers care less about erotic forms of sexual capital, but that they possess the class-specific privilege to exchange erotic capital behind closed doors. As Skeggs (2004, 60) resoundingly argues, while class is being displaced by theories and claims of mobility and individualisation, it is simultaneously being institutionalised and reproduced as "a re-legitimation and justification of the habitus of the middle-class that does not want to name itself, be recognised or accept responsibility for its own power". The silence of middle-class queers on their class privilege implicitly attributes social distinctions to "individual choice", as if such choice is not constrained by systematic problems, social stratification, and classifying structures. The very ability to make choice *as* individuals first and foremost owes to the possession of certain class-specific human capital. The discourse of individualisation is ultimately a (not so) new middle-class excuse to continue justifying and engineering social exclusion along the lingering myth of "individual quality", albeit no longer in the moralistic name of *suzhi*. So-called individual choice is inherently a class privilege articulated by either those who have it or those who want it.

During recent years, arguments concerning individualisation and social distinction have frequently surfaced and resurfaced on Feizan under the themes of education, migration, cultural taste, commitment in relationship, and so forth. This social networking service has often become a platform where people holding different opinions attack each other and defend their own standpoints. During this process, many previously active users, including some of my fieldwork informants, have withdrawn from Feizan, partially because the overall

quality of discussions has dropped to a disordered level of verbal fight, while constructive insights (i.e. cultural capital) are increasingly scarce in supply. Another reason is that the early sense of community and commonality has been diluted by a changing demography and a growing population on Feizan (i.e. quality has been diluted by quantity). With fewer users contributing high-quality original contents, Feizan is losing its appeal for Chinese queer people. When I expressed my concern during my interview with Ling about the increased withdrawal of active users from Feizan, he acknowledged the problem but had yet to come up with a solution.

In 2013 and 2014, Feizan also suffered from a series of long-lasting malicious attacks: automatic robot programmes registered thousands of new accounts every day, and generated countless status updates to submerge the content generated by real users. From February to March 2014, Feizan was also hit by a database malfunction that took the website offline for several days, during which a large number of users lost their profile data stored on Feizan. These incidents recorded Feizan's struggle to redefine itself from a small community led by Ling to one of the largest queer social networks in the world. Feizan used to be commercial-free, but has incorporated advert banners to cover the growing operational costs, and started formal collaborations with gay-friendly businesses such as travel agencies (a hint on middle-class interests in leisure and tourism) and condom manufacturers (sexual health and self-regulation). For Ling, however, Feizan has never been fully commercialised, especially compared to the company's later mobile dating application ZANK that fully operates on venture capital. The rise of location-aware mobile queer social media like ZANK in China (discussed below) has also taken away a lot of users from the web-based Feizan.

Ling's team has been mostly working on ZANK since its release in April 2013, and Feizan has been largely left alone to grow on its own with very limited technical support. Minor technical glitches started to emerge on the website and became increasingly frequent

in 2015—the quality of the platform *per se* was declining. Discontent was noticeably growing among the users, which caused more people to leave Feizan. The decline of Feizan was already quite obvious as of early 2015, when I started to draft the first version of this chapter. Since then, moreover, some LGBT organisations and social groups (including the film clubs studied in this research) have withdrawn from Feizan, and instead turn to mass social media or mobile queer social networking services to market their businesses and social events. As of late 2015, often one to three user-generated articles were automatically ranked and enclosed in the hot-topic list on Feizan’s frontpage. Previously this list often contained eight to ten articles on any given day. As of November 2015, a total of 106,923 user-generated articles had been deposited in the archive (less those deleted by the authors), or about 1,550 per month on average. But, in that month, only around 600 articles were archived on Feizan. The decrease in user-generated content was apparent. More and more users who have chosen to stay in this online queer community have begun to complain about the decline in Feizan’s quality and popularity. At this point, Feizan is dying.

From an online community catering to a small circle of socially advantaged queers, to the largest queer social network in China with a diverse demography, and to today’s almost abandoned fallen empire, Feizan has left a unique trajectory in its development and in its contribution to queer Chinese communities and cultures in the early twenty-first century. The rise and fall of this virtual online kingdom has reflected and reproduced the changing social discourses on *suzhi*/quality and the rising middle classes in the larger society. What we have learned by studying Feizan is how the structured and structuring forces of class-related human capital, especially cultural capital, have shaped and reshaped queer Chinese cultures and communities. The new frontier in today’s queer media and screen cultures is mobile social media, which I examine below along the line of class mobility and immobility, as well as the lingering myth of *suzhi*/quality.

Politics of Proximity: Locative Mobile Queer Social Networking Platforms

In this part I analyse ZANK and Blue'd, the two largest mobile gay dating and hook-up applications in the Chinese world. As of late 2014, ZANK had seven million registered users, and Blue'd proclaimed itself as the world's largest mobile gay social network with fifteen million users, three million of which came from overseas markets outside China.¹ These two mobile social media both attracted a large amount of venture capital investment in 2014, respectively published reports about queer economy in China in the same year, and have invested in digital video and short film productions to promote their services. Other mobile queer social apps that I have found and tested in this research include Grindr (one of the most popular mobile gay apps worldwide), Jack'D (based in the US and popular in Chinese societies), G-Friend (*G-You*, China-based gay app), Aloha (created in Beijing and allowing users to register with mobilephone numbers from 18 different countries), Butterfly (Hong Kong lesbian mobile network), Tofu (China-based mobile app for female fans of inter-male romance and sex), and GuyFones and Sparkling (Taiwan-based gay apps).

Mobile dating and hook-up apps present a newly emerged type of locative queer social media based on users' GPS locational data on smartphones, also known as location-aware or location-based services (LBS). Mobile apps like ZANK and Blue'd automatically read the GPS data on the smartphone and list nearby users onscreen in grid format based on geo-locational proximity—the nearest ones on top followed by others in descending order. Locative mobile media has caught wide academic attention during recent years (Evans 2015; Farman 2012; Frith 2015; Gudelunas 2012; Hjorth and Arnold 2013; Katz and Lai 2014; Wilken and Goggin 2014). A substantial amount of research on mobile gay applications (especially on Grindr) is also erupting across multiple disciplines including media studies

¹ See news reports at <http://www.36kr.com/p/216639.html> and <http://www.vice.cn/read/this-former-policeman-launched-chinas-biggest-gay-dating-app>. The data of ZANK was acquired from Ling during my interview. In January 2016, Blue'd announced that the number of registered users had reached twenty-two million.

(Batiste 2013; Blackwell et al. 2015; Brubaker et al 2014; Chiou 2012; Licoqqe et al. 2015), cultural critiques (Atman 2014; Fox 2014; Hartman 2013; Penney 2014; Quiroz 2013; Race 2015a/2015b), and AIDS/HIV prevention and mental health (Burrell et al. 2012; Gibbs and Rice 2016; Holloway et al. 2014; Landovitz et al. 2012; Martinez et al. 2014; Miller 2015; Rendina et al. 2014; Su et al, 2015; Sun et al. 2015; Winetrobe et al. 2014).

Jason Farman (2012) understands social reciprocity on locative mobile media as embodied space of proximity and intimacy (67), insomuch as the broadcasted location through media platforms often indicates one's social relation and constitutes one's identity (57-8). Writing on locative media in the Asia-Pacific, Hjorth and Arnold (2013, 6-14) argues for a "mobile intimacy" (*cf.* Raiti 2007; Yue 2012a) emerged through location-aware mobile applications and conditioned by material-geographical and electronic-social mobilities and fluidities across time and space. This kind of intimacy mobilised through locative media not only functions in private spaces but often in the public. Rainie and Wellman (2012) famously describe this private-public nexus reinforced by the revolution of digital technology as "networked individualism". They argue, in contrast to Hjorth and Arnold, that people function more as connected individuals and less as embedded group members (12) in mediated day-to-day social interactions. I will further develop and question these arguments in my examination of locative mobile dating and hook-up apps in queer China.

Mobile queer social media, moreover, significantly differ from other forms of LBS mobile services in several major aspects. First, unlike Facebook that capitalises upon existing social relations and connections, mobile queer social networking often starts from strangers instead of acquaintances. The mobile dating services are often designed for users to *discover* queer strangers in the neighbourhood. Second, for sexual minorities, especially closeted gays and lesbians, using mobile queer media may expose their sexual preference and result in unexpected coming-out. They often have to use mobile dating and hook-up services in an

incognito way, hiding from families, roommates, friends, or colleagues. Third, in a country like China, mobile queer media are heavily censored and publicly stigmatised by the state, which is underlined by the lingering myth of quality in reproducing self-regulated and socially responsible good citizens, albeit not in the name of *suzhi* anymore. I will further develop these arguments shortly.

