The Self-Understandings and Everyday Lives of *Gay* Men in Hainan

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Abstract

Drawing on 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Hainan, People's Republic of China (PRC), especially 30 semi-structured interviews, this thesis explores the self-understandings and everyday lives of men who recognised themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi* (comrade), and/or 'in the scene' (*quanneiren*). Given the choice of field site, this thesis is one of a handful of sociological studies to explore the lives of non-heterosexual people in the PRC outside of major urban centres, and potentially the first to do so in a region that has historically been considered 'marginal'. As such, an exploratory approach is taken in engaging with a range of concepts and contexts that participants saw as central to their self-understandings and everyday lives. Specifically, this thesis explores the ways in which participants constructed and experienced 'the scene' (*quan*) as a framework of social-sexual belonging, perceived internet technologies as having deeply impacted their everyday lives, and narrated their lives as dis/oriented towards certain futures. These issues can be seen as complexly intertwined; they are drawn together in this thesis under an overarching concern for the ways in which participants negotiated understandings of themselves, in relation to others, within socio-cultural and material contexts of emergent social-sexual possibilities and pervasive pressures to marry and have children. In exploring these issues, this thesis draws upon a range of sociological and anthropological perspectives.

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Firstly, I would like to thanks all those who gave their time to be interviewed for this research and shared thoughts and experiences. Without you, none of this would have been possible, and I hope that I have done justice to your stories. Special thanks go to my friends in Hainan for their guidance and inspiration; may we see each other again soon.

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Chapter One: Introduction

29-year-old Ah Tao came scrambling over a low hedge in Qionghai Park: 'let's go, I'll take you to see where the *gays* go to play mah-jong'. I first met Ah Tao in 2013 when he had been working at a *gay* bar in Haikou, the provincial capital of Hainan Province, People's Republic of China (PRC). In 2014, at the request of his parents, Ah Tao had returned to Qionghai, on Hainan's east coast, to assist his family with farm work. Ah Tao and I had recently re-connected via Blued, the PRC's leading *gay* social networking app, and I had come to Qionghai following his offer to show me all the 'meeting places in the scene'. It was early evening and the tour had just begun. Ah Tao's nervous excitement had the air of a first-time tour guide keen to show off his local knowledge. We set off heading north through the park and passed a sculpture of a bronze baby suspended in a looped metallic wave; an accompanying plaque read 'population, development, future'. Pointing towards me, a man sat alone on the squat brick wall surrounding the sculpture shouted out '*Ah Tao oi*, *moh suaigoh di mi nang*?' 'He's just a friend' Ah Tao replied coyly. We carried on out of the park, through the empty stalls of No.1 Meat Market, and turned into a dark alleyway, wide enough at ground level to traverse on foot or moped, but from the second floor up the buildings jutted out on both sides, leaving only a grey-purple strip of sky above the smell of cooking oil descending from extractor fans.

'When we get there, don't say any *gay* stuff' Ah Tao warned as we approached a shop in the cut-out corner of a building at an intersection with an even narrower alleyway. The floor of the small convenience store had been cleared to make room for three automatic mah-jong tables. Around one table sat four women; around another, four men; and around the last, three women and one man. Ah Tao skirted round the tables and stopped to rest his elbows on one of the men's shoulders. '*Dtee la*! Not your lucky night!' he laughed, as he looked down at the man's mah-jong pieces. 'You've not been down here for a while' said a woman at another table without raising her eyes from the pile of ivory squares before her. 'I've been busy' Ah Tao answered.

'Busy doing what? You've no wife and no children' the woman replied. 'Nobody wants him' chimed one of the other men. 'How about you introduce someone to me?' Ah Tao retorted as he skirted back around the tables. Standing by my side, he nudged me with his elbow and whispered in my ear, 'all the men here are *gay*', 'really?', 'yeah', 'do the others know?' 'No, they…' 'Why don't you have your foreign friend introduce a nice western girl to you?' asked another woman, less a genuine question than an interruption to our whispering.

I open with the above vignette as it succinctly highlights several of the key themes addressed in this thesis. It points to ways in which men who understand themselves as *gay* and 'in the scene' (*quanneiren*), and who may also refer to themselves as *homosexual* (*tongxinglian*) and *tongzhi* (comrade), embody these sexual categories in their everyday interactions with certain others. It suggests the ways in which boundaries are maintained such that one can be known and seen as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' by some but not by others. It points to forms of sociality, ways of occupying spaces, and passing time that unfold in relation to, and as part of, the recognition of belonging to shared sexual categories. It also points to the ways in which such sociality, spatiality, and temporality are 'interrupted' by pervasive heteronormative pressures to marry and have children.

This thesis engages with the everyday lives and self-understandings of men in Hainan who referred to themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi* and/or 'in the scene'. I will explore the meanings of these terms for participants in this research, how they came to understand themselves and others as particular 'kinds' of sexual people living particular 'kinds' of lives, and how these self-understandings were practised in everyday life. These issues are explored by drawing upon data generated over eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork across city, town, and villages sites in Hainan. Fieldwork included 30 qualitative, semi-structured interviews with men aged between 18 and 63, which provide the main data source drawn upon in this thesis. From this data, I will draw out and analyse key social, spatial, and temporal contexts through and within which participants negotiated understandings of themselves and

their relations to significant others, and constructed lives for themselves under specific conditions of pervasive heteronormativity. In this sense, this thesis responds to Ken Plummer's (1981: 92) early assertion that:

> We need to ask about the ways in which individuals come to categorise themselves as certain kinds of sexual (or non-sexual) beings, how they come to hook themselves on to both wider societal and narrower community definitions, and how such definitions are used in fashioning subsequent lifestyles.

As further discussed below, within the current literature concerning non-heterosexual lives and identities in the PRC, limited attention has been paid to how such processes unfold as everyday realities, especially outside major urban centres. The primary aim of this thesis is therefore to explore a range of social, spatial, temporal, linguistic, and material contexts, concepts, and processes that participants narrated as they gave accounts of themselves and their everyday lives.

Over the past 20 years, scholars have explored the emergence of non-heterosexual identities in the PRC in the context of post-Mao economic 'reform and opening' (*gaige kaifang*). It has been suggested that such identities have emerged at the intersections of the PRC's integration into transnational flows of capital and cultures, continued desires for national belonging within the PRC, and the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) enduring authoritarian rule (Bao, 2018; Ho, 2010; Kong, 2016, 2012b, 2011; Rofel,1999b, 2007). Such studies have produced nuanced critiques of the globalisation of Euro-American sexual discourses and have shown that, as Lisa Rofel (2007: 96) concludes, 'for gay men in China … invocations of global gayness articulate with the need to place themselves within Chinese culture in temporal, spatial, linguistic, and substantive terms'. However, the majority of existing research has been conducted in the mega-cities of the PRC's east coast, researchers have taken the nation and transnationalism as their geographic scales of analysis, and their research has largely been facilitated by, and focused on, formal community and activist organisations. Questions remain over the extent to which their findings can be extended to regions of the PRC in which 'vigorous processes of globalisation,

neo-liberalism, cosmopolitanism and consumerism' (Kong, 2011: 150) may be less explicit features of everyday life and in which activist networks are either non-existent or very recent phenomena.

This thesis contributes to the field of Chinese sexualities studies, as well as to the sociology and anthropology of sexuality more broadly, by exploring everyday dynamics of social and sexual 'being' in an 'out-of-the-way place' (Tsing, 1993). In a range of official and popular geopolitical discourses in the PRC, Hainan is constructed as a 'marginal' region (Feng, 1999). Various 'development' initiatives undertaken by the Chinese government over the past 30 years have brought about significant social change in Hainan. However, the island has not seen the levels of economic growth, domestic and international investment, and industrialisation that have characterised other coastal regions of the PRC (Brødsgaard, 2009). Within this context, this thesis is one of only a handful of sociological studies of non-heterosexual lives and identities in the PRC outside of the mega-cities of the east coast. It is also, to my knowledge, the first to be conducted in a region of the PRC that can be considered 'marginal', and to work across city, town, and rural sites. To this extent, this thesis offers insights into ways in which non-heterosexual lives are understood and lived 'as an everyday possibility that can be done in any location – rather than the particular cosmopolitan spaces where liberation politics existed in the past' (Casey, McLaughlin, and Richardson, 2003: 1). At the same time, as these lives are lived under the pervasive heteronormativity of the state, the workplace, and, perhaps most importantly, the family, it will be argued that these 'possibilities' are uncertain and involve quotidian struggles for recognition and material security.

The remainder of this introductory chapter offers an account of the research context in Hainan and addresses the general empirical and conceptual orientations of this thesis. I will also discuss the ways in which certain terms will be used. Finally, I will outline the overall structure of the thesis.

Regional Context

Hainan is an island province of the PRC located 25 km off the south west coast in the Gulf of Tonkin (Fig.1). It is the PRC's smallest province in terms of landmass, at 34,300 km squared (similar in size to Denmark or Taiwan). It is the fourth smallest region in terms of population, at 9.17 million (out of 31 provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities) and also the fourth smallest in terms of gross domestic product, accounting for 0.54% of the national total (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2017). Hainan has two large cities: Haikou, in the north east, with a population of 2 million; Sanya, in the south, with a population of 550,000 (Statistical Bureau of Hainan Province, 2017).[1] The island is divided into 18 administrative districts, including Haikou and Sanya as city-level districts and 16 county-level districts; each county-level district is headed by a county capital (Fig.2 and Fig.4). Hainan is a culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse region. 15% of Hainan's population are of Li minority ethnicity (*Lizu*) and speak Hlai; the Li have been referred to as 'the indigenous people of Hainan Island' (Nettings, 1997: 3); there are also smaller populations of Miao/Hmong (*Miaozu*). 84% of the population are of Han ethnicity (*Hanzu*), the PRC's largest ethnic group (Statistical Bureau of Hainan Province, 2017). Scholars have recognised further divisions amongst Han people in Hainan, between those identifying as Hainanese (*Hainanren*; descendants of pre-1949 migrants from the mainland), who speak the Hainanese dialect (*Hainanhua*), and those identifying as Mainlanders (*Daluren*), who speak Mandarin (Feng, 1999).[2] Mandarin is widely spoken by all ethnic/cultural groups in Hainan and Mandarin education has been compulsory since the 1970s (Lin, 2013).

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[1] The above quoted data, gathered by National Bureau of Statistics of China (2017) and Statistical Bureau of Hainan Province (2017), was gathered in 2016, the same years that my fieldwork in Hainan was completed.

[2] Up-to-date population figures for these disparate Han groups are not available as such cultural-linguistic distinctions they are not recognised in official censuses in the PRC. A 1999 estimate put the Hainanese population at 60% and the Mainlander population at 25% of a then-total population of 7.4 million (Feng, 1999).

Fig.1 Map showing the location of Hainan within the PRC (SACU, 2017)

Scale 1cm : 30km
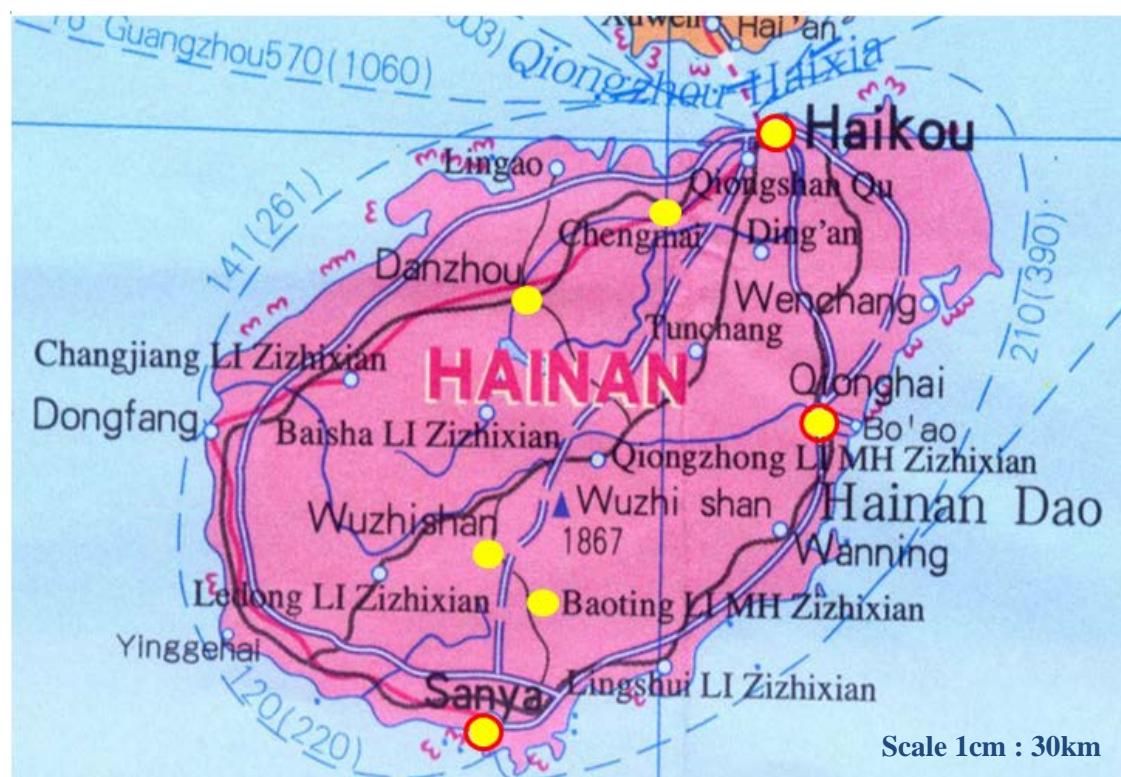
Fig.2 Map of Hainan (China Maps, 2014). Yellow circles indicate sites in which interviews were conducted; yellow circles framed in red indicate sites in which extended periods of time were spent, this is discussed in the Methodology.

Hainan has historically occupied a position of geo-political marginality. The island was incorporated into the Han Empire in 206BC and served as a site to which political exiles were sent. Hainan was described in the poetry of the famous exiled official Su Dongpo as 'a place of exile in a barbarian country [from which] there is no hope of my return alive' (written in 1097AD, cited in Lin, 1948: 322). Under the Republican government (1911-1949), Hainan was established as an administrative region of Guangdong Province on the mainland. The island came under Japanese military occupation between 1939 and 1945. Following the Communist Revolution and the establishment of the PRC in 1949, Hainan became an important site for the production of rubber, iron ore, salt, and sugar, which was shipped to the mainland for processing. The dominance of primary industry in Hainan meant that the island's economic development lagged behind other coastal regions throughout the Mao years (1949-1976). In 1980, as Feng and Goodman (1998: 60) have observed, 'the gross value of [Hainan's] industrial and agricultural output was only 1.7 billion RMB, less than a well-developed county on the mainland … and Hainan's urban population was less than 9 per cent of the total, the same as in the 1950s'.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the PRC entered a period of economic 'reform and opening' under Deng Xiaoping. Hainan's relative lack of economic development, especially compared to a rapidly developing Taiwan under the Republican Government, led to a range of preferential economic policies being implemented on the island in an attempt to stimulate growth.[3] Such policies were comparable to those implemented in Special Economic Zones (SEZ) such as Shenzhen and Zhuhai on the mainland and included a degree of economic autonomy, import tax exemptions, and freedom to engage with foreign businesses (Brødsgaard, 2009: 16-17). In 1988, Hainan was given further economic autonomy and officially became a SEZ; the island's administrative status was also upgraded to that of a province. In what became known as 'Hainan Fever', the new province's liberal business environment attracted waves of migrants from the PRC mainland (Gittings, 1996: 226). In 1988 alone,

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[3] In 1982 Taiwan's GDP was 40 times higher than Hainan's, despite the latter's superior natural resources (Brødsgaard, 2009).

170,000 mainland migrants arrived in Hainan and from 1989 to 1994 annual mainland migration was estimated at 40,000 people (Feng, 2005). Throughout the early 90s, Hainan experienced annual economic growth rates of between 20-40% and rapid growth in urban areas amidst a construction boom, especially in Haikou and Sanya; by 1994 25% of the island's population lived in urban areas (Gu and Wall, 2007). However, in 1995 Hainan's property development bubble burst and the growth rate fell to just 3.8%. Annual economic growth in Hainan averaged 10% between 1994 and 2009, on a par with the national average, though below that of other coastal regions (Brødsgaard, 2009: 38).

Hoping to restore economic growth, in 2009 the central government announced plans to turn Hainan into an 'international tourist island' through increased investment in infrastructure, service provision, and construction (State Council of the PRC, 2009). In recent years, there have been rapid developments in the island's transport infrastructure. A circular highway (completed in 2010) and high-speed railway (completed in 2015) now link Haikou and Sanya to other coastal county capitals, while a central highway (completed in 2016) links Haikou to Sanya via county capitals in the central mountainous areas. There are commercial airports in Haikou and Sanya offering domestic flights and international flights to Korea, Russia, Taiwan, and Thailand. Regular ferries leave from Haikou for Guangdong Province on the mainland. Property development has re-emerged as a key sector and there has been massive construction in Haikou, Sanya, and most county capitals (Figs.3-5).[4] Recent construction has largely offered second homes to wealthy mainland buyers. Various rural development initiatives have also boosted construction in smaller towns and rural areas. In 2016, 56% of Hainan's population lived in urban areas; the average annual income in urban areas was 30817 RMB (3469 GBP) and 12902 RMB in rural areas (1452 GBP) (Statistical Bureau of Hainan Province, 2017).

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[4] All photography in this thesis is my own, unless otherwise stated.

Fig.3 View of Haikou's central business district

Fig.4 View of Baocheng, capital of Baoting County, central Hainan
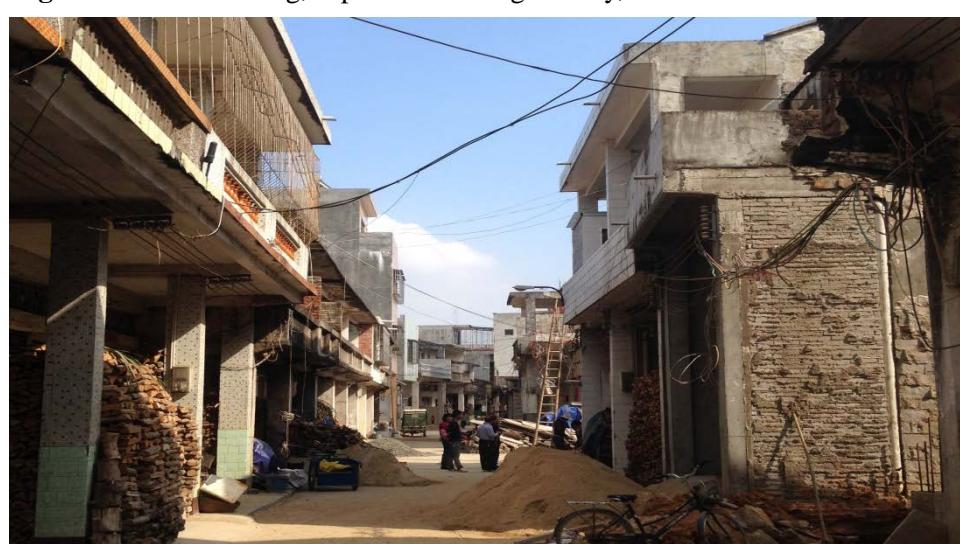
Fig.5 Street scene from a small town in Chengmai County, northern Hainan

The Hainan 'Scene'

In the Literature Review, I discuss historical studies that have recounted the emergence and development of discourses of 'homosexuality' (*tongxinglian*) in both Republican (1911-1949) and Maoist (1949-1978) China. I also discuss research on non-heterosexual identities in the reform era (1978-present). There is no such literature upon which I can draw in relation to Hainan. Below, I draw on accounts given by men I spent time with in Hainan, including some participants in this research, and my own experiences in Hainan since 2009 to piece together a brief history of 'meeting places' (*judian*), AIDS prevention work, and community organisations in the region. This account provides some contextual background to issues explored and spaces mentioned throughout this thesis.

The earliest accounts I have heard of a recognisable 'meeting place' for men seeking friendships and sex with other men refer to a pedestrian bridge that crosses one of the busiest roads in central Haikou. It is claimed that men began meeting there in the mid-1990s. As the number of men gathering on this bridge reached the point at which their activities began to attract the attention of passers-by, an alternative meeting place was established in nearby Yuefang Park.[5] This meeting place had the benefit of being located near a large hotel, reported as one of the first places in Haikou to offer internet access in the form of an internet cafe on the ground floor. Here, men would find and contact one another online and arrange to meet in Yuefang Park.[6] This internet cafe has long closed down, but today men, mostly aged over 40, continue to meet in a quiet corner of Yuefang Park, where a concrete pavilion surrounded by dense bushes makes mosquito-bitten ankles a small price to pay for pleasures made possible by the cover of darkness. This meeting place is only occasionally disturbed by park security. However, during our interview, 33 year-old Xiaoyu recalled being chased out of the park toilets by a cleaner yelling 'pervert!' (*biantai*). In Sanya, the far

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[5] This account was given to me by a 29 year-old friend in Haikou in 2015. He described the story as something he had been told 'by some of the old *gays* in Haikou'. Certain information about these the above mentioned places has been altered to preserve their anonymity.

[6] This account is paraphrased from my interview with Yefeng, a 42 year-old AIDS prevention worker in Haikou.

end of Dadong Beach, east of the city centre, where nude bathing was permitted before 2001, is rumoured to have been a popular meeting place. However, as what had been a cluster of hotels at the west end of the beach expanded eastward, nude bathing was banned and men seeking men stopped meeting at Dadong Beach.[7] Since its construction in 2009, men have been meeting in Sanya's Linlan Park, east of the city centre. Linlan Park is referred to by men 'in the scene' as 'the company' (*gongsi*). There, a densely planted bamboo grove allows men to meet out of view of other park users.[8]

Hainan's first *gay* bars (*gayba*) are said to have appeared in the mid-2000s. Haikou's first *gay* bar was also located on the outskirts of Yuefang Park. This was described by 42 year-old Yefeng as 'a little karaoke bar; you could sing, you could dance, and there were cross-dressing (*fanchuan*) performances. … This made them pretty obvious and people who lived nearby reported them; they were very quickly investigated and shut down by the police'. Since 2007, there has always been at least one *gay* bar in operation in Haikou. Most bars have been short-lived, remaining open for no more than three years. Bar owners appear to have taken advantage of empty buildings left behind by the severe down-turn in Hainan's real estate sector in the mid-1990s, and all *gay* bars I have visited in Hainan since 2009 have been housed in former hotels and disused office buildings (Fig.6). A total of five *gay* bars have opened and closed at various locations in Haikou over the past ten years; sometimes two bars have existed at the same time, though as Yefeng put it, 'the market isn't big enough to support two bars and one always ends up closing down'. Haikou's current *gay* bar, Yese (literally: 'night colour'), has been in operation since 2013, making it the longest-surviving in Hainan. *Gay* bars in Sanya have followed a similar pattern, with three bars opening and closing at various locations between 2008 and 2014. Tianchi (literally: 'heaven lake'), Sanya's current *gay* bar, opened in 2014 on the first floor of a disused hotel not far from Linlan Park (Fig.6) and relocated in 2015 when the

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[7] This account is paraphrased from my interview with Ah Zheng, a 54 year-old man from Sanya.
[8] Here too, I draw on my interview with Ah Zheng. The words 'park (*gongyuan*)' and 'company (*gongsi*)' have partly similar pronunciations in Mandarin Chinese. Specific terms used by men 'in the scene' are discussed in Chapter Four.

building was condemned to demolition. I worked as a dancer in the cabaret 'cross-dressing' performance and as a 'drinking partner' (*peijiu*) at Tianchi for six months during fieldwork for this research. *Gay* bars in Hainan are poorly attended during the week (See Fig.7), and bar staff often outnumber patrons. Friday and Saturday nights draw in crowds of 50-100 people and special events, such as increasingly frequent male strip shows, can attract up to 200 customers. These bars are almost exclusively frequented by men, though small groups of women do occasionally visit. *Gay* bars also play host to occasional HIV screening and AIDS awareness events.

Fig.6 Former location of Tianchi *gay* bar, Sanya (Baidu Maps, 2018)

Fig.7 A quiet Wednesday night at Tianchi

In 2008, Hainan was one of 14 sites across the PRC chosen for inclusion in the China-Gates AIDS Project, a five year period of intensified AIDS control and prevention work funded by the Bill & Miranda Gates Foundation and administered by the Chinese Ministry of Health (Haikou Health Bureau, 2013).[9] This led to the formation of AIDS prevention organisations focused on 'men who have sex with men' (MSM) at Disease Control Centres in Haikou and Sanya.[10] In Haikou, Hainan Same Love Group was established with a mixture of paid and volunteer staff, all of whom, as I was told by the group's leader in 2013, identified as *gay*.[11] A smaller group was established at the Haikou Skin Disease Hospital under the name Rainbow Group. In Sanya, a group was established under the name End of the Earth Group. Between 2008 and 2013, these organisations held regular social events, mostly karaoke parties in private KTV rooms, at which participants were required to take part in HIV screenings.[12] As the China-Gates AIDS Project came to a close in 2013, End of the Earth Group was disbanded; one of its former members continues to direct MSM-focused AIDS prevention work at the Disease Control Centre in Sanya. Rainbow Group also disbanded, though former members continue to engage in occasional voluntary work. Under the collective name Hainan Red Ribbon, Hainan Same Love Group was merged with AIDS prevention organisations focusing on female sex workers and intravenous drug users. MSM-focused AIDS prevention social events have not taken place in Hainan since 2013; however, with varying regularity, HIV screening events continue to be held at *gay* bars in both Haikou and Sanya.

In 2012, a group of students at Hainan University in Haikou set up the Hainan LGBT League (*Hainan LGBT lianmeng*). The group's leader, a *lala* woman from Hunan Province, mainland PRC, was aware that Hainan Same Love Group had been

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[9] Hainan was the only site in which the initiative was administered at the provincial level; the other 13 sites were cities. I participated in several of these events in 2013.

[10] These organisations use the Roman alphabet acronym 'MSM' when discussing their work. They translate this into Mandarin Chinese as '*nannan xingxingwei zhe',* which literally means 'someone who engages in sex between men'.

[11] I interviewed the leader of Hainan Same Love Group as part of my Masters research in 2013.

[12] KTV are karaoke venues offering private rooms of varying sizes, common throughout the PRC.

organising exclusively male social gatherings and was motivated to set up a mixed-gender social organisation under the rubric 'LGBT'.[13] The group sought to bring to Hainan the forms of community-based activism that had been advanced by 'LGBT' and '*tongzhi*' organisations in bigger cities on the mainland, and its stated aim was 'to promote *tongzhi* culture in Hainan'.[14] In 2012, the Hainan LGBT League held an event at a *gay* bar in Haikou to celebrate International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO). This appears to be the first time that such an event took place in the region. Again, in 2014, the League organised an IDAHO event in Haikou. This time, the event was held in the early afternoon at Evergreen Park in Haikou's central business district and involved collecting signatures from other park users to confirm that they were 'not opposed to homosexuality (*bu fandui tongxinglian*)'.[15] This remains the only activist event to have been held outdoors in a public space in Hainan. 19 women and 14 men, all aged between 18 and 30, took part in the event and over 200 signatures were collected. The event was supported by funding from the Beijing-based *lala* activist organisation Tongyu (common language). In 2014, the leader of the League left Hainan to take up work on the mainland; she was unable to find anyone to continue the League's work and so the group disbanded. Community activist events were not held again in Hainan until 2016, when the Guangzhou-based Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays China Division (PFLAG; *tongzhi qinyou hui*, literally: 'meeting for the family and friends of *tongzhi*') organised a meeting in Haikou. Four PFLAG members (parents supportive of their *tongzhi* children) flew in from Chongqing on the mainland and gave talks about their experiences. The event was attended by 30 men and one woman; only one participant brought a parent with them. Following the event, an online Hainan PFLAG group was established on the social media platform WeChat; this group now has 216 members and several get-togethers have taken place.

The above-noted spaces, organisations, and events are/were all located or took place

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[13] *Lala* is one of the terms of self-description used by women who desire women in the PRC, other terms include *les*, *nütongzhi*, and *homosexual*

[14] I interviewed the leader of the Hainan LGBT League as part of my Master's research in 2013.

[15] I was present at the event, which coincided with my Master's fieldwork.

in Haikou and Sanya, Hainan's largest cities. Between 2008 and 2013, Hainan Same Love Groups organised AIDS prevention social events in Wenchang and Wanning, county capitals on Hainan's east coast (Fig.2). These were reported to have been poorly attended and only two events took place in each site. Of the various county capitals in which I spent time and conducted interviews for this research (Fig.2), I am most familiar with Qionghai, having visited frequently. Here, as highlighted in this chapter's opening vignette, a number of sites are recognised by some men as 'places in the scene': a corner shop with mah-jong tables, an inconspicuous 'old dad' teahouse (*laoba cha*),[16] and a particular seating area in Qionghai Park. In contrast to *gay* bars and meeting places in parks in Haikou and Sanya, in these sites, as Ah Tao put it, 'there are people in the scene (*quanneiren*) and people who aren't in the scene (*quanwairen*) all mixed together'. As such, their status as *gay* spaces is known only to specific groups of men who regularly meet in these spaces. It is likely that similar spaces exist for some men elsewhere in Hainan. However, no such places were mentioned in my interviews with men in county capitals other than Qionghai. Many men in county capitals emphasised the importance of online spaces. On this point, however, it should be noted that online spaces were deeply valued as ways of meeting other men not only by participants in county capitals, but by almost all men in this research. Indeed, this brief history of the Hainan 'scene' is incomplete without an account of the rise of the internet technologies and their roles as particular kinds of sexual spaces. This emerged as a major theme in this research and is explored in detail in Chapter Five.

Exploring Everyday Concepts and Contexts

I take Hainan's geo-political 'marginality' as a point of departure and suggest the originality of this thesis as a sociological study of the lives of non-heterosexual people in a 'marginal' region of the PRC. However, the issues discussed in the data chapters

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[16] '*Laoba*' or 'old-dad' teahouses are common in northern and eastern Hainan. They are busy, open-fronted cafes serving tea, coffee, pastries, and snacks. The name refers to the fact that patrons are mainly men over the age of 50 who come to these teahouses in the afternoon and evenings to discuss and choose numbers for local lotteries.

are not necessarily specific to Hainan. This is in contrast with what I initially anticipated that this study would be about. Within the limited literature on relations between Hainan and the PRC mainland, the island has been described as an 'internal colony' (Feng and Goodman, 1998: 50) and is said to have been subject to 'ahead of time experiments' in neoliberal governance (Feng, 2001: 25). As will be discussed in more detail in the Methodology chapter, my initial intention was to explore the ways in which sexual identities in Hainan were shaped by, and were emerging in relation to, the island's relationship to the mainland, the recent history of regional 'development' initiatives, and hierarchical arrangements of 'local', 'national', and 'global' forms of sexual knowledge and ways of being. However, as ethnographic fieldwork progressed, I recognised that such processes of change, continuity, and struggles over power at these regional, national, and translational scales were not perceived by those I spent time with and interviewed in Hainan as particularly salient to their self-understandings and everyday lives. It seemed that these men were more concerned with the meanings of their everyday relations to other men who were perceived as 'the same', the kinds of interactions through which such 'sameness' was recognised, the ways of living such 'sameness' was seen to make possible, and the ways of living it was seen to threaten. These are issues of relational self-understanding and the kinds of lives that can become imaginable on their basis, lives that become liveable or are rendered unliveable in relation to certain sociocultural and material conditions of possibility. In response to this apparent need for a more fluid and expansive approach, the focus of the research was opened up. Rather than asking how a particular set of issues was perceived by participants, the research became an open-ended inquiry that asked: what concepts and contexts are perceived by participants as shaping their self-understandings and everyday lives? And, in what ways are participants' self-understandings and everyday lives shaped by these concepts and contexts?