My point of departure from existing scholarship is to analyse ZANK and Blue'd along the politics of proximity on mobile queer screens. I adopt the notion of "proximity politics" from two different sets of scholarship. The first is John Tomlinson's (2000) examination of communication and media technology in a globalising world, written before the onset of locative mobile media. Tomlinson argues that telecommunication technology that bridges distance in time and space has enabled structural and experienced proximity, which has in turn extended and complicated relational human closeness. He describes it as "enforced proximity" to criticise this kind of enforced hyper-connectedness enabled by technology. In what follows, I will develop this idea in another direction (the myth of *suzhi*/quality) to scrutinise mobile queer social media. My second inspiration comes from recent mobility scholarship. In the introduction to the edited anthology *Politics of Proximity: Mobility and Immobility in Practice*, Giuseppina Pellegrino defines proximity as physical co-presence and feelings of closeness enhanced by virtual and communicative flows of information via social and relational connections (notwithstanding possible disruptions; 2011, 7). I will build on Tomlinson's and Pellegrino's insights to outline my subsequent analysis of the politics of proximity in mobile queer social media. I will analyse how the enforced principle of proximity evokes and troubles the myth of quality on mobile queer screens.

On mobile gay dating and hook-up apps like ZANK and Blue'd, users can check others' profiles, become their followers, and chat via the apps based on their geolocational proximity. Each of these apps lists and juxtaposes twenty-some users on a small smartphone

screen, resulting in an extremely compact display of nearby users with miniaturised photos and minimum personal information (distance and sexual roles). People in such mobile queer social media are hence reduced, flattened, and miniaturised into tiny gridded icons one-twentieth the size of a smartphone screen (Figure 8). Profiles on mobile social media are often very concise—a large number of users do not bother to fill in any personal information except for age, height, and weight. Some people may also write up a few taglines indicating dating preference. Most profiles include (seductive) personal photos, while lots of others have no personal pictures at all. These mobile media screens look like super-thrift lonely hearts adverts ranked dynamically by geo-proximity. That is to say, mobile social media only allow limited space for self-display, as too much information will inundate the small screen.



Figure 8. Blue'd (left) and ZANK (official promotional screenshots)

The miniaturised profiles on mobile screens bring us back to the “supermarket” I described earlier, where we choose unfamiliar products based completely on the pictures and small print on the package without knowing their quality. Mobile dating and hook-up apps like ZANK and Blue'd are designed with a very specific strategy that enables users to identify and approach nearby dates or sexual partners as fast as possible. In other words,

these apps capitalise on the co-presence of queer individuals in close proximity, with a promise to facilitate social and relational closeness and connectedness via mobile digital devices. Unless one uses special applications to fake locational data on the smartphone, mobile dating and hook-up apps only grant users access to queer individuals in relatively close geo-proximity. One's own profile, in addition, will be read mainly by nearby users. It is precisely in this sense that the principle of locative mobile queer media is *enforced proximity*: geographical closeness becomes the fundamental structure that determines whom one can see on mobile screens and who are likely to access one's own profile. The enforced proximity pinpoints people in a location-based nexus where geographical closeness is the single most defining characteristic in queer social networking through locative mobile media.

The politics of enforced proximity on mobile queer screens evoke and trouble the myth of quality at multiple interrelated levels. First of all, the enforced principle of proximity has largely replaced the emphasis on quality, but proximity does not ensure quality. The cost of cultural capital to join in mobile queer social platforms is low, and the enforced proximity does not prioritise cultural tastes and interests. Users have to reach out to establish contact based on limited and objectified information (photos, profiles, and sexual roles; see Licoqqe et al. 2015, 2). While finding nearby queer peers are easier than ever, identifying an ideal partner will take some guesswork. Through this lens, the proximity-based mobile apps are more akin to early gay dating forums and websites, and share fewer similarities with more recent web-based queer sites like Feizan which is designed for people to establish well-informed social connections based on much fuller self-portrayals of personal interests and cultural tastes.

More specifically, members of Feizan have more tactics to attract and identify those with similar or desirable qualities. One such example is to post up well-crafted opinion essays or stories, and create themed photo albums as discussed above. This tactic functions as an

effective filtering and screening mechanism to attract followers who share similar interests and possess certain cultural capital. One is more likely to select potential dates and a future partner from this group of people. Those who do not have similar levels of cultural capital for exchange, however, will be less likely to become one's followers. Essentially, this is a tactic to reduce *quantity* in order to identify people with desirable *quality* from a large user-base. In mobile social networking, however, such tactic no longer works. Mobile platforms limited by hardware infrastructures (e.g. small screen and lack of full-sized keyboard for long text input) have little room to accommodate in-depth cultural or intellectual exchange. Instead, they are more suitable for fast circulations (through Wi-Fi and 3G/4G networks) of sexual capital such as selfies shot with smartphone cameras. Mobile dating app users are only able to filter others based on objectified information such as height, weight, and sexual roles; quality/culture is hence often submerged by the overflows of mobilised sexual capital (quantity/nature). From this perspective, web-based queer social networks (e.g. Feizan) and proximity-based mobile social media (e.g. ZANK and Blue'd) are unlikely to replace each other, because they have distinctive roles to serve and different needs to fulfil.

But this does not mean that proximity-focused mobile queer social media completely function outside the domain of cultural capital and social distinctions. Rather, the circulation of cultural capital is deeply embedded in mobile social networking in a more nuanced way. Location broadcasting and location-tagged photos shared through ZANK and Blue'd often implicitly indicate one's social position and cultural capital. If location is part of identity, as Farman (2012, 57) argues, then it is also part of individual quality. Living in which neighbourhood of the city, dining in what kind of café and restaurant, and spending leisure time in what type of cultural or commercial space all demonstrate one's class affiliation and personal tastes. The location broadcasted on locative mobile media not only defines one's social relation (Farman 58) but indicates one's social position. The enforced principle of

proximity potentially bridges queer people in the same neighbourhood such as a university campus or an affluent urban residential compound, the residency in which often implies certain level of class-related capital such as education and material wealth. In this sense, locative mobile media continue to reinforce the social distinctions in “quality” through the politics of proximity.

Second, the enforced proximity is contingent on both mobilities and immobilities. Proximity designates a relative geographical closeness, a factor that constantly changes in accordance to the changing distance between people. The enforced principle of proximity entails a dynamic negotiation when people keep travelling across geographical areas from daily commuting to international migration (mobility), as well as a relative stability when people often live and work in the same place for a prolonged period (immobility). This is why ZANK and Blue’d both allow users to become followers of other people, and continue to receive their updates even when they have moved to a new location. Some mobile dating and hook-up apps like Aloha, furthermore, automatically tags each picture with the embedded GPS data to broadcast one’s location. Even users travel to another place, these location-tagged pictures will remain in their profiles for previous followers and other users in the new neighbourhood to view. This inevitably leaves a trace, however weak and fragmented, that indicates one’s lifestyle, class affiliation, and social position.

In addition to geographical mobility and immobility, the enforced principle of proximity also structures the intimacies forged between queer strangers via locative mobile media that troubles the myth of quality. “Bluntly stated”, writes Max Fox, a mobile gay app is a service “to find guys to fuck” (2014, 19). Whether one cheers for its relentless supply of erotic capital or impugns it as a disordered market of seductive part-objects (Hartman 2013, 45) does not change the fact that locative mobile gay dating apps are pervasively used for “pseudonymous sexual encounters between gay strangers” (Licoppe et al. 2015, 1). These

mobile apps are meant to “preclude repeat encounters and relational development, with the protagonists supposedly left unaffected emotionally, relationally and socially by their meeting” (*ibid.*). The enforced proximity, in this regard, only facilitates short and transient sexual encounters for quick exchange of erotic capital, but to a much less extent forges meaningful and long-lasting social and relational closeness. In this sense, the promise of “mobile intimacy” (Hjorth and Arnold 2013) mostly reproduces erotic intimacy, while queer people’s need for non-sexual forms of social and cultural connections often left unattended.

This explains why mobile apps like Grindr in the West and Blue’d in China carry the stigma as superficial hook-up tools. In Chinese gay parlance, these newly emerged hook-up apps are known as *yuepao shenqi*, literally “holy tools for fuck-buddies”. What is condemned is never sex *per se*, but that the enforced proximity on mobile platforms offers too little for queer cultural exchange while offering too much for erotic encounters. This is why Ling’s company launched ZANK as a mobile service for interest-based dating, as distinctive from sex-based dating and hook-up. ZANK carries on Feizan’s early strategy to augment cultural rather than erotic capital, with an eye-catching slogan “dating starts from interests”. But the proximity-centred design of ZANK, not unlike its various predecessors, has limited its potential in capitalising on non-erotic forms of quality. Fuelled by venture capital, moreover, Ling’s company also has a financial obligation to its investors of promoting ZANK to as wide a market as possible. To put it another way, quality has to make way for quantity. ZANK’s strategy for interest-based dating has soon been challenged by the resistant tactics of the users. While some people initiate group dating in restaurants, cinemas, or sport centres, others exploit the same function in the app to create a “date” in a hotel room with two people in total—an indirect hunt for sex. ZANK has to some extent become yet another “holy tool” on mobile screens. That is to say, mobile intimacy forged through these locative queer social media is often reduced to erotic physical closeness for sexual pleasure.

These newly emerged “holy tools” have thus been condemned by Chinese authorities on state-owned television. On 13 February 2015, the influential crime-fighting reality show *Legal Report (Jinri Shuofa)* aired an episode titled *Dangerous Relationship (Weixian Guanxi)* depicting drug-enforcement agents catching gay men red-handedly with methamphetamine and in promiscuous group sex—both are illegal in China. The agents found that these people were complete strangers, and initiated an investigation of gay men temporarily hooking up through locative mobile apps for drug and sex. The investigation concluded in what depicted as a major triumph, with dozens of drug-using gay men detained in compulsory rehabilitation centres. This episode focused not on drugs, however, but on the gay hook-up apps. The show described in detail what they called mobile application B (Blue’d) and mentioned another popular platform J (Jack’d). Several drug-using and HIV-positive gay men were interviewed in the rehabilitation institutions, talking about the “high percentage” (read: quantity) of drug users and HIV-positive men on mobile gay hook-up platforms. A high-ranked national drug-enforcement officer specifically pointed out in the show that the B app had millions of users—and hence was a major threat to social order and “population quality”. Although several detained gay men described the apps as “*tongzhi* social networking software”, the fact that these apps were also designed and used for dating was completely neglected by the show.

Group sex and drug use clearly ran against the lingering myth of quality engineered by the state to reproduce responsible, self-regulated, and health-conscious good citizens. Nobody in the show used the term *suzhi*, however, and both the senior drug-enforcement officer and the field agents emphasised that they would not judge “individual choice” (i.e. homosexual orientation). This echoes my previous argument that the *suzhi* rhetoric has been replaced by the discourse of individualisation that continues to justify social exclusion. In addition, the enforced principle of proximity on mobile queer social media has been proven efficient in bringing together nearby strangers for sex-driven and drug-infused (read: low-

quality) activities under the radar of state regulation. The authorities thus started to panic and brought up the issue on national TV. It soon generated a chilling effect among locative gay app users, and reinforced the stigma around these mobile “holy tools” in China’s queer communities. Since then, ZANK will automatically display a message whenever a user starts to chat with others, which reads “keep yourself safe—no porn or drug”, as a means to encourage self-governance on this mobile dating platform.

The third aspect that enforced proximity disturbs the myth of quality lies in the networked individualism that locative mobile apps help to forge among the users. The mobile dating apps provide digitally mediated and transient social connections in both actual and virtual mobilities; once a person travels to another location, the apps will show a different set of users in close geographical proximity. What mobile queer social media have to offer is less a *community* than a *platform*, where travellers and commuters looking for quick casual sexual encounters, and where queer people may pass by and come out but never fully belong in. Mobile apps like ZANK and Blue’d seldom cultivate an intimate sense of belonging, the opposite of what Feizan has achieved. This is why some people still prefer Feizan over ZANK, and have chosen to stay on the former community despite its apparent decline. The early marketing slogan of ZANK, “dating starts from interests”, has also been replaced by “no longer lonely with you”. The new slogan indicates a promise to save people from loneliness by facilitating location-based social networking and dating via mobile technology. This echoes the slogan of another mobile gay dating and hook-up app G-Friend (*G-You*), “in lonely cities, there is always a group people like you”. Here the “group” refers to both sexual minorities and lonely urban dwellers who often turn to mobile apps to find company.

The politics of enforced proximity capitalise on an economy of loneliness through mobile queer social networking. In the pursuit of quality and upward social mobility, young generations often travel across the large territory of China or across countries for better

education and employment (see Chapter 4 on stretched kinship). This process often detaches people from their original familial and social circles, and relocates them (sometimes more than once) into new environments from rural to urban and less to more developed areas. Tight social circles established in one's early life have therefore been replaced by new communities of strangers, and intimate social connections in the hometown by a loneliness in the localist host cities and societies (Chapter 5 has more on this). In other words, the discourse of *suzhi*/quality has reproduced not only an aspirational middle-classness, but an urban middle-class loneliness that the proximity-based mobile apps have promised to mitigate.

But, as I have argued, locative mobile dating and hook-up apps have curtailed ability to engender a sense of community among the users, and people function more as connected individuals and less as embedded group members in the age of networked individualism (Rainie and Wellman 2012, 12). Social mingling through mobile apps often appears as “a repetition of similar encounters among a wealth of potential new partners”, and occurs between unknown strangers “who are attractive in part because they are strangers” (Licoppe et al. 2015, 2). The promise of enforced proximity thus becomes questionable, when its strategy to save people from loneliness is to facilitate often short-lived encounters between strangers, instead of nurturing and cultivating long-term and in-depth social and relational connections. This is why the enforced principle of proximity has only reproduced a “lonely crowd” (Fox 2014) on mobile gay dating platforms where *solitudes* are plural and users are “alone together” (Turkle 2011).

The idea of lonely crowd is first developed by David Riesman ([1950] 2001) in his classic sociological research of the “other-oriented” American middle classes who rely on a social “radar” to look at others for conformity. Riesman's radar metaphor finds a new manifestation in locative mobile media in the twenty-first century—the early version of ZANK, for example, had a function to search for dates and sexual partners by showing a

radar onscreen searching for other users in close proximity (ditto to the “gaydar” metaphor). Writing about networked individualism, however, Rainie and Wellman (2012, 117-8) argue that in the recent century every generation has come up with something like “a lonely crowd” to sound an alarm about the increase in social isolation and urban loneliness, and the decline in community and authentic in-person relationships. They believe that this change in human relationships along with the development of the Internet and social media is not a shift toward social isolation, but toward “flexible autonomy” (124-5). Individuals increasingly play the role of abled agents in making their own choice in social interactions, and act less as committed members in fixed groups. They are not lonely—loneliness exists only in isolated cases—but rather have more choices to invest their time across different networks and communities, and devote themselves to social reciprocity in more selective ways.

What they call “autonomy”, however, is precisely what I have described as a class-specific privilege that enables certain socially advantaged people for autonomous decision-making and self-governance as individuals. Disadvantaged people down the social ladder may not have equal chance to be that “selective” in queer social interactions and transgressive sexual practices. For sexual minorities, especially the closeted ones, their commitment to queer social networks is often isolated and separated from real-life connections with families, friends, and co-workers. That is to say, even they can choose from a wide range of networks and groups to join in, queer sexual and cultural expressions are only allowed in self-confined queer communities online and offline, particularly in a country like China. These people already live in social isolation, while proximity-based locative media only relocate them in networks of strangers. Locative mobile media that enforce the principle of proximity only provide the chance for transient encounters and weak connections, not a sense of belonging as in established queer communities online (e.g. the early Feizan) and offline (e.g. film clubs as alternative families).

As I discussed in the previous chapter, queer film club participants are willing to travel from different corners of the city through the notoriously crowded public transportation during rush hours in order to attend the film screening sessions. Distance is not really a problem once the clubs empower them with a sense of in-person connection and intimacy, and enable in-depth discussions for the members to exchange knowledge and experience (i.e. cultural capital). The same goes for Feizan whose members come from all over the country and across the world to pursue high-quality original contents, albeit the recent decline in quality of this online queer community. Locative mobile media have replaced distance with proximity, but proximity cannot replace the sense of community and the pursuit of quality. The guaranteed proximity does not solve the problem of queer people's social isolation, nor does it provide a prolonged solution to the loneliness facing urban queer migrants and residents. Mobile dating and hook-up apps at best offer a complement, not a replacement, to queer people's demand for social connectedness and their desire for quality.

Analysing the enforced principle of proximity on locative mobile queer social media, I argue that proximity does not ensure quality, nor does it necessarily help build real intimacy or solve the isolation and loneliness facing queer migrants and urban queer dwellers. On the contrary, proximity often troubles the lingering myth of quality. The enforced principle of proximity has often squeezed out the room for the display of individual quality. The circulation of recognisable cultural capital hence takes a more nuanced form through the broadcasting of locations which implicitly indicate one's social position and class affiliation. Also, the enforced principle of proximity on locative mobile dating and hook-up apps often brings together nearby users for casual sex and hence accelerates the flows of erotic desires. ZANK's early strategy to encourage interest-based dating (exchange of cultural capital) has been challenged by users' resistant tactics in hunting for transient erotic intimacies. The stigmatised "holy tools" mainly foster unregulated ("low-quality") sexual encounters and

exchanges of erotic capital, and are hence publicly condemned by the Chinese authorities on national TV (albeit not in the name of *suzhi* anymore).