The concepts, contexts, and processes analysed in this thesis can be seen as central to participants' self-understandings. This centrality was gauged through a combination

of my own deep ethnographic embedding in the research setting and a semi-structured interview approach that both drew upon this embedding and sought flexibility for participants to tell stories of their own choosing. In this sense, this research can be considered exploratory, not only as an in-depth sociological inquiry into non-heterosexual lives in a 'marginal' region of the PRC but also in that this 'marginality' is not seen as necessarily relevant to those lives. Instead, the aim of this research has been to engage with concepts and contexts that participants themselves saw as central to their self-understandings and everyday lives and to unpack and explore the meanings and complexities of these concepts and contexts.

From an anthropological perspective, this approach embodies a commitment to exploring culturally situated knowledge (Geertz, 1973), while problematising the alignment of that knowledge with a pre-given geo-cultural scale or thematic context (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997b; Schegloff, 1997). From a sociological perspective, this approach foregrounds a constructionist commitment to analysing concepts and contexts that become salient features of participants' everyday realities by way of their construction as such (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Gubrium and Holstein, 2008). Moreover, as this research has been conducted with a view to its future translation into Chinese and distribution to those involved in its production, this approach embodies ethical commitment to producing knowledge that is relevant to struggles and debates in which men in this research are themselves engaged.

This openness to a range of concepts and contexts around which participants oriented understandings of themselves has meant that, across the data chapters, this thesis explores a broad, though by no means exhaustive, range of issues. Each data chapter explores a cluster of contexts and concepts. These are:

1) **'The scene'** (*quanzi*) as a space of social and sexual collectivity to which belonging was claimed in relation to various social-sexual interactional processes and marked off from an imagined (hetero)sexual majority.

2) The internet and mobile networking technologies, as a primary means by which social-sexual connections between men seeking men were forged and in relation to which participants came to understand themselves in terms of collective sexual categories.

3) Narratives of the future within which relations to family were articulated and the prospects of marriage and reproduction were confronted with implications for self-understandings in the present and the kinds of lives seen as liveable.

These three clusters emerged as key themes over the course of fieldwork and subsequent analysis of interview data. Each was discussed at length and often with vehemence by the majority of interview participants, and each was reflected in my wider ethnographic experiences. The connections between these themes may not be immediately clear. However, as will be highlighted across the data chapters and in the Conclusion to this thesis, they are complexly intertwined in various ways. They are drawn together via an overarching concern for the ways in which participants negotiated understandings of themselves in relation to others within socio-cultural and material contexts of both emergent social-sexual possibilities and pervasive heteronormativity.

Exploring these issues has required a broad range of theoretical perspectives to be engaged. In this thesis, I variously draw upon symbolic interactionist, Foucauldian, queer, feminist, and phenomenological perspectives, working across and between their points of convergence and conflict (discussed in the Literature Review). Broadly, these perspectives can be seen to fall within the remit of constructionist sociology. As such, as Stevi Jackson (2006a: 45) has noted, it is possible to:

> appreciate, albeit critically, the diverse insights that competing perspectives have to offer and build upon these. It is not merely that 'social constructionism' comprises multiple perspectives but that social construction itself is a multi-layered, multi-faceted process, requiring attention to a number of levels of social analysis.

Anna Tsing (1993: 32) has echoed this point from the perspective of cross-cultural

anthropology, suggesting that '[l]ocally engaged theory is eclectic … Transcultural conversations sensibly make use of whatever fragments of theories are available … there is no reward here for pursuing the coherence of an approach to its logical end'. Given that the aim of this research is not to develop a particular theoretical agenda, but to appreciate a range of complex, situated, everyday social-sexual dynamics, theoretical perspectives are engaged as tools that support this task (and those 'tools' may be re-shaped along the way). As will be seen, more than a clearly articulated theoretical framework, a fragmented, multiple, conflictual, and contradictory set of theoretical perspectives may be the most appropriate toolkit for exploring self-understandings and everyday lives that are themselves characterised by fragmentation, multiplicity, conflict, and contradiction. With this in mind, it will be helpful to briefly outline here what is meant by the terms 'self-understanding' and 'everyday life' as used in this thesis. This is not to lay down fixed definitions, but to suggest that this pair of mobile concepts opens up multiple fields of inquiry. Many of the conceptual issues noted below are further elaborated in the Literature Review.

Self-Understanding and/in Everyday Life

This thesis is about a range of concepts and contexts in relation to which participants articulated understandings of themselves as particular 'kinds' of sexual people living (or not) particular kinds of lives. Participants articulated these 'kinds' using a range of words and phrases. They would variously refer to themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, and *tongzhi*, as 'in the scene', as 'this kind of person' (*zhezhong ren*), and as 'someone on this side' (*zhe fangmian de ren*). These can be seen as matters of self-categorisation in relation to imagined collective categories of sexual and gendered 'sameness'; they also concern processes of marking out sexual and gendered 'difference' from others. In this thesis, I use the term 'self-understanding' to refer to the ways in which participants positioned themselves within such categories, and how they recounted the processes through which they came to understand themselves in such ways. I will also discuss contexts within which such self-understandings were seen to come into

conflict with other ways in which participants understood themselves, for example as 'sons', 'brothers', 'fathers', 'husbands', and 'co-workers', and how such apparent conflicts were managed.

On the one hand, the categories within which participants placed themselves and others could be seen as 'sexual identities', where 'identity' describes 'our sense of who we are, which can be translated into labels with which we identify ourselves or others' (Jackson and Scott, 2010b: 122). I will, at times, use the terms 'sexual identity' to refer, in this more narrow sense, to the adoption and conferral of certain labels. However, my concern, a concern that was shared by men in this research, is not only for sexual categories, identities, or labels, but the complex social contexts within which, and processes through which, these were encountered and taken up as everyday ways of being and living in the world. As will be explored across Chapters Four, Five, and Six, as participants positioned themselves and others within collective sexual categories, such positioning often concerned complex entanglements of gendered sexual desires and sexual practices, forms of social intimacy, the sharing of specific kinds of knowledge, presence and in/visibility within particular spaces, forms of temporal dis/orientation, and ways of relating to marriage and reproduction. I use the term 'self-understanding' to refer abstractly to all of these processes and as a means of managing this complexity. Self-understanding therefore serves as a heuristic tool that identifies the central focus of this thesis, which is in fact a range of decentred, multiple, partial, and entangled processes. This also raises the question of the extent to which the 'sexual categories' within which participants placed themselves and others should be termed 'sexual' at all – over the course of this thesis, they will be shown to be complex entanglements of sociality, space, and time.

A large part of my analysis is concerned with how self-understandings were narrated by participants and the social, spatial, and temporal contexts and relations around which such narratives were oriented. Here, 'narration' is understood as 'a strategy for placing us within a historically constituted world … if narrative makes the world intelligible, it also makes ourselves intelligible' (Moore, 1994: 119). Narratives of

self-understanding are the stories that participants told in which they recounted how they came to understand themselves in terms of belonging to a collective sexual category. They are also stories of the kinds of futures that belonging to such categories was seen to open up and foreclose under certain discursive and material conditions of possibility. In this sense, narrative refers to 'the manner in which persons operating under the constraints of social ideologies make sense of the past, while anticipating the future' (Hirsch and Stewart, 2005: 262).

This attention to narrative is useful in appreciating how people make sense of themselves, their lives, and the social, spatial, and temporal contexts within which they are situated. However, I do not want to privilege the analysis of (linguistic, narrative, discursive) processes of 'sense making' over embodied and material practices of living. Rather, these are understood as intertwined. It is with this concern in mind that I understand this thesis to be about participants' self-understandings *and* their everyday lives, or perhaps self-understandings *in* everyday life. Here, 'everyday life' refers to the ways in which, for men in this research, 'being' a particular 'kind' of sexual person was an embodied and lived experience. Such 'being' is oriented not only in narrative but within an 'obdurate empirical world' (Plummer, 2003: 520) that exerts its own structural, orienting, and enabling force upon who we think we are and how we live our lives (Ahmed, 2006b). In this sense, 'being' a particular 'kind' of sexual person may be figured within narrative, within the ways people talk about their lives, yet 'we cannot talk about a body [or a life] without knowing what supports that body[/life] and what its relationship is to that support or, indeed, to that lack of support' (Butler, 2015: 65). As such, I use the concept of 'everyday life' to refer to 'a living set of relations [that] cannot be fully dissociated from the infrastructural and environmental conditions of its living and acting' (ibid.). This attention to everyday life also pushes analysis beyond the individual towards the 'intersubjective relations' (Moore, 2011: 177) that sustain self-understandings and facilitate certain ways of living. These are 'the ground not only for self-making, but for participation in knowable social orders, for making connections with historically and socially

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constructed others across space and time' (ibid.).

Notes on Terminology

In the review article *Queer Studies in the House of Anthropology*, Tom Boellstorff (2007: 18) begins:

> There is no more symptomatic, productive, and vexing starting point for this discussion than the impossibility of naming the very subject of study … This impossibility constitutes not a problem to be solved but a kind of syntax error or event horizon reflecting the complexity of the subject under consideration.

What Boellstorff refers to is the politics of naming in cross-cultural research on sexuality, which includes questions of whether 'sexuality' is itself a useful category in cross-cultural analysis. Something similar could be said of this thesis, given that, as noted above, there is no single term that participants used to describe themselves and when particular terms were used, there was no guarantee of stable meanings with which they were invested, though sometimes such meanings were relatively stable and unambiguous. I use '*gay* men' in the title of this thesis because, when asked directly, this was reported by the majority of participants to be their preferred self-description in relation to 'this side of themselves' (*ziji de zhe fangmian*). However, in the course of conversation, participants would also use the range of other terms noted earlier, sometimes seemingly interchangeably, sometimes to particular effect. These issues of terminology speak of the complexity and uncertainty that characterised participants' self-understandings and everyday lives; I hope to work within this complexity, rather than elide it in favour of convenience and readability.

Some scholars have sought to distinguish between the terms 'gay', 'homosexual', and 'tongzhi' (Chou, 2008; Garber, 2003; Rofel, 2007: 102-103), all of which were used by men in this research. However, the extent to which participants used these terms interchangeably means that their specificity should not be over-emphasised. In this thesis, my main concern is not necessarily the meanings of specific terms but the ways in which these terms were be preceded by 'I am' (*woshi*). Thus, I explore how

participants constructed, embodied, and lived ways of 'sexual being', and how these 'ways of being' were deeply social, spatial, and temporal. Of course, exploring these issues does, at times, require consideration of the specific meanings of a term when used in a specific context (Chapter Four explores what it meant for participants to 'be in the scene'; Chapter Six explores participants' perceptions of the meanings of 'homosexual/homosexuality' for their parents).

In this thesis, I follow participants in using a range of terms depending upon context, which here means depending upon the analytical point being made. I will speak of 'participants' understandings of themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*' when making a more general point about the construction and experience of collective sexual categories; all three terms are used to suggest their potential interchangeability; italics are used to complicate their straightforward alignment with the English-language terms 'gay' and 'homosexual'. Sometimes I will include '… and/or in the scene' as also interchangeable. However, as Chapter Four will discuss, the meanings of 'being *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*' and 'being in the scene' are relational but are not always interchangeable. In discussing specific interview excerpts, I will use whatever terms were used by the interviewee in that particular instance; whether or not this is used interchangeably with other terms will depend on issues discussed in the excerpt and the analytical points I draw out. When discussing the work of other scholars, I will use their terms in quotation marks. In certain sections of the Methodology Chapter, where analytical precision is not my main concern, I will use *gay* for convenience. This also represents the term I most often used in my everyday conversations in the field.

Thesis Outline

This introductory chapter has given an account of the regional context within which this research took place; it has also addressed the general conceptual and empirical concerns of this thesis. It has been outlined that the primary aim of this research is to explore a range of concepts and contexts that participants saw as central to their

understanding of themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene', and how such modes of sexual being and belonging were performed in everyday life. Below, the remaining chapters are summarised.

Chapter Two: Literature Review. This chapter reviews a broad range of literatures that are drawn upon and have informed the conduct and writing up this research. This chapter begins by reviewing social constructionist approaches to sexuality; symbolic interactionist, Foucauldian, and queer theory approaches to sexuality are discussed in detail and their points of convergence and conflict are addressed. Following this, I review anthropological approaches to sexuality, where the cultural specificity of sexual desires, practices, and identities has been emphasised. I will also discuss recent turns in anthropological theory and practice that have sought to problematise the analytical categories deployed in cross-cultural research; here I will consider the (in)translatability of 'sexuality' as an analytical framework across cultural-linguistic contexts. I then go on to explore China-specific literatures, offering a detailed review of historical research on discourses of 'homosexuality (*tongxinglian*)' in Republican and Maoist China, as well as the current field of research on contemporary *gay* and *tongzhi* identities.

Chapter Three: Methodology. This chapter offers a reflexive account of the conduct of this research. I begin by connecting the theoretical and empirical issues highlighted in the Literature Review to the ethnographic approach taken in this research. I will define 'ethnography' and highlight its key values; I will also position the main data source draw upon in this thesis, 30 semi-structured interviews, within a broader understanding of an ethnographic methodology. Following this, I will describe how the focus of this research changed through the process of fieldwork as the research agenda was brought in line with the everyday concerns of men I spent time with and interviewed in Hainan. The fieldwork is then discussed in detail; I will provide a personal narrative account of the fieldwork, reflect on my positionality in the field, and discuss processes of sampling, recruitment, interviewing, and data analysis. Throughout the chapter I highlight the intimate nature of the fieldwork and discuss

ethical concerns.

Chapter Four: The Scene/Quanzi. All but one of the men in this research understood themselves as having 'come into the scene' (*jinquan*). However, 'coming into the scene' was narrated in various ways. This chapter explores meanings of 'the scene' and 'coming in' as constructed by participants. Understandings of 'the scene' are loosely placed within five categories, each analysed in detail. The first section explores accounts in which 'the scene' was understood as devoid of essential meaning and was seen to ambiguously confer a commonality of sexual identities, socialities, and/or practices. The following three sections explore the ways in which 'coming into the scene' was narrated in relation to 1) desiring and having (certain kinds of) sex with men, 2) engaging in forms of social interaction with other men 'in the scene', and 3) possessing and sharing certain kinds of sexual knowledge. The final section explores relationships between 'being in the scene' and 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*; here, it is suggested that the former could be seen as a 'life world' in which the latter are taken up not only modes of 'being' but also as ways of living.

Chapter Five: Being On-and-Off-line. This chapter explores the central importance that participants attributed to internet technologies in their narratives of self-understanding and in their everyday social and sexual interactions with other men. The first section explores narratives in which the arrival of the internet was seen as a 'sexual watershed' after which other *gay*, *homosexual*, and *tongzhi* men became visible and accessible online. The second section explores the ways in which many men in this research came to understand themselves as belonging to a particular sexual category after searching the internet for the 'meanings' of their desires for men. In both sections, the internet appears associated with concepts of 'progress' and 'enlightenment'; these are analysed in more detail in the third section. The fourth and fifth sections specifically focus on the mobile, locative *gay* social networking app Blued. These sections respectively explore the production of (*gay*) space and the embodiment of sexual categories in relation to Blued. The final section explores debates amongst participants over the uses to which internet technologies should be

put. In these debates, casual sexual encounters were often condemned, while the pursuit of friendship and romantic relationships was valorised.

Chapter Six: Life-Times. The chapter explores the ways in which participants anticipated and narrated the future and the conflicts they experienced between understandings of themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' and pervasive pressures to marry and have children. The first section explores the temporality of 'the scene', analysing the ways in which, for many men, 'coming into the scene' also involved the problematisation of futures oriented toward marriage and reproduction. Here, the continued necessity for children as care-givers in later life is linked to the uncertain continuity of a 'life in the scene'. The second section analyses participants' accounts of their parents' understandings of 'homosexuality', in which 'being homosexual' was seen as a threat to the continuity of 'the family line', a key facet of Confucian parent-child relationships and world views. Within these accounts 'homosexuality' came to symbolise discontinuity and, in some instances, even death. In contrast to these issues, the third section explores how some men narrated essentialised notions of a *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* life premised on the rejection of marriage and reproduction. The final section explores practices of accommodating marriage and reproduction while continuing to live a life 'in the scene'; this was seen as possible either through the practice of 'contract marriages' with *lala* women or the maintenance of spatial distance between one's 'family life' and one's 'life in the scene'.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion. This final chapter outlines the key contributions of this research. I return to issues raised in the literature review and consider these in relation to the issues discussed in the data chapters. I also discuss important limitations of this research and make suggestions for future studies.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

As outlined in the Introduction, the primary aim of this study is to explore a range of concepts and contexts through and within which participants could be seen to negotiate understandings of themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene'. Methodological openness towards uncertain objects of inquiry has led to engagement with a range of theoretical perspectives. This chapter offers a broad overview of the various literatures within which this thesis can be situated, and highlights approaches within these literatures upon which I have drawn and debates to which this thesis seeks to contribute. Part of this will include a review Chinese sexualities studies literature. As such, I offer further contextual information concerning the social, political, and cultural contexts within which this research is situated, while also reviewing the ways in which scholars have conceptualised non-heterosexual lives and identities in the PRC.

A loose and preliminary conceptual framework for exploring the concepts of 'self-understanding' and 'everyday life' has been outlined in the Introduction. As has also already been discussed, this thesis does not adhere to a particular theoretical position, though my approach is broadly social constructionist. As such, this chapter takes a necessarily broad approach to reviewing the relevant literatures. It begins with an overview of scholarly work that has, from varying perspectives, suggested that sexuality should be understood as 'socially constructed'. This section discusses symbolic interactionist, Foucauldian, and queer theory approaches to sexuality, and points to the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches, as well as their points of convergence and contestation. Section Two turns to anthropological work that has theorised the cultural specificity of sexuality. This section considers anthropological debates concerning culturally specific interrelations of gender and sexuality and arguments made for the privileging of one over the other. I will also engage with

recent anthropological literatures associated with 'the ontological turn' – a movement toward the critique of analytical categories themselves and a call to appreciate categories of existence as they appear in ethnographic data.[17] In relation to these debates, I will question the utility of the concept 'sexuality' in exploring a socio-cultural and linguistic context in which no equivalent concept/term can be found.

Sections Three and Four review Chinese sexualities studies literatures. Section Three offers an account of the historical emergence of discourses of 'homosexuality/*tongxinglian*' in China, tracing the trajectory of such discourses through various historical and political contexts. At the same time, I highlight debates between historians of 'homosexuality' that complicate notions of a monolithic discourse. Section Four reviews work on the emergence of *gay* and *tongzhi* identities in what has been termed the 'postsocialist' period (1978-present). Again, this section provides contextual information concerning contemporary fields of sexual discourses, politics, and everyday life in the PRC, while also addressing various ways in which scholars have conceptualised non-heterosexual identities. Two key, and potentially related, critiques I make of the current literature concern the issues of geographic bias, with most existing research having been conducted in the mega-cities of Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, and the dominance of concerns for questions of modernity, cosmopolitanism, and globalisation. Such issues did not appear to be quotidian concerns of men that I lived and socialised with in Hainan and those I interviewed for this research.

The Social Construction of 'Sexuality'

As outlined in the Introduction, the conceptual leanings of this thesis are broadly social constructionist. 'Social constructionism' encompasses an impossibly broad

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[17] In this thesis, I include interview data within the category of 'ethnographic data' as I understand the 'ethnographic' quality of data to be invested in the ways in which data is generated, conceptualised and used, rather than as referring to a particular 'kind' of data (i.e. field notes) or a particular method of data collection (i.e. participant observation). These issues are discussed in the Methodology.

range of theoretical perspectives that can be no more than tentatively pointed to here. Overall, the term implies scepticism of assumed objective, essential realities and a critique of the human-social role in their production (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008). The strength and extent of this scepticism varies between and within different theoretical orientations (Haslanger, 1995). Certain perspectives, including strands of Marxism, phenomenology, and psychoanalysis, propose certain aspects of reality as products of social activity, defining these as 'subjective', 'ideological', 'social' or 'cultural', while viewing others as existing independently of human activity, defining these as 'natural', 'essential', or 'primordial' (dichotomous views of biological sex versus social gender or of homosexual desire versus gay and lesbian identities are relevant examples of such conceptual orientations). On the other hand, 'strong' forms of constructionism, associated with poststructuralism, recognise the practice of knowing as fundamentally social, such that all that is or can be known is also necessarily socially constructed (Fuss, 1990). These varying degrees of opposition to essentialism mean that rather than an absolute dichotomy of essentialist/constructionist perspectives, 'it may be more helpful to think of a social constructionist/essentialist continuum along which theorists may be placed' (Richardson, 1997: 157). This section offers an overview of constructionist theorisations of sexuality that have shaped the conceptual orientation of this thesis. I will also highlight points of conflict and convergence between these perspectives.

It is worth pointing out, first, that forms of interdisciplinary analysis have also challenged the analytical separation of the human (social, cultural, subjective) and the non-human (material, objective), as well as the collapsing of the latter into the former within poststructuralist theory. Such work has often been interdisciplinary and has proposed human-object-discursive assemblages (Braidotti, 2013; Deleuze and Guattari, 1986; Puar, 2007), cyborg subjectivities (Harraway, 1991), networks of human and non-human acatants (Latour, 2005), and agentive materials (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010) as objects of analysis. To some extent, these dynamic perspectives have entailed a refashioning of existential phenomenological concerns; feminist

scholars have been pivotal in this refashioning (Ahmed, 2006b; Neimanis, 2017). Later in this chapter I will trace links between these literatures and queer theory. However, a detailed review of this literature is beyond the confines of this thesis (for reviews, see Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012; Giffney and Hird, 2009).

Symbolic Interactionism and Sociological Approaches

A specifically social constructionist approach to sexuality emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in the work of American sociologists such as Irving Goffman (1963), John Gagnon and William Simon (1973), and Barbara Ponse (1978). These were followed by British sociologists such as Ken Plummer (1975; 1981), Jeffrey Weeks (1977; 1981), Stevi Jackson (1978) and John Hart and Diane Richardson (1981). These scholars were largely informed by symbolic interactionism and worked within the context of a broader shift within the discipline of sociology away from macro-scale quantitative studies and toward qualitative analyses of everyday life (Adler, Adler, and Fontana, 1987). This shift also entailed a questioning of psychological/psychoanalytical paradigms of human behaviours, interactions, and identities (ibid.). At the same time, in the United States, the findings of the Kinsey Reports (Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin, 1948; Kinsey et al., 1953) highlighted incongruities between the supposed mutually exclusive sexual categories 'homosexual', 'heterosexual' and 'bisexual' and people's actual sexual desires and practices. These finding provided an empirical impetus for rethinking dominant modes of sexual categorisation (Kimmel, 2007: vii-viii).

Having itself emerged as a critique of pseudo-scientific, psychological conjecture as to the 'internal' workings of the mind (Denzin, 1992: 2-3), symbolic interactionism, as developed by George Herbert Mead (1934) and Herbert Blumer (1968), provided a theoretical perspective from which sociologists could question notions of innate, biological 'drives' (Richardson, 1984; Stein, 1989). While symbolic interactionism encompasses a broad range of theoretical orientations (Denzin, 1992), it remains premised on three guiding assumptions: '[1] human beings act towards things on the

basis of the meanings that the things have for them … [2] the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, social interaction … [3] these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things' (Blumer, 1969: 2). In a more recent appraisal, Plummer (2000: 194) has noted that:

> A key concern for interactionist sociology is with the manner through which human beings go about the task of assembling meaning: how we define ourselves, our bodies and impulses, our feelings and emotions, our behaviors and acts; how we define the situations we are in, develop perspectives on the wider social order, produce narratives and stories to explain our actions and lives; how such meanings are constantly being built up through interaction with others.

From this perspective, sociologists were able to reconceptualise sexuality as a social phenomenon – a matter of the production of meanings and the negotiation of self-understandings through processes of categorisation and narrative ordering. From an interactionist perspective, these processes are seen as occurring in both specific interpersonal interactions, and through the situation of individuals and groups within broad and complex macro-scale socio-cultural dynamics (Jackson and Scott, 2010a).

The notion of 'sexual scripting' introduced by Gagnon and Simon (1973) was, and remains, influential in providing a framework for conceptualising the social construction of sexuality from an interactionist perspective. Gagnon and Simon posited that this 'construction' takes place across three interrelated scales: 'the agentic individual, the interactional situation, and the surrounding sociocultural order' (Gagnon, 2004: 276). They understood the social construction of sexuality as premised upon the prior negotiation of gender identities (Gagnon and Simon, 1973: 22).[18] Upon this basis, the notion of 'sexual scripting' offers an understanding of sexuality that is social 'all the way down': from broad socio-cultural narratives, or 'cultural scenarios', that define certain practices and bodily regions as 'sexual' and label some 'normal' and others 'deviant', to situated and embodied interactions

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[18] Gagnon and Simon (1973) do not offer an elaborate account of the social construction of gender. For such an account, from an interactionist/sociological perspective, see Kessler and McKenna (1978), also West and Zimmerman (1987).

between individuals, or 'interpersonal scripting', to the internalisation of sexual categories and the provocation of desires through a reflexive process termed 'intrapsychic scripting' (Gagnon and Simon, 1973; 1986). 'Sexual scripting' therefore incorporates the central tenets of symbolic interactionism: a notion of the self as at once internally self-reflexive and situated in external relations to others; an understanding of 'reality' as constructed through the production of meaning; and an insistence on the inseparability of the individual from broad socio-cultural contexts (Epstein, 1994; Plummer, 1995). Scripting theory formulates these tenets into an analytical framework for exploring the sociality of sexual desires, practices, selves, and identities across and between macro- and micro-social scales (Colman-Fountain, 2014; Jackson and Scott, 2010a; Kimmel, 2007). This 'multi-layered' approach has been recognised as an advantage of scripting theory over post-structuralist approaches (Jackson and Scott, 2010a); these are discussed later. Importantly, Gagnon and Simon went further than most other constructionists in suggesting that gendered sexual *desires* were the product of social interaction and scripting, thus offering the only alternative understanding of sexual desire to those proffered by biological and psychoanalytic paradigms. Their preference for the term 'sexual conduct', rather than 'sexual behaviour', was intended to emphasise the subjective intentionality at work in, and the meaningfulness of, sexual desires and interactions (Gagnon, 1977: 2; Plummer, 1981).

While Gagnon and Simon's work explored a broad range of desires, practices and identities under the rubric 'sexuality', including 'heterosexuality', much early constructionist work focused on (mostly male) 'homosexuality' (Richardson, 1984). This was due to the influence of deviance studies on much early work and the political urgency of contesting biological and psychological paradigms, with their assertions of 'homosexual pathology' (Epstein, 1994). [19] Departing from psycho-medical concerns for the 'aetiology of homosexuality', sociological

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[19] It has been suggested that the application of theoretical paradigms emerging form deviance studies to the study of 'homosexuality', in fact, reified the notion of 'homosexuality' as a form of 'deviance', even as these paradigms reconceptualised 'deviance' as socially constructed (see Connell, 1992).

approaches were more 'concerned with the transition to a homosexual identity … and determining what conditions permit a person to say 'I am a homosexual' (Dank, 1971: 180).[20] Mary McIntosh's (1968) discussion of 'the homosexual role' was one of the earliest attempts to theorise 'being homosexual' not as an essential state but as an assigned and adopted label – a social 'role'. McIntosh noted that empirical evidence of people's diverse sexual practices and desires belied their exclusive categorisation as either 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual'. As such, she suggested that practices of sexual labelling and categorisation served certain purposes, establishing 'a clear-cut, publicised and recognisable threshold between permissible and impermissible behaviour' and 'segregat[ing] the deviants from others ... The creation of a specialised, despised and punished role of homosexual keeps the bulk of society pure. (ibid.: 183). McIntosh maintained that 'the homosexual' was not prior to these dynamics of social control, but produced by the very act of labelling; as she noted, 'if the culture defines people as falling into distinct types - … homosexual and normal - then these types tend to become polarized, highly differentiated from each other' (ibid.).[21]

McIntosh recognised that such categorisation, as much as serving to define 'the homosexual' as 'despised', also enabled resistance to such definition:

> homosexuals themselves welcome and suppose the notion that homosexuality is a condition. … It appears to justify the deviant behaviour of the homosexual as being appropriate for him as a member of the homosexual category. The deviancy can thus be legitimised for him and he can continue in it without rejecting the norms of the society. (ibid.)

While credit has more often been given to Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality: Volume 1* (1978, discussed below), McIntosh's account of the 'homosexual role' pre-empts the key analytical foci of contemporary research on non-heterosexual identities: the construction of identities within dominant discourses; the ways in

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[20] These conceptual shifts within academic research both informed, and were informed by, the social and cultural movements of gay liberation and lesbian feminism, within which discourses of social identity were fervent (see Escoffier, 1990; Seidman, 1994).

[21] It should be noted that while McIntosh proposed 'the homosexual role' as a social construct, in her understanding of sexual desire she remained within the biological paradigm of 'innate drives' (see McIntosh, 1978: 56; and Jackson and Scott, 2010a: 817 for critique).

which these are reinterpreted by individuals and groups; and the dynamics of conformity, accommodation, subversion, and resistance that these processes entail (Nardi and Schneider, 1998; Weeks, 2010).

As Gayle Rubin (2002: 37) notes, 'McIntosh's greatest contribution was to historicize this 'homosexual role''. This move gave rise to forms of historical analysis that took 'homosexuality' and 'homosexuals' not as the latest iterations of an essential, transhistorical 'same-sex desire', but as cultural phenomena and objects of knowledge specific to their time and place. Contemporary 'homosexuality', in this sense, was not entirely independent of its historical precedents, but could be seen as linked genealogically via the transmission of cultures and knowledges, rather than by an ahistorical, essential (homo)sexual desire.[22] Developing this attention to historical specificity, Weeks (1977: 3) has noted that the trajectory from 'sodomites', to 'homosexuals', to 'gay' and 'lesbian' identities is not a matter of 'new labels for old realities: they point to a changing reality' (also see D'Emilio, 1983; Foucault, 1978). Following these insights, much constructionist work on sexuality has explored the ways in which shifting social-historical contexts give rise to new sexual categories and modes of self-understanding (Plummer, 1995; Seidman, 2002; Weeks, 2010; Whisman; 1996).

Importantly, while interactionist approaches emphasise the historical specificity of sexual categories, identities, desires, and practices, as a firmly sociological approach, interactionist analyses remain grounded in the 'obdurate empirical world' (Plummer, 2003: 520). As such, while sensitive to broad historical, socio-cultural, and discursive shifts, by centring on the production of meaning in situated, everyday interactions, symbolic interactionism remains 'a way of examining sexuality as it is understood and practised by individuals in their everyday social lives and interaction' (Coleman-Fountain, 2014: 11). This combined focus on macro-scale historical and socio-cultural shifts and on everyday interaction and the situated production of meanings is important in this thesis.

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[22] However, McIntosh herself may have disagreed here (see previous footnote).

Foucauldian Approaches

Interactionism's attentiveness to the everyday has been recognised as an advantage of the approach over the more often-adopted understanding of 'the discursive construction of sexuality' developed by Foucault (1978). While Foucault's work similarly posits the historical specificity of sexual desires, practices, and identities, it has been critiqued for its exclusive focus on the institutional production of sexual discourses and for having little to say about how such discourses are engaged and negotiated in everyday interactions (Brickell, 2006; Hacking, 2004). Feminist interactionists have also highlighted Foucault's under-theorisation of gender (Foucault (1978: 155) uses the term 'sex') and his positioning of gender as derivative of sexuality (Jackson and Scott, 2010a: 818-821). The relationship between symbolic interactionist and Foucauldian understandings of sexuality is worth further consideration, especially as this will provide a useful preface to anthropological questions of cultural 'difference' addressed in the following section.

There is considerable crossover between Foucauldian and interactionist insights. In common with interactionists, Foucault (1978: 105-106) recognised 'sexuality' as broadly encompassing 'the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, [and] the strengthening of controls and resistance'. Both interactionist and Foucauldian perspectives posit sexuality as a field of meaning and activity through which certain effects are produced. Both reject notions of innate sexual desires, potentials, or energies that are variously expressed or repressed (Foucault, 1978: 49; Gagnon and Simon, 1973: 11). Echoing McIntosh (1968), Foucault (1978: 43-44) suggested that sexual categories such as 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual', as well as a full cartography of 'sexual perversions', produced the subjects they claimed to name. This process of labelling, or discursive construction, was seen as at once an act of incorporation into a field of power and, by virtue of that incorporation, a pre-condition for acts of resistance (ibid.: 92-102). Despite these similarities, there are subtle, though important, differences between

interactionist and Foucauldian notions of the social construction of sexuality. These concern the disparate disciplinary locations and contrasting motivations of these theoretical paradigms, and, consequently, the epistemological and ontological status they afford to 'sexuality' in relation to the notion of social construction. Such differences may account for Foucault's inability/refusal to conceptualise 'sexuality' in the context of everyday, lived realities.

As noted earlier, for interactionist sociologists, the impetus for developing a sociological critique of sexuality was discrepancies between essentialist sexual categories (homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual) and empirical evidence of people's actual sexual desires, practices, and self-understandings. As such, the interactionist understanding of the social construction of sexuality emerged as a framework for explaining inconsistencies within a field of human experience defined as 'sexuality'. Foucault, on the other hand, as both a historian and poststructuralist philosopher, was primarily concerned with the emergence of the conceptual category 'sexuality' itself. Foucault understood 'sexuality' not as an empirical reality manifest in desires, practices, and identities but as a power-laden field of knowledge (Halperin, 1998). He sought to explicate the emergence of 'sexuality' as an object of medical, psychological, and moral concern in nineteenth century Europe. Foucault understood the emergence of 'sexuality' to be part of wider shifts in the operations of state power (amongst other forms of institutional power), from the regulation of subjects through the threat of death to regulation through the administration of life, a mode of power he termed 'bio-politics' (1978: 134-159; 2008; 2004). What Foucault offers is not an empirical theory of 'sexuality' *per se*, but a theory of power as operating through the production of human fields of concern and activity (Halperin, 1995; Seidman, 2013: 179-183; also Foucault, 1966). 'Sexuality' is but one such field that Foucault positioned alongside 'health', 'sanity', and 'criminality' (Foucault, 1963; 1967; 1977 respectively), as central to the production of governable, and largely self-governing, subjects in modern nation-states.

From this Foucauldian perspective, to assert an extant field of practice and experience

that can be defined as 'sexuality', and to offer an explanatory theory of its constitution, is to be complicit in the regulatory production and maintenance of that same field.[23] This is seen to be the case regardless of whether 'sexuality' is conceived as a biological/essential phenomenon or as the product of social interaction (Seidman, 1994; Valocchi, 2005). There is a risk, here, of overstating this distinction between Foucauldian and interactionist understandings of 'sexuality', particularly given that interactionist perspectives recognise the empirical content of 'sexuality' as always contextually contingent, dependent upon the bodily regions, desires, practices, relationships, and identities that are deemed 'sexual' in a given time and place (Jackson, 2007; Stein and Plummer, 1994). However, as will be discussed later in this chapter, this distinction becomes important when debates concerning the social construction of sexuality are translated (or, indeed, fail to translate) into non-Anglophone cultural contexts.

Queer Approaches

Foucault's work has been foundational to a range of constructivist, or, more aptly, deconstructivist, critiques that have been a key current in the theorisation of sexuality since the early 1990s. Such critiques tend to be grouped together under the rubric of 'queer theory' (Jagose, 1996; Warner, 1993).[24] Queer theory emerged through the intertwining of critiques of unitary and monolithic notions of gay and lesbian identities that came to circulate within the gay liberation and lesbian feminist movements in the U.S and critiques of the relationship between feminist politics and the category 'woman' (Seidman, 1994). Both of these issues were framed by a wider 'postmodern turn' in continental philosophy. Aspects of these critiques were initially

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[23] In making the above assertion, my reading of Foucault is aligned with that of David Halperin (1998), who rejects what he sees as the dominant (mis)interpretation of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* as describing a transition, in 19th Century Europe, from sexual acts to sexual identities (Halperin, 1989: 95-96). This has been widely understood as a shift in the *meanings of sexuality*. By contrast, I understand Foucault as offering, more fundamentally, a critique of the emergence of 'sexuality' itself as a meaningful, regulatory concept and field of experience. In this respect, the histories of sexuality offered by Weeks (1977) and Foucault (1978) could be seen as distinct projects.

[24] It is worth pointing out that the colocation of varied and, at times, conflictual theoretical orientations under the singular rubric 'queer theory' is somewhat at odds with the critique of singularity that is characteristic of these texts themselves. So too is the kind of summary account of 'queer theory' offered in this section; this summary should be recognised as partial, highlighting only some of the key tenets of queer work.

mounted by black and ethnic minority activists and scholars who questioned the assumed primacy of sexual and gender identities, as sites of both unity and oppression, over racial and classed forms of both belonging and exclusion (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983; Lorde, 1984). These concerns were developed by others into a general critique of the normative function of sexual and gender identities (Butler, 1990; 1993; de Lauretis, 1991; Fuss, 1991; Sedgwick, 1990; Warner, 1993).

These emerging queer theorists followed Foucault in recognising knowledge as a site of power and in seeing power as producing subjects through the deployment of discourses (Sprago, 1999). However, departing from Foucault's general critique of 'sexuality', queer theorists have largely explored the regulatory function of binary logics of gender and sexual identities. For Judith Butler (1990: 24), human subjects are formed with a 'matrix of intelligibility' structured around the binary, interrelated pairs 'man/woman' and 'homosexual/heterosexual'. For Butler, to be an intelligible human subject is to be recognised as either 'man' or 'woman' and for this division to be reflected in both sexual desire and sexual identity (ibid.). This normative relationship between gender and sexuality is seen as instituted by 'heteronormativity': the naturalised assumption that there are two genders, 'man' and 'woman', and that these 'opposite' genders are 'naturally' attracted to one another (Butler 1990; 1993; Warner, 1993).[25] While within some queer work, 'homosexuality' is seen as a challenge to heteronormativity (Edelman, 2004), given that the notion of 'same sex desire' reiterates the assumption that there are such things as 'same' and 'opposite' sexes/genders, concepts of 'homosexuality', 'bisexuality', and 'heterosexuality' are seen to remain within a heteronormative ordering of gender and sexuality (Butler, 1993: 74).

Influenced by both Foucault's conception of 'discursive fields' (1978; 1982) and Jacques Lacan's notion of 'symbolic order' (1977), 'heteronormativity' has largely been conceptualised within queer work as a cultural ideology instituted through

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[25] Adrienne Rich's (1980) concept of 'compulsory heterosexuality' has been seen as a forerunner to the notion of 'heteronormativity' (see Jackson, 2006b, for discussion of the two concepts and feminist work on normative heterosexuality more generally).

language and representation.[26] In this respect, queer approaches have been critiqued, especially by feminist and materialist sociologists, for their inattention to the role of material inequalities in the construction of gender and sexuality (Hennessey, 2006; Jackson, 2001). At the same time, however, it has also been suggested that queer work can be used in addressing material concerns that may be beyond the remit of conventional sociological approaches, seen as limited by their emphasis on the production of meaning in human interaction and by a conception of 'the material' that is limited to a critique of capitalism and the gendered division of labour (Rahman and Witz, 2003). The notion of heteronormativity as a pervasive symbolic structure has allowed some queer theorists to go beyond humanist concerns to consider the ways in which gendered and sexual subjectivities are instituted at 'metaphysical' levels. This can be seen in queer work on the materialisation of bodies (Bordo, 1998; Butler, 1993; Hughes and Witz, 1997), the production of space (Binnie, 1997; Grosz, 1995; Halberstam, 2005), and the perception of time (Edelman, 2004; Freeman, 2010). Together, these perspectives could be considered as constituting a 'queer phenomenology' that explores the production of gendered and sexual identities and subjectivities as entangled with the production of bodies and their orientation in space and time (Ahmed, 2006b; Rodemeyer, 2017; Moore, 2011).[27] Certain aspects of these works will be further elaborated and developed across the data chapters.

While heteronormativity is figured as a symbolic structure within queer work, the categories through which subjects become intelligible – 'man', 'woman', 'heterosexual', 'homosexual', 'individual', 'human' – are seen as unattainable ideals (Butler, 1990: 43-44; 1993; Giffney and Hird, 2009). Here, the influence of Jacques Derrida's 'deconstructionism' (1974; 1981) is evident, as queer work questions the possibility of final, fixed, and self-referential meaning. Within queer theory, 'being' (a man, a woman, gay, lesbian, an individual, a human etc.) and 'identity' are seen as

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[26] The pairing of Foucault and Lacan within queer work has been recognised as rather paradoxical, given Foucault's rejection of psychoanalysis (see Jackson and Scott, 2010a: 20, for full details).
[27] Many of the scholars referenced here should be seen as both queer and feminist theorists. The relationship between queer theory and feminism is complex, they have many points of overlap and contestation and neither queer theory nor feminism represent a singular conceptual position. An elaborate account this relationship is beyond the confines of this thesis (see McLaughlin, Richardson, and Casey, 2006 for more details).

matters of the citation of normative ideals (Namaste, 1994). They are seen as always matters of performance, never final actualisations (Butler, 1993). Following this logic, much queer work has focused on cultural practices that are seen to expose the fragility of 'being' through performances of identities, or non-identities, that resist definitive categorisation within the terms of gender, sexuality, race, and humanity (Halberstam, 2011; Muñoz, 1999; Young, 2016).

This emphasis on indeterminacy has been highlighted as distinguishing queer work from interactionist accounts of the social construction of gender and sexuality (Green, 2007). Whereas interactionism has been seen to account for social processes whereby individuals *do* align themselves with, and come to embody, sexual and gendered meanings, from a queer perspective, such alignment is an impossible, normative ideal (ibid.: 33-34). This line of thinking has led some queer theorists to celebrate 'failure' (Halberstam, 2011) and 'negativity' (Bersani, 1987; Edelman, 2004) as practices of resistance to the normative ideal of fully-realised selves and identities. However, other strands of queer theory can be seen as 'radically anticipatory', going beyond the explanation of existent social realities, to theorise alternative possibilities and more 'utopian' worlds (Muñoz, 2009; O'Rourke, 2014). Queer theory's celebration of indeterminacy and speculative possibilities has been critiqued for its abstraction of everyday lived realities; this has been seen as potentially disempowering individuals and groups for whom stable constructions of self and identity may be vital frameworks through which to contest exclusion and inequality (McLaughlin, 2006; Nussbaum, 1999).

This section has reviewed three key paradigms through which sexuality has been theorised as socially constructed: symbolic interactionism, Foucauldian discourse theory, and queer theory. Amongst these, the insights of symbolic interactionism are most clearly evident in my analysis of the self-understanding and everyday lives of participants in this research. However, I also draw upon aspects of queer theory where these offer insight into issues of spatiality, temporality, embodiment, and the normative materialisation of everyday life. The themes of instability, uncertainty, and

negativity that have been elaborated by queer theorists also resonate with some of the quotidian concerns discussed by participants and explored in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. The ways these literatures have shaped this thesis, and key contributions I seek to make, will be further discussed in the conclusion to this chapter. The influence that the Foucauldian critique of 'sexuality' has had on this thesis will be further elaborated in the following section, which discusses anthropological approaches to sexuality and gender.

Anthropological Insights

The conceptualisation of sexuality as socially constructed is not unique to sociology; it can be seen to have precedents in the work of anthropologists such as Evelyn Hooker (1967) and David Sonenschein (1966). This said, the work of sociologists such as McIntosh (1968), Gagnon and Simon (1973), Weeks (1977), and D'Emillio (1983) has been recognised as a catalyst for a constructionist turn with the anthropology of sexuality (see Rubin, 2002; Weston, 1993). This section can offer no more than a brief account of the trajectory of constructionist thinking about sexuality within anthropology. Instead, with reference to relevant literatures, this section outlines some of the theoretical, methodological and ethical problems that arise when an anthropological concern for cultural 'difference' is brought to bear on debates concerning the social construction of sexuality as outlined in the previous section.

Recognising their contributions to the theorisation of 'homosexuality' within anthropology, Rubin (2002:39) notes that constructionist sociologists:

> discovered a mutable homosexuality that had discontinuities sufficient enough to make problematic even the application of labels such as "lesbian," "gay," or "homosexual" to persons of other historical periods or cultural contexts. That which we might be tempted to identify as "homosexual" might refer to an assemblage of institutional elements and social relations alien to a modern notion of sexual, much less "homosexual," conduct.

The recognition of sexual identities, as well as the concept of 'sexual identity' itself, as culturally specific stimulated much anthropological work on sexuality across

disparate geo-cultural contexts (Lewin and Leap, 2002). This has generated debate around the relationship between sexual desires, practices and identities, as anthropologists have explored cultural contexts in which sex between men or between women is not recognised as constitutive of particular sexual identities (Adam, 1993). Research has also shown that age and sex-roles may be more central to understandings of sexual identities that the gender of a sexual partner (Lancaster, 1992). It has also been noted that practices involving bodily regions considered 'sexual' within certain cultural contexts may, in fact, have more to do with age-related or religious rituals (Herdt, 1993; Parker, 1986). Similar to its impact within sociology, the constructionist turn in the anthropology of sexuality garnered 'a renewed emphasis on the importance of taking into account context and meaning' (Weston, 1993: 347).

Anthropologists have debated the translatability of sexual categories and have critiqued the uncritical use of the terms 'homosexual', 'gay', and 'lesbian' in reference to non-Anglophone contexts (Herdt, 1994; Leap and Boellstorff, 2004). Instead, it has become common practice to centre analyses on sexualised terms and categories as they appear with the socio-cultural context under enquiry. There have been similar debates around the application of the term 'transgender' to diverse gender identities and embodiments in disparate cultural contexts (Valentine, 2007). As such, anthropologists have produced ethnographic accounts of Indian *hijra* (Reddy, 2005), Thai *katheoy* and *tom/dee* (Jackson, 2000), Brazilian *travesti* (Kulick, 1998; Vartabedian, 2018), Indonesian *tombois* and *waria* (Blackwood, 1998; Boellstorff, 2005 respectively), Navajo *nadleehi* (Epple, 1998), and Chinese *tongzhi* (Chou, 2008, discussed in more detail later), to list but a few examples.[28] These terms are, to varying degrees, understood not as culturally specific variants of 'homosexual', 'gay', 'lesbian', 'transgender' identities, but as gender and sexual identities that cannot be

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[28] This is not to say that constructionist theorising of gender and sexuality in anthropology has only been the concern of scholars working on 'non-normative' genders and sexualities. Feminist anthropologists have also recognised the cultural specificity, and questioned the universal applicability, of the categories 'heterosexual', 'man' and 'woman' (see Mascia-Lees and Black, 2017).

assimilated into 'Western' conceptual categories.[29] At the same time, however, Kath Weston (1993: 348) has cautioned against the rush to claim cultural 'specificity'. As she puts it, 'the use of "foreign" terms constructs the subject of inquiry as always already Other'; this may constitute 'a renewed form of Orientalism in which linguistic terms subtly reify differences and buttress ethnographic authority' (ibid.; also Valentine, 2007).

Multiple Sexualities

The cross-cultural diversity of gendered and sexual terminology is not, in itself, evidence of the cultural specificity of gendered and sexual identities, desires, and practices. Likewise, a commitment to using 'indigenous' terminology is no safeguard against ethnocentric assumptions that may operate at conceptual levels (Graham, 2014). Avoiding abject 'Othering', on the one hand, and rejecting universalist assumptions, on the other, requires attention to the history of a given sexual category or practice and the ways in which it is negotiated, embodied, and lived contextually and historically. There are two ways in which the question of 'specificity' has been framed within anthropological work on sexuality: 1) in terms of the need to distinguish between sexual practices and sexual identities (Herdt, 1994); and 2) in terms of the relationship between sexuality and gender (Jackson, 2000; Sinnot, 2004). The first of these framings has been critiqued as premised on a false dichotomy that figures sexual 'desires' and 'practices' as pre-discursive, positioned outside of fields of culture and meaning to which 'identities' are seen to belong (Elliston, 1995). Seeking to circumvent arbitrary distinctions between desires, practices, and identities, Brown et al. (2010) advocate the use of the term 'sexualities' in cross-cultural research and see this pluralised category as capable of accommodating both cultural difference and similarity. 'Sexualities', in this sense, refers to:

> heterogeneous assemblages of bodies desiring and engaged (or not) in sex acts and

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[29] It should also be noted that researchers often vary in their conceptual and stylistic commitment to the assertion that 'homosexual' and 'homosexuality' reference historically specific constructs. Many make such claims only to go on using 'homosexual' 'for convenience' (for example Weston, 1993: 348).

sexual practices; experiencing pleasures, emotions and affective sensations; and connecting to other bodies through various forms of intimacy, as well as social relations (that include gender, race, religion, kinship and class). … These sexualities defy easy categorisation and representation; they exceed the boundaries of the sexual identity categories that we think we know. And yet, at certain times and in certain places, people feel the need to talk about themselves and others in terms of commonly 'known' sexual identities, thus inhabiting and ascribing meaningful social and discursive positions. (ibid.: 1568)

This productive approach allows for nuanced work that rejects the dichotomy of 'practice/identity' and the ways in which this has implicitly reiterated the dichotomies of 'East/West', 'self/other', and 'traditional/modern' (Berry, 1996; Martin; 1996). Moreover, in relation to questions of the relationship between gender and sexuality, the plural notion of 'sexualities' allows for diverse, culturally and contextually specific points of intersection, as well as divergence. In his work on the proliferation of 'sex/gender categories' in Thailand between 1960 and 1980, Peter Jackson (2000) uses a similar strategy of pluralisation, however, he questions the relevance of the concept of 'sexuality' and, instead, offers an account of myriad 'eroticised genders' (2000). It has been suggested that these anthropological concerns to reconsider relationships between sexuality and gender and to conceptualise sexuality against the grain of clear distinctions between sexual desires, practices, and identities has given contemporary anthropology an inherently 'queer sensibility' (Boyce, Engebretsen, and Posocco, 2017). [30]

While such strategies of pluralisation, whether of genders or sexualities, are useful in acknowledging multiplicity and complexity within and across the categories of gender and sexuality in disparate cultural contexts, it has been noted that they do not necessarily question the authority of these social categories themselves (Hendriks, 2017). Here, an anthropological concern for cultural 'difference' intersects with Foucauldian concerns for the regulatory production of 'sexuality' as a field of

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[30] Of course, anthropologists have not only posed questions of 'difference' in relation to culturally diverse genders and sexualities. Much attention has also been paid to the increasing redundancy of comparative paradigms amidst the 'globalisation' of Euro-American sexual discourses and their intersections with 'local' sexual-gender dynamics outside of 'the West' (Altman and Symons, 2016; Boellstorff, 2005; Grewal and Kaplan, 2001). This can be seen as a dominant approach being taken in work on Chinese sexualities; this literature is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

knowledge. It becomes necessary to ask to what extent the maintenance of 'sexuality' as an analytical category, even when pluralised and abstracted as 'sexualities', presupposes a corresponding empirical field of experience, thereby imposing such an analytical framework upon socio-cultural dynamics that may be more usefully conceptualised in other ways (Moore, 2012: 11-12). This question is particularly salient in the case of research on issues of 'sexuality' in China, where no term/concept equivalent to 'sexuality' can be found in Mandarin Chinese (*Putonghua*). As Jackson, Liu, and Woo (2008: 2) note:

> All East Asian languages have words for sex but the concept of sexuality … has proved particularly difficult … In Chinese, a language based on ideographic representation of concepts (as opposed to sounds) the problem is more intractable. Here 'sexuality' has been variously translated simply as *xing* (sex), in Taiwan *xing-zhi* ('the nature of sex') or, in China, as *xing cunzai* ('the existence of sex'). None of these terms is very satisfactory.

These difficulties surrounding the translation of 'sexuality' are telling. They may be taken to point to alternative cultural logics of sexuality and the need to rethink the concept, particularly, as discussed above, the interrelations of gender and sexuality. However, they may also suggest the limitations of 'sexuality' as a conceptual framework for understandings cultural logics and lived realities in other cultural contexts. This line of thought moves from the question of how best to translate 'sexuality' into other cultural contexts to the question of how best to engage with the concepts and lived realities of other cultural contexts when 'sexuality' is a potentially problematic framework. These issues point to the 'cognitive injustice' that may be at work when a specifically 'Western' category of experience and analysis is given the status of an abstract universal (Ho et al., 2018: 515; also Bhambra and Santos, 2017; Connell, 2007). As Henrietta Moore (2012: 11) suggests, this requires a questioning of the 'the ontological status of sexuality'.

Alternative Ontologies

A still-emergent branch of anthropological thinking, described as 'the ontological turn', is exploring the implication of such issues concerning the (in)translatability of

analytical categories (Holbraad and Pedersen, 2017; Jensen et al., 2017; Paleček and Risjord, 2014; Pedersen, 2012). For ontological anthropologists, such failures of translation do not demand the rethinking of an existent concept; rather, they occasion the formulation of alternative conceptual categories altogether (Descola, 2013: 477). In this sense, 'the epistemological problem of how one sees things is turned into the ontological question of what there is to be seen in the first place' (Holbraad and Pedersen, 2017: 5). From this perspective, it may not be the case that 'genders' and 'sexualities' are constructed, experienced, and interrelated in different ways in different socio-cultural contexts, but that something altogether different may be constructed and experienced that may be elided by categorisation as 'gender' or 'sexuality', or some combination of the two. Ontological anthropologists argue that in order to avoid this imposition of inappropriate ontological categories, primacy must be given to the conceptual-ontological categories that are evident in the sociocultural context under enquiry; these must not be conceptualised as variants of a wider, abstract concept such as 'sexuality'. Methodologically, this means 'that we need to approach our ethnographic data without presuming that they signify, represent, or stand for something other than what they purport to be' (Vigh and Sausdal, 2014: 51).

These forms of ontological anthropology have been used to critique the concepts of 'nature', 'culture' (and their binary separation), 'kinship', 'truth', and 'morality' as inherently eurocentric (Holbraad and Pedersen, 2017; Viveros de Castro, 2014). While a number of scholars have noted the need for critical ontological thinking (and unthinking) about 'sexuality' (Boellstorff, 2012; Moore, 2012), little grounded ethnographic work has been done in this direction (Hendriks, 2017, is one example). However, while not framed in the terms of an 'ontological turn', nor even from an anthropological perspective, sociologist Pan Suiming (2006a; 2006b) has proposed the notion of 'the primary life cycle' (*chuji shenghuo quan*) as a potential alternative to researching 'sexuality' in China. There is an affinity between this proposal and ontological anthropology as described above. Pan's notion of 'the primary life cycle' refers to the interrelation and inseparability of 'sex, reproduction, support/sustenance

relations (*gongyang*), love, the management of sexual relations (*chuli xing guanxi*), and social gender (*shehui xingbie*)' (2006a: online, my translation).[31] Pan (ibid.) also suggests that 'the primary life cycle' can be considered an alternative to the concept of 'family', one that is more appropriate to dynamics of intergenerational relations and responsibilities in China. Work on 'sexuality' in China has emphasised the central importance of family relations, especially the Confucian concept of 'the family line' (Kong, 2011). However, in contrast to such accounts of the interrelations of 'family' and 'sexuality', Pan's concept of 'the primary life cycle' suggests an alternative point of analytical departure, one from which 'family' and 'sexuality' could not be seen as 'interrelated', since such 'interrelation' would still imply analytically separable concepts.[32] What would it mean, and to what conclusions may it lead, if research were to be based not on concepts of 'sexuality' and 'family' but on 'the primary life cycle'? It would appear that such a research agenda would have to think beyond the 'individual' and centre on issues of process, relationality, temporality, intergenerationality, and the material sustainability of 'life' (*shenghuo*). What would it mean if the terms '*gay*', '*homosexual*', '*tongzhi*', or 'in the scene' were understood not as identities, or self-descriptions, or as pertaining to a field of social experience called 'sexuality', but as referencing potentially problematic relationships to 'the primary life cycle'?

These are important questions, certain aspects of which will be returned to a throughout Chapters Four, Five, and Six. However, this study is not premised on the concept of 'the primary life cycle'. The central argument of ontological anthropology

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[31] Pan's notion of 'the primary life cycle' is translated in Jeffreys (2006: 26). In the English text, 'sex' (*xing*) and 'the management of sexual relations' (*chuli xing guanxi*), as they appear in a Chinese article by Pan on the same topic (2006a), are translated singularly as 'sexuality'. My concern with such translation practices is that much conceptual nuance and specificity is lost. '*xing*' can be modified as '*xingbie*' (sex difference/gender) but also as '*xingjiao*' (sex connection/sexual intercourse), and '*xingai*' (sexual love/sex and love). It also operates as a suffix that changes a noun into an adjective, for example '*shehui*' (society) becomes '*shehuixing*' (social). Sang (1999) offers a limited genealogical discussion of *xing*, which she traces back to the philosopher Mencius' conception of human nature (*renxing*). The use of *xingbie* (sex difference/gender) was established in China only in the 1920s, when '*xing* was chosen to be used as gender out of the need to translate the category gender in European languages' (ibid.: 278).

[32] It should be noted that while Pan (2006b) proposes 'the primary life cycle' as an alternative to 'sexuality', he also sees 'the primary life cycle' as undergoing massive change and, to some extent, dissolution, as part of what he terms a 'sexual revolution' unfolding in the PRC. The wider social context of this supposed 'sexual revolution' is outlined later in this chapter.

is that conceptual frameworks should be allowed to emerge from within ethnographic data (Holbraad and Pederson, 2017). There is no guarantee that the notion of 'the primary life cycle' would prove to be any more useful or any less limited than 'sexuality' as an object of enquiry assumed in advance. I outline Pan's concept of the 'primary life cycle' simply to suggest that 'thinking ontologically' about analytical categories and thinking conceptually about ethnographic data may lead to new avenues of inquiry that may be more attuned to the everyday lives of research participants. To this end, ontological anthropology advocates an 'open-ended attitude to its object of study' (Pedersen, 2012: online).

In certain ways, anthropology's turn to 'ontology' is deeply problematic. Scholars have questioned whether the turn to 'ontology' is, in fact, a return to essentialism and, worse, orientalism (Geismar, 2011; Heywood, 2012; Keane, 2009; Vigh and Sausdal, 2014). Proponents of the ontological turn have responded to these critiques by claiming that a radical return to essentialism, one that posits multiple, essential realities, as opposed to variously constructed realities, is necessary in resisting eurocentric enlightenment ideals of a singular and knowable reality (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell, 2007; Holbraad et al., 2014). In making this claim, ontological anthropologists see post-structuralism as a eurocentric enterprise premised on a singular representational-linguistic, and therefore humanist, ontology.[33] They have also stressed that the ontological claims they make should be seen as contingent, temporary, and open to reformulation (Holbraad, 2012; Pedersen, 2012). At the same time, however, this has been seen to 'consign anthropology to some neverland of philosophical reflection … at the expense of the nitty-gritty realities of which ethnographic fieldwork is made' (Holbraad and Pedersen, 2017: 189-190, paraphrasing Bessire and Bond, 2014). As such, the 'ontological turn' has been identified as 'a particular trend … in which the complex ideas, practices and social processes of everyday life are overlooked in the intellectual pursuit of radical alterity'

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[33] These critiques and responses from proponents of the 'ontological turn' are more complex than I can outline here. They cannot be full explored without exposition of related debates concerning post-humanism and new materialisms. Such an exposition is beyond the confines and concerns of this thesis (see Jensen et al., 2017; Todd, 2016).

(Killick, 2014: online)

These critiques are well founded. However the question of translating 'sexuality' is a persistent one. Even when the question is pared down to its most practical and seemingly un-philosophical level, were this thesis to use the term 'sexuality' in any substantive way, it would not be possible to translate the text into Chinese without substantial alterations to its meaning. Perhaps this is an unavoidable burden of working across cultures and languages, yet it also points to the inequalities and power dynamics that pervade the production of knowledge in cross-cultural research (Connell, 2007; Liu, 2010). With these concerns in mind, across the data chapters, I have intentionally avoided the use of the term 'sexuality'. This is not an essentialist/ontological claim that 'sexuality' does not 'exist' in Chinese cultural-linguistic contexts. Such a claim would reify both 'sexuality' and 'China' as fixed objects. Rather, it is an experimental attempt to remain discursively, linguistically, narratively, and conceptually open to unexpected concepts and context that may emerge with in the data; it is also an effort to broach a more proximate relationship between everyday discourse and analytical abstraction. This may allow for the telling of unexpected stories and bring unexpected realities into view.

This section has outlined a number of debates within anthropological work on sexuality upon which I have drawn and to which I seek to contribute. Anthropology has provided cross-cultural perspectives on the social construction of sexuality and has become a key site for 'the study of sexual and gender diversity in the contemporary world' (Boyce *e al*, 2017: 2). As a discipline centred on the study of cultural specificity, anthropological work on sexuality has stressed the importance of rejecting eurocentric assumptions as to the meanings, practice, and politics of sexuality in disparate cultural contexts. This has garnered attention to relations and disjunctions between sexual desires, practices, and identities, as well as diverse and complex relations between gender and sexuality. An ontological anthropological approach goes further by calling into question the status and utility of 'sexuality' itself as a universally applicable analytical category. While I would not go as far as to call

this thesis an exercise in 'ontological anthropology', the impact of such work is evident in my desire to remain open to, and to explore, concepts as they are used by participants and to think deeply, analytically, and ethically, if not quite 'ontologically', about the problems and politics of translation. These issues are discussed further in the Methodology.

The History of '*Tongxinglian*/Homosexuality'

The previous two sections have both emphasised that sexual desires, practices, and identities should be understood as historically and socio-culturally specific. An overview of the regional context in Hainan has already been given in the Introduction, where attention was also paid to the emergence of meeting places (*judian*), *gay* bars, and AIDS prevention networks in the region's urban centres. This section and the following one provide further contextual information by way of reviewing literatures that have explored the emergence of discourses of 'homosexuality' (*tongxinglian*) and 'homosexual', 'gay', and 'tongzhi' identities in China. I will also critically engage with these literatures, exploring debates amongst scholars and highlighting the strengths and limitations of approaches that have been taken to understanding 'homosexual', 'gay', and 'tongzhi' identities in China. I begin with a historical review of the emergence of official discourses of 'homosexuality' and trace the trajectory of these discourses through changing socio-political contexts. While scholars often recount the 'history of homosexuality' in China as a clearly periodised story characterised by definitive shifts in meaning, the below review offers a more complex and nuanced account that pre-empts the multiple meanings men in this research could be seen to invest in notions of 'being homosexual'.