Moreover, locative mobile queer media provide less a community than a platform, and the short-lived connectedness between strangers in close proximity does not present a solution to the social isolation and prolonged loneliness facing queer people. The principle of proximity enables quick and weak queer encounters and connections between the networked individuals, but is less promising in catering to queer people's demand for community and desire for quality—both essential for sexual minorities in today's China when homecoming and homemaking are often equally difficult and problematic. While Dennis Altman (2014, 6) believes in the equalising power of locative queer social media where everyone can come out and join in, I argue that these platforms on mobile screens may not be the places where queer people acquire a sense of belonging. Overall, the enforced principle of proximity on locative mobile media both evokes and troubles the myth of quality, and complements but not replaces other forms of queer social networks and communities such as urban queer film clubs, which I will discuss in the following section.

Gated Communities: Queer Film Clubs and Urban Queer Communities

In this part, I analyse China's queer film clubs in particular, and queer communities in general, as *gated communities* separated and stratified by class-specific capital, cultural taste, and the lingering myth of quality. The notion of a gated community derives from academic studies of China's housing reform and the rising urban middle classes (Pow 2009; Tang 2013; Tomba 2004/2014; Wu 2005; Zhang 2010). Housing in urban China often takes the form of high-rise residential buildings grouped together in individually gated residential compounds, referred to as *xiaoqu* in Mandarin. With a large and urban-conglomerated population, what city governors allow to be built and most Chinese people can afford are normally apartment-style suites in multi-level residential buildings, not villa-style townhouses as often seen in the

residential areas of Western countries. Previously, such an urban living arrangement was often based on the *danwei* system—“work-unit” or places of employment functioning as both economic and social governing units in China (Bray 2005; Lü and Perry 1997; Lu 2005). That means, people worked in the same *danwei* would likely live in the same gated residential compound, where neighbours were also co-workers and the sense of community was strong. As a result of the rapid privatisation of state-owned enterprises and the commercialisation of the real-estate market, however, *danwei*-based housing arrangement has significantly declined (see Pow 2009; Tang 2013; Wu 2005; Zhang 2010).

The urban housing sector in China has transformed from work-unit based compounds of acquaintances to commercialised urban enclaves of strangers. These urban residential enclaves often take the form of gated communities where spatial enclosure ensures privacy, higher social status, high-level community service, high-quality lifestyle, and spatial and social segregation from “low-*suzhi*” groups such as the urban poor and peasant migrant workers (Pow 2009; Tang 2013; Tomba 2004/2014; Wu 2005; Zhang 2010). In today’s urban China, residents in the same residential compound and even in the same building do not necessarily know each other, and the sense of community is often quite weak. This is shown in the first season of *Rainbow Family*, the popular queer sit-com series produced by the company behind ZANK, where two people who live across the hallway at the same level of a building (called *duimen*) barely know each other for years, until they meet through a mobile gay dating app. Also because of the heated house-rental market in urban centres and the frequent changes of tenants in some gated communities, as seen in the co-tenanted household in *Rainbow Family*, today’s residential compounds have often turn into shared shelters for strangers (hence the urban loneliness discussed above).

Many film clubs and LGBT organisations in China are hidden in such gated urban neighbourhoods, and part of my field research was walking through the gates (often guarded

by property managers) to visit the enclosed queer enclaves and attend communal queer events in these gated communities. When I visited the office of Feizan/ZANK to interview Ling, which was also hidden in a gated residential compound in central Beijing, I was questioned for a few minutes by a community security guard (*bao'an*, similar to property manager) before I was allowed to enter the building. It is from these fieldwork experiences that I have developed the metaphor of *gated communities* to designate today's social exclusions and distinctions within China's queer communities. I argue that today's queer communities in China are segmented into different social clusters, or small gated communities, the entry to which entails certain qualities determined by various forms of capital specific to social position and class affiliation. I will develop this argument by analysing urban queer film clubs in China, with particular focus on the Fellowship of *Tongzhi* Film-lovers (*Huo Ying Tong Ren*, hereafter the Fellowship).

As the oldest queer film club in the Chinese world running uninterruptedly from early 2009 through to today, the Fellowship originally derived from the Beijing LGBT Center where queer films were occasionally screened since mid-2008. Lu Tai, a young film-lover travelling to Beijing in the same year searching for jobs, participated in a few sessions and then took up the challenge to establish a regular film club for the LGBT Center. The club gradually became independent from the NGO in the following years and now operates on its own, only in collaboration with the LGBT Center to use its office as the screening venue. The Fellowship has its online profiles for publicity on mainstream film sites Douban and MTime, and then on Feizan, Weibo (microblog), and WeChat (micro-letter), with more than thirty thousand followers combined. As of late 2015, this film club has organised more than 300 weekly screenings in six consecutive years, with some sessions attracting up to eighty participants each time. These records reflect the Fellowship's wide influence and unparalleled reputation among China's urban queer film clubs.

The Fellowship has a strong cinephilic inclination. The films screened in this club are worldwide art-house cinematic classics including both queer and non-queer works, with few commercial blockbusters. Most queer Sinophone feature films examined in this research have been shown in this club as well. Each time one or more guest speakers will be invited to the screening session, who will prepare PowerPoint slides beforehand to share personal readings of the film. Sometimes Lu Tai himself will deliver a talk after the screening on relevant cinematic issues (Figure 9). During my field research conducted from 2013 to 2014 which included participatory observation in the Fellowship, most post-screening discussions in this club were led by either a veteran cineaste or a young professional filmmaker or film student. These people exclusively demonstrated a good knowledge of and a deep passion for cinematic art, and most of them apparently fitted the profile of “arty youth” (*wenyi qingnian*), a popular Chinese slang emerged in recent years that describes and stereotypes young people with distinctive artistic and aesthetic tastes (a form of cultural capital, apparently).



Figure 9 Lu Tai introducing French actress Isabelle Adjani to the film club participants in 2014

(picture taken by the researcher in the film club with his permission)

The post-screening discussions in the Fellowship often develop closely around the movies, and can be completely irrelevant to queer issues if the movie screened is not a queer film. Sometimes participants only talk about the characters and the stories, or philosophically about love and intimate relationships in general without specific reference to transgressive queer desires, even most of them are self-identified gay men (and sometimes a few lesbians). Both the guest speakers' devotion to cinematic art and the participants' enthusiasm in the often in-depth discussions have been frequently emphasised as a unique quality of this film club throughout its online publicity across mass and queer social media. The distinctive cinephilic focus of the Fellowship, queer or not, separates this film club from its competitors such as the group-psychotherapy style Concentric Circle (Chapter 4), the commercial gay-friendly Taiwanese coffee house and film club Two-City Café (Chapter 5), and the more entertaining film clubs in Shanghai and Guangzhou (Chapter 2).

When I formally interviewed Lu Tai in late 2014, together with a regular participant and a volunteer working in the Fellowship since the very beginning, the strong and unique cinephilic inclination of the club and the film-focused organising style were central concerns in our conversation. However, this artistic taste may also alienate potential queer participants whose passion for film is not as strong. During my field study in this club, I noticed that there were always a few attendees who were less active during the discussions. They often showed less interest in the films screened, and were more likely to drop out from participation after one session. A two-hour screening of an art-house film with a one-hour discussion of the movie can be exhausting, if not disappointing, for those who only came to mingle with queer peers and look for potential dates and partners. The founder of the Concentric Circle, furthermore, was originally a participant of the Fellowship several years ago. Increasingly dissatisfied with the strong cinephilic emphasis of the club and the lack of mental and spiritual interactions in the heavily film-orientated discussions, he left the Fellowship and

established the Concentric Circle brand (book club, film club, writing group, etc.) with a psychotherapeutic focus.

More important, the aesthetic taste of the film club also functions as a classifying force that engenders potential social inclusions and exclusions. As I have argued after Pierre Bourdieu, taste in art is automatically rank-ordered and rank-ordering; the possession of certain cultural capital and the pursuit of upward social mobility are tokens of the rising and inspirational middle classes. Lu Tai's personal experience that he shared with me during the interview—migrating from a less developed area to Beijing and building up both his own business and the queer film club from scratch—presents a successful story of social mobility and “class escape” (Bérubé 1997, 44-5) that empowers people in coming out as urban gay men from a less-advantaged geographical and social position. But, as I argued in the previous chapter, only a selected few are able to put down their roots in the host societies, while those failed in geographical *and* social class migrations are often soon forgotten or reduced to silence in the host cities. Among the guest speakers and regular participants of this film club, the taste in art-house cinema and the knowledge of cinematic aesthetics not only symbolise advantaged cultural capital and affiliated social position, but often indicate previous success in social class migrations.

It is in this sense that I argue today's queer communities in China are gated and segmented by class-specific qualities and cultural tastes both embedded within and enabled through upward social mobility. The Fellowship, for example, functions as a small cinephilic queer community gated by the relatively high-brow aesthetic taste for art-house cinema, a luxurious cultural capital not often affordable to those down the social ladder. The Concentric Circle with its focus on psychotherapy and mental health also reproduces self-governed “high-quality” citizens by regulating transgressive psycho-sexual desires through the modern medical science of psychology. A commercial coffee house like Two-City Café, furthermore,

particularly caters to the consumerist desire of the rising urban middle classes, while coffee itself is a symbol of Western lifestyle and a token of middle-classness in today's China. All these queer film clubs, in other words, are gated and walled by class-specific qualities, the entry to which is not often granted to those with less economic and cultural capital.