The Republican Era

The general consensus amongst Chinese sexualities scholars is that the concept of 'homosexuality', or '*tongxinglian*' (literally: 'same sex love'), emerged in China amidst the modernisation campaigns of the Republican era (1912-1949) (Chiang,

2010; Chou, 2000, 2008; Kong, 2016; Samshasha, 1984; Wu, 2003; Zheng, 2015). This is seen to have occurred through the translation into Mandarin Chinese, usually via Japanese (Sang, 1999), of certain foundational texts of Western psycho-medical sexology (including those of Richard von Kraft-Ebbing, Sigmund Freud, and Havelock Ellis). In his analysis of pre-1912 representations of intimacy between men, Bret Hinsch (1990: 7) notes that 'Chinese terminology … did not emphasise an innate sexual essence, but concentrated rather on actions, tendencies, and preferences … instead of saying what someone "is", Chinese authors would usually say whom he "resembles" or what he "does" or "enjoys"'. Hinsch (ibid: 169) contends that with the arrival of a psycho-medical discourse of 'homosexuality' in Republican China, these 'fluid conceptions of sexuality of old, which assumed that an individual was capable of enjoying a range of acts, have been replaced with the ironclad Western dichotomy of heterosexual/homosexual'. This is perhaps an over-simplification; the extent to which this 'dichotomy' was ever 'ironclad', in either its 'Western' or 'Chinese' iterations, is debatable (Weeks, 2010: 6). Moreover, other scholars have critiqued the notion that the Republican-era discourse of '*tongxinglian*' represented a wholesale adoption of the Western concept of 'homosexuality' as a 'term that defines a small group of pathological individuals according to a concrete sexual essence' (Hinsch, 1990: 169).

In her meticulous analysis of the translation practices of Republican-era Chinese sexologists, Tze-lan Deborah Sang (1999) suggests that the literal meaning of the term '*tongxinglian*' – 'same sex love' – marks a semantic break with the Western notion of 'homosexuality'. Sang agrees with Hinsch that the emergence of '*tongxinglian*' denotes the formalisation and institutionalisation of knowledge concerning same-sex intimacies in China. However, she suggests that '*tongxinglian*/same-sex love' did not imply an essential, biological property of individuals, but rather 'a modality of love or an intersubjective rapport' (Sang, 1999: 292-293). As such, 'homosexuality*/tongxinglian*', as it emerged in Republican China, bore the markings of both a 'Western' sexological imagination, with its emphasis on

fixed sexual typologies, and what Sang (ibid.: 292) calls 'traditional Chinese understandings of the self, in which the self is seldom seen as an autonomous, independent entity, but often as a site where a set of relations converge' (also Guo, 2016).

Further complicating these debates, Frank Dikötter (1995) suggests that '*tongxinglian*' emerged in Republican China at the intersection of a 'Western' discourse of 'homosexuality' and the condemnation of 'sodomy' (*jijian*) in China, alongside prostitution and pederasty, as 'forms of non-reproductive sex which needed to be eliminated for the sake of the family and the nation' (ibid.:137). For Dikötter, this condemnation preceded Chinese engagement with 'Western' sexology and was rooted in the nation-building ideologies of the late-Qing (1740-1911) and in the Confucian emphasis on patrilineal continuity.[34] As such, rather than introducing a radically different notion of 'the homosexual' as an individualised, psycho-medical identity, 'medical science was selectively appropriated by modernizing elites in Republican China to consolidate the widespread distinction between procreative and nonprocreative sexual acts' (Dikötter, 1995: 139). 'Homosexuality/*tongxinglian*', in this sense, referenced illicit, non-reproductive sex acts, named their perpetrators, and figured both as a threat to social and moral order (also Kang, 2009). These debates amongst historians suggest that as discourses of sexual categorisation emerged in China through practices of cultural borrowing and translation, the meanings of emergent categories remained mobile and contested. 'Homosexuality' could connote a particular 'type' of sexual person, a form of intersubjective relation, a deviant, non-reproductive sexual practice, and a threat to social and moral order.[35]

Scholars offer conflicting accounts of the extent to which the emergent discourse of

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[34] This period also saw the first legal regulations of same-sex sexual practices in the form of laws against 'rape between men', introduced in 1740 and revised in 1818 and 1852. This jurisdiction was often used arbitrarily to punish extra-marital sex between men (Dikötter, 1995: 138). This also marks the first instance of an historical association between male-male anal sex and rape. The Chinese terms for 'sodomy', *jijian,* used from the Qing through to the early post-socialist period (discussed later), literally means 'lewdness of the chicken'; the term 'lewdness' (*jian*) also forms part of the term 'rape/*qiangjian*', literally meaning 'forcible lewdness'.

[35] A comparable 'history of heterosexuality' in China remains to be documented. Sang (1999) notes that the term *xing*, used in both 'homosexuality/*tongxinglian*' and 'heterosexuality/*yixinglian*', began to connote 'sex' during the early Republican period (278), though she does not go on to discuss the historical emergence of 'heterosexuality'. For a 'history of heterosexuality' in the U.S. see Katz (1995).

'*tongxinglian*' referred to sexual intimacies both between men and between women. Hinsch (1990) comments that 'instead of a 'homosexual tradition,' it might be more accurate to speak of the 'male homosexual tradition' and suggests that both before and during the Republican Period, intimacies between women we neither celebrated nor condemned. Dikötter (1995: 141) seconds this, claiming that 'female homosexuality was rarely discussed in Republican China, a discursive silence which can probably be ascribed to the overwhelming concern with regulating male extramarital sexuality'. In contrast, Sang (1999) records the ways in which '*tongxinglian*' was used by Chinese male sexologists to describe sexual intimacies between both men and women. However, she notes that discussion of the latter tended to focus on strategies for prevention, suggesting that 'although European sexology on homosexuality instills a new awareness of women's homosexuality as a counterpart to men's, the new awareness turns immediately to regulate female desire but not male desire' (ibid.: 284; also 2003).

The Maoist Years

The ambiguous status of 'homosexuality' and 'the homosexual', as a category of personhood, practice, and/or relationality, continued into, and was reworked throughout, the Maoist years (1949-1978) following the Communist revolution and establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. A number of scholars have viewed the Maoist years as a puritanical 'dark age' of 'sexual repression' (Ruan, 1991: 107; Ruan and Bullough, 1989). Others scholars, pursuing Foucauldian lines of enquiry, have explored the production of institutionalised sexual discourses amidst efforts to construct an 'ideal socialist society', one premised on scientific objectivism, moral virtue, and class consciousness (Evans, 1995; Honig, 2003; Jeffreys, 2006; Zhang, 2005).

Prior to the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), the Communist Party embraced medical sexology (*xingxue*) as an official state doctrine (Kong, 2016: 500). However, in doing so, sexology shifted from a scholarly concern to a facet of the overarching project of

socialist revolution. Throughout the Maoist years, largely through propaganda campaigns, though also through coercive measures, the state made intermittent attempts at regulating and reducing population growth (Greenhalgh and Winckler, 2005: 55-92). State discourses on sex therefore emphasised the reproductive function of complimentary 'male' and 'female' bodies and the need for this function to be regulated for the sake of national rejuvenation and the attainment of socialist utopia (ibid.; Hershatter, 1996). As Harriet Evans (1995: 370) notes, 'the fusion of sexuality to procreation also defined the boundaries between constructions of "normal" (*zhengchang*) and "abnormal" (*bu zhengchang*) sexuality … [and] confirmed heterosexuality as the only normal sexuality'. However, in contrast to Republican sexology's attempts to categorise and understand 'abnormal' sexualities, the focus of Maoist discourses on elaborating the relationship between revolution and reproduction, meant that 'representations of sexual identity that did not conform to this model were all but totally absent from the 1950s discourse' (ibid.).

While sexual and romantic relations between men and women were increasingly institutionalised by a nexus of biological, moral, and revolutionary discourses, discourses of 'homosexuality', carried forward from the Republican era, remained on the fringes of Maoist sexological-political imaginaries. 'Homosexuality' was variously associated with biological abnormality, mental illness, counter-revolutionary sentiment, and moral and social corruption, though was rarely the subject of explicit official discussion during the Maoist years (Wu, 2003). Rather than a discourse of 'homosexuality', explicit state regulation of male same-sex intimacies came in the form of the (re)criminalisation of 'sodomy' (*jijian zui*) in 1956. However, the extent to which this law applied to consensual or non-consensual sex between men was unclear (Li, 2006). More broadly, same-sex sexual practices were figured under a pervasive socialist-moral discourse of 'hooliganism' (*liumang*, lit.: 'drifter'), a rubric covering a broad array of perceived anti-social behaviours, including prostitution, unemployment, and homelessness (Chen, 1998). As Michael Dutton (1998: 62) puts it:

liumang is tied back to the idea of the outsider, the unsettled … To be without a place means exclusion from the norm and exclusion from an acceptable social position. … This wider 'economy of the outsider' points to a heterogeneous collection of bodies defined more by what they are not than anything else. What they are not is 'normal'.

In addition to fomenting social condemnation, 'hooliganism' operated as a pseudo-legal discourse and was used to arbitrarily subject those suspected of engaging in same-sex sexual activities to punishment, including varying durations of imprisonment, loss of employment, and public ridicule (Li, 2006). 'Hooligans' were also subject to psycho-political rehabilitation through class education and labour activities (Chou, 2000; Wu, 2003).

The Cultural Revolution began in 1966 as an attempt by Mao to reassert his legitimacy following the disastrous economic policies of the Great Leap Forward and the resultant Great Chinese Famine (Kraus, 2012).[36] During this period, the expression of desires for anything other than the attainment of a socialist utopia under Mao could be considered counter-revolutionary and could result in harsh punishment (Evans, 1995). This included discussion of 'normal', let alone 'abnormal', sexual desires and practices (Bao, 2018: 10). Even historians, such as Evans (1995: 366-365), whose stated aim is to critique the paradigm of 'sexual repression', have concluded that 'sex could not be mentioned in public[;] … the Cultural Revolution's discourse was one based on silence, even denial'. Of course, this does not mean that people were not having and discussing various kinds of sex in private.[37]

The Reform Era

The Cultural Revolution ended with Mao's death in 1976. Following two years of internal conflict within the CCP, Deng Xiaoping emerged as Party leader in 1978 and

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[36] The Great Leap Forward (1958-1962) was intended as a period of rapid industrialisation and increased agricultural production. The initiative in fact lead to economic decline and reduction in food supplies and is recognised as a contributing factor to the Great Chinese Famine (1959-1961) that killed 30-40 million people in rural areas (for full details see Dikötter, 2010)

[37] In her analysis of the literary genre of the 'Cultural Revolution Memoir' that emerged in the late-1990s, Emily Honig (2003: 144) contends that 'even in detailing horrific punishments inflicted on youth accused of inappropriate romantic relationships … the hundred-odd memoirs insert and implicitly insist on sexual preoccupations being at the center of experiences of the Cultural Revolution'. Honig (ibid.: 164-166) adds that while '[l]ittle has been written about homosexual relationships during the Cultural Revolution[,] … we must not assume that the sexual encounters of sent-down youth were necessarily or only heterosexual'.

announced that China would enter a period of 'reform and opening' (*gaige kaifang*). This would entail the PRC's integration into the global economy, the continued authoritarian rule of the CCP, and a cultural policy of cautious appropriation of 'foreign knowledge' coupled with nationalist aspirations for the construction of a 'modern' and powerful China (Wang H. , 2004). While some scholars have signalled 1978 as a 'watershed' year in relation to the proliferation of sexual discourses in post-Mao China (Ho, 2010; Wan, 2001), the complex and awkward balance of internationalism, nationalism, and state authoritarianism that characterised processes of 'reform and opening' suggests more nuanced dynamics of continuity and change.

With the advance of science and technology established as a cornerstone of Deng's 'Four Modernisations' (*si ge xiandaihua*), alongside advancements in agriculture, industry, and defence, the late 1970s and early 1980s saw the return of sexology as an official state doctrine and as a popular discourse (Kong, 2016). Sexological knowledge was disseminated by publishing houses and vendors that proliferated with the deregulation of private enterprise and was consumed by a public eager for sexual knowledge following the ten-year silence of the Cultural Revolution (Evans, 2008). The 'homosexual' returned as an object of scientific inquiry yet remained constructed as an aberration of the 'natural' sexual desire. Research of the 1980s concerned the aetiology of 'homosexuality' and explanations ranged from psychological damage and hormonal imbalance (Kong, 2016: 503). As the discipline and practice of psychiatry sought to establish itself as an 'objective science', one disentangled from socialist ideology, the standard and authoritative *Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders* was published in 1978. This document categorised 'homosexuality' as a 'sexual disorder' (*xing zhang'ai*) (Wu, 2003).

In the same spirit of establishing 'objective' institutional protocols, the first Criminal Law was promulgated in 1979; this was intended as a shift from the Maoist 'rule of man' to a modernist 'rule of law' (Bakken, 2003). However, somewhat contradictory to this aim, the pseudo-legal and moral discourse of 'hooliganism' was enshrined in the new Criminal Law under Article 160. This outlined the criminal status of any

person who 'assembles a mob to stir up fights, cause trouble, humiliate women, or engage in other hooligan activities undermining public order' (National People's Congress, 1979). The Criminal Law made no explicit reference to 'homosexuality'; however, in an early sociological study of 'the lives of homosexuals in China', Li Yinhe (1998) records that many of her participants had been apprehended by police in public parks and toilets on charges of 'hooliganism' during the 1980s and early 1990s. At a time when public meeting places were one of the few avenues available to men seeking other men, the policing of these spaces, legitimised by Article 160, perpetuated associations between 'homosexuality' and criminality (ibid.; Li, 2006; Zhang, 1996), reinforcing the 'economy of the outsider' (Dutton, 1998: 62) as described earlier.

While pejorative understandings of 'homosexuality' acquired institutional legitimacy through the formalisation of both psycho-medical and legal codes, the reform-era emphasis on the separation of science, law, and subjective human judgment meant that the figuring of 'the homosexual' as mentally ill, on the one hand, and criminal, on the other, became contradictory (rather than collusory, as per the Maoist years). This contradiction enabled resistance to police harassment by strategically claiming status as mentally ill. As psychiatrist-turned-community-activist Zhang Beichuan (in Wu, 2003: 128) recalls, 'when the police arrest somebody for homosexual behaviour, I testify that it is a disease. Then they release him. Simple as that'. Similarly, Li (2006: 85) describes how, in the early 1980s, some men sought official diagnoses as suffering from 'same-sex love illness' (*tongxinglian bing*) in order to claim compensation for punishment to which they were subject during the Maoist years. This said, as Li (1998; 2006) has emphasised, a primary concern for men detained on charges of 'hooliganism' was not their detention itself, but the risk that the police would report their 'homosexuality' to both their employers and families. The former threatened the loss of employment; the latter risked social condemnation and the breakdown of familial ties. The threat of such exposure deterred detained men from seeking formal medical diagnoses, left them open to police blackmail, and even led

some to commit suicide (Li, 2006: 89-92) (fears of 'exposure' amongst men in this research, and perceived repercussions for family relationships, are explored in Chapters Five and Six, respectively).

Clearly, the transition from the Maoist period into an era of 'reform and opening' was not the catalyst for 'sexual revolution' that some scholars have imagined it to have been (see Jeffreys, 2006: 2-3 for critique). Rather, as civil institutions began to emerge under the orchestration of the state and mindful of the ultimate authority of the Party, 'reform and opening' during the 1980s largely entailed the institutionalisation of state-sanctioned discourses of 'homosexuality' as both a mental illness and form of social disorder (Kong, 2016; Li, 1998). There is evidence, however, that by the mid-1980s the diversification of academic disciplines (especially the re-emergence of the social sciences), transnational knowledge exchange, and the limited freedom of the privatised press had begun to foster alternative discourses. In 1985, under the pseudonym Hua Jinma, medical historian Ruan Fangfu published an article entitled 'Homosexuality: an Unsolved Puzzle' in the popular magazine *To Your Health*. In a later review of the article, Ruan and Tasi (1988: 190) recall:

> It pointed out that homosexuality exists in all nations, all social strata, and all historical periods in human history; … that in some countries in some historical periods homosexuals were severely punished and prosecuted even with the death penalty; … that this perhaps was an example of how majorities subjugated minorities in human societies; … homosexuals should not be prosecuted for failing to reproduce; that the number of homosexuals in a society was substantial and more than lay people expected; that homosexuals' problems should not be ignored and that their status should be a reasonable one in society; that homosexuals were no different from heterosexual people in intelligence, physical strength, creativity, etc.; and that two homosexuals can love each other and maintain a stable life and relationship as well as other couples …

Five months later, the article was reprinted in China's most widely read magazine of the time, *The Reader's Digest*. Ruan and Tsai (ibid.) regard the article as groundbreaking in its rejection of 'homosexuality' as either a mental or physiological illness. 'Homosexuality' was instead constructed as an essential, universal, transhistorical category, potentially rooted in biology, though subject to social

regulation; 'homosexuals' were seen as a 'minority' group subjugated by a 'heterosexual majority'; and it was asserted that 'homosexuality' could constitute the basis for 'a stable life and relationship'.

This radical break with dominant discourses of the time was reflected in 56 letters Ruan subsequently received from 'homosexual' readers. The letters contained statements such as:

> Hua's article on homosexuality provides me with a soothing sense of relief never before experienced in my life. It also gives me hope about my life and my future … gives us, a small number of homosexuals, a spiritual uplift. It gives me a second life and takes me to the spring of my life. (Ruan and Tsai, 1988: 191-192)

Recognising these letters as 'the first and only information of this kind on contemporary Chinese gay life ever obtained by any scholar' (ibid.: 190), Ruan subsequently published an analysis of their content under the title 'Male Homosexuality in Contemporary China' (ibid.). Ruan concluded that the letters evidenced demands 'that society should accept homosexuals' and desires for 'freedom to interact with other homosexuals' and for 'protection of homosexual rights' (ibid.: 194-195). At the same time, however, 'half of these homosexuals wished to be converted to heterosexuality to lessen their dilemma' (ibid.: 196). These letters suggest the extent to which, alongside institutionalised constructions of 'homosexuals' as criminal and mentally ill, by 1985, a broader range of discourses and self-understandings, including concepts of 'rights', 'love', and 'acceptance' was already in circulation amongst men who understood themselves as 'homosexual'.

This section has offered an overview of the historical literature that has recounted the emergence and trajectory of discourses of 'homosexuality' in China. My aim in doing so has been twofold. Firstly, this overview serves to situate the everyday lives and self-understandings of men in this research within a broad historical context. Secondly, paying due attention to debates within the literature, it is apparent that the history of 'homosexuality' in China is more complex than is suggested by an established narrative that speaks of a trajectory from sexual practices, to pathologies, to

repression, and finally to social identities. Each transition of historical period, from dynastic, to Republican, to Maoist, to reform, and associated shifts in sexual discourses, can be seen to entail processes of both change and continuity. As such, the history of 'homosexuality' in China is not one of radical ruptures, but one of increasingly multiple, layered, and conflictual meanings. Understandings of 'homosexuality' as an intersubjective relation, a form of non-reproductive sex, a gendered sexual desire, a mental illness, a form of social and moral disorder, and a social identity may have been respectively dominant with certain historical periods, yet they cannot be assigned to these periods alone. As will be seen across the data chapters, to varying degrees, each of these conceptualisations of 'homosexuality' remains relevant to the everyday lives and self-understandings of men in the research.

Contemporary *Gay*, *Tongzhi*, and *Homosexual* Identities

The previous section has suggested that it may not be helpful to read a radical break in discourses of 'homosexuality' as occurring along with the transition from the Cultural Revolution, and the Mao era more broadly, to 'reform and opening' in the late 70s and early 80s. There have, however, been significant changes both in the direction of academic research on, and legal and medical definitions of, 'homosexuality' over the past 30 years. In 1997, as part of the further formalisation of the PRC's legal system and the deletion of ambiguous socialist rhetoric, references to 'hooliganism' were removed from the Criminal Law (Guo, 2007). This, at least formally, removed the legal basis upon which men seeking sex with men in public spaces could be arrested; this has been considered the *de facto* 'decriminalisation of homosexuality' in the PRC (ibid.; Kong, 2016). In 2001, as the PRC strove to align itself with a range of international standards in preparation for joining the World Trade Organisation, official psychiatric discourses were brought in line with those proffered by the World Health Organisation (Wang, Zhang, and Wang, 2007). 'Homosexuality/*tongxinglian*' was declassified as an 'abnormal sexual disorder' in the *Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders* (Zhang and Kauffman, 2005). However, advice remains for the

diagnosis of 'ego-dystonic homosexuality' (*ziwo buhexie tongxinglian*) (CMD-3, 2001: 69) and has served as the premise for the continued use of 'conversion therapies' (Human Rights Watch, 2017).[38]

In 2003, in response to an increasingly evident AIDS epidemic, the state officially recognised 'the existence of male homosexuals' (Ho et al., 2018: 496). AIDS prevention discourses have since become a key site at which 'men who have sex with men' have been constituted as a recognisable 'group' or 'community' (*qunti*) (Bao, 2018: 47) and state funding has been made available to AIDS prevention organisations whose work has contributed to the formation of local social networks (Jones, 2007). At the same time, it has been noted that AIDS prevention discourses also further the medicalisation of sex between men as 'high risk behaviour' and have provided a renewed basis for police harassment of men gathering in public spaces (Wong, 2015).

More broadly, there have been significant, even radical, shifts in public sexual discourses and the institutions through which they are promulgated and regulated. Many scholars have described the proliferation of diverse sexual discourses in the era of 'reform and opening'. This has been seen as linked to the PRC's transition from a centrally planned economy to one based on market principles and related shifts in the CCP's mode of governance (Anagost, 1997; Farquar, 2002; Jeffreys, 2006; Rofel, 2007; Wasserstrom and Brownell, 2002). This transformation of the PRC's economic structure has been intertwined with changes in state ideology and discourse as economic prosperity has replaced the pursuit of 'socialist utopia' as the CCP's stated goal and as a cornerstone upon which the legitimacy of the one-party system is premised (Zhang and Ong, 2008). This legitimacy has been bolstered by the framing of economic development in nationalist rhetoric concerning China's rise as a global economic and political power (Wang, 2004). It has been suggested that the state's

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[38] The current edition of the *Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders* defines 'homosexuality' as a 'sexual disorder' (*xingzhang'ai*), though notes that 'sexual disorders' are 'not necessarily abnormal'. 'Ego-dystonic homosexuality' is defined as a disorder in which a person's 'homosexuality' is 'unwanted and causes stress and depression' (CMD-3, 2001: 69, my translation).　　'

promotion of economic development has garnered a public culture increasingly oriented by economic competitivism and individualism (Yan, 2010). This has led some scholars to define the nature of contemporary governance in the PRC as 'postsocialist' and 'neoliberal' (Zhang, 2008).

Continued state authoritarianism and market manipulation has led some to question such assertions of 'neoliberalism' (Kipnis, 2007; Nonini, 2008). However, there has been a clear retraction of the state's direct influence over the social and intimate lives of individuals (Ho et al., 2018). This has been most clear in the dissolution of the *danwei* system of state-allocated employment and in the relaxation of the *hukou* system of household registration (Fan, 2008).[39] Both of these changes have fostered greater geographic mobility and have led to rapid urbanisation (ibid.). Amidst this rapid urbanisation, and within a deregulated business environment, entertainment venues have proliferated and the service sector has grown exponentially (Bassi, 2012; Farrer, 2011; Feng, 2005). This has created new spaces for social and sexual interactions (Farrer, 2002) and has led to growth in the commercial sex industry (Zheng, 2009). Such spaces not only exist as physical sites but have also taken the form of websites, chatrooms, and smartphone mobile dating apps following the arrival of the internet in the PRC in the late 1990s and the subsequent rapid development of information technologies. This has opened up new possibilities for social connectivity, information sharing, and the pursuit of romantic and sexual relationships (Liu, 2016). It has also allowed for the emergence of officially banned, though readily accessible, pornography (Jacobs, 2012). Within this context of rapid social, economic, and political change, as Harriet Evans (2008: 363) concludes:

> sexuality and its renderings in images of the sexed body may … be seen as a field of practice and meaning in which the withdrawal of explicit ideological controls from the visual and social spaces of everyday life is spawning the formation of an exploratory and potentially conflictive plurality.

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[39] The *hukou* system of household registration has only been partially relaxed. This means that individuals are able to move and work away from the location in which their 'households' are registered. However, migrants do not have access to state schools or reduced-cost health care (see Fan, 2008, for more details)

This said, the efficacy with which the 'One-Child Policy' was enforced after 1979, and continued population regulation, marked by the 2015 transition to a 'Two-Child Policy', highlight the influence the state retains over individuals' reproductive and intimate lives (Greenhalgh and Winckler, 2005; Zheng and Hesketh, 2016). [40] Moreover, despite claims that the PRC has experienced a 'sexual revolution' over the past 30 years (Pan, 2006b), marriage remains near-universal; a 2010 census showed marriage rates amongst men and women aged over 34 at 93.6% and 98.2% respectively (cited in Ho et al., 2018: 494). There have also been significant increases in state censorship of the media and the regulation of social, religious, and activist organisations and activities since current Party Chairman Xi Jinping came to power in 2012 (Ringen, 2016; Smith Finley, 2018). In 2015, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television introduced legislation banning the depiction of 'abnormal sexual relations and practices, including incest, homosexuality, sexual perversion, sexual assault, sexual torture, and sexual violence' (SARFT, 2015: 5, my translation). Legislation of the same wording was introduced in relation to online media in 2016 by the China Netcasting Service Association (CNSA, 2016). However, this ban has been widely and vehemently critiqued on Chinese social media and has been enforced in a rather piecemeal fashion, with different websites and service providers upholding the ban to varying degrees (Kuo, 2018).

It is within the context of 'postsocialism' and embrace of more 'neoliberal' modes of governance in the PRC that many scholars have explored the emergence of 'gay' and 'tongzhi' identities (Bao, 2012, 2018; Ho, 2010; Kong, 2011, 2012b; Rofel, 1999b, 2007; Zheng, 2015).

Modern, Cosmopolitan, and Transnational Identities

Lisa Rofel's (1999b; 2007) theorisation of 'desiring China' has been particularly

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[40] At the same time, the 'One-Child Policy' has been recognised as 'a contributing factor to the liberalization of China's sexual mores' (Ho et al., 2018: 490), having disrupted the Confucian emphasis on large families. The One-Child policy is also recognised as having significantly increased the social status of daughters, disrupting the 'traditional' privilege of sons (Fong, 2004).

influential in articulating relationships between macro-scale economic and state-ideological shifts in the PRC and intimate lives and gender and sexual identities. Rofel's metaphor of 'desiring China' refers to what she sees as a form of postsocialist cultural citizenship within which claims to national belonging and cosmopolitan modernity are made through the performance of 'sexual, material and affective self-interest' (Rofel, 2007: 13). For Rofel (ibid.: 95), '[c]ultural citizenship, perhaps more so than legal subjectivity or theories of psychological personality, establishes proper and improper sex in postsocialist China'. In relation to this novel form of postsocialist, neoliberal cultural citizenship, Rofel (ibid.: 86) explores the ways in which, '[i]n the mid-1990s, Chinese metropolises witnessed a veritable explosion of people who call themselves gay'. This adoption of the term 'gay' is seen as a means by which individuals began distancing themselves from the medicalised discourse of 'homosexuality/*tongxinglian*' and constructing identities as modern, cosmopolitan citizens of 'desiring China' (ibid.: 102-103). At the same time, Rofel (ibid.: 103) notes that the terms 'gay', 'homosexual', and 'tongzhi' are often used interchangeably, though she suggests that such interchangeable usage 'speaks of fraught moments of identification and division that occur diasporically and … transnationally, across novel forms of sameness and difference produced out of neo-orientalisms in rhetorics of globalisation'.

Rofel's (1999b; 2007) insights have been developed in subsequent research on 'gay' and 'tongzhi' identities and concepts of citizenship, modernity, globalisation, and cosmopolitanism have become a mainstay within the literature. Travis Kong (2012b: 291), for example, describes 'tongzhi' identities characterised by:

> individuality, difference, sophistication, liberation, and modernity. This new image of tongzhi is a derivative of 'global queer identity': Urban, middle-class, knowledgeable, civilised, cosmopolitan, and consumerist. This yearning for worldly cosmopolitanism is consistent with the government's embrace of neoliberalism.

Similarly, Loretta Ho (2010: 83) has explored forms of 'self-consciously modern Chinese same-sex identity'. Such 'modern' identities have been seen as articulated in

relation to 'un-modern Others'. Ho (ibid.) suggests that 'same-sex articulations in urban China enunciate diverse forms of "modern" and "proper" representations of same-sex identity, something that is based on a complex social hierarchy'. Such forms of social hierarchy have been seen as constructed and maintained through a discourse of 'quality' (*suzhi*).[41] It has been suggested that the concept of 'quality' became central to the articulation of contemporary 'gay' and 'tongzhi' identities in the late 1990s. The term was appropriated from AIDS prevention materials in which the concept of 'quality' was used, according to Rodney Jones (2007: 94), to 'represent "gays" as educated, urbanised and well-dressed' and to encourage the pursuit of 'a healthy lifestyle with a single, stable partner whom they can trust'. The appropriation of discourses of 'quality' has been recognised as a major strategy through which 'gay' men represent themselves as 'cultural citizen[s] capable of cultivating "quality" through leading a "healthy lifestyle" … regulating [their] own behaviour, … [and] serving society more positively" (ibid.: 95). At the same time, accusations of 'low quality' have been seen as serving to 'Other' rural migrant men and those who engage in sex work (Ho, 2010; Kong, 2012b; Rofel, 1999b; Zheng, 2015).

These dynamics have not only been theorised in relation to concepts of neoliberalism and modernity but also in relation to the PRC's integration into global flows of capital and cultures over the past 30 years. As such, contemporary 'gay' and 'tongzhi' identities have been conceived as resolutely transnational. Rofel (2007:89-94) distinguishes between the notion of 'global gay identity', as proposed by Dennis Altman (1997), and her own understanding of Chinese 'gay' identities as *transnational*. The former is seen as a thesis of 'homogenisation' that charts 'the emergence of a western-style politicised homosexuality in Asia' (Altman, 1997: 417), the latter speaks of proliferating diversity amidst ever-increasing global interconnections and processes of hybridisation. As such, Rofel (2007: 89) suggests

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[41] The concept of '*suzhi*' is more complex than a translation as 'quality' suggests. The term first appeared in the early 1980s in state propaganda campaigns in surrounding the 'One-Child Policy'. Through these campaigns, the state sought to bring about a shift in the reproductive culture of the nation, from a focus on the number of children, to a focus on the 'quality' of a single child (see Anagost, 2004; Greenhalgh & Winckler, 2005; Kipnis, 2007 for more details).

that:

> Chinese gay men index neither another exemplar of global gay identity nor merely local particularity. Transcultural processes of gay identification shape the contours of cultural citizenship in China for gay men; conversely, desires for cultural belonging shape the way in which gay men in China construct the meaning of transcultural practises of sex, desire, and sexual identities.