They are, in short, gated queer communities. Social and spatial gating in urban queer communities and residential compounds evokes the lingering myth of *suzhi*/quality in three aspects. First, in Seio Nakajima's ethnography conducted in Beijing (2006/2011/2014), film clubs are understood as critical spaces that enable exhibition and circulation of independent films flying under the radar of state censorship. I agree with Nakajima that film clubs offer a site of resistance against state regulation of cultural products, but queer film clubs as gated communities have also reproduced the state-engineered social inclusions and exclusion in the larger society. People who are able to move into the gated communities—both in the physical form as gated residential compounds and in the metaphoric form as gated queer spaces—are those who have benefited most from the state policy in improving population quality and expanding urban middle classes through economic reform and higher education expansion. Although the film clubs are always open to any new members, the *de facto* residency is often offered to those who have enough class-related cultural capital to cash in for membership.

The fact that these queer film clubs are often located in urban centres (or in satellite university-towns near major metropolises) itself limits access to these queer enclaves to a selected few. Those failed or left-behind in geographical and educational migrations are hence denied the entry to these gated and classed urban queer sectors. Most people I encountered during my ethnographic study in China's urban queer film clubs were young, urban, educated gay males, while the aged, the rural, the undereducated were seldom entitled to enter these queer cultural spaces. Previous ethnographies conducted in Beijing's gay bars (Engebretsen 2014; Ho 2010b; Rofel 2007) face exactly the same problem: urban bar culture

in China is also a privilege entitled to the rising and aspirational urban middle classes who have the capacity of consumption, which often excludes the poor, the aged, the rural, and other queer people down the social and sexual hierarchy. I will return to this point later.

Gatedness also guarantees similar taste among the residents to facilitate queer social interactions and intimacies in the community such as dating and relationship-building. “Taste is a match-maker”, writes Bourdieu, and “what brings together things and people that go together” ([1984] 2010, 236-7). Queer communal events often function as intersectional places for dating that bring together people from different corners of the city, as I have discussed earlier, and the common taste for cinematic art in the Fellowship functions as the match-making principle in a gated community like this. From this standpoint, urban social gating is selective inclusion and selective exclusion. Each gated community selects its members and expels the non-conformists based on the taste of its residents. Those who remain in the community hence inevitably share some key similarities in cultural interests—a good starting point for social interactions and for building intimate relationships between the members.

The second and more important aspect of how urban gating evokes the lingering myth of quality is that gating better ensures quality and security. The birth of gated communities in urban China in part owes to “the rapid social change and dramatic improvement of some social groups’ lifestyles, together with the widened inequality gap between different social groups” (Tang 2013, 66). This has caused a feeling of insecurity among the beneficiaries of China’s post-socialist economic miracle, and legitimated urban gating to safeguard their earned material wealth and social privilege. This kind of gatedness extends Rofel’s (1999) ethnographic observation that the socially advantaged urban queers in Beijing defended their social privilege in the name of *suzhi*—a symbolic token of social gating and an entry ticket to the “high-quality” urban queer communities. The established spatial and social boundaries

effectively keep out unwanted “low-quality” others (see Pow 2009 and Tang 2013), and protect the class-related privilege and privacy within the gated communities from being diluted or threatened by outside forces. In other words, gating exists to secure the cultural capital, the social privilege, and the material wealth of the community from external threats and risks.

Gating in urban queer communities also better sets the boundaries, maps the territory, regulates the entry, and helps maintain the quality of the communities. Not long after the Concentric Circle book club started to flourish and attracted a large number of participants in Beijing, for instance, the “gatekeeper” (the founding-organiser of the club) handpicked two people from this queer community to initiate a film club under the same name. He meant to side-route interested participants from the overloaded book club to the film club; in so doing, each club would have fewer members, which better ensured enough time for every attendee to participate in the discussions. Since then, the Concentric Circle brand has expanded to six different niche divisions at the peak of its development in Beijing, in addition to two satellite clubs in other cities (Nanchang and Chengdu) in South China. The rise and fall of Feizan, on the other hand, shows how an online queer community initially gated by cultural tastes develops into an open-gate mass online society, whose early cultural wealth has been diluted and quality impaired. Many early members of Feizan have abandoned this online community, not unlike urban residents who flee from a neighbourhood once the demography starts to change towards lower social classes and the overall quality of the community starts to decline. Gating in queer communities, that is to say, helps regulate the quantity and maintain the quality.

Socially gated queer communities thus entail both a group of committed members and a strong leader/gatekeeper. In the case of the Fellowship, for example, the organiser who serves the role as the gatekeeper decides what films to screen, which guest-speakers to invite,

what kind of media outlets to use for publicity, and what topics to start with in each post-screening discussion. In this way, the gatekeeper ensures that the films, speakers, topics, and marketing channels all meet the same standard. The core members of this community (long-term volunteers and participants) also contribute thoughts and ideas, and sometimes serve as guest speakers. Such strategy ensures that temporary visitors and would-be residents will follow the rules and the examples set by the gatekeeper and the core members to maintain the consistent quality of this community and safeguard its cultural wealth. Social gating, in this sense, empowers queer communities to employ better “quality control”.

Similar to actual spatial gating in China’s urban residential compounds, however, social gating in queer communities for privilege and privacy also entails self-surveillance inside the gate. The organisers of the film clubs, as they told me during my interviews with them, often have to enforce self-censorship and be very cautious about what films to show and what agenda to set during the post-screening discussions. Beijing LGBT Center, the screening venue for both the Fellowship and the Concentric Circle, has been raided by local police for several times during recent years, not because of the film clubs but that this NGO has been a key player in queer social activism. Gated communities like the queer film clubs often entail a certain level of self-surveillance enforced by the gatekeepers and supported by the self-governed community members, as gatedness itself does not guarantee the immunity from regulation and punishment of the authoritarian state.

The third aspect that urban gating evokes the lingering myth of quality is that gating helps maintain social distinctions. Different gated queer communities like gay bars and film clubs have different positions in the lingering *suzhi* hierarchy. In the first chapter I discussed *quanzi* (“circles”), an imagined community and a constructed notion in Mainland China describing socio-sexually hyperactive gay men. The common stereotype is that *quanzi* is in a constant state of disorder (“*luan*”), full of transient sexual encounters and quick exchanges of

erotic capital. Gay bars in urban China, a central focus in previous ethnographies, have often been connected by the quality-conscious Chinese queers to this disordered and low-quality *quanzi*. In my interviews with the organisers of the Concentric Circle film club and with the founding-owner of the Fellowship of *Tongzhi* Film-lovers, they explicitly made the point that people coming to film clubs are essentially different from those going to gay bars. This distinction they made echoes my previous discussion about the split between those actively pursuing cultural capital (at the upper level of the *suzhi* hierarchy) and those pursuing erotic capital (at the lower level of the *suzhi* hierarchy).

Bar culture in China is a modernist fashion coming from the West after the opening-up of the country in the 1980s and mainly enjoyed by today's young urban consumers who desire a Western lifestyle. Chinese queers often see gay bars as social spaces for people who enjoy alcohol, night life, and (erotic) gay performance and for those who hunt for sexual encounters. In other words, gay bars are often understood as places for unregulated flows of sexual capital and expressive queer desires. Physical attractiveness and sexual vivaciousness often determine one's popularity in gay bars, while there is little room for meaningful cultural and intellectual interactions. This is why gay bars reside in the lower end of the hierarchy of *suzhi*/quality as shallow and superficial queer public spaces gated and walled not by cultural tastes but by sexual capital and consumerist desire.

Therefore, the more quality-conscious queer people in today's China often feel distanced from such sexual-driven expressions of unregulated queer desires. This explains why other social events such as queer book club and film club have emerged during recent years as "alternative circles" catering to the cultural needs and interests of queer people. In the case of Concentric Circle, the filmic-therapeutic experience with focuses on kinship and story-telling is valued by its organisers as much more beneficial for queer people than the experience of visiting a gay bar. They believe that people coming to the Concentric Circle are

more conscious about and responsible for their mental and spiritual development (*xinling chengzhang*)—a symbol of self-governed good citizens and health-conscious middle classes reproduced by the lingering *suzhi* discourse. In the Fellowship, moreover, the cinephilic taste implicitly celebrates refined cultural capital, compared to the primitive and unrefined sexual desires circulated in other queer spaces such as gay bars. Although at any rate people can still go to both film clubs and gay bars, the distinctions in the quality of these queer communities (cultural-driven versus sexual-driven) nonetheless indicate a hierarchical structure in today's social gating in China's urban queer communities.