This nuanced understanding of the transnational formation of contemporary 'gay' identities in the PRC explicitly rejects binary framings of globalisation as a matter of conflict along lines of 'East vs. West', 'local vs. global', and 'tradition vs. modernity'. Instead, the very concepts of 'East', 'West', 'the local', 'the global', 'tradition', and 'modernity' are seen as contingent discursive constructs figured within unequal transnational encounters.

This transnational paradigm is at the heart of much recent anthropological work on sexualities outside of Anglophone contexts (Boellstorff, 2005; Grewal and Kaplan, 2001; Martin, 2003; Phillips, Watt, and Shuttleton, 2000; Puar, Rushbrook, and Schein, 2003).[42] Indeed, transnationalism has been taken up within anthropological work on sexuality to such an extent that Marc Epprecht (2012:186, emphasis in original) asks, '[is] it possible that there [are] people out there who believe that research on the topic could *not* be transnational?' Likewise, transnationalism has become a foundational premise within work on 'gay' and 'tongzhi' identities in the PRC. In a review of the literature, Kong (2016: 505) points to a central question around which much research has been framed: 'how to criticize the universalism of Western gay identities … and understand Chinese queer/tongzhi identities as a social process of discrepant transcultural practices'. The transnational paradigm is a vital way of thinking beyond the binary of 'global vs. local'. However, it may also be problematic to assume that sexual identities are necessarily constructed and experienced as transnational (Sang, 2003: 11). It is perhaps also necessary to question the dominance of the concept of transnationalism and the ways in which this may

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[42] The centrality of the transnational paradigm within the anthropology of sexuality is reflective of a wider shift within the discipline, James Clifford (1997: 17-47) has described this as a shift in concerns from 'root to routes'.

obscure practices, performances, and lived experiences that have little to do with 'transcultural processes of gay identification' (Rofel, 2007: 89).

Family and Filial Piety

To question the transnational as a necessary frame of analysis is certainly not to argue for a notion of 'essential Chinese sexual identities'. Such arguments have, however, been made by others. Ho (2010), Kong (2011), and Rofel (2007) each acknowledge interchangeable usage of the terms 'gay', 'tongzhi', and 'homosexual'. In contrast, Chou Wah-Shan (2000; 2008) posits a radical difference between 'gay' and 'tongzhi' identities. In his account of 'the cultural politics of *tongzhi*', Chou (2008: 27) describes and advocates an 'indigenous *tongzhi* politics that need not reproduce Anglo-American experiences and strategies of lesbigay liberation'.[43] In doing so, Chou is motivated by the belief that 'coming out' is a 'Western' concept and practice that is incompatible with 'a society where filial piety is given the utmost importance in defining a person [and where] hurting one's parents can be the most terrible thing for a *tongzhi* to experience' (ibid.: 34).[44] Instead, Chou suggest that 'tongzhi' engage in practices of 'coming home': maintaining same-sex relationships while saving the 'face' of their parents by never explicitly articulating such relationships as sexual-intimate and awaiting parents' tacit acceptance (ibid.: 36). This account of *tongzhi* practices has been widely criticised as premised on essentialising notions of 'the Chinese family' and 'Chinese tradition', as well as for advocating a 'politics of reticence' (Liu and Ding, 2006: 32-33; also Kam, 2013; Wong, 2007). As Fran Martin (2003: 33) remarks, 'the cultural essentialism that characterises Chou's argument on "silent tolerance" in fact shores up the local homophobic system … with sometimes literally fatal results'.

Chou's dichotomous and essentialising notions of 'Chinese *tongzhi*' and 'Western lesbigay' identities, practices, and politics may be highly problematic, yet his

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[43] Chou (2008:27) uses the term 'lesbigay' to refer to 'lesbians, bisexuals, and gay people in the West'
[44] Chou (2000; 2008) does not differentiate between the PRC, Hong Kong, and Taiwan in his account of '*tongzhi* politics'; he includes these sites within the category of 'Chinese culture'.

emphasis on the ways in which parent-child relationships and the Confucian concept of filial piety (*xiaoshun*) shape contemporary sexual identities and life-courses in the PRC is shared by many scholars. Filial piety, characterised by respect for one's parents and the imperative to 'carry on the family line' (*chuanzong jiedai*) (Wang, 2011), has been seen to shape non-heterosexual identities in the PRC, though in potentially different ways for men and women (see Rofel, 1999b: 84, discussed in more detail in Chapter Six). In her research with 'queer women in urban China', Elisabeth Engebretsen (2014: 19) notes that:

> The filial principal remains a central regulatory trope and shapes the field of gendered agency in important ways. This is especially clear when considering the continued primacy put on marriage and the pressures that young women and men, regardless of sexuality, continue to face in this regard. In my research this quickly emerged as the most central structuring factor in lala women's lives and one that profoundly shaped life strategies on social and intimate levels, regardless of generational cohort.[45]

These issues highlight the extent to which marriage remains a 'near universal imperative' (Engebretsen, 2017: 163) in the contemporary PRC. As Zheng Tiantian (2015: 43) comments, '[b]owing to pressure to marry and produce progeny, more than 90 percent of same-sex attracted people in China are estimated to choose to marry opposite-sex partners and form heterosexual families with children'. Zheng (ibid.: 143-163) describes the ways in which older, married 'tongzhi' lead 'double lives' and suggests that many young 'tongzhi' aspire to live 'normal lives' in the future in which they no longer interact with other 'tongzhi', or in which such interactions are limited to sporadic sexual encounters.

In relation to pressures to marry and have children, scholars have emphasised the intertwining of Confucian cultural norms of filial piety and contemporary state welfare and population control policies (Engebretsen, 2014; 2017; Huang, 2017). The One-Child policy is seen as having increased the pressure on only-children to marry and reproduce as they have become 'the only hope' for continuing their 'family lines'

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[45] 'Lala' is one term used by women Engebretsen (2014) collectively refers to a 'queer women', other terms include 'les' and '*nütongzhi*' (female tongzhi), and 'homosexual'.

(Hildebrandt, 2018). Additionally, as Evans (2008: 173) has observed, 'the promotion of the Confucian model of filial duty has been prominent in recent years [and remain prominent today] to compensate for the government's focus on economic growth rather than welfare policy'. The retraction of state welfare in the era of 'reform and opening' has significantly increased parents' dependence on their children for care in later life (ibid.; Fong, 2004). Within this policy context, Timothy Hildebrandt (2018: 10) suggests that 'all Chinese, but especially LGB [lesbian, gay, bisexual] people, need to be especially concerned about how they will be cared for as they age'. At the intersections of Confucian cultural norms of filial piety and the institutionalisation of marriage and reproduction in social policy, it has been noted that for many *gay* men and *lala* women, marriage and reproduction appear inevitable necessities (Engebretsen, 2014, 2017; Zheng, 2015). Within this context, Anna Huang (2017: 229) has noted that *lala* communities in the PRC are characterised by 'a feeling of insecurity and precariousness'. As will be discussed in Chapter Six, the same could be said for the lives of many men in this research.

Researchers have also described ways in which imperatives of marriage and reproduction are resisted and negotiated. Speaking of *memba* identities in Hong Kong,[46] Kong (2011: 94-119) describes the Confucian dictate that sons must 'carry on the family line' as constituting a form of 'family biopolitics'. However, he goes on to explore the ways in which *memba* resist the imperatives of marriage and reproduction by constructing alternative support networks and 'families of choice' (ibid.). In the PRC, scholars have explored the creative practices through which *lala* women and *gay* men work together to accommodate their parents' demands that they marry by entering 'contract marriages' (*xinghun*, literally: 'nominal marriage') with one another (He, 2009; Kam, 2013; Choi and Luo, 2016). Some researchers have suggested that such marriages are a means of maintaining agency in relation to the continued necessity of marriage, and these arrangements have been described as 'queer kinship networks' that suggest emergent alliances between *gay* men and *lala* women (Wong,

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[46] Kong (2011) describes *memba* in Hong Kong, *tongzhi* in the PRC, and *golden boys* in London, UK, under the board rubric of 'Chinese male homosexualities'.

2015: 735). Other researchers are more ambivalent, seeing such marriages as working to 'reaffirm the dominance of the heteronormative family' (Engebretsen, 2017: 164). Moreover, it has been noted that in maintaining the pretence of normative marital roles the autonomy of *lala* women as 'wives' is more limited than that of *gay* men as 'husbands' (ibid.; Choi and Luo, 2016).

Beyond the Metropole?

Hildebrandt (2018: 4) notes that 'the family pressure on men and women in poorer provinces to get married, procreate, and take care of their parents is especially high' (also Guo, Chi, and Silverstein, 2015). In this respect, it is important to recognise that the vast majority of the above-discussed studies were based on fieldwork conducted in the PRC's three largest cities: Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou.[47] This focus on major urban centres can be seen as symptomatic of a general trend within research on (non-hetero)sexual identities. As Judith Halberstam (2005: 34) points out, 'most queer work on community, sexuality and gender roles has been based on and in urban populations, and exhibits an active disinterest in the productive potential of nonmetropolitan sexualities, genders and identities'.

Earlier, it was suggested that the pervasive emphasis, within recent studies, on the transnational nature of contemporary sexual identities may need to be problematised. Given that the majority of studies claiming to represent contemporary 'gay', 'homosexual', and 'tongzhi' identities in the PRC are based on research conducted in the mega-cities of the east coast, it is possible that the emphasis scholars have placed on notions of modernity and cosmopolitanism may in fact be specific to these unban contexts. It is therefore necessary to question the extent to which such studies can represent sexual identities as a national scale. Echoing themes pervasive in the current literature, Bao Hongwei (2018:41) has explored 'how gays and lesbians in Shanghai imagine cosmopolitanism in different ways'. However, Bao (ibid.: 37) situates these

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[47] One exception is Zheng (2015), whose fieldwork was conducted in Dalian, Liaoning Province, in the Northeast of the PRC. However, Zheng does not explore the regional context of her research.

observations in relation to Shanghai's status 'as the 'gay capital' of China' (ibid., also 2012). Recognising limited geographic diversity with the existing literature, Bao (2018.: 207) suggests that, '[m]ore ethnographic research needs to be conducted into the queer lives [*sic*] in second-tier or third-tier cities, small towns and even the countryside'.

In this respect, Wei Wei's work on '*tongzhi* space' in Chengdu (2007; 2012), a second-tier city in Sichuan Province, stands out within the literature. In common with many of the above-discussed works, Wei explores relationships between sexual identities and processes of social changes wrought by 'reform and opening'. However, he explores these dynamics within the context of Chengdu's changing urban landscape and the shifting spaces within which men seeking men find one another. Wei (2012) explores the disappearance of local *piaopiao*, or 'wandering men', identities in relation to shifts in the spaces used by men seeking men, from public parks, to teahouses, to gay bars, to information communication technologies. Wei's research emphasises the importance of recognising that contemporary sexual identities are constructed amidst broad processes of social change unfolding in complex and disparate ways across specific and diverse contexts that are at once local, regional, national, and transnational.

This section has explored the work of Chinese sexualities scholars who have theorised the construction of non-heterosexual identities in the era of 'reform and opening'. It has been noted that a key concern for many of these scholars has been the ways in which broad shifts in the economic structure of the PRC, state discourses and ideologies, and the nature of state governance have created space within the field of cultural citizenship for the articulation of modern and cosmopolitan *gay* and *tongzhi* identities. This has been seen as a rejection of earlier pathologising discourses of 'homosexuality'. At the same time, many scholars have emphasised that in spite of increasing individualism in the era of 'reform and opening', contemporary *gay* and *tongzhi* identities continue to be constructed and lived in relation to issues of family, marriage, and reproduction at the intersections of Confucian cultural norms and

contemporary state welfare policies. As Choi and Luo (2016: 263) have suggested, contemporary non-heterosexual lives are lived 'within the tension between the enduring importance of family and marriage and the growing tide of individualism'. At the same time, many of the conclusions drawn within the current literature should be recognised as based on fieldwork conducted in major urban centres. Beyond these sites, notions of cosmopolitan modernity may be of less relevance to everyday *gay*, *tongzhi*, and *homosexual* lives and identities, while pervasive pressures to marry and reproduce may be experienced with even greater intensity.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the key fields of literature upon which this thesis draws, and to which this thesis seeks to contribute, in exploring self-understandings and everyday lives of men in Hainan who referred to themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene'. These fields are: 1) social constructionist approaches to sexuality, namely symbolic interactionism and queer theory; 2) the anthropology of sexualities, including approaches critical of the concept 'sexuality' itself; and 3) Chinese sexualities studies, especially work on contemporary *gay, tongzhi*, and *homosexual* identities. In reviewing these literatures, this chapter has given an overview of both the conceptual and empirical (historical, social, political) contexts within which this thesis is situated. At the same time, however, I have endeavoured to highlight the ways in which there can be no clear boundary between the 'conceptual' and 'empirical'. Rather, conceptual frameworks are developed in relation to the demands of shifting socio-political contexts, while the perception of 'context' is also inevitably a matter of conceptual framing (Parker and Aggleton, 2012). In this sense, it should be noted that while the above literatures have been reviewed separately, they can be seen as having been in dialogue with one another over the course of this research.

In relation to the literature on non-heterosexual identities in the PRC, it was suggested that the dominance of transnationalism as an analytical framework within much of the

current literature, and a focus on macro-scale narratives of social change have meant that less attention has been paid to everyday interactional contexts, concepts, and practices within which sexual meanings and self-understandings are constructed, embodied, and negotiated. As such, there is a need for open-ended and exploratory research into the everyday lives of non-heterosexual people in the PRC, especially outside of major urban centres. A symbolic interactionist approach to sexuality, one that focuses on the situated production of meaning in interaction, provides a conceptual framework through which such open-ended and exploratory research can be conducted. As such, I draw on these insights in this thesis; however, I do not adopt a formal theoretical approach such as Gagnon and Simon's notion of 'sexual scripting' (1973). A formal framework is resisted in light of my anthropological leanings and desire to privilege concepts used by men in this research as they narrated understandings of themselves. At the same time, I find value in certain aspects of queer theory that can be used to push analysis beyond a humanist focus on narrative and the construction of meaning in order to address questions of the materialisation of bodies oriented in space and time. Here, insights gained from existing work on non-heterosexual identities in the PRC are fed back into the analysis in exploring such processes of materialisation in relation to specific dynamics of the Confucian family and contemporary PRC state policy. This thesis, therefore, can be seen as the product of a dynamic relationship between the various literatures reviewed in this chapter. These are placed in dialogue with the voices of men in this research.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

The previous chapter emphasised the need for exploratory, open-ended research to be conducted into the lives of non-heterosexual people in the PRC, especially in sites beyond the major urban centres in which the vast majority of existing research has been conducted. It was suggested that a symbolic interactionist understanding of sexuality, 'fleshed out' by queer-phenomenological work on matter, embodiment, space, and time, and mediated by an anthropological scepticism of the concept 'sexuality' itself, may provide a productively mobile conceptual framework within which such exploratory research can be conducted. This chapter proposes that ethnography, including ethnographic interviewing, offers a corresponding methodological approach that is attentive to situated meanings and interactions, is capable of locating such meanings in wider contexts of everyday life, and remains productively uncertain as to the object of its enquiry.

I understand this project as 'ethnographic' based on the nature of my fieldwork in Hainan and the ways in which the themes addressed in the following chapters represent issues that emerged as key concerns over the course of fieldwork in dialogue with participants. To some extent, my presentation and analysis of these themes is the product of my own conceptual orientations. However, none of the concepts and contexts analysed in this thesis – 'the scene', the role of information technologies, narratives of the future – were anticipated during the planning of the research or the early stages of fieldwork. Rather, these issues emerged as key concerns through my experiences of living 'in the scene' for 18 months and through conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with men in Hainan who understood themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene'. This chapter offers an account of the processes and interactions through which I generated the data and arrived at the themes analysed in this thesis.

I begin by discussing the relationship between ethnography and interviewing, within this research, from a conceptual perspective. I will highlight the value of a broadly ethnographic methodology in relation to the issues discussed in the previous chapter and in relation to the central aim of this thesis, which is to develop a nuanced understanding of the socio-culturally and materially situated self-understandings of men in this research. Following this, I will offer a more detailed, situated, and embodied account of the actual events, interactions, and processes of learning that together constituted my fieldwork in Hainan and gave rise to the data analysed in this thesis. This section will also address ethical issues encountered during the fieldwork and how these were negotiated. Finally, I will discuss how the data has been analysed. Here, particular attention will be paid to translation as an analytical practice.

Ethnography and Ethnographic Interviewing

Ethnography is both a method and a methodology, where 'method' refers to a specific technique, practice, or form of interaction used to generate and record data, while 'methodology' refers to the conceptual and practical relationship between theory, data, and analysis (Brewer, 1994: 231). As a method, ethnography has often been understood as a synonym for 'participant observation' (Gobo and Marciniak, 2016), a method entailing extended periods of participation in the everyday activities and social interactions of research participants and the recording of these experiences through field notes (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 2001). However, the range of methods that can be engaged in ethnographic research is much broader and may include 'a variety of types of interview…, quantitative data …, conversations arranged with naturally occurring groups, historical and contemporary documents…, everyday practices… , videos, and series of photos' (Lüders 2004: 227).

This said, a 'mixed methods' approach does not necessarily make a project ethnographic. In a broader, yet equally more specific, definition of ethnography, Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 2) state that 'the ethnographer participates … in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening

to what is said, asking questions; in fact collecting whatever data is available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned'. In this definition, the shift from ethnography as method to ethnography as methodology is evident. Here, ethnography implies a form of research that is embedded in everyday life, one in which the very nature of a research project, the issues to be analysed, the methods through which data is generated, and the conceptual tools used in analysis are negotiated in dialogue with the researcher's ongoing interactions with participants and integration into the everyday social worlds, networks, and scenes that the researcher seeks to explore (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 2001). Ethnography, in this sense, is a mode of research that remains productively open to all that is unknown at the outset of a research project and critical of what is assumed to be known. The use of varied methods of data collection corresponds with this wider methodological openness to a complex, multi-faceted object of enquiry that is necessarily ambiguous at the outset of a research project and can only emerge through a process of ethnographic embedding and learning. The 'what, when, where, and how' of ethnographic research emerge as part of a research process that 'begins with the apparently trivial question "What the hell is going on here?"' (Lüders, 2004: 225; in-citation from Geertz, 1973). As Charmaz and Mitchell (2001: 160) put it, ethnography 'connotes a frame of mind – an intent to be open to everything unknown; a suspension of disbelief'.

In this sense, ethnography is an endeavour to produce contextually specific forms of knowledge that emerge through the researcher's embedding within, and attempt to understand, culturally, socially, and materially specific situations (Gobo and Marciniak, 2016; Marvasti, 2004). However, this is not to say that ethnographic researchers are expected to enter the field with no prior conception of what their research will entail (Kools et al., 1996). An initial set of assumptions and questions, and a reading of potentially relevant conceptual and contextual literatures will orient researchers towards the field in a particular way, setting the initial boundaries of what constitutes 'the field' as such, identifying who potential 'participants' may be, and where 'they' may be found (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997a). However, in ethnographic

research, these assumptions are acknowledged as contingent and temporary; they are readily open to reformulation and rejection (Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001; Goulding, 2005). Through ethnographic research, the researcher attempts to go beyond initial assumptions that set the terms of the issues under enquiry to engage and explore realities as they are constructed, experienced, and contested by participants (Barnes, 1996; Schutz, 1967; Spradley, 1979). This also involves reflection on how 'participants' become constituted as such by both conceptual framings and the practicalities of access and recruitment (Hammersly and Atkinson, 1983).

Understood as a methodological commitment to exploring the participants' lives in relation to social, cultural, material, and linguistic contexts within which they are lived, ethnography has particular valence in relation to the conceptual issues discussed in the previous chapter. There is a widely recognised affinity between ethnography and the symbolic interactionist premise that social realities are multiple, contingent, and constructed (Denzin, 1997; Rock, 2001; Prus, 1996). Ethnography has been seen as a means of engaging with contextually specific meanings and of situating meanings within the social-interactional contexts of their production (Rock, 2001). It has been suggested that ethnography is particularly suited to constructionist research on sexuality because this requires 'sensitivity to the complicated and multi-layered lived experiences and subjectivities …, to the social settings within which these experiences and subjectivities takes shape, and to the larger cultural, discursive, and institutional contexts of these lives' (Valocchi, 2005: 767). At the same time, an ethnographic methodology allows research to proceed on the basis of certain concepts – 'sexuality', 'self', 'identity', 'space', and 'time' in the case of this project – while acknowledging that these concepts may be inappropriate, may require reformulation, or may be discarded as the research progresses and new concepts are developed through fieldwork. Finally, as a lived, interactional, embodied experience that involves everyday practices of living in specific material contexts (Okely, 2007), ethnography can connect theory, data, and analysis to 'the blood, bricks and mortar of everyday life' (Browne and Nash, 2010: 6). Ethnography can highlight the ways in which the 'social

construction of sexuality' is as much a material, bodily, and spatial practice as it is symbolic, discursive, and linguistic (Graham, 2010). As Alison Rooke (2010: 27-28) suggests, 'an ethnographic approach to sexuality … acknowledges that gender and sexual identities, and the meanings that circulate around them, are more than merely discursive formulations, they are daily realities and practices that have real consequences'.

These broad claims about the value of ethnography should be tempered in relation to critiques of the method. Since the 'reflexive turn' of the 1980s, the situated realities that come into view through ethnographic research have been recognised as partial, constructed, and problematic (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Denzin, 1997). While ethnography works towards a contextually specific understanding of participants' lives, world-views, and self-understandings, there is no singular 'context' within which participants live. In this sense, ethnographic research does not unveil the 'truth' of the way things 'really are' in the field (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997a). At best, it offers an interpretive, partial, and contingent view of participants' social worlds, one shaped by the positionality of the researcher in the field and constructed as much within the research-text itself as within the socio-cultural contexts under inquiry (Boellstorff, 2005: 20). Moreover, feminist critiques of ethnographic writing (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Ahmed, 2000) have shown that the classical ethnographic injunction to 'see things from the native's point of view' (Geertz, 1974: 27) reproduces 'the native' as a singular, 'othered', and exoticised category. Rejecting this trope, it is necessary to recognise that while ethnographic research does seek to engage specific, situated, and contextual 'points of view' and draw out their commonalities, these are also always multiple, partial, contingent, and temporary; points of view shift across differently socially situated groups and individuals with their own complex, layered, and multi-scalar biographies (Appadurai, 1988; Comaroff and Comaroff, 2003). Importantly, so long as the authority over the production of a research-text lies with the researcher, it is ultimately the researchers' 'point of view' that the text represents. There can be no unmediated access to 'the world as

experienced by participants' (Maynard and Purvis, 1994: 6). Ethnographic research, therefore, entails the 'reconstruction of social constructs' (Honer, 2004: 1160). This necessitates forms of reflexivity that bring the researcher into the text and show how the research has been shaped by the researcher's own biography, intentions, and interactions with participants (Hollands, 2003; Skeggs, 1994; 2001).

Amongst other reasons, to be discussed below, it is partly in relation to the above concerns that this thesis draws most heavily on data generated through 30 semi-structured interviews with 31 men who understood themselves as *gay*, *tongzhi*, *homosexual* and/or 'in the scene'. [48] While research that identifies itself as 'ethnographic' is often centred on observational data and 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) and supported by interview excerpts (Marvasti, 2004: 35-56), the reverse is the case in this thesis, where my analysis is centred on interview data and is interjected only occasionally with participatory-observational vignettes. This is an attempt to maximise the 'polyphony' of this thesis and allow the voices of participants themselves to come through (Abu-Lughod, 1990: 18; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997b: 2). Of course, interview interactions can also be shaped by power inequalities between interviewers and interviewees, which tend to privilege the former with the ability to set the agenda (Bourdieu, 1996: 18; Stanley and Wise: 1993: 177). Further, it cannot be denied that authority over the final presentation of interview excerpts and interpretive inferences lies with the researcher (Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1994). Still, it seems conceptually and ethically appropriate that a project concerned with the everyday lives and self-understandings of men in this research should privilege accounts offered by these men themselves over my own experiences and observations.

In parallel with these ethical concerns, there is a conceptual and practical rationale for drawing most extensively on interview data. I am primarily interested in the meanings that participants invested in their everyday experiences and their relations to others and how, in their narratives of everyday life and relationality, they articulated understandings of themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene'. As

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[48] One of these interviews was a joint interview with two participants. This is discussed later.

noted above, appreciating the ways in which everyday lives and self-understandings are culturally, socially, and materially situated, and recognising that they are more than discursive-narrative constructions, requires a wider ethnographic framing. Yet exploring such dynamics also requires the elicitation of detailed, self-reflexive narratives (Lamont and Swindler, 2014: 159-160). Such narratives may be offered or elicited spontaneously in everyday conversations during fieldwork. However, interviews provide practical opportunities for such narratives to be elicited, expanded upon, and to be recoded in their full detail and nuance (ibid.; Kong, Mahoney, and Plummer, 2002; Rapley, 2004). Interviews also provide an interactional space within which consent can be sought from participants for the use of such narratives as 'data' (discussed in more detail later).

These issues bring to the fore questions of the relationship between ethnography and interviewing within this research. I understand the interviews I conducted in Hainan as part of a wider ethnographic methodology. The interviews were deeply shaped by my wider experience of living 'in the scene'. Indeed, it would not have been possible to have the kinds of conversations participants and I had during our interviews were it not for my wider everyday participatory experiences. I therefore recognise these as 'ethnographic interviews'. Ethnographic interviewing involves a style of semi-structured interview that is not abstracted from the wider social contexts within which participants' lives are lived and the 'material, cultural, and interpretive circumstances to which respondents might orient' in the course of the interview (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995: 77). It is a mode of interviewing that seeks to avoid 'decontextualis[ing] respondents by separating individuals and their responses from the context of their daily lives' (Heyl, 2001: 375). Instead, ethnographic interviews aim to 'facilitate "respondents" ability to develop detailed, coherent narratives and to trace with the interviewer how they have made sense of events and experiences' (ibid.). Such interviews, therefore, offer a means of 'searching out and analyzing the symbolic forms - words, images, institutions, behaviors - in terms of which … people actually represent themselves to themselves and to one another' (Geertz, 1974: 30).

Moreover, ethnographic interviews resist the 'methodological individualism' and artificial coherence that can characterise more structured and decontextualized interview approaches (Lamont and Swindler, 2014: 162); drawing in wider contexts of everyday lived experience allows complexity, contradiction, indeterminacy, and relationality to enter the interview conversation (Heyl, 2001: 370).

This kind of situated, contextualised interview requires the interviewer to possess sufficient background knowledge and linguistic resources; these can be developed though broader ethnographic participatory work (Bourdieu; 1996: 19-22). This knowledge shapes decisions around what questions to ask and how to ask them and enables the researcher to be attentive to the complexity and nuance of the unfolding conversation, and to seek clarification and further details where necessary (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). Sufficient background knowledge allows the interviewer to relate abstract themes to specific contexts, experiences, and events, and to explore those contexts, experiences, and events in ways that bring out the abstract meanings they may hold for participants (ibid.; Marvasti, 2004: 56-57). Ethnographic interviews also require 'enough rapport for there to be a genuine exchange of views and enough time and openness … for the interviewees to explore purposefully with the researcher the meanings they place on events in their worlds' (Heyl, 2001: 370). A minimal level of structure, in the form of a thematic guide (see Appendix A) can help to orient the conversation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 112-113). At the same time, the ethnographic interviewer seeks to maintain a level of openness, 'empowering interviewees to shape, according to their world-views, the questions being asked and possibly even the focus of the research study' (Heyl, 2001: 370). Such interviews are therefore a way of engaging participants as agents in the research process. As James Spradley (1979: 34) puts it, the ethnographic interviewer should communicate to the interviewee that 'I want to know what you know in the ways that you know it … Will you become my teacher and help me understand?'

The strengths of this kind of interview are consistent with those noted above for ethnography more broadly: they enable the production of contextually specific

knowledge, grounded in everyday lived experience, which can be placed in productive dialogue with conceptual framings. This can lead to the production of new knowledge that is both empirical and theoretical (Marvasti, 2004: 56). Additionally, ethnographic interviews allow conversation to cover issues that participants themselves see as relevant to their everyday lives (Heyl, 2001: 370). This means that research findings may speak not only to academic debates but also to quotidian struggles in which participants are themselves engaged. One significant drawback of this kind of interview approach, compared to more structured approaches, is the limited scope for systematic comparison across the interviews, as each interview may significantly differ from others in the range of issues discussed (Hopf, 2004). This also causes problems at the stage of analysis in gauging to what extent a particular point of view is shared amongst participants (ibid.). To some extent, these issues can be addressed by paying attention, during a particular interview, not only to what *is* being discussed, but also to what *is not* being discussed in comparison to previous interviews (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). This can be explored with the interviewee during the interview. However, this level of attentiveness is difficult to maintain in practice.

This section has discussed ethnography as the methodological approach taken in this research. It has been suggested that ethnography, as an open-ended form of inquiry centred on incremental learning in the field through participation in the everyday social context under inquiry, is in keeping with the central aim of this research, which is to explore participants' self-understandings and everyday lives in ways sensitive to their socio-cultural, material, discursive and linguistic specificities. I have also addressed the conceptual and ethical rationale for conducting semi-structured, ethnographic interviews and drawing upon these most extensively in my analysis. This has been done so as to place the voices of participants at the centre of this research. These interviews can be considered 'ethnographic' given that, in terms of the topics discussed, they were deeply embedded in wider socio-cultural, material, discursive and linguistic contexts that participants saw as relevant to their

self-understandings and everyday lives. The above discussion is rather abstract; later in this chapter I will detail key aspects of the actual events and interactions that constituted my fieldwork in Hainan.

From 'Research Questions' to Questioning 'Research'

While this thesis draws on interview and participant-observational data generated over 18 months of fieldwork conducted in Hainan between September 2014 and June 2016, it is also the product of my wider experiences of living in Hainan for extended periods over the past nine years. During the third year of my undergraduate degree in Modern Languages (Mandarin Chinese/Spanish), I lived in Haikou, Hainan's provincial capital and largest city, for 12 months (2009-2010) while I studied Mandarin Chinese at Hainan University. During this time, I made concerted efforts to familiarise myself with the region; I travelled extensively throughout Hainan, visiting all counties in the province. This was a time at which Hainan appeared to be changing rapidly. A rail link was under construction that would reduce the journey time between Haikou and Sanya, the region's two largest cities, from 5 hours by bus to 2 hours by high-speed train. The western portion of the island's circular highway had recently been opened, linking the towns and cities of the west coast, somewhere I often heard describe as 'backward' (*luohou*), to Haikou, Sanya, and the tourist hot-spots of the east coast. In December 2009, the central government announced plans to 'develop Hainan as an international tourism island' through increased investment in infrastructure, service provision, and construction (State Council of the PRC, 2009). Within one month of the announcement, house prices in certain districts of Haikou and Sanya had doubled (Tencent Finance, 2010). There were even rumours of plans for a sea bridge to be built across the Qiongzhou Straits, the 20km stretch of water that physically and symbolically separates Hainan and the PRC mainland (China Daily, 2009). It was during this time that I also became aware, through everyday conversations, of pervasive discourses that constructed 'Hainanese' (*Hainanren*) and 'Mainlander' (*Daluren*) as dichotomous geo-cultural identities, a binary maintained along

discursive lines of 'tradition/modernity', 'backward/progressive', 'isolated/connected'. These dynamics were later corroborated by my reading of related academic literatures (Feng, 1999; Feng and Goodman, 1998; Pang, 1995).