To conclude, by arguing that queer film clubs function as gated communities in urban China, I have further analysed the issues of quality and human capital (particularly cultural capital) in social inclusions and exclusions. Gating reproduces social stratification, better ensures quality and security, and further strengthens social distinctions in the lingering *suzhi* hierarchy. In addition, gating in China itself is a result of social upward migrations and geographical movements (vertical and horizontal mobilities) that have produced today's rising and aspirational middle classes who increasingly demand urban gating to secure their growing material wealth, privacy, and social privilege. One last thing that I want to note before concluding this chapter is that gated communities are often connected by both actual networks of transportation and virtual networks of digital social media. Through this lens, gated queer communities in China are inherently mobilised and networked, however socially stratified and culturally hierarchical.

Conclusion: Pursuing Upward Social Mobility

In this chapter I have examined the lingering myth of *suzhi*/quality and how it structures queer Chinese communities online and offline across various forms of media and screen cultures. This myth of quality centres on Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital that is measured by cultural tastes and interests, in addition to economic, social, and sexual

human capital. I have chosen three case studies to carry out my investigation: the web-based queer social network Feizan as an upward online community, locative mobile queer dating and hook-up applications that enforce the principle of proximity and trouble the myth of quality, as well as urban queer film clubs (e.g. the Fellowship of *Tongzhi* Film-lovers) as gated queer communities. I argue that, although the term *suzhi* itself has to some extent expired, its legacy still underpins the reproductions of larger social inclusion and exclusion in today's queer communities.

In the past few decades, the state engineered *suzhi* discourse to improve population quality has been driving people to pursue education and employment through migration. This nation-wide pursuit of “high quality”, first and foremost measured by cultural capital, has engendered an aspirational class who desires for upward social mobility and class migration. This upward desire, I argue, is the underlying driving force that encourages people to embark on domestic and transnational migrations (Chapter 5) which result in the stretched queer kinship structure in today's Chinese societies (Chapter 4). This desire will continue to shape and reshape queer kinships, cultural flows, and social distinctions, as well as various forms of queer media and screen cultures, in the twenty-first century. In the final concluding chapter, I further discuss the theme of queer mobilities across the registers of kinship, migration, and class with critical reflections of my research methods and fieldwork strategies, and point out possible directions for future studies.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

I always hate writing up the conclusive part of my research, which feels like authoring my own eulogy. I often try to convince myself everything that has a beginning should have an end, and a conclusion is not only to summarise the past and contemplate the present, but to potentially shed light on the future and allow tomorrow's path to be better illuminated. In this chapter, I first summarise my investigations of queer screen cultures and queer mobilities, as presented in previous chapters, and further develop some arguments that I have made in this thesis concerning stretched kinship, queer migration, and social distinction. I then proceed to discuss possible directions for future studies of queer screen cultures and queer mobilities in Chinese societies. I conclude this thesis with a few final remarks at the end of this chapter.

Kinship, Migration, and Class: Queer Mobilities and Queer Screen Cultures

In this section, I summarise my previous discussions of queer cultures on and off screens in Chinese societies, examine the process in which I coined and theorised various concepts during my study, and further develop my arguments of stretched queer kinship, Sinophone mobilities, and social distinctions. This research, in a nutshell, examines three aspects of queer mobilities: stretched kinship as an outcome of queer mobilities, queer migrations and cultural flows as manifestations of queer mobilities, and the desire for upward social mobility and class migration as the underlying driving force of queer mobilities. Queer mobilities, as I have argued, manifest in three interrelated forms: emotional embodied movement of queer migrants across different locales; the endeavour of sexual minorities to overcome social and state homophobia so as to claim equal citizenship; and the mobilised transgressive queer desire to cross and destabilise the borders between queer and non-queer, local and non-local, and China and the Sinophone.

Through these discussions, I can now offer a full definition of *queer mobilities*: queer mobilities refer to the motions (geographical movements) and emotions (psychological re-adjustments) across the queer/non-queer and the local/non-local borders in domestic and transnational queer migrations, often driven by people's desire for upward social mobility, that result in a stretched queer kinship structure. Beyond queer studies, my theorisation of mobilities potentially has wider appeal to researchers and theorists in investigating global social changes, given that migration and cultural flow have become increasingly frequent across the globe in the twenty-first century. Outside Chinese societies and the Asian area, my examination of kinship, migration, and class also paves the way for further investigations of these issues in different countries and regions. In broader realms of cultural studies and screen studies, moreover, the concept of queer mobilities also sheds light on future research of traditional and emerging forms of queer cultural production through the medium of the screen against different socio-cultural backdrops across the world.

More specifically, I have first examined the recent change in queer kinship structure caused by domestic and transnational queer migrations in China and across different Chinese societies. I carried out this investigation through a critique of the "coming out as coming home" strategy, textual analyses of two autobiographical queer films, and ethnographical field research of a queer film club in urban China. I argue that today's queer kinship has often been stretched by physical distance between queer people and their family, and by the rupture between one's non-conforming sexuality and the hetero-reproductive expectations from the aging parents. Queer homecoming and homemaking are hence often difficult or impossible, even for those who have "come out" from China to overseas Sinophone societies, while alternative queer families (e.g. queer film clubs) have started to emerge in urban areas that engender a displaced sense of home and belonging for queer migrants out of the family of origin.

My coinage of stretched kinship was initially inspired by reality TV shows. Long being an enthusiast of the reality cooking show *MasterChef* and its multiple global versions in China, Australia, and New Zealand, I had watched contestants kneading and stretching dough to make pastry, pasta, noodle, or ramen on many occasions. The term “stretched kinship” then hit me when I was watching Hung’s and Scud’s autobiographical films *Soundless Wind Chime* and *Permanent Residence*. Then I further developed this idea together with “queer homecoming and homemaking”, “coming out to the Sinophone”, and “alternative kinship” during my fieldwork. This “stretched” metaphor closely echoes the stretched and stressed experience in familial kinship negotiations, as depicted in recent queer films and videos and discussed by queer people on social media, in film clubs, and during my interviews. Although my research mainly covers gay male dominated queer screen cultures and urban middle-class queer communities, my theorisation of stretched queer kinship applies to all queer individuals under the pressure of filial piety for hetero-reproductive marriage.

I understand that the concept of stretched kinship is so far rather descriptive and explanatory, but here I argue that stretched kinship can function as a strategy for queer kinship negotiation. The process of “stretching” (long-term physical separation) earns people more time and space to gradually test how much leeway their parents allow them on such issues as marriage and reproduction. Today’s parents and elder family members may have quite different levels of leeway on such issues. A confrontational inquiry directly seeking answers to these questions may not produce any meaningful and positive outcomes; instead, these sensitive questions should best be implicitly “kneaded” into the most mundane small talks in family communication through letters, phone calls, and online chatting. The key is to keep the process slow and steady, which allows the family more time to think about how to respond and leaves more room for subsequent negotiations. One should not give up if the family’s answer to one of the questions initially sounds strict and conservative. The essence

of stretched kinship is to keep it as an ongoing process of negotiation that is always dynamic and elastic.

Then, once people have enough time and space to carefully figure out where their families draw the bottom line, they could further select the desired strategies they have learnt from similar peer cases to make the next move. Some people may come out to their parents in various ways. Some with more financial resource may turn directly for surrogacy or adoption without marriage to bring home a baby—this works in some cases when the family actually cares more about reproduction than marriage, but may lead to disastrous result in a family with low tolerance of extramarital children. At some point after that people can choose to reveal their sexual orientation, if it still matters for them and for their families. Some people may begin to arrange a cooperative quasi-marriage if the familial tolerance is quite low on any marriage-related issues, if not opt for incognito heterosexual marriage. For queer partners who have the chance of moving to the place where both their families reside, they can still try out the old “coming out as coming home” strategy, if they do not favour a confrontational declaration of their sexual selves.

These strategies are contingent on the stretched spatial and temporal distance that allows queer people to gradually observe and test the family’s reactions to the issues related to marriage and sexuality, and to learn and compare different queer peer experiences to cope with different situations. The core of “stretched kinship as a strategy” is not simply delaying the next move, but to take advantage of separation as an invaluable opportunity to figure out the familial leeway, and to accumulate enough resources and experiences to work out the most suitable strategy that matches the actual familial circumstances. This is also a chance and a process for young people to learn more about their family without immediate pressure for hetero-reproductive marriage. If we return to the dough metaphor, the reason for stretching it is to make the dough elastic and hence even stronger. Exactly the same logic

goes for the stretched kinship negotiation strategy: stretching the kinship tie is to make the familial connection more resilient and stronger with enhanced mutual understandings. This is both essential and effective for any subsequent queer kinship negotiation strategies in today's Chinese societies.

The second major aspect of queer mobilities that I have examined in this research is queer migrations and cultural flows between Mainland China and Sinophone societies. I critically analysed the text of a recent queer Sinophone Hong Kong film, studied the case of Chinese-Malaysian queer filmmaker, and investigated a Taiwanese gay-friendly coffee house and film club in Beijing through ethnographic fieldwork. With these analyses, I challenge the queer migration optimism that I have framed around the notion of stretched kinship, and argue that emotional embodied queer migrations may end up in sorrow and death without the chance to put down roots for settlement. Furthermore, even for the settled post-diasporic Chinese descendants, they are often sandwiched between a dual domination of state racism and homophobia and cultural essentialism from the ancestral China. I also argue that the movements of capital, culture, and people from Sinophone societies back to China function as queer "counterflows" that challenge our current understandings of Sinophone mobilities.

When I interviewed Yeh-tzu, the Taiwanese owner of the Two-City Café in Beijing, he was quite amazed that I, a researcher growing up in the PRC, was also interested in studying Taiwanese and other Sinophone cultures on the margin of China and Chineseness. He was curious about what experience connected me with the marginality of Taiwan and other Sinophone societies in geo-politics and in global cultural flows. I did not fully respond to his question during the interview, but since then have given it some serious thought. First, people growing up inside the PRC do not necessarily take the localist/nationalist version of Chineseness for granted, nor do they all self-identify with the China-centrist view of Chinese cultures. In fact, the strong state control and censorship of cultural products and flows often

make Chinese people think about other forms of Chinese cultural productions, particularly outside the Mainland. Second, as the digital-generation in the increasingly frequent global cultural flows, people growing-up inside China also have more opportunities to learn about other Sinitic-language cultures through the Internet and digital media.

Third, after the Chinese Nationalist Party lost its leadership in Taiwan in 2000, it began to explore other options to change its old image and walk out from its historical burden. The Party leaders paid a ground-breaking visit to the Mainland in 2005 and opened a new chapter in the cross-strait relations between the socialist regime in Mainland China and the capitalist regime in Taiwan. I was a sophomore high school student at that time, and have since then developed a strong interest in Taiwan and a dream to become a scholar in Taiwan studies. My current research on queer Sinophonicities, despite its wider focus beyond Taiwan, carries on my teenage dream and enables me to look at both China and the Sinophone from a more critical perspective. Finally, my own experience of migrating from the PRC to Australia and New Zealand also contributes to my empirical understanding of marginality—Chinese people as marginalised ethnic groups in Western societies—and directs me towards the realm of Sinophone studies. As a researcher sandwiched between the West and the East, and between China and the Sinophone, I am the biggest *other* in this research with a never-settled identity.

The third aspect of queer mobilities that I have discussed in this research is the desire for upward social mobility and class migration that is successfully engineered by the Chinese state in the nationwide *suzhi*/quality improvement during the recent decades. Through digital ethnographic study of online queer community and mobile dating platforms, as well as ethnographic fieldwork in a cinephilic urban queer film club in Beijing, I argue that queer communities online and offline are gated communities in today's China, the entry to which often entails certain cultural capital acquired and accumulated through upbringing and

education. These gated queer communities have often reproduced aspects of larger social inclusion and exclusion, while the lingering myth of *suzhi*/quality continues to structure queer social stratification, despite the decline in the popularity of the term *suzhi* itself. Locative mobile dating apps, however, function less as communities than platforms which evoke and trouble the myth of quality through the enforced principle of geo-locational proximity.

Furthermore, most queer people whom Engebretsen (2014), Ho (2010b), and Rofel (2007) encountered during their respective ethnography in Beijing's gay bars appeared to be part of the *quanzi*, or socially and sexually more active and expressive queer circles. Those outside the *quanzi* and those who never go to gay bars (e.g. some of my informants and interviewees) have long been overlooked in previous studies. The stigma around *quanzi*, as I have discussed, is due to the myth of quality that celebrates refined enculturation and degrades unregulated sexual desires and practises. The newly emerged urban queer spaces such as film clubs during recent years have provided important queer cultural outlets in urban China. Here my point is a queer film club or a gay bar alone cannot offer a full picture of today's queer cultures anymore. Although their markets are not mutually exclusive and participants can join in these two types of social circles at the same time, there are always some people who only visit one type of the venues and keep a conscious distance from the other. The most famous gay bar in Beijing does have a dedicated cultural space upstairs for occasional queer film screenings and other queer cultural events. But one of my interlocutors told me that, when he organised a series of fortnightly film screenings for the bar, sometimes they only had as few as two or three participants. It was probably because the films he selected were too art-house, or perhaps the film club owners I interviewed did have a point that people coming to film screenings were not the same as those going to gay bars.

More important, what I have described as gated queer communities function as the *exemplar par excellence* of Bourdieu's notion of field (*le champ*), or social arenas where

habitus operate to structure how we behave and what we like. Writing on and beyond Bourdieu in *A Sociology of Culture, Taste and Value*, Simon Stewart (2014, 64) comments that there are specific stakes and interests to each field, and the rules and laws of one field may not suit another. Each field values certain knowledge and celebrates certain forms of capital. From Feizan and the Fellowship of *Tongzhi* Film-lovers to locative media and gay bars, each queer field entails and enforces its own priorities in various forms of human capital, although erotic and cultural capital assume different positions in the hierarchy of *suzhi*/quality. It is also in this sense that today's queer communities in China are gated and guarded—both horizontally by different field-specific capital and vertically by the ranking of these different forms of capital in the *suzhi* hierarchy. Gating is to ensure that the rules and laws of each field will be maintained and carried on.

Another point of interest that I want to further develop is what I have described as the lonely economy—the capitalisation on urban loneliness by queer social media companies to encourage virtual and actual social interactions. Queer people facing limited public visibility and social stigma do not have equal chance to meet and date others in the offline world. Intimate feelings cannot be revealed if one is unsure about another person's sexual preference, or the overall tolerance of queerness is uncertain in a particular environment. The fear of and the anxiety about being alone without company is what online and mobile queer social media have actively exploited to market their services with the promise of saving single people from loneliness. During recent years queer people in China have increasingly discriminated against single people, probably because the rise of social media (e.g. ZANK and Blue'd) and queer communal events (e.g. film clubs) has made dating and match-making much easier. *Tuodan* (departing from the single life) has become a hegemonic discourse separating winners and losers based on relationship status. Having a partner almost indicates one's triumphant quality and ability to “win” in the market, while single bachelors have

started mocking themselves as *dan-shen-gou*, or “single dogs”, who long for love and attention.

The enforced proximity of locative mobile gay apps to capitalise upon the lonely economy evokes a deeper level of *suzhi*/quality. While most people use mobile gay apps for casual sex, some of them have also joined in ZANK and Blue'd with the hope to find someone who satisfies their psycho-biological needs for love and for partnership. The lonely economy builds exactly on this discourse of “departing from the single life” and echoes the lingering myth of *suzhi* in reproducing high-quality good citizens whose transgressive sexualities must be regulated through relationship and commitment. Being alone is hence being “unregulated” and falling off from the hierarchy of quality and from the *habitus* of good (middle-class) citizens. In a growing lonely economy, that is to say, the ability to cash in one's capital in the market to find a partner becomes a token of middle-class identity and quality. A relationship is never only about sexual and romantic desires, but is deeply intertwined with the class structure and social hierarchy.

The presumption of the lonely economy is that being single is being lonely and pitiable, and hence needed to be saved (so there is a market). This was my assumption, too, before I started my fieldwork and digital ethnography. But some informants have taught me a lesson: their choice of being single has shown that living alone can be equally fulfilling and rewarding as in a committed relationship. Being single can be a conscious choice, as a feminist informant pointed out during my field research, as well as a resistance against the institutionalised reproduction of marriage and relationship. If being gay is something that people are proud of, as seen in Western gay activism, then being single can be an equally proud choice. As long as one has some interests (read: cultural capital) to pursue on one's own, living a single life is not lonely at all. Living alone has also become a growing global

trend during recent years, as Jamieson and Simpson (2013) report in their research of solo living in the age of globalisation.

But being single challenges the continuation of the family line, and radically deviates from the very Confucian ideal of reproduction as a central responsibility in filial piety. Single people will face many more difficulties in everyday life; in addition to public shaming of being “deviant” and not fulfilling the duty of reproduction, single people are also disadvantaged in a society whose whole system functions on the family as the basic social unit. Thus, the choice of being single entails more social, cultural, and economic resources; both the possession of cultural capital (cultural interests to pursue while being alone) and a certain level of privacy (that protects individual choice from public scrutiny) are deeply associated with one’s economic and social positions in the class hierarchy. If the ability to cash in human capital in the market is a token of class privilege, then the possibility to maintain a conscious single life is also available only to those with advantaged class-related capital. It is in this sense that the choice of being single is also a privilege that not everyone can afford.

Through these discussions of quality and social hierarchy, I intend to highlight that transgressive sexualities are less tolerated in society and often entail certain social privilege to protect them from external scrutiny and stigma. The desire for “high-*suzhi*/quality” is to improve oneself through augmenting various forms of human capital that help deal with common challenges facing queer people such as kinship negotiation (homecoming) and overseas gay marriage, migration, adoption, and surrogacy (homemaking), as well as to filter and screen more desirable high-quality individuals as potential partners to build a better and longer queer future together. As Ivan tells Windson in the film *Permanent Residence*:

According to evolutionism, in any large tribe, there is a minority out of [the] ordinary. They will be repelled and suppressed by the mainstream. They can survive only if they are more brilliant. Eventually, their merit will spread out and become the mainstream. Then a cycle of evolution is completed.