My involvement in 'the scene' in Hainan between 2009 and 2010 was minimal and superficial, consisting of four visits to the two *gay* bars that were in operation in Haikou at the time. However, I was struck by what seemed to me at the time to be the obscure locations of these bars, situated at the ends of dark corridors in buildings that had once been office blocks or large hotels, now given over to a diverse range of informal businesses (see Introduction). After returning to the UK in 2010, I became increasingly interested in possible relationships between dynamics of social change in Hainan and the lives of non-heterosexual people, especially the 'Hainanese/Mainlander' binary, its associated discursive framings, and to what extent these intersected with discourses of non-heterosexual identities. This interest was developed into a small-scale project that I pursued as part of a Research Master's degree. For this, I returned to Hainan in 2013 and interviewed 9 men who identified as Hainanese and *gay*. I also interviewed the leader and founder of the Hainan LGBT League (see Introduction, page 13), a woman from Hunan Province on the mainland who identified as *lala*. This latter interview suggested that in framing its stated mission of 'promoting *tongzhi* culture in Hainan' the LGBT League, an organisation run by a group of Hainan University students from the Mainland, drew on wider developmentalist discourses that constructed the Mainland as 'modern' and Hainan as 'backward' and in need of 'liberation'. The interviews I held with Hainanese *gay* men also suggested that geo-cultural, regionalist, and developmentalist discourses shaped their understandings of themselves and their interactions with other *gay* men. In hindsight, these findings were shaped to a great extent by the narrow focus of the project and an inflexible interview style.

My PhD research initially sought to build upon these findings by exploring the ways in which non-heterosexual people in Hainan viewed processes of regional social change. Initial research questions asked: what impacts do non-heterosexual people in

Hainan perceive social change to have had on their everyday lives? And, how are narratives of social change intertwined with narratives of self? I remained particularly interested in the intersections of geo-cultural (Hainanese/Mainland) and sexual identities, while also anticipating that participants' narratives of social change, their self-understandings, and their everyday lives would differ significantly between urban and rural contexts. I planned to generate data to explore these questions using semi-structured interviews, supported by observational data, and intended to conduct 40-50 interviews with equal numbers of men and women and 'Hainanese' and 'Mainlander' respondents. A roughly equal number of interviews would be conducted across three key field sites in Hainan that included both urban and (semi-)rural sites (Haikou, Sanya, and Wuzhishan, Fig.2, page 6).

Certain aspects of these themes are still addressed in this thesis, however not in the ways I had initially imagined. There are also significant differences between the anticipated and actual interview sample, these are discussed later. Over the course of fieldwork and analysis the theme of 'social change' slipped from the central position I had afforded it in my initial conceptualisation of what the research was about. On reflection, it was perhaps always too abstract and broad a theme to be explored empirically and it was naïve to expect that a diverse group of participants would offer narratives from which a coherent account of relationships between their everyday lives and broad patterns of 'change' could be inferred. I returned to Hainan in 2014 with the intention that my research would be ethnographic, that the focus of the research and the research questions would remain open to reformulation in dialogue with incremental processes of learning through being and living in the social setting with which the research was concerned. However, this process of incremental learning through everyday social interactions, as well as through interviews and analysis, was not one through which a 'picture' of what the research was to be about slowly came into focus. Rather, it was a matter of coming to terms with the complexity of multi-faceted lives, lived across various contexts; it entailed the realisation that the contexts I imagined would orient participants in both the conduct and

conceptualisation of their everyday lives were not necessarily the same contexts that participants themselves deemed relevant and meaningful, or those that they wished to discuss during our interviews. The men I interviewed had other, more relevant, more interesting, and more pressing concerns.

This research has become an exploration of some of these concerns – those that were discussed with the greatest intensity and sense of urgency and those that were discussed by the greatest number of participants across 30 interviews. They are also issues that were reflected in my wider, everyday observational field notes and lived experiences. Other issues also emerged through fieldwork and analysis; ideally, these should also be addressed in order to provide a more complex account of the self-understandings and everyday lives of men in this research. However, given the constraints of space and time in writing this thesis, certain themes, issues, concepts, and contexts have had to be excluded. Using a more distanced and less detailed mode of analysis, I could have attempted to cover the full range of themes that emerged in this research, or at least a broader range than the three key themes that are the focus of the data chapters – I could have chosen breadth over depth. However, with limited space for careful analytical detailing, this could have become a simplistic auditing of the data. Worse, this could have risked what Donna Harraway (1988: 581) calls 'the god trick' by suggesting that something has been explored from all possible angles and understood in its entirety.

As discussed in the Introduction, 'self-understanding' and 'everyday life' are used in this thesis as unstable, partial concepts that work within and acknowledge the tension between holism and partiality and between research-inquiry and lived realities. In this spirit, over the following chapters, I focus on three key themes: 'the scene', uses and the usefulness of internet technologies, and narratives of the future. My rationale for focusing on these themes is fourfold:

- First, as key concerns for men in this research, exploring these issues offers insights into their everyday lives and self-understandings. At the same time, in

limiting the focus of this research to the close and detailed analysis of these three key themes, it should be clear that no attempt is being made to suggest that 'self-understandings' and 'everyday lives' can be known in their entirety, or that there exists an objective 'entirety' available to be known. This kind of thematic analysis is explicitly partial, it acknowledges that narratives of 'self-understanding' and 'everyday life' are necessarily given and received from particular perspectives and oriented around particular concepts and contexts.

- Secondly, these three themes provide occasions for asking a range of conceptual questions concerning relationships between selves, identities, narrative, space, time, and embodiment. Although not in any systematised way, focusing on these themes feeds into debates within the sociological and anthropological literatures discussed in the Literature Review. At the same time, by placing these themes themselves at the centre of analysis, I seek to avoid their deferral to abstract conceptualisation within the existing terms of sociological and anthropological enquiry. Rather, they are explored as concepts themselves and placed in dialogue with a series of other sociological and anthropological concepts.

- Thirdly, these are issues that appeared to be of most concern for many of the men in this research, yet they have received limited attention within previous research on the lives and identities of non-heterosexual people in the PRC, especially 'the scene' and uses of internet technologies. Addressing these themes, therefore, responds to a series of gaps in existing literatures.

- Finally, while these were key concerns for participants, they were also issues that were contested, issues around which questions of morality, authenticity, 'right', 'wrong', 'real', and 'fake', and a great deal of uncertainty, circulated. In this sense, in focusing on these three themes, it is my hope that this thesis, once translated back into Mandarin Chinese, will be of interest, and perhaps of some use, to participants and others facing similar issues to those addressed in this thesis. This, of course, may involve an alternative presentation of the text.

In focusing on the three key themes of 'the scene', uses and usefulness of internet technologies, and narratives of the future, I am motivated by a range of conceptual, ethical, and practical concerns, as well as interrelations between these fields. Focusing on these three themes serves a broad range of purposes, as outlined above, and enables a broad range of questions to be indirectly explored. My exploration of these themes, however, does not cohere around a single research question. This research has been motivated by a series of research questions that have undergone continual processes of revision. Now that this research exists as a written, delimited document with perceptible (though not always clear) boundaries, it is possible to suggest that the central questions addressed in this thesis could be phrased along the lines of: Through what concepts, and in relation to what contexts, do participants narrate understandings of themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene'? And, what meanings are invested in these concepts and contexts as they are narrated and lived as everyday realities? While such questions may offer this research some sort of systematising and over-arching coherency, arriving at these questions is clearly a matter of post-rationalisation that belies a more complex, messy research process, one that has not always progressed on the basis of tangible, coherent objectives.

Fieldwork

The previous two sections have discussed the methods used in generating the data analysed in this thesis and certain methodological, conceptual, and ethical concerns that have shaped the final content of this thesis. This section offers a reflexive account of key aspects of the events and interactions that constituted my fieldwork in Hainan and certain ethical issues that were encountered and negotiated. The following sub-section is a narrative account of the fieldwork and processes of 'ethnographic embedding'. It would not be possible to give a full account of 18 months of fieldwork and living in Hainan. The following narrative is therefore partial and intended to give a sense of the day-to-day practices of fieldwork, including the ways in which I came to know a number of men in this research, how I became embedded in 'the scene',

and how I gained knowledge that was drawn upon during interviews and subsequent analysis. This is a personal narrative in which I wish to convey not only the 'facts and figures' of the fieldwork, but also its emotional and intimate 'weight'. Details of all people and places mentioned below have been altered to preserve anonymity.

Ethnographic Embedding/Becoming 'Someone in the Scene'

As noted above, prior to commencing my PhD fieldwork, I had already lived in Hainan for a total of 15 months; I had conducted research with *gay* men; and I had established relationships with a local 'LGBT' activist organisation and two AIDS prevention organisations in the region. In terms of conceptualising the research, this previous experienced proved somewhat problematic, as it instilled in me a naïve confidence that I knew the issues that the research would address, leading to certain assumptions being made that would later come into conflict with my desire to allow the research to develop in relation to incremental learning in the field. At the same time, in terms of initial access, locating 'gatekeepers', establishing a network of contacts, and social integration into 'the scene', these previous experiences were invaluable.

Upon returning to Hainan, I spent a week in Haikou reconnecting with groups and individuals I had come to know during my Master's fieldwork, many of whom I had kept in contact with over the interim year. I met with the leader of the Hainan LGBT League, who informed me that she would soon be leaving Hainan to take a job on the Mainland, a job that paid, as she put it, 'far more than [she] could earn in Hainan'. She explained that, having been unable to find anyone willing to continue the League's work, the group would be disbanded. I considered offering to take over the League, though felt it too great a responsibility at that early stage in my fieldwork. I also feared the possible implications of this when I would inevitably leave Hainan 18 months later. As will be discussed in more detail later, the disbanding of the Hainan LGBT League significantly impacted upon my ability to meet *lala* women.

During this first week, I also visited the Haikou Disease Control Centre, where Hainan Red Ribbon is based, to catch up with AIDS prevention workers I had come to know during my Master's fieldwork and explore what role the group might play in participant recruitment. I especially sought advice on participant recruitment in smaller towns and rural areas, as I knew that Red Ribbon had made in-roads into conducting MSM-focused AIDS prevention work in certain smaller towns in Hainan. The advice I received was that rather than basing myself in one smaller town for six months, as was my intention at the time, I should take a multi-sited approach, making the most of any contacts I was able to make in any smaller towns, especially via people I met in either Haikou or Sanya who may be able to introduce me to friends in their hometowns elsewhere in Hainan. This was advice that I later took. I was also put in contact with an MSM-focused AIDS prevention worker in Sanya, the city I would be living in for the following six months. That evening, I ended up accompanying Red Ribbon staff to Yese (lit.: 'Night Colour'), Haikou's only *gay* bar, where they were holding an on-the-spot HIV testing event. I spent much of that evening talking to a co-leader of Red Ribbon, whom I had not met before. He invited me to return to the Disease Control Centre the following day to interview him. When the testing event was over, Red Ribbon staff left the club. I stayed, talking and drinking with the bar staff. A few days later, I also met with the former leader of Rainbow Group. This was also an organisation I had come to know during my Master's fieldwork. We went together to Yuefang Park to hand out condoms to men who meet there to socialise and have sex. In addition to reconnecting with these organisations, during that first week I caught up with a number of friends and handed over the various items I had been asked to purchase in the UK, things that were either expensive or hard to find in the PRC. Amongst these were Boots moisturiser, clothes from Primark, and a bottle of Kyle Minogue perfume.

After a week in Haikou, I travelled to Sanya, where I would remain for the following six months. Sanya was chosen as a field site given the city's rise, over the past 30 years, to become the PRC's most popular domestic tourist destination. This process

transformed what had been a small fishing town into a city of over half a million people (Gu and Wall, 2007). It was anticipated that these changes would be seen by non-heterosexual people in Sanya as having impacted upon their everyday lives. I would also undergo six months of language training in the Hainanese dialect (*Hainanhua*) at Qiongzhou University, on the outskirts of the city.[49] Upon arriving in Sanya, I met up with another friend I had made during my Master's research. He took me to Tianchi, Sanya's only *gay* bar and somewhere I would spend much time over the coming months. That first night drinking and dancing at Tianchi I met Honghong, who organised a monthly HIV-testing event at the bar. He invited me to attend the next event, which would take place in a few days' time. Soon after arriving in Sanya, I also followed up on the contact I had been given by the staff of Red Ribbon in Haikou, meeting and interviewing an MSM-focused AIDS prevention worker at the Sanya Disease Control Centre. I sought his advice on participant recruitment and he suggested that I set up a profile on Blued, the PRC's leading *gay* dating and social networking app, though he warned me that 'most people on there are just looking to hook up (*yuepao*)' (Blued, online interaction, and 'hook-ups' are discussed at length in Chapter Five). One evening, a few days after our interview, we met again and he took me to a quiet and poorly-lit corner of Linlan Park to hand out condoms to men who meet there to socialise and have sex. That evening, I met and exchanged contact details with Ah Zheng, who I would later interview.

For the first few weeks in Sanya, I lived in student accommodation at Qiongzhou University. I studied Hainanese in the mornings, read and wrote up field notes in the afternoons, and made the one hour journey into the city centre almost every evening to visit Linlan Park, Tianchi, and to talk, eat, and walk around the city with a growing number of friends 'in the scene'. I set up a Blued profile on which I introduced myself, provided a photo of myself, and outlined the research, ending with the tag-line: 'If you are interested in being interviewed or would like to know more about the research, feel free to contact me anytime!' (see Appendix B; the meanings associated with

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[49] In 2016, Qiongzhou University was re-named Hainan Tropical Ocean University.

self-representative photographs and their functions in online interaction are discussed in Chapter Five).

At this early stage, I had already begun to question the focus of the research on 'social change' in relation to conversations I was having, and through reflection on the two interviews I had conducted with AIDS prevention workers. As I wrote in my field diary:

> Oct 29th, 2014
> I'm beginning to question the validity and value of my research. … What does it mean to have chosen to research Hainan? … When I explain my research to people here, they often question why I have chosen to focus on Hainan and suggest that there isn't really any difference between here and other parts of China. Each time I hear this, I feel my stomach sinking, as I feel that this undermines the entire focus of my research. … Perhaps I need a more open approach.

These feelings of uncertainty were exacerbated by my loneliness and the lack of structure to my daily activities. I also felt that by living at the University, so far from the city centre, I was somehow missing out on something; I had a feeling that what my research 'should really be about' would become clearer if only I were more integrated into '*gay* life' in Sanya, these are assumptions I now see as premised on an over-determined understanding of both 'research' and '*gay* life'. With these concerns in mind, I messaged the manager of Tianchi, with whom I had exchanged contact details during an earlier visit to the bar. I asked if I could begin working at the bar, to which he replied with a resounding 'yes'. As he later explained, having a 'foreign' (*waiguoren*) employee would help attract customers to the struggling bar. I made it clear that I had vested interests in working at the bar, explaining that I hoped it would contribute to my research by allowing me to meet more people and achieve a deeper understanding of 'the scene'. As such, I declined payment for working at the bar. This was also a pre-emptive act of self-preservation; not being a paid member of staff left me outside of the complex money relations that later became the cause of disagreements between managers and staff at the bar. It also gave me freedom to take time off from working at the bar when I later began taking up invitations from friends

to visit their hometowns elsewhere in Hainan. My ability to refuse payment for working at Tianchi was clearly dependent on my privileged position as a funded student and is a clear indication of the economic inequalities that existed between myself and other workers at the bar, indeed, between myself and many of the people I interacted with during fieldwork.

Once I began serving drinks, dancing in a cabaret 'cross-dressing' show (*fanchuan yanyi biaoyan*), and drinking with customers (*peijiu*) at Tianchi three nights a week, moving into the city centre became even more imperative.[50] I posted on my WeChat profile (the PRC's most popular social networking app) that I was looking for somewhere to live in the city centre. Honghong, who I had by then met with a number of times, offered me a room in his apartment.[51] Honghong was well-known 'in the scene'; he visited Tianchi almost every night; he organised a monthly HIV-testing event; many years earlier, he had even run a *gay* bar in Sanya. Living with Honghong gave me somewhere I felt 'at home', somewhere I could *live*. At the same time, I felt that I was now in the midst of the social worlds I was trying to understand. More than this, Honghong was kind; he welcomed me into his circle of friends; he offered advice on my research and took an interest in my personal life. Honghong's offer of a place to live and the kindness and guidance he showed me were life-lines at a difficult stage in my fieldwork; for this I am deeply grateful.

I continued to question the shaky foundations of my research. However, living with Honghong and working at Tianchi gave routine to my daily activities in Sanya and gave me the sense that I was engaged in the kinds of learning through lived experience that I understood ethnography to entail. I continued studying Hainanese three mornings a week. I swept up sunflower seed shells and cigarette butts, danced in leatherette hot-pants, and drank warm beer with patrons at Tianchi three evenings a week. I went out with Honghong and his friends for barbecued meat at roadside stalls;

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[50] I performed 'male aesthetic' (*nanzhuang*) in the cabaret show at Tianchi alongside two other 'male aesthetic' performers and three 'female aesthetic' (*nüzhuang*) performers. There is much scope for further research into the gender dynamics of gay bar performances in Hainan and the lives, identities, and social worlds of performers. These issues are not explored in this thesis, though I am keen to do so in future research.
[51] I paid Honghong ¥800/month (£80) to rent a room in his apartment.

his friends became my friends too. I attended monthly HIV-testing events. I continued visiting that quiet and poorly-lit corner of Linlan Park, though this was not always somewhere I felt comfortable visiting alone. I came to know many men through Blued. I made field notes and kept a list of key terms and emergent themes; I revised my interview guide and continued conducting recorded interviews (the interviews are discussed in more detail later in this chapter). On reflection, I was 'coming into the scene' (*jinquan*) – establishing a life and a sense of self in relation to the kinds of interactions I was engaging in, the spaces I spent time in, and the people I spent time with (Chapter Four explores meanings of 'the scene' and 'coming in' as constructed by men in this research). I must also acknowledge the invaluable role of supervision during the fieldwork. This took place via Skype on a two-weekly basis during the first two months of fieldwork, and on a monthly basis thereafter.

One evening at Tianchi, I met Ah Ji. I had been talking with the other performers in the changing room when the manager came in to tell me a customer had requested that I shared a drink with them. I spent the rest of the night struggling, over the pounding beat of Chinese techno, to hear Ah Ji speak at lightning speed in his thick Hainanese accent, only occasionally interrupted by mandatory shots of warm beer. Ah Ji had recently discovered 'the scene' (narratives of 'discovery' are discussed in Chapter Five). He was full of youthful excitement; for Ah Ji, 'the scene' was a 'new world' (*xin de shijie*) that was opening up before him (construction of 'the scene' as a 'world' are discussed in Chapter Four); there were new people and places, new ways of speaking, new ways of interacting, new pleasures, and new pains; Ah Ji was keen to explore. After that night, we began meeting up regularly. Ah Ji would take me to Linlan Park, where he would pretend to be my 'wife' (*laopo*) so as to deter to the wandering hands of other men in that poorly-lit and quiet corner. I would take him to Tianchi, where I would introduce him to the 'cross-dressing' performers, with whom he was infatuated, and slip him a few free beers when no one was looking. In our shared desire to explore 'the scene', Ah Ji and I forged a deep and lasting friendship.

It was after meeting Ah Ji that I began spending time in sites beyond Sanya. In late

December 2014, Ah Ji invited me to visit his home village in rural northern Hainan, where *Gongqi* celebrations were set to take place – a festival Ah Ji described as 'a birthday party for the god of the village'. Visits to Ah Ji's home-village later became a regular occurrence. Ah Ji valued my company in his otherwise 'boring' village and the esteem that bringing a 'foreigner' into the village garnered. I valued the window these visits gave me into rural lives. Each time we returned, we would both engage in extensive identity work. I would assume the role of 'foreign exchange student'; Ah Ji would make sure to wash off his pencilled-in eyebrows and swap his leopard-print trousers for basketball shorts. I would make excuses as to why, in my late twenties, I was not married with children; Ah Ji would reassure his parents that he was looking for a girlfriend (issues of familial pressures to marry and have children are explored in Chapter Six). Ah Ji was confident in his family's 'cluelessness'; he would use the word '*gay*' when his mother was within earshot, reassuring me that 'even if she hears, she won't understand'. However, on one occasion, late in the fieldwork, while Ah Ji and I were shopping in the town adjacent to his village, a shopkeeper who assumed I could not understand Hainanese asked Ah Ji, 'why do you always bring that foreigner home with you? Are you two doing homosexuality (*doh dangdinglin*)?' (fears of 'exposure' as 'homosexual' are discussed in Chapters Five and Six). Following this incident, I visited Ah Ji's village only once more to say goodbye to his family before my departure for the UK.

Each time I travelled to Ah Ji's home village, we would take the high-speed train from Sanya to Qionghai (see Fig.2, page 6), from where the village was another hour and a half west by bus and 20 minutes by three wheeled motor-taxi. Sometimes, we would stop to spend a night in Qionghai. Through these regular visits to Qionghai, I came to know a number of men in 'the scene' there. On an early visit, I opened Blued and flicked through profiles in the vicinity (relations between Blued and the concept of 'vicinity' (*fujin*) are discussed in Chapter Five, as are relationships between the app and the production of 'rural' space). It was then that by chance I received a message from Ah Tao whom I had previously met in Haikou during my Masters fieldwork. Ah

Tao and I kept in contact after I returned to Sanya and met up the next time I visited Qionghai. Ah Tao introduced me to other men in the Qionghai 'scene'. Later in my fieldwork, I would make regular trips to Qionghai, spending up to a week at a time there, socialising with Ah Tao and his friends and visiting 'meeting places in the scene'– a corner shop with mah-jong tables, an inconspicuous 'old dad' teahouse, and a particular seating area in Qionghai Park. Each of these were places where men would gather, though these men would be recognisable only to one another as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' (relationships between visibility, recognition, presence, and identity are explored in Chapter Five). Over the course of fieldwork I conducted three interviews with men in Qionghai.

After spending six months in Sanya, and having conducted nine interviews there, I moved to Haikou, the provincial capital. There, I was joined by my partner Jerry, himself originally from Jilin in the northeast of the PRC. He moved from Newcastle, UK, to Haikou, where we lived together for the remaining twelve months of my fieldwork. A month earlier, Ah Ji had also moved to Haikou, having fallen in love with a man he met during one of our trips to Qionghai, who had subsequently moved to the capital. Nothing came of their romance, though Ah Ji decided to remain in Haikou, finding that he preferred 'the big city' and the reduced journey time to his home village. As such, we were able to continue our friendship and our shared explorations of 'the scene'; Yuefang Park and Yese soon became our regular haunts. Upon arriving in Haikou, I was asked by the manager of Yese to work at the bar. He had visited Tianchi and had been impressed to see a 'foreign' dancer. However, I declined his offer. Working at Tianchi had been a useful means of meeting people, a number of whom I went on to interview; it had also enabled me to establish a role for myself in the Sanya 'scene'. However, with twelve interviews conducted by that point, I needed more time to work on transcription; plus, the late nights, excessive drinking, and smoking involved in bar work were taking a toll on my health.

Daytimes in Haikou were spent translating and transcribing an increasing number of recorded interviews, writing up field notes and reflexive commentaries, and reviewing

themes that were emerging in the interviews. I conducted a preliminary analysis of six of the interviews that I had conducted in Sanya and Qionghai. This showed that 'the scene' and 'coming in' were clearly important to many participants, though contested in their meanings; issues of family and the future prospect of marriage and reproduction were also sites of concern. Through translation and transcription, I became further sensitised to certain issues and themes that participants were discussing in interviews. I was able to reflect on my own interview practice: which questions were working? Which weren't? Where was I missing opportunities to push for further elaboration? What was I misunderstanding? I caught myself asking leading questions and resolved to avoid this in future interviews. I went on to conduct eleven interviews in Haikou. My evenings were spent visiting Yuefang Park, drinking at Yese at the weekend, shopping in the busy Jiefangxi district, and drinking *gay* milk tea (a practice explained in Chapter Five). Jerry made his own friends 'in the scene', who he introduced to me, and I introduced him to mine. What had been an already blurry boundary between 'fieldwork' and 'living' in Sanya became entirely imperceptible in Haikou. I continued making trips to Ah Ji's village and visiting friends in Qionghai. I also returned to Sanya a number of times to see friends and dance at Tianchi for special events. I also became involved in the organisation of the PFLAG event help in Haikou in January, 2016 (see Introduction, page 14). Both through Blued and through friends and contacts in Haikou, I came to know men in a number of towns across Hainan. I travelled to Chengmai, an hour south of Haikou, where I conducted two interviews, to Baoting and Wuzhishan, in the central highlands, where I conducted three interviews, and to Danzhou in the northwest, where I conducted two interviews.

The above is only a summary account of my fieldwork in Hainan, it fails to capture the full detail of the experiences and interactions that have shaped the course of this research or the extent to which my fieldwork was a lived, embodied, emotional, joyous, and painful experience. It was not only *my* fieldwork but was an experience shared with others, some of whom I continue to consider close friends. The ethical

implications of such relationships are discussed later. In offering this brief account, my intention has been to give a sense of the extent to which I was not only 'conducting fieldwork' in Hainan; I lived there, with all the mundane complexity that 'living' implies. These lived experiences shaped the interviews I conducted, facilitating 'ethnographic interviewing' as described earlier. This allowed for the exploration of issues with which I, as a researcher, was concerned, while also remaining open and sensitive to concepts and contexts that participants themselves brought to the interviews. The following sub-section addresses some of the ways in which many of the above experiences, interactions, and relationships, as well as interview interactions, were shaped by my own identities during fieldwork.

Being Gay, a 'Foreigner', and a Man in the Field

Researchers have a limited ability to reflect on the relational identities they perform and are ascribed in their interactions with research participants, and the extent to which these both shape and are shaped by power inequalities (Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1994). In this section, I discuss three key ways in which I identified myself in the field and in which I was identified by participants and those I interacted with in my everyday life in Hainan. These dynamics of identification clearly impacted upon processes of 'becoming someone in the scene', as described above, and on issues of access, recruitment, and rapport between myself and interview participants.

The ways in which I came to know men in this research, through mutual friends, through my work at Tianchi, through socialising in public parks, and through Blued, largely made me automatically identifiable as *gay* (Chapter Five discusses relationships between spatial co-presence and sexual identification). The description of myself and my research on my Blued profile also stated that 'I am also *tongzhi* myself' (*benren yeshi tongzhi*) (see Appendix B). All interview participants knew that I desired and had sex with men, that I had a male partner with whom I had been in a relationship for 5 years, and that my partner was Chinese. Such information was communicated either through social interactions that preceded our interviews, in our

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informal self-introductions and casual chat prior to commencing interviews, or would come up in conversation during the course of interviews. It has been suggested that 'the gay interviewer and gay interviewee [can] empathize around shared meanings and ways of knowing' (Kong, Mahoney, and Plummer, 2002: 251). In cross-cultural research, however, this cannot be taken for granted. My own understanding and experience of 'being gay' as a white, working-class, twenty-seven year old man who grew up in the UK, may have been vastly different from what it meant to 'be *gay*', and the experiences this entailed, for men in this research, if indeed 'being *gay*' was how they understood themselves.

This said, identifying myself, and being identified by participants, as *gay* and/or *tongzhi* facilitated access and allowed for the building of rapport that may not have been enjoyed to the same extent or in the same ways by a differently gendered and sexualised researcher. For example, when I met with Ah Ben after he had expressed an interest in being interviewed, he explained that he wanted to speak with me to learn more about 'the lives of *gays* abroad' (*waiguo gay de shenghuo*) **(36, Danzhou)**.[52] Much of our interview was spent comparing our experiences of 'being *gay*' in our relative socio-cultural contexts and in the trajectories of our personal biographies. It is also worth noting that my own experiences of 'being gay' are intertwined with my relationship with my partner Jerry and our elaborate efforts to hide our relationship from his parents. As such, participants and I could discuss not only our differences, but also certain similarities in our experiences of negotiating sexual identities, maintaining relationships with men, and facing pressures to marry and reproduce in relation to Confucian notions of family and pressures to 'continue the family line' (discussed in Chapter Six).

Ah Ben's interest in '*gay* life abroad' points to another significant aspect of my positionality in the field: being 'a foreigner'. 'Foreignness' in the PRC is constructed

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[52] Throughout this thesis, where participants are quoted, the quotes are followed by the participant's age and the place where they were living at the time of our interview. Where the latter differs from where the participantgrew up, this location in also provided. All places mention are shown in Figures 1 and 2 in the Introduction to this thesis (page 6).

at the intersections of discourses of race (*zhongzu*/*renzhong*), ethnicity (*minzu*), and nation (*guo*) and articulated in relation to notions of 'Chineseness'. Such discourses are more complex than I am able to fully acknowledge here (see Chow, 1998; Zhao, 2004). It has been suggested that disparate racial, ethnic, and national identities between researchers and participants can hinder access, rapport, and the reliability of research findings (see Song and Parker, 1995: 242). However, as Penny Rhodes (1994: 552) has suggested, such dynamics of 'difference' may also generate discussion of 'information [participants] would have assumed was the taken for granted knowledge of an insider'. At times, this was clearly the case in my interactions with participants. For example, while discussing my research experience with Zhang Liang during our interview, he commented: 'if it was a Chinese person doing it, people wouldn't say so much, because they'd think; 'you're a local too (*bendi ren*), we're both Chinese, I don't need to tell you so much'' (**28, Haikou, from Fujian, Mainland PRC**).

Moreover, as noted earlier, rather than acting as a barrier to access and establishing a role for myself within 'the scene', being 'foreign' facilitated access and enabled me to spend time in certain spaces. The manager of Tianchi's acceptance of my request to work at the bar was certainly no reflection of my dance skills; rather, his hopes that having a 'foreigner' working at the bar would attract customers reflected the exoticisation and sexualisation of 'foreignness' in the PRC (Farrer, 2010). Similarly, invitations to visit friends' hometowns where I would be 'shown off' (*xuanyao*) to family and friends were, to varying degrees, underpinned by the associations between (white, Euro-American) 'foreignness' in the PRC and notions of modernity and cosmopolitanism (Schein, 1994).

While 'being foreign' presented certain advantages in terms of access, recruitment, and building rapport, these should also be recognised as problematic forms of privilege that point to certain inequalities between myself and many of the men in this research and those I spent time with in my everyday life in Hainan. Such inequalities were not solely related to my 'foreignness', but coalesced at the intersections of my privileged racial, national, economic, and educational status in relation to many

participants. As noted earlier, as a funded PhD student I enjoyed forms of mobility that were not enjoyed by many of the people I lived, worked, socialised, and researched with in Hainan.[53] Such forms of privilege allowed me to refuse payment for my work at Tianchi and to travel around Hainan at whim, following up contacts and conducting interviews.

Writ large, such privilege allowed me to travel to Hainan, stay there for 18 months, leave, and return to the UK to write a thesis on the basis of this experience and data collected. I cannot ignore the fact that I am complicit in the global division of labour and knowledge production that continues to privilege 'Western' researchers as producers of knowledge and 'non-Western' research subjects as those who are 'known' (Alatas, 2003). My resistance to a formal conceptual framework through which to make sense of the lives of men in this research and my commitment to thinking ontologically about the concepts these men themselves use in making sense of their lives are connected to these issues. These are attempts to position men in this research not only as 'known' but also as producers of complex and conceptual knowledge about their own lives. More significantly disruptive practices have been adopted by other researchers, including collaborative research design (Bishop, 1996) and shared authorship (Gay y Blasco and de la Cruz, 2012). These are practices I would like to explore in future research.