Here “a minority out of the ordinary” refers to sexual minorities who have to be “more brilliant” (of high-quality) so as to survive in a heteronormative society. The aspirational queer people in China both desire for high-quality individuals as ideal partners and pursue self-improvement and social mobility through education and employment to fulfil their own class migrations in China’s rapidly growing economy. This desire and pursuit for quality and social mobility is precisely the underlying force that drives people to embark on migration journeys which, in turn, result in the stretched queer kinship structure in today’s Chinese communities.

Into the Future: New Directions in Queer Screen Studies

In this section, I discuss possible directions for future research on queer cultures on and off screens in Chinese societies, as well as some emerging forms of queer media and screen cultures that may become the next focal point in this field of study. In terms of kinship, the transnational flows of queer people and border-crossing migrations will continue to increase, and the stretched queer kinship connection will become more common than ever in the years to come. The theme of queer kinship, in addition, will also continue to be popular on various forms of queer screens. Future scholarship on queer kinship will further investigate kinship negotiation strategies in particular Chinese societies and communities, and also transcend real and imaged boundaries to further address transnational queer kinship structures and queer homemaking (e.g. overseas same-sex marriage and surrogacy). The discussions of coming-out strategies and kinship structures will assume more complexity and

heterogeneity, especially when Chinese societies are still undergoing continuous changes and developments in the twenty-first century.

Sinophone cultural critiques will also proliferate further in the foreseeable future, when the PRC continues to rise on the global stage and its growing “colonising” power over smaller Chinese societies and communities will provoke more “Sinophone resistance” against China’s cultural essentialism. Studies on Sinophone cinemas are also emerging, both inside and outside the domain of queer studies. Queer Sinophonicities and transnational homecoming and homemaking will also enjoy increased popularity in academic debates, and Sinophone and transnational ethnography and autoethnography may soon emerge. The boundaries of Sinophone theories and ontologies will be pushed further, and Sinophone studies will be developed into polyphony across a wide range of disciplines in arts and humanities. China and the Sinophone, a queer pair seemingly at each other’s throat, will become even more inseparable in future, while the studies of the two will more frequently look at each other for mirrored reflections in social, cultural, historical, linguistic, economic, and political domains. Although China’s economic development has slightly slowed down since 2014 and its growth rate is likely to further decrease in subsequent years, this country will remain as the world’s fastest developing economy and continue to tighten its connections with Sinophone and Western societies in the near future.

Queer cultures in the Chinese world will continue the ongoing digital and mobile technological transformations. Mobile queer socialising platforms will become more popular across different Chinese societies. Venture capital and tech-companies will further expand the gay market and look for more opportunities to invest in the lesbian economy. The accelerated technological development will further boost the mobilisation of digital media, with more fragmented social interactions occurred and visual content consumed on or through mobile devices. Social media will continue to facilitate offline communal activities organised by and

for queer people, while LGBT groups and NGOs will continue to join in online and mobile platforms to create and extend social interactions from real to virtual queer publics. When techno-media have become ubiquitous, it is increasingly difficult to research queer cultures without considering the technological influences.

Queer cinemas in Chinese societies will continue to grow and carry on the tradition of transnational production to portray more diverse queer themes. Queer images onscreen will further break away from the stereotype of the “lonely sad young man” towards more positive portrayals of a fuller spectrum of queer sexualities and characters. Digital queer videos circulated through social media will become more popular, too. Queer films may also see more imbrication with mainstream screen cultures, when queer cultural productions have attracted growing interest from advertisers who appreciate the business potential of the queer markets in Chinese societies. On a different note, although the academic journal *Porn Studies* has been established in 2014, gay and lesbian pornography produced in Chinese societies has yet to be critically analysed as a form of screen culture. Gay porn produced in the PRC and circulated in the cyberspace is a particular interesting case, given that this is a completely underground industry flying under the radar of the authoritarian state.

Queer film clubs will see more growth and diversity in China where queer movies are still not permitted for theatrical release, and queer film festivals will continue to be forced into guerrilla style operations. Some less-developed cities in the Mainland may also catch up and develop their own film clubs, if the local queer population continues to increase. A few old film clubs, as those in Beijing, have established stable organising styles, each with its own loyal members while still attracting new participants. These clubs may not see any major changes in organisation and operation in the near future. On the other hand, when people have many more choices for different social groups and activities in today’s queer Chinese world, film clubs not only need to compete against each other, but have to win participants

from other queer social spaces and communal events. The club organisers will need to think about future strategies; collaborating with queer social media or producing original visual content might be promising directions for the development of the queer film clubs in the twenty-first century. The queer film club as a cultural phenomenon also deserves further research in the future.

On digital screens, more mobile dating and hook-up apps will continue to emerge in various Chinese societies. The competition will be much more intense, both among the local players and against their Western counterparts. The next few years will see which apps can survive in competition and which will languish. Queer social media will likely continue to function along the lingering myth of *suzhi*/quality, which needs further discussion and examination in future studies. Furthermore, although video games are entering the field of academic inquiry, digital games designed for queer people have not caught enough attention in media and screen studies. G-friend, one of the Chinese gay hook-up apps examined in this research, has incorporated mobile games specifically designed for gay men. *Bear Run*, for example, resembles the popular *Temple Run*, but features an athletic Asian man running in sport uniform. Queer mobile gaming has a lot of potential for profitable business growth, and the studies of which may soon emerge if venture capital and tech-companies start to invest in this field.

In 2015, furthermore, a personal finance application for gays and lesbians called ZanDo emerged in China. ZanDo claims to increase the economic wealth of queer people through Peer-to-Peer-Investing (P2PI), or lending money to borrowers through this mobile service without recurring to traditional financial institutions. It promises a much higher financial return than bank deposit interest, and promotes itself as “the first upmarket financial platform for *tongzhi* in China” that targets rising middle-class queers who have extra money for investment and who need financial return to fulfil overseas same-sex marriage, migration,

and surrogacy/adoption. ZanDo directly caters to the desire for upward social mobility in a neoliberalising Chinese economy, and provides tailored financial management plans for self-governed and more affluent high-quality queer individuals. This emerging mobile finance app for gays and lesbians is in beta test (the first public test outside the developing team) as of October 2015, and I hope to examine it in my next research project.

On top of that, queer activists and researchers should focus more on underprivileged queer people in Chinese societies. While studies on Chinese lesbian women are growing under the avid academic interest in gay male cultures, transgender/sexual, bisexual, intersex, and other marginalised queer people seldom enjoy equal media and academic attention. I hope we could see some breakthrough in this field before long. Scholarship on disadvantaged demographic groups such as queer people of age (e.g. Kong 2012) and rural sexual minorities (e.g. Koo et al. 2014) will continue to increase, however slowly, while future researchers will also turn the spotlight to disabled queer Chinese people when queer disability studies (e.g. “crip theory”, McRuer, 2006) has assumed more significance in recent English-language scholarship. Since 2013, a few American and Hong Kong agencies have visited Beijing to market their services in overseas gay marriage and surrogacy or adoption. Some of my informants had already completed their same-sex marriage in the West or signed surrogacy contracts. In the next decade, the world will see an emerging demographic group whose same-sex marriage and parent-status are only recognised in the West but not likely in their home countries in Asia. These emerging forms of transnational queer mobilities and queer homemaking need further research in the near future.

Final Remarks

I still remember that, after each interview, I often asked my interlocutors if they had any questions, either about me or about the research I was conducting. The three most popular questions were how old I was, whether I had a boyfriend, and why I chose to do this

research. After my explanation of my academic purposes, they often told me that it would be great if my research could benefit queer people instead of being circulated only within academic circles. Each time I returned from the field, what I thought about most was exactly how to make my research both intellectually appealing and practically helpful for queer people to better understand the underlying structures and principles beneath today's queer cultures and social interactions. I hope that my research not only records their stories and pushes the theoretical boundaries, but provides certain insights for queer people to navigate through the challenges in everyday life and build a better future together.

One day this research will be forgotten. The ashes of time will dust up my thesis, the pages unturned, and the cover untouched. But the people recorded in this research will be remembered for their stories and for having created such diverse and dynamic queer cultures on and off screens in the early twenty first century. Future queer generations in Chinese societies will carry on their great legacy and continue to write the never-ending stories of queer people's struggle and success in kinship negotiation, domestic and transnational migration, and social class mobility. As a researcher, I am deeply blessed that I have had this chance to present their cultures and creations in front of the world—for me, for them, and for everyone who likes to see a more equal world that we all live in. When the cold pages of this thesis feel the warmth of your fingers, I hope that you can also feel the heartbeat of the people behind this research.

Filmography

Citation style: English title (original title), director, company credits, year.

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