My gendered positionality as a man (*nanxing/nanren*) had perhaps the greatest impact on access and recruitment and, subsequently, on the empirical and conceptual orientations of this thesis. As noted earlier, my initial intention had been to interview both *gay* men and *lala* women. Before beginning fieldwork, I had anticipated that, as a man, it would be significantly more difficult for me to meet and recruit *lala* women than *gay* men. Such difficulties have been noted by gay male researchers in recruiting lesbian participants in Anglophone contexts (Coleman-Fountain, 2014: 55). I hoped that the Hainan LGBT League, itself led by a *lala* woman and having a number of

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[53] This is not to deny that some participants occupied positions of economic privilege in relation to others (potential relationships between economic inequalities and imaginable futures are highlighted in Chapter Six).

lala members, would enable me to meet *lala* women. However, as noted earlier, the League disbanded shortly before I arrived in Hainan in September 2014 and the leader returned to the mainland.

The spaces within which I spent time during fieldwork and came to know men in this research (AIDS prevention networks, *gay* bars, public parks, and Blued) were largely exclusively male spaces. On rare occasions, groups of women did come to socialise at Tianchi and I made attempts to introduce myself to these women. However, in doing so, I felt that I was intruding into a social space in which, as a man, I was not necessarily welcome. Significantly, groups of women at Tianchi would sometimes invite 'female aesthetic' (*nüzhuang)* performers, whose gender identities were more fluid than my own, to drink with them; I never saw such invitations extended to the other 'male aesthetic' (*nanzhuang*) performers. Maintaining a Blued profile proved to be a useful means of meeting and recruiting *gay* men and I considered setting up a similar profile on LESDO, a popular *lala* social networking and dating app. However, after downloading the app, the first question asked in the process of account registration was: 'are you a woman (*ni shifou n nüxing*)?' To this question, a reply of 'no' voided the process of profile registration. Clearly, this was also a space in which men were not welcome; I decided to respect this boundary and deleted the app. None of the men I interviewed reported having close *lala* friends. I was introduced to a *lala* woman by a *gay* friend in Sanya and, after an evening drinking at Tianchi, we exchanged contacts. In our subsequent communications, and after discussing my research, she said that she did not wish to be involved.

Late in the fieldwork (January 2016), I met Lu Cha, the only *lala* woman to attend the PFLAG event held in Haikou. I kept in contact with Lu Cha following the event, and later she arranged for me to meet with her and four of her friends to conduct a recorded group discussion. This took place in May 2016. By that late stage in the fieldwork, it was clear that the focus of the research was on the everyday lives and self-understandings of *gay* men. Ethnographic experiences and interview data clearly suggested that in everyday life *gay* men and *lala* women in Hainan rarely interacted.

When asked if they had any *lala* friends, the majority of men in this research said they did not, while some said that they knew *lala* women but had not spoken with them at length. Many men did suggest that *gay* men and *lala* women belonged to the collective and potentially gender-neutral sexual category of 'homosexuals'. However, this commonality was not necessarily understood as imputing forms of social collectivity. As Xiao Mai put it:

> I think they are their world and we are our world (*tamen shi tamen de shijie, women shi women de shijie*), but we do belong to the same kind of person (*shuyu yilei ren*), we're men with men, they're women with women, but they are one world, and we are another world. But we're the same kind of person, we all like homosexuals, we're not heterosexuals (*xihuan tongxinglian, bushi yixinglian*) **(18, Sanya, from Dingan)**

Such responses were typical amongst men in this research, where *lala* women were assumed to belong to a different 'world', though some degree of commonality as 'homosexuals' was perceived. Similarly, during the group discussion with Lu Cha and her friends, these women all noted that they did not have any *gay* friends. When asked why they thought this to be the case, Ah Mei replied:

> Just look, all of our social apps (*jiaoyou ruanjian*) are separate. Maybe if we were together on social apps then we would chat a bit. What I mean is that our boundaries (*fanwei*), or the places we occupy (*women dai de difang*), are not the same. Because, you know, people of the same gender (*tongyang de xingbie*) more often make contact with the same boundaries (*jiechu de fanwei hui duo yixie*). Because even if someone is *gay*, they are still the opposite gender (*bijing shi gay, yeshi yixing*). Without any reason, you wouldn't tell your orientation (*xingxiang*) to someone of the opposite gender. **(24, Haikou)**

Given the extent to which *gay* men and *lala* women appeared to understand themselves as occupying 'separate places' and categorised themselves in terms of

'separate boundaries', for conceptual coherence, this thesis focuses specifically on the everyday lives and self-understandings of *gay* men. This is in accordance with the primary aim of this thesis, which is to explore participants' self-understandings as they are constructed and negotiated in everyday life. It is also in acknowledgement of the fact that the data generated through fieldwork is overwhelmingly weighted towards the everyday lives and self-understandings of *gay* men, allowing for an in-depth and nuanced analysis that would not be possible on the basis of a single group discussion with *lala* women. The construction of such gendered 'boundaries' and 'worlds' is itself an important point for further research; however, within the confines of space and time, and in accordance with my desire to explore issues that participants themselves discussed fervently during our interviews, this is not explored in detail in this thesis. The limitations of this focus on *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* men, to the exclusion of *lala* women and *gay* bar performers who identified as *CD* ('cross-dresser') and *weiniang* (literally: 'fake women'), are discussed in the Conclusion to this thesis. It is perhaps worth pointing out that it is common practice for research on the lives of non-heterosexual people in the PRC to focus on the specific experiences of either *gay* men (Jones, 2007; Kong, 2011; 2012b; Rofel, 1999b; Zheng, 2015) or *lala* women (Engebretsen, 2014; Kam, 2013; Sang, 2003).

Interview Participant Sample

This research is not intended as a representational study; therefore, participant sampling was not a matter of procuring a participant group roughly representative of a 'general population'. Indeed, the criteria by which such a 'general population' could be perceived are productively uncertain and are, to some extent, themselves the focus of this research. This is in the sense that this thesis is an exploratory and interpretive account of a series of concepts and contexts in relation to which men in this research could be seen to understand themselves as a 'population', as particular 'kinds' of people, through the articulation of 'sameness' and 'difference' along various social, spatial, and temporal axes. As an exploratory piece of research, and given the shifting

focus of the research questions, interview participant sampling was a loose and contingent process shaped by the practicalities of access and recruitment and developing continually in relation to emergent themes. Exploratory research tends to involve opportunistic sampling (Denscombe, 2014: 33) which, as Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003: 81) note, involves 'the researcher taking advantage of unforeseen opportunities as they arise during the course of fieldwork, adopting a flexible approach to meld the sample around the fieldwork context as it unfolds'.

Upon commencing fieldwork, when the research was premised on (seemingly) more focused research questions concerning relationships between regional social change and sexual identities, it was anticipated that gender, urban/(semi-)rural location, and Mainlander/Hainanese status would be social categories relevant to exploring such questions. As noted earlier, I had intended to conduct 40-50 interviews with equal numbers of men and women and 'Hainanese' and 'Mainlander' respondents, across three field sites chosen in relation to their geographic and historical specificities (Haikou – provincial capital and major urban centre; Sanya – most popular tourist destination; Wuzhishan – semi-rural transport hub in central highlands). In hindsight, age would have been a key social category relevant to issues of social change (as is noted in Chapter Five in relation to the arrival of the internet in Hainan). However, age was not factored into the original planned sample. The target number of interviews was reduced to 30 in the course of the fieldwork. As I conducted an increasing number of interviews, it became clear that the interviews were long (most over 90 minutes, some up to 3 hours) and were richly detailed. With a view to managing this volume of data and considering time constraints on translation *and* transcription, which were conducted solely by myself, 30 interviews was identified as a manageable number, while still allowing for a sufficient number of interviews to be conducted across a range of geographic locations.

As discussed above, my own gendered positionality and the gendering of the spaces within which recruitment took place meant that the inclusion of women in this research became practically and conceptually problematic. Of the 31 men who

constitute the final interview sample, 22 were born and grew up in Hainan, while 9 were born and grew up in various places on the Mainland and had been living in Hainan for varying lengths of time. As discussed earlier, over the course of fieldwork, it became apparent that issues of geographic origin or geo-cultural identities were not a major concern for men I was interacting with in my everyday life 'in the scene', nor did they emerge as key themes in the interview data. This is not to say that they are of no relevance to the lives of men in this research; these issues were minor themes in interviews with a minority of participants. Geographic location is of greater relevance to some of the issues explored in the data chapters, as will be discussed throughout. However, issues of 'urban' and 'rural' residence are not a key theme addressed in this thesis. At the time of our interviews, 20 participants were living in major urban centres and 11 were living in smaller towns or villages, a breakdown is given in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Geographic Location Breakdown (see Fig.2, page 6, for map)

Location	Number of Participant
Major Urban Total	**20**
Sanya	9
Haikou	11
Smaller Towns and Villages Total	**11**
Baoting	2
Chengmai	2
Danzhou	2
Qionghai	3
Wuzhishan	2
Total	**31**

As fieldwork progressed, it was apparent that the participant sample was increasingly weighted toward men aged 20-30 years. As will be discussed in Chapter Six, above this age bracket, many men 'leave the scene' in the face of familial pressures to marry and have children (also see Kong, 2012a; Zheng, 2015: 142-62). As such, older *gay* men can be considered a 'hard to reach group'; this has been noted by researchers

working in other socio-cultural contexts (Penrod, Preston, and Cain, 2008). I endeavoured to recruit older men (30+) as I believed that the experiences of these men would be relevant to emergent themes, especially relationships between self-understanding, family, marriage, and reproduction. Many of the younger men I spoke to and interviewed reported that they had recently 'come into the scene' and narrated the excitement (but also the worries; discussed in Chapter Six) they felt upon 'discovering this new world'. I was therefore interested in interviewing older men for whom 'the scene' was less a novel 'new world', and more an everyday, and perhaps mundane, reality. In the latter months of fieldwork, recruiting older men was made a priority; I pursued existing contacts to older men as well those made via Blued. However, the interview participant sample remains significantly weighted toward men under the age of 30. A breakdown of participant's ages is given in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Participant Age Breakdown

Age barcket	Number of Participants
18 - 24	10
25 - 29	11
30 - 34	4
35 - 39	2
40 - 44	1
45 - 49	1
50 - 54	1
55 - 59	0
60 - 64	1
Total	**31**

Negotiating and Conducting Interviews

Ethical Approval for all stages of the fieldwork, as described below, was granted by Newcastle University prior to my departure for Hainan in 2014. As described earlier in the summary account of the fieldwork, I came to know interview participants in a range of ways, including through AIDS prevention organisations, through working and socialising in *gay* bars, through visiting meeting places (*judian*) in public parks,

through introductions via existing contact, and through Blued (see Appendix C for details of how each participant was recruited). Some participants I had met and socialised with a number of times prior to our interviews; for others (a number of those I came to know through Blued), our interviews were our first face-to-face meeting. Maintaining a Blued profile, on which I outlined the research and invited those who viewed the profile to contact me for further information (see Appendix B), proved highly effective; 17 interview participants were recruited in this way. I made constant efforts to ensure that, upon our first meeting, those I met in bars and parks were aware that I was a researcher interested in 'the everyday lives of *gays* in Hainan' (*hainan de gay de richang shenghuo*). This did not require great effort as my 'foreignness' meant that I was constantly required to explain my presence in these spaces and my reasons for being in Hainan more generally.

Nine interviewees actively requested to be interviewed. During these interviews, some these men noted that they had recently undergone what they saw as epiphanal experiences. For example, Ah Run noted that he wanted to be interviewed as an opportunity to discuss the way in which he had recently come to 'entirely accept [him]self' (discussed in Chapter Five, page 213). Others envisaged their lives changing in the near future and saw the interview as an opportunity to leave a record of their lives thus far. For example, Ah Ming, who at the time of our interview was considering 'leaving the scene' and marrying his girlfriend (discussed in Chapter Six), commented:

> I want to tell you about the things that have happened to me over these few years because you never know how long a life will be (*bu zhidao ren zheyisheng hui you duojiu*) and probably, in the future, I will never talk about these experiences again. But, you know, these are my memories; if someone could write them down and other people can know that these things did happen… This is why I wanted to be interviewed by you. **(31, Haikou)**

The other 22 interview participants were asked if they would be interested in

conducting a one-to-one audio-recorded interview. I made the conscious decision only to ask this question through online communication, rather than face-to-face, as I felt that asking face-to-face could result in increased pressure to agree to the interview. As Barratt and Lenton (2010: 70) note, in online communication, 'the lack of physical presence of the researcher makes it easier for the participant to withdraw or opt out'. Where I had come to meet potential interview participant in face-to-face contexts (in bars, parks, or through mutual friends), I inquired about their interest in conducting an interview later, after we had added one another on WeChat.[54] I did not raise the question of conducting an interview again with anyone who did not express interest after my initial inquiries. However, this is not to say that I no longer communicated or socialised with such individuals. As part of the online communication regarding the interviews, it was explained that the interview would be audio-recorded, would take place in a private dining room (*baojian*) in a restaurant, and would last for one to two hours. Many participants sought clarification that the interviews would only be audio-recorded and that no visual recordings would be made.

With the exception of my interview with Da Shu, all of the interviews took place in private dining rooms in restaurants. Participants were asked to choose a restaurant at which they would like the interview to take place. However, with the exception of Dajun Ge, all participants said they would rather I decided the location. In Haikou, Sanya, and Qionghai, where more than two interviews were conducted, I alternated between different restaurants so that the frequency of my visits would not attract the attention of restaurant staff. Private dining rooms allowed for the discussion of sensitive issues without the risk of being overheard, while also being impersonal and porous spaces, therefore avoiding any potential stress that could have been caused had interviews been conducted in either my own or participants' homes. A number of

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[54] The only exception to this was my interview with Da Shu. This interview was conducted spontaneously at my home in Haikou when Da Shu was visiting for dinner. Over dinner, Da Shu and I were discussing issues similar to those that were discussed in the interviews and I asked Da Shu if he would be happy for our conversation to become an audio-recorded interview interaction, to which he agreed without reservation. I knew Da Shu well and I was confident that he would feel sufficiently empowered to decline the interview if he wished. Prior to audio-recording the remainder of this conversation with Da Shu, I followed the procedures of negotiating informed consent as described later in this section.

times, I received messages from men on Blued stating that they would like to take part in an interview, only for their interest to disappear when it was explained that the interview would take place in a private dining room, rather than in their homes, my home, or a hotel room was often proposed. In private dining rooms, our interviews were occasionally interrupted by waiting staff at the restaurants. When this happened, both participants and I would either change the topic of our conversation, if potentially problematic issues were under discussion, or switch to using intentionally vague terminology.

Prior to beginning our audio-recorded interviews, informed consent was sought and gained from all participants in line with the British Sociological Association's guidelines for ethical practice (BSA, 2017); this involved the use of an information sheet (Appendix D) and the signing of a consent form (Appendix E). As has been noted by many researchers working in non-Anglophone contexts, soliciting written consent and handing out official documents can be a confusing and discomforting experience for participants (ASA, 2011; Creed-Kanashiro et al., 2005). This was the case for some men in this research who did not see such formalities as necessary and appeared intimidated by the information sheet, which they saw as embodying an expectation that they should provide some sort of expert and clearly articulated knowledge. I sought to allay such concerns by emphasising that these documents were, on the one hand, a bureaucratic requirement of my university and, on the other, a convenient way for me to double-check that participants were happy to go ahead with the interview and understood its purpose. I also noted that this allowed us to discuss any concerns before turning on the recorder. This meant that the details of the information sheet were both read by participants and elaborated through discussion. Participants were also comforted by the fact that they were not required to use their real names in signing the consent form.

During the interviews I refrained from taking extensive notes, recognising that this could make participants feel uncomfortable (Smith, 2006) and would compromise my ability to engage in active and responsive listening (Bourdieu, 1996). In most of the

interviews, the interview guide served to start the conversation; however, participants would often take the conversation in unexpected directions. I sought to accommodate such diversions by remaining flexible and attentive to the ongoing discussion, especially as I increasingly came to see the project as exploratory and became less concerned with an explicit focus on issues of 'social change'. As noted above, a number of participants came to our interviews with their own agendas for what they wished to discuss; I was happy to accommodate participants' priorities. In some instances, the interview was largely directed by the participant. However, more often I would work towards a balance between following the threads of stories participants wanted to tell and interweaving the agenda of the interview guide. Not all participants came to the interviews with their own sense of having something to say and, as such, a minority of the interviews followed the interview guide in a more straightforward manner. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese; participants occasionally used Hainanese, as discussed later.

I was aware that for some (perhaps many) participants, it was the opportunity to talk to 'a foreigner' that had brought them to the interview. I wanted to acknowledge and engage these desires. Before beginning each interview, I explained to participants that the interview was an opportunity to exchange ideas (*jiaoliu*); I emphasised that they should feel free to ask me any questions they wished during the course of the interview. At the end of each interview, I reiterated this, thanking participants for telling me about themselves and asking if there was anything more they would like to know about me. It was my hope that making myself open to participants' questioning would introduce a degree of 'reciprocity' (Liamputtong, 2007: 60) into the interview interaction.

As noted earlier, I became, and remain, good friends with a number of men that I interviewed. Feminist researchers have noted that friendship between researchers and research participants can foster more equitable relations and more serious and prolonged reflection on research ethics (Coffey, 1999; Edwards and Ribbens, 1998). However, such friendships can also be ethically problematic. They risk coercion, as

friends may feel obliged to participate in the research or forget, during the course of an interview, that the interaction is indeed *an interview*; this can call into question the certainty of informed consent (Duncombe and Jessop, 2012). In this respect, it is worth noting that my friendships with a number of men in this research developed only after we had conducted our interviews.[55] Such friendships were, however, ethically problematic in relation to the generation of observational data and my eventual departure from Hainan and return to the UK, as discussed in the following section.

Friendship and (Not) Leaving the Field

Ethnographic fieldwork leads to blurred boundaries between 'work' and 'life' and between clearly definable research relationships and personal ties of friendship (Taylor, 2011). For some ethnographers, such blurring has been seen as a hallmark of the method, as one that works towards intimate understandings of everyday lives (Powdermaker, 1966; Tillman-Healy, 2003). However, many have also critiqued the potentially manipulative and coercive character of such 'friendships', particularly when researchers occupy economically and socially privileged positions *vis-a-vis* their participant-friends (Rabinow, 1977). Malcolm Crick (1992: 175) has gone as far as to suggest that 'to speak of "friendship" [in ethnographic fieldwork] is somewhat odd. It is but a strategy, "sop behaviour" that is merely part of the extraction of information'.

Crick's seems a rather pessimistic view. It is my whole-hearted belief that I was, and continue to be, friends with a number of men I spent time with in Hainan, some of whom I interviewed, and that our friendship was based on the enjoyment of one another's company, not 'the extraction of information'. Indeed, actively avoiding the formation of such relationships could itself be considered unethical practice (Hall, 2009: 267). This said, from the outset of this research I have also been conscious of

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[55] Here, Da Shu and Lu Ge are the only exceptions. I regularly socialised with these men both prior to and after our interviews.

the fact that blurred boundaries between 'friends' and 'participants' are ethically problematic if personal disclosures are made on the basis of friendship that might not have been made on the basis of a clearly defined researcher/participant relationship (Duncombe and Jessop, 2012).

There are two ways in which I have sought to navigate the ethically problematic terrain of friendship alongside ethnographic research. Firstly, in this thesis, I draw most extensively on interview data for which written, informed consent was gained from all interviewees. The interviews were interactions during which the collection of 'data' was explicit and our relative positions as participant and researcher were more clearly defined. Secondly, where observational data is used in the following chapters, these vignettes describe interactions with participant-friends who were aware that details of our interactions may be recorded as field notes. Moreover, the content of these vignettes is largely contextual; they do not contain information that could be considered a personal disclosure.

More ethically problematic was the risk that the development of friendship relationships over the course of 18 months of fieldwork could cause harm when the time came for me to leave Hainan and return to the UK. Throughout the fieldwork, I sought to mitigate this risk by regularly reminding those I had become close friends with that I would leave Hainan and that, although I would visit in the future, it was unlikely that I would return to Hainan for an extended period (though this will depend on my future research endeavours). I was most concerned by my close friendship with Ah Ji, as we socialised regularly (often daily) and had done so since the beginning of my fieldwork. Moreover, the simultaneity and intertwining of our processes of 'coming into the scene' meant that, to some extent, our sense of ourselves as 'people in the scene' was relational and conferred by our friendship (Chapter Four discusses relationships between 'coming into the scene' and friendship). Ah Ji and I regularly discussed the fact that I would leave Hainan and toward the end of the fieldwork I increasingly voiced my concerns that this might be painful for him (as it certainly was, and still is, for me). During the final two months of the fieldwork, I sensed that Ah Ji

was increasing the distance between us; he visited my home less frequently and was often busy with 'new friends' (*xinpengyou*). We did not discuss this, but I took it as a matter of Ah Ji preparing himself for my departure and respected the increased distance between us. Since leaving Hainan, Ah Ji and I have remained in regular contact via WeChat and Skype, as I have with several other men in this research.

Friendships in ethnographic research makes 'leaving the field' an especially ethically problematic phase of the research (Irwin, 2006). However, even where such friendships are not formed, researchers should reflect critically on the process of 'leaving the field' and the ways in which the ability to do so can highlight structural inequalities between researchers and participants. These have been noted earlier in regard to my privileged mobility compared to many of those I spent time with in Hainan. Heidi Gottfried (1996: 15) points out that 'entering' and 'leaving the field' can entail processes whereby 'the researcher intervenes into a system of power relations that she is free to leave upon completion ... By disengaging, the researcher leaves the subjects on their own to negotiate the power dynamics they have mutually uncovered'. One of the most difficult issues I have faced in carrying out this research is the fact that I was able to travel to Hainan to learn about and participate in the everyday lives of men in this research and was able to end this participation and return to the UK. Stories that for me became 'data' remain everyday realities for men in this research. While many of these stories were joyful, many were also painful and spoke of the struggle to live outside of dominant heteronormative life courses. Recognition of this inequality, as well as my continued friendships with several men in this research, have motivated me to produce a piece of research that I hope will be of interest, relevance, and perhaps some use to participants. A key task upon completion of the research will be to render it accessible to those who contributed to its production.

Additionally, although I am no longer in Hainan, I have not entirely 'left the field'. I continue to support the work of PFLAG in Hainan by advertising their activities on my WeChat profile, which remains accessible to all interviewees and many of those I

spent time with in Hainan. I have also used WeChat to post several translated summaries of sections of the analysis. While above I have noted certain ethical problems that arise in the intertwining of friendships and ethnographic research, there are also benefits. My continued communication with men in this research means that the findings of the research can feed into our everyday conversations. It seems to me that the blurring of boundaries between 'work' and 'life' inherent in ethnographic research also presents opportunities for the blurring of boundaries between academic knowledge production and everyday intimate communication. This is not only a matter of the ways in which everyday intimate communication becomes available to academic enquiry, as discussed earlier in this chapter; it is also a matter of allowing academic enquiry to feed into everyday intimate communication.[56]

Translation, Analysis, and Writing

As I have sought to highlight in the narrative account of my fieldwork given earlier, analysis does not take place as a definable stage of research following the collection of data. Rather, 'it is an inherent and ongoing part of qualitative research' (Spencer, Ritchie, and O'Connor, 2003: 199). Decisions concerning choice of research topic, field site, research questions, and methods can all be seen as analytical decisions in that they speak of an anticipated object of inquiry. These decisions shape what a research project 'is about' and therefore embody analytical decisions about the kinds of things that 'exist in the world' and how they can be known and represented. The process of analysis in this research has been cumulative and diffuse. As discussed earlier, my analysis in the following chapters draws most extensively on data generated through semi-structured interviews. However, this interview data should be seen as situated within, and as the product of, a wider ethnographic methodology: it was shaped by the range of everyday interactions in which I was engaged, the field notes I took, the multiple pieces of analytical and reflexive writing I produced in the field, and the ways in which I became 'a walking archive' (Okely, 2008: 58) of my

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[56] Less directly connected to this research, though still related to my desires for reciprocity, over the past year I have volunteered as a translator for self-identified 'Chinese queer filmmaker' Fan Popo.

everyday life in Hainan. These not only shaped the production of interview data but also its subsequent interpretation. In this section, I focus more closely on the processes of translating the interview data in to English and analysing the transcripts.

All interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese. The nine participants who had moved to Hainan from the mainland PRC spoke only Mandarin. Of those who were born and grew up in Hainan, one participant also spoke only Mandarin, seventeen spoke Mandarin and Hainanese, two spoke Mandarin, Hainanese and Hlai, and two spoke Mandarin and the Danzhou dialect.[57] All participants were confident speaking Mandarin and did so in their everyday lives. Although I underwent six months of language training in Hainanese, the level of fluency I attained was insufficient to conduct in-depth interviews. On a few occasions, participants noted particular expressions in Hainanese that they felt were difficult to translate into Mandarin. Here, my basic knowledge of Hainanese was useful. However, it remains a serious limitation of this research that Hainanese could not feature more prominently in my everyday interactions in the field, in interviews, and in subsequent analysis. This said, a number of participants noted that they would have found it unusual to have spoken Hainanese in the context of our interviews, seeing Hainanese as something they spoke, to quote Xiao Mai, 'only in the village with my parents' (**18, Sanya, from Wenchang**). This in itself is telling of the things that can and cannot be said, including the languages that are and are not spoken, in different social contexts.[58]

I point to these limitations concerning the languages in which this research was conducted because of the importance of language within social constructionist analysis. If, as discussed in the Literature Review, '[a] key concern for interactionist sociology is with the manner through which human beings go about the task of assembling meaning' (Plummer, 2000: 194), then the ways in which meaning is assembled through specific uses of language are necessarily also a key concern. Over

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[57] Hlai is the language of the Li ethnic minority group, it is spoken in central and western Hainan. The Danzhou dialect is spoken in Danzhou County in northwest Hainan. This dialect is distinct from both Mandarin and Hainanese.

[58] Two participants also spoke English.

the following chapters, I draw out analytical insights from the specificities and nuances of participants' language use. Linguist Shuan-Fan Huang (1982: 87) has suggested that 'a language' constitutes 'an ontological world', one that 'defines and delimits what basic entities or categories exist and how declarative sentences in that world are to be interpreted'. As such, in seeking to explore participants' self-understandings and everyday lives, it is necessary to pay close attention to the actual terms through which selves and lives are articulated and the 'ontological worlds' those terms construct.

This presents particular methodological problem, however, when research takes place across cultural-linguistic contexts and involves translation. If language is a key field within which social realities are constructed, then translation necessarily risks the fundamental alteration and obscuring of those realities (Benjamin, 1968). At the same time, once translation is recognised as problematic, it also becomes a valuable analytical strategy. As Gayatri Spivak (1993: 180) has suggested, 'translation is the most intimate act of reading'. Translation necessitates serious consideration of meaning, logic, and ambiguity; as these are reconstructed in another language, the ways in which they were constructed to begin with are opened up to analysis (Bhabha, 1994: 36; House, 2010). Translation, in this sense, is necessarily an interpretive analytical practice that draws out the ways in which meanings are produced in discourse, narrative, and interaction. Difficulties encountered in translation speak of cultural or, as discussed in the Literature Review, ontological specificity (Asad, 1986; Salmond, 2013).[59] With these concerns in mind, at certain points in the following chapters I will explore, sometimes in intricate detail, the potential meanings of a particular word or turn of phrase used by participants. This is in order to highlight layers of meaning that elide direct translation but which may be important in exploring participants' self-understandings and everyday lives. As such, my analysis shifts between 'zooming in' on specific uses of languages, a kind of micro or

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[59] By this same token, it is important to note that the ease with which much everyday dialogue can be translated, even between languages as distinct as Mandarin Chinese and English, speaks of cultural or ontological similitude and generality.

linguistic analysis, and 'zooming out' to recognise such uses of language as situated within discursive-symbolic fields, social relations, everyday material contexts, and broad historical and political dynamics of change and continuity.

I have taken great care in translating the interviews, all of which I translated myself in full. I transcribed and translated seventeen interviews while in Hainan, the remainder were transcribed and translated after returning to the UK. The first seven interviews were transcribed in Chinese before being translated into English. This process proved to be time consuming and the remaining twenty three interviews were transcribed and translated directly into English; however, this did not significantly reduce the amount of time dedicated to the process. When transcribing directly into English, I continued to make note of Chinese terms or would transcribe certain passages in Chinese before translating; this was done where the complexities and nuances of their meaning and logic required reflection upon the specific Chinese terminology and sentence structure that a participant had used. For all interview excerpts that appear in the following chapters, I returned numerous times to the audio-recordings and located the passage in order to review the translation and consider the excerpt within the wider context of the interview. This often led to making slight alterations to the translation where certain nuances appeared to have been missed. I regard myself as having near-native fluency in Mandarin Chinese;[60] however, where necessary, I consulted a colleague at Newcastle University, who is a Mandarin Chinese native speaker, to discuss the subtleties of the meanings invested in particular terms or turns of phrase. In the interview excerpts in the following chapters, I have included the pinyin (Romanised Mandarin Chinese) for words or turns of phrase where I feel the translation does not satisfactorily convey certain nuances. In most instances, these nuances are elaborated in the subsequent analysis of the excerpt. However, given constrains of word count, this has not always been possible. The inclusion of pinyin is intended to unsettle a reading of the English prose; it serves as a reminder that the excerpts are translations;

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[60] I studied Mandarin Chinese for my undergraduate degree, beginning in 2007. I have lived in the PRC for a total of 32 months. My partner of 7 years is from the PRC and we largely speak Mandarin with one another. Since September 2017, I have taught undergraduate Chinese-English translation at Newcastle University.

it also points to inequalities inherent in cross-cultural research when, through translation, words and concepts become unintelligible to those by whom they were spoken in the first place.

Translation and transcription were fundamental facets of data analysis. The interview transcripts were annotated electronically as they were produced. In this way, each transcript was produced alongside an analytical commentary on its content. This allowed me to record reflections on the process of translation, to track emergent themes, to connect the interviews to one another and to my field notes, and to connect emergent themes to conceptual questions. Themes emerging through everyday participant observation and within the interviews were also recoded in a master document that was continually added to, revised, and annotated throughout the fieldwork. I kept in regular conversation with my supervisors regarding emergent themes and produced several 'update' documents that discussed the data and my continuous analysis. All of this also fed into my everyday conversations in Hainan and shaped the continued process of interviewing. In this way, throughout the fieldwork, I was continually immersed within the interview data and engaged in diffuse, lively, and ongoing forms of analysis (Liamputtong, 2009: 133).

After returning to the UK and translating and transcribing the remaining interviews, I engaged in more systematic forms of analysis. I read each transcript and used different colours to highlight, or 'code', sections of the text in accordance with the theme under discussion (Coffrey and Atkinson, 1996: 26-27). This involved the confirmation of initial themes identified during translation and transcription, as well as their reformulation and the emergence of new themes in light of working across the data set as a whole. As I read and coded each translated transcript, I simultaneously listened to the recording of the interview. This served a range of purposes: it allowed me to review the quality of the translation; it prevented me from analysing the transcripts as English-language documents, instead directing analytical attention towards themes as they were articulated by participants in Mandarin Chinese (and occasionally Hainanese); and it served as a reminder that transcripts are more than

texts and represent more than processes by which meaning is discursively and narratively produced: they are the product of the lived experiences of individuals and speak of everyday practices of living.

Once all interviews had been coded, excerpts were extracted from the transcripts and collated in documents corresponding to each theme. Many excerpts were relevant to more than one theme. As excerpts were moved to these documents, they were also categorised in terms of emergent sub-themes. Each excerpt was annotated to highlight its relevance to the sub-theme, the main theme, and the overall aim of the project. As this process continued, it became evident that certain themes had been discussed at greater length, with greater passion and urgency, and by a greater number of participants than other themes, this was also reflected in my field notes and wider experiences in Hainan. This allowed for the identification of key themes that became the focus of the data chapters: meaning of 'the scene' and processes of 'coming in'; processes of sexual categorisation in relation to online interaction; and narratives of the future in relation to family, marriage, and reproduction. This was not necessarily a matter of the revelation of previously unforeseen 'key themes' but more a process by which my intuitive awareness of the importance of certain issues came into increasing focus.[61]

Following these processes, writing up the data chapters involved working with excerpts collated under these key themes, and further categorised into sub-themes, to develop an analytical narrative in dialogue with existing literatures and the range of conceptual perspectives drawn upon in this thesis. This was not a straightforward process; it involved both the expansion and narrowing of themes and subthemes and the inclusion of data that had been previously allocated to other themes. As discussed earlier, I have not attempted to cover all issues that participants raised during our interviews as relevant to their self-understandings and everyday lives; this would be

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[61] In June 2017, themes of embodiment, spatiality, and visibility, discussed primarily in Chapter Five of this thesis, were developed into a dance performance in collaboration with choreographer Martin Hylton (Gateway Studios, Newcastle) and Cap-a-Pie Theatre. This was performed under the title 'Here With' at the Northern Stage in Newcastle by a group of researchers, including myself, as part of the programme Performing Research. This experience also contributed to my analysis of these themes.

impossible within a single thesis and somewhat futile, given that those lives and self-understandings are neither monolithic nor static; they are multiple, partial, and changing. As such, the data chapters are detailed and complex accounts of certain issues, those that appeared to be of most concern for the majority of participants; they seek to tell coherent stories of these issues as they were related by participants, while also complicating this coherency by drawing in contrasting perspectives.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

As will be seen over the following chapters, issues on anonymity, secrecy, and (in)visibility are everyday concerns for men in this research. This highlights the sensitivity of the issues discussed in this thesis and the ways in which participants managed the extent to which they allowed themselves to be known to others as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*, as desiring and having sex with men, within disparate social contexts. Anonymity and confidentiality have been important consideration over the course of the research. As discussed earlier in this chapter, interviews took place in locations where participants and I would not be over-heard and no one but myself and the individual participant was informed of where the interview would take place.[62] Participants were not required to use their actual names in signing the consent form. During the interview, the consent forms and information sheet were removed from the table to prevent them being seen by waiting staff. Recorded interviews were deleted from the recording device once saved to my password protected laptop. This laptop was kept at home at all times, or else it was stored out of sight in my lockable hotel rooms during period of fieldwork in smaller towns across Hainan.[63]All names in this thesis are pseudonyms; these were also used in the transcripts. Information that could have compromised anonymity was altered in, or omitted from, the transcripts,

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[62] Again, my interview with Da Shu is the exception here, for which my partner Jerry was also present. On three occasions participants brought friends with them to the interviews. Ah Gang brought Xiao Pang with him and both men gave their consent to be interviewed. Ya Nan and Lai Lai also brought friends with them. However these friends did not wish to take part in the research. While they did contribute during the interview, their contributions were not transcribed and are not discussed in this thesis.

[63] I had anticipated storing the interview recordings on Newcastle University's Remote Application Service (RAS), this would have been the most secure place to store the files. However, I found that I was unable to access the RAS while in the PRC.

and transcripts were also kept on my laptop. Field notes were only written in rough, abbreviated, and coded form in notebooks; these were elaborated as they were written up on my laptop and certain details were omitted or altered. In most instances, places names given in this thesis do reflect the city/town in which the interview took place and where participants had grown up. This information is general and does not pose a threat to anonymity. However, this information has been altered in instances where, in combination with other details, it could have compromised anonymity. These measures taken to ensure anonymity will be carefully reassessed when the thesis, or some version of it, is translated into Chinese and distributed in Hainan.

Conclusion

This chapter has given an overview of the considerations, processes, and interactions that were involved in the conduct of this research. It has been suggested that an exploratory ethnographic approach, in which the focus of the research is mobile and shifts throughout the process of fieldwork, provides a way of 'doing research' that is sensitive to self-understandings and everyday lives as they are negotiated and lived in specific cultural, social, linguistic, and material contexts. This chapter has outlined how this played out in practice during my fieldwork in Hainan. I have reflected on ethical dilemmas encountered in the course of this research and have reviewed the process of analysing the data co-produced with participants.

It has also been acknowledged that such an approach can also lack focus, as it is not driven by a clearly articulated research question. This is a question of the kinds of knowledge that a researcher seeks to produce. In this thesis, I do not aim to produce a concise answer to a specific question. Rather, my primary aim is to explore and unpack certain concepts and contexts that were central to the ways in which participants placed themselves within certain sexual categories and how these self-understandings were taken up as lived realities, as ways of being in the world together with others. The following chapters explore various aspects of three concepts and contexts that emerged as key concerns for men in this research. I begin with the

ways in which participants understood themselves and others as 'people in the scene'
(*quanneiren*) and narrated processes of 'coming into the scene' (*jinquan*).

Chapter Four: 'The Scene/*Quanzi*'

Introduction

One evening, not long after I had arrived in Hainan to begin fieldwork, I accompanied Xiaoxiao to a densely planted corner of Yuefang Park, in Haikou, where a concrete pavilion stands nestled amongst trees at the end of a narrow path that descends from the park's central walkway. Xiaoxiao and I had known each other for over a year, having met at the 'Concluding Meeting of the Hainan China-Gates AIDS Project' in 2013. When I suggested we meet to catch up, Xiaoxiao invited me to come with him to hand out condoms and leaflets to men who, weather permitting, visit this dark and quite corner of Yuefang Park to relax, chat, and have sex. At that point, I was unaccustomed to visiting such places and I sat beside Xiaoxiao nervously as he talked with one of the ten or so men gathered in the pavilion. 'This is my friend Ah Kang, he's here to do research', he said, as he leant back so that the man and I could see one another.[64] Half-light from the nearest lamppost, obscured by leaves, failed to hide the look of worry that crossed the man's face at the mention of 'research'; it also failed to hide the fact that I was 'a foreigner'. Sensing the tension, Xiaoxiao quickly added, 'he's in our scene too' (*ta ye shi women zhege quanzi li de*). I do not know by what yardstick Xiaoxiao judged me to be 'in the scene' and it would be some time before I would come to recognise myself as such. But for a man seeking friendship and sex with other men in the half-light of a pavilion hidden amongst the trees of Yuefang Park, this did not seem to matter. Knowing that I was 'in our scene too' was enough to confirm that I wasn't a threat and that I was potentially a candidate to satisfy his longings.

As has been outlined in the Introduction, a central problematic of this thesis is the question of how to refer to modes of sexual 'being' when a range of terms were used by participants, sometimes interchangeably, at other times in relation to specific

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[64] Ah Kang is my Mandarin Chinese name.

interactional contexts. These are not only stylistic issues but point to an empirical context in which sexual identities, self-understandings, and modes of 'being' and belonging are emergent, ambiguous, and are articulated in both the construction and collapse of distinctions between sexual practices, sexual desires, and various forms of sociality. A key framework through which men in this research could be seen to negotiate understandings of themselves in relation to others was 'the scene/*quanzi*'. This chapter explores 'the scene' and the ways in which men in this research understood themselves and other men as 'people in the scene' (*quannei ren*) - a sexual-social collectivity within which all but one of the men in this research positioned themselves. Particular attention is paid to how participants narrated a range of interactional processes through which they understood themselves to have 'come into the scene' (*jinquan*).

To be 'in the scene' is a concept widely used by men in Hainan, and elsewhere in the PRC, who may also refer to themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*, or simply 'this kind of person' (*zhezhong ren*). Despite pervasive use of the term-concept 'scene/*quan*', it has received limited attention within the literature on non-heterosexual lives and identities in the PRC. 'Scene/*quan*' has received only passing mention in a handful of articles in which its centrality is displaced by an analytical focus on the production of 'gay' and '*tongzhi* identities'. Translating the term as 'circle', scholars have recounted the ways in which 'men referred to a budding "*tongzhi* circle" or community' (Chapman et al., 2009: 694). Others have noted that 'respondents described the gay circle as a separate space in which one could express one's true self … Gay circles are also the space where men develop a positive sense of their sexual and social identity as gay men' (Sun, Farrer and Choi, 2006: 10). This point concerning relationships between 'gay circles' and 'sexual and social identity as gay' is important and is developed throughout this chapter. However, the above cited studies offer limited discussion of the meanings of 'the circle/scene/*quan*' and 'coming in'; this chapter offers a nuanced and detailed exploration of these issues. In doing so, this chapter is inspired by anthropology's

'ontological turn' (Holbraad and Pedersen, 2017) and resists aligning 'the scene' with a general concept such as 'community', which is itself a long-contested term (Brint, 2001). Instead, this chapter asks: what is 'the scene' as it was constructed and experienced by men in this research? This is explored through close analysis of the ways in which participants defined 'the scene' and narrated their processes of 'coming in'. In doing so, relationships between 'being in the scene' and 'being' *gay*, *tongzhi* and/or *homosexual* are also brought into focus. These relationships are explored implicitly throughout this chapter before being addressed more directly in the final section.

As will be shown in this chapter, '*quan*' carried a broad range of meanings for men in this research. As such, I see the translation of '*quan*' as 'circle' to problematically imply a social totality with clearly definable boundaries. At the same time, my own translation of '*quan*' as 'scene' risks submission to an Anglophone frame of reference. It appears, however, that the English word/concept 'scene' is endowed with a range of meanings that may make it a particularly useful and suitable translation in light of the ways in which '*quan*' was understood and used by men in this research. It has been recognised that the English word/concept 'scene' carries multiple and ambiguous meanings. This has made it a central concept within the field of Subcultural Studies, where the concept of 'a scene' is used to describe social-cultural and material processes ranging from micro-level interactions to global flows of capital and cultures (Blum, 2003; Straw, 2015). Woo, Rennie and Poyntz (2015: 285) note that the term 'scene' has shifted 'from a simple ready-to-hand descriptor for a kind of neighbourhood or clique to a complex theoretical object … agnostic to the nature of its subjects, applying equally to collections of people, spaces, practices, and modes of participation, yet people are able to use it intuitively'. As will be shown in this chapter, the covalence between this understanding of 'scene' and uses of '*quan*' by men in this research is quite extraordinary.

Of course, 'scene' is also a term commonly used by gay men and lesbians in Anglophone contexts, and relationships between 'gay scenes' and sexual identities,

and communities have been explored by a number of scholars (Browne and Bakshi, 2011; Casey, 2004). Such work, however, has largely emphasised the term's spatial connotations, defining 'gay scenes' as 'gay consumption enclaves … usually made up of commercial clubs/bars and support/information groups' (Valentine and Skelton, 2003: 850). While there are certainly spatial connotations to the meanings of 'scene/*quan*' as constructed by men in this research, these are but one context-dependent facet of a much more diverse range of meanings, social and sexual interactions, and self-understandings that coalesce under the rubric of 'the scene'. At the same time, this should not be taken as a claim to an essential difference between the Anglophone 'gay scene' and Chinese 'scene/*quan*'. Indeed, the ways in which 'gay scenes' are more than geographic spaces has been implicitly noted in research on 'scene/non-scene' binaries within Anglophone gay and lesbian cultures, in which 'being scene' or 'non-scene' refers as much to styles of dress and bodily comportment as to whether or not one frequents gay bars or other 'scene' spaces (Baker, 2003; Holliday, 2001). In their work on 'Australian gay identities', Ridge, Plummer and Peasley, (2007: 505) note that 'the scene' is frequently experienced as a "whole new world" that exists somewhat apart from the realities inherent in the everyday world'. These notions of a 'new world' and a social space seen as in some way 'different' from 'the everyday world' resonate with the ways in which men in this research constructed the 'scene/*quan*' and narrated processes of 'coming in'.

Despite the frequency and ease with which participants used the term 'scene/*quan*', there was little agreement as to its meanings or the processes through which one 'comes in'. Endeavours to define the term directly are often complex, contradictory, and intertwined with narratives of self-categorisation as *gay*, *homosexual* and/or *tongzhi*. As is evident in the vignette with which this chapter opened, precise definitions of 'the scene' are not always necessary for the concept to function in everyday interactions. As such, a central argument outlined over the following pages is that 'the scene' is rooted in ambiguity and multiplicity. This chapter begins by positioning 'the scene' alongside the Levi-Straussian concept of a 'floating-signifier'

(Levi-Strauss, 1987) to suggest that 'the scene' allows for the production of forms of sexual-social collectivity and articulations of 'sameness', while leaving the boundaries of belonging to such a grouping, and the nature of this sameness, productively ambiguous. The following sections will explore three key ways in which men in this research understood themselves to have 'come into the scene', these are: 1) through the recognition of gendered sexual desires and engagement in certain sexual practices; 2) through social interactions and relations understood as 'deep' and 'committed'; and, 3) through the accrual, possession, and sharing of certain forms of knowledge. The final section of this chapter addresses relationships between 'being in the scene' and 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, and *tongzhi*. Here, it will be suggested that 'the scene' operates as a 'life-world' (Husserl, 1936; Honer, 2004) within which notions of sexual 'being' are oriented as ways of 'living' – this theme is also key in following chapters.

'The Scene' as a Floating Signifier?

The majority of participants did, in fact, offer accounts of how they 'came into the scene' within which it is possible to infer a range of meanings invested in 'the scene'. However, many also recognised their understandings of these processes as specific to themselves and accounts of 'the scene' were often concluded with caveats such as 'but that's just my opinion'. Meanings of 'the scene' were thereby left open to redefinition by others. As a pre-curser to the following sections, which explore in detail various and specific ways in which men in this research understood themselves to have 'come into the scene', this section focuses on the ways in which some men recognised and reflected upon the ability of 'the scene' to simultaneously refer to myriad sexual-social dynamics across fields of desire, practice, and identity. These men can be seen to emphasis the productive effects of this ambiguity.

In order to explore multiple meanings of the scene, it useful to first consider the term's ambiguity at the level of formal semantic content. The Mandarin Chinese word '*quan*' (*sxuan* in Hainanese) is not unique to men who also understand themselves as

gay, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*. In its general usage, it can be both a noun and a verb, and carries meanings of 'circle', 'to encircle' or 'to enclose'. While this multiplicity of meanings and simultaneity of noun and verb may be common to the English-language 'circle', an analysis of the Chinese script allows for further exploration by breaking the term down into its constituent components:

圈 *quan*

circle, encircle, enclose, connect, confine

口 *wei*

enclosure, surround, surroundings, perimeter

卷 *juan*

roll up, envelope, entwine, to be swept up, enter, admittance, entangle
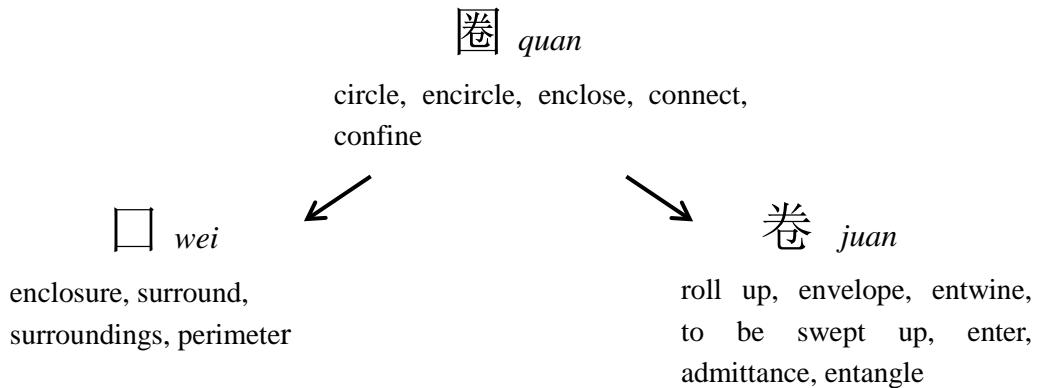
'Scene/*quan*' can be understood as both 'that which is entered' and the experience/practice of 'enclosure' therein. Scene's component elements '*juan*' and '*wei*' both imply practices, processes, and experiences. However, the unison of these two verbs as '*quan*' produces the apparent result of the process – a space within which it is possible to be enclosed. In this sense, 'scene/*quan*' appears inherently performative – it is an object or space produced as the result a certain practice and which itself defines that practice. 'Scene/*quan*' simultaneously conveys the experience of entry and 'that which entered'. In this sense, 'scene/*quan*' can be seen to entail relationships between social practice and the production of social space (*shejiao fanwei*). Such relationships are elaborated throughout this chapter.

This apparent interplay of noun and verb, of boundary, binding and boundary crossing, can be seen as implicit within uses of 'scene' by men in this research. While, as noted above, the term 'scene' is not unique to *gay* vernaculars, some men in this research contrasted their understandings of 'the scene' with more general uses of the term. Below, Ah Gang and Xiao Pang contrast the meanings of 'scene' as it is used by 'straight people' and the range of meanings they saw the term to embody 'for gays':

Xiao Pang: Straight people (*zhiren*) use the term 'scene' too; straight men have their 'social scenes'…

Ah Gang: You can think of it as a kind of interpersonal relationship (*renji guanxi*)

Xiao Pang: Relationships (*guanxi*) are normally just a person to person thing, but for gays 'scene' is a way of talking about something more multi-faceted (*geng duo fangmian de dongxi*). … Maybe it's that in this scene people can achieve a collective sense of sameness (*jiti rentonggan*).

Ah Gang: This scene, it is basically a form of interpersonal relationship, everyone accepts and recognises that you belong as someone this scene (*dajia dou rentong ni shuyu zhege quanzi de ren*)…

Xiao Pang: It feels like there are people who are the same as you and there are people who can help you. **(26, 29, Wuzhishan)**

The meanings of 'scene', here, appear ambiguous and contested. For Ah Gang and Xiao Pang, there is an affinity with uses of 'scene' by 'straight people'; they also see similarities with the concept of '*renji guanxi*', or 'interpersonal relationship'. Yet, as Xiao Pang notes, 'for gays 'scene' is a way of talking about something more multi-faceted'. What this 'something' might be is established, here, in relation to the abstract sense of 'difference' constructed between 'scene' as it is used by 'gays' in the articulation of 'a collective sense of sameness' and as it appears in wider contexts of usage. Xiao Pang and Ah Gang recognise parallels between 'scene' and the notion of '*renji guanxi*' or 'interpersonal relationships', a commonplace concept that implies social or economic connection and mutual influence between two people (Lin, 2010). For Ah Gang, the nature of this relationship is one of 'recogni[tion] that you belong', while for Xiao Pang, it is a matter of 'achiev[ing] a collective sense of sameness' and finding 'people who can help you'. Here, however, subtle differences between '*guanxi*/relationship' and '*quan*/scene' are evident in their discussion, given the latter

concept's affinity with the multiple (*quan* is seen as much more than 'person to person'), the mutual (*guanxi* does not require a relationship of 'sameness') and the ethical (*guanxi* does not necessitate attachments of care). 'Scene' is therefore distinguishable from '*guanxi*', here, in that 'scene' articulates a form of belonging, it implies collectivity based on an abstract 'sameness', and members of this collectivity are seen to share an ethical commitment to one another.

As Ah Gang and Xiao Pang continued, their sense of the distinctiveness of 'scene' and the complexity of the ways it is used by *gay* men were articulated more clearly:

> **Ah Gang:** When people ask 'when did you come into the scene?' it means when you first really came into… really came to know that you are *tongzhi*. But when people are just talking about friends (*pengyou*), they might say 'oh, he's from such and such a scene', or 'my work colleague scene' (*tongshi quan*), scene just means…

> **Xiao Pang:** That's a different concept (*bu yiyang de gainian*).

> **Ah Gang:** That's different, … when people say 'coming into the scene' it's just an expression (*shuofa*), you could say it as 'when did you first start coming into contact with *tongzhi*? When did you first start having same-sex sexual activities (*tongxing xingxingwei*)?' It's all the same. **(29, 26, Wuzhishan)**

Here, uses of 'scene' by *gay*/*tongzhi* men are contrasted with use of the term amongst 'friends', which here implies relationships within which issues of sexual identification are assumed to be irrelevant; 'work colleagues' is given as an example of such relationships (these can, in fact, be seen as relationships premised on assumptions of heterosexuality, as discussed in Chapter Five). Ah Gang locates the 'difference' between these contrasted uses of 'scene' in the wider range of meanings the term takes on in relation to the question 'when did you come into the scene?' As Xiao Pang affirmed earlier, 'straight people use the term 'scene' too', but, as Ah Gang contends here, in its 'straight' usage, being part of a 'scene' implies a form of belonging that is

temporary, contextual, and of limited significance; a person may be 'from such and such a scene' but this categorisation is not understood as a definitional, existential quality of who that person 'is'. In contrast, for Ah Gang, when one *tongzhi* man asks another 'when did you come into the scene?' what is implied is a question of self-understanding: 'coming into the scene', here, means 'know[ing] that you are *tongzhi*'. However, Ah Gang goes on to contend that this may also be a question of social interaction in the form of 'coming into contact with *tongzhi*' and/or a question of sexual practice: 'having same-sex sexual activities'. While these questions may appear to relate to disparate fields of experience, they share an inaugural quality: each question concerns a 'start', an accomplishment, a narrative turning point. What precisely is being asked with the question of when one 'came into the scene' appears quite irrelevant. For Ah Gang, these questions are 'all the same', provided that a response to the question takes the form of an inaugural narrative, be it in terms of self-understanding, social interaction, or sexual practice. 'The scene', here, appears to operate as an open-ended rubric under which various relations of sexual identity, knowledge, sociality, and practice are negotiated and rendered covalent. The status of 'scene' as 'a different concept', can be seen as manifest in this simultaneous and undetermined reference to sexual-social dynamics spanning fields of identity, sociality, knowledge, and practice. This can also be seen as implicit in Xiao Pang earlier comment that 'scene' references 'something more multi-faceted'. These dynamics are explored individually over the following sections.

Claims to the inherent ambiguity and multiplicity of 'the scene' were not unique to Ah Gang and Xiao Pang; they were echoed by other men in this research, as will be further explored below. The use of 'scene' to refer to myriad social-sexual dynamics suggests its function as what Levi-Strauss (1987) described as a 'floating signifier':

> a term which 'always and everywhere …intervene[s], a little like algebraic symbols, in order to represent an undetermined quantity of signification, in itself void of meaning and thus apt to receive any meaning, whose unique function is to bridge a gap between *signifiant* and *signifié* [between signifier and signified] (ibid., in Mehlman, 1972: 23).

Indeed, in their conclusion to the above debate, Xiao Pang and Ah Gang recognised 'scene' as possessing no essential meaning outside of its contextual usage in specific conversations:

Xiao Pang: The scene is a conceptual exchange produced when you are talking (*liaotian de shihou zuo chulai de yi ge gainianxing de jiaoliu*).

Ah Gang: So it really doesn't matter (*wu suowei*).[65]

Xiao Pang: Yeah, it doesn't matter. **(26, 29, Wuzhishan)**

This recognition of 'the scene' as a floating signifier or 'a conceptual exchange', the precise meaning of which 'doesn't matter', stands in apparent contradiction to the term's centrality in the life-course narratives and everyday discourses of many men in this research. Yet it appears that, for some men, the utility of 'scene' was precisely its ability to be deployed *ad hoc* within various contexts to various effects. When asked what 'the scene' meant to him, Xiao Zhou engaged with this function:

Xiao Zhou: It's like a small boundary (*xiao fanwei*). … It's a very suitable word.

James: Why?

Xiao Zhou: Because it points to something rare/few (*xiyou*).

James: Rare/Few?

Xiao Zhou: Using the word 'scene' fixes it (*yong quanzi jiu ba ta guding qilai*), it makes it easy to separate (*fenkai*) or distinguish (*qufen*).

James: … what does it distinguish? How do you understand what is in the scene and what is outside of the scene?

Xiao Zhou: This is very hard to tell, it depends how you see it, there's no right

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[65] In everyday usage the phrase '*wu suowei*' is comparable to the English 'it doesn't matter', or 'I don't care'. However, a literal translation would read 'it is without being named', with '*suowei*' referring to 'the process by which things are named', comparable to the English 'so-called'.

answer, it depends how you see it. … It's really hard to define the scene (*quanzi hen nan dingyi*); it depends on how you think about it. It depends on how you understand it.

James: So you understand it as?

Xiao Zhou: It's too vague (*tai mohu*), it's too big (*ta tai da*), and its margins aren't so clear (*ta de bianyuan bu shi name qingxi*). What I mean by 'its margins aren't clear' is that there are some people who don't know that they are *tongzhi*, but they've already come into the scene and they still don't admit it (*bu chengren*), they're just on the margins, so you can't clearly distinguish. … It's very difficult to tell things apart, you can't tell things apart. If you want to know how people understand the scene then you need to base it on what they know. Maybe some people will think that the scene is just that kind of person (*na yi lei de ren*), like some specific activities, activities that belong to them (*shuyu tamen de huodong*), this is like a scene. **(24, Sanya, from Baisha)**

Xiao Zhou's understood 'the scene' as something at once both delimited and limitless. In his account, 'the scene' operates as a space of definition and fixity, yet is itself without clear or fixed meaning. Xiao Zhou saw 'scene' as a 'very suitable' word for two reasons: it 'points to something rare/few' and 'fixes it'. Both of these functions are implicit in his description of 'the scene' as a '*xiao fanwei*'. This is translated above as 'small boundary' but also carries meanings of a delimited 'range', 'remit', 'modality', 'scope' and 'extent'. 'The-scene-as-*xiao-fanwei*' suggests potential boundaries of belonging, a shared disposition, a delimited field of concern, and a contained field of knowledge. 'The scene', in this sense, can be seen to operate as a minoritising discourse; it produces a category of people, 'rare' and 'few', who are seen to share some form of abstract commonality and are 'distinguished' or 'separated' from a corollary majority. Precisely what is shared by men 'in the scene' and how they are 'distinguished' from an imagined majority 'outside of the scene', however,

remains unspecified. For Xiao Zhou, this was 'really hard to define'.[66]

The delimiting, fixing, and identificatory function of 'scene' contrasts with Xiao Zhou's refusal, here, to articulate general criteria for belonging or any set of objective characteristics between which 'scene' serves to 'distinguish', as he contended, 'there's no right answer, it depends on how you see it'. In the above account, Xiao Zhou does evoke a more definitive discourse of sexual identity under the label '*tongzhi*'. However, the relationship between 'being in the scene' and 'being *tongzhi*' remains ambiguous. His assertion that 'there are some people who don't know that they are *tongzhi* but they've already come into the scene' suggests that sexual self-identification and the disclosure of this identity to others are not prerequisites for 'being in the scene'. At the same time, the perceived disconnect between self-understanding and the assumed objectivity of 'being *tongzhi*', renders the boundaries of 'the scene' 'too vague' and 'too big'. This is further mired by assumed discrepancies between what others inwardly 'know' and outwardly 'admit'. Xiao Zhou broaches an implicit definition of 'being in the scene' as an alignment of 'being *tongzhi*', 'knowing that you are *tongzhi*', and 'admitting to others that you are *tongzhi*' (I will return to such alignments shortly), and it appears that such alignments would make the 'margins' of 'the scene' more 'clear'. However, the complexity of these issues ultimately led Xiao Zhou to conclude that such definitional work must be left to the subjective and contextual knowledge of others. 'The scene' may 'fix it … mak[ing] it easy to separate or distinguish', but the question of what 'it' is remains deferred.

As the above excerpts have suggested, 'the scene' can elaborate ideas of sameness, belonging, boundaries, and fixity while allowing these to be interpreted in multiple and ambiguous ways. A number of linguists have suggested that such ambiguity is a characteristic of Chinese language use (Chen and Chung, 1994). As Hui-Ching Chang (1999: 537) notes, 'there is in Chinese conversation an indeterminate linguistic space, created by the exchange of indirect messages, which allows interactants considerable

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[66] In contrast to his comments here, later in our interview Xiao Zhou provided his own relatively unambiguous definition of 'coming into the scene' which suggested clearer boundaries that he articulates above.

flexibility in negotiating relational position and role behavior within the confines of a relational system'. This would seem to resonate with Xiao Pang's earlier assertion that 'the scene is a conceptual exchange produced when you are talking'.[67] Such understandings of 'the scene' also suggest its affinity with the concept of 'queer', figured as 'a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance' (Halperin, 1995: 62). Butler's (1993:175) definition of 'queer' as 'a necessary term of affiliation [that does] not fully describe those it purports to represent' can be compared to the ways in which Ah Gang, Xiao Pang, and Xiao Zhou all recognised 'scene' as a demarcation that enables negotiations of 'sameness' and claims to belonging that remain strategically uncertain in their meanings. This could be seen as a practice of 'strategic ambiguity' (Jarzabkowski, Sillince, and Shaw, 2003), allowing amorphous claims to social-sexual collectivity that are, at once, highly individualised and broadly collective.

When asked why it is that men 'in the scene' refer to themselves as such, Liang Zongwei further elaborated the strategic function of 'the scene'. He recognised 'the scene' as articulating a sexual minority and saw this minority status as both the product of, and a form of resistance to, exclusion from 'mainstream society':

Liang Zongwei: It's like I said, this scene is a small society (*xiao shehui*) …

James: Why do you think we use the word 'scene' in this way?

Liang Zongwei: This is a bit like… I'll give you an example. It's like when the weather is cold, people will huddle together to warm each other up. So swap cold weather for a society that offers little acceptance and recognition (*shehui renzhi bu gao*), us, this pitiful group of people (*kelian de ren*), huddle together to warm each other up, to get through a crisis (*aoguo weiji*). It's pretty much like this. … Yeah, we're like a group huddled together against the bitter cold (*yanhan*). …

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[67] It should also be noted that such arguments about 'Chinese' linguistic practices verge on cultural essentialism. It may be more appropriate to understand such deployments of ambiguity as contextually specific. As will be seen in the following chapter, in relation to other issues and contexts, dynamics of clarity were also highly valued by many men in this research.

Because a scene has its boundaries, mainstream society marks you out (*quanzi shi you jiexian, zhuliu shehui ba nimen qubie kai*), so you encircle yourselves together to protect yourselves (*quan cheng yikuai baohu ziji*). If everyone accepted you, there would be no scene, you wouldn't live/develop under conditions of confinement (*mei you yige juanyang ni de huanjing*), no one would care. **(26, Haikou)**

Here too, 'the scene' operates as a minoritising discourse, a 'small society' that suggests belonging to a circumscribed social world. However, this 'society' is seen to be defined not by its own essential attributes but by a shared experience of exclusion from 'mainstream society'. For Liang Zongwei, here, sexual minority status – the 'marking out' of the boundaries of 'the scene' – is seen as externally imposed and experienced as a 'condition of confinement', without which 'there would be no scene'.[68] Above, he does not specify the nature of this exclusion, only that it is a lack of 'acceptance and recognition' understood as everywhere and inescapable, 'like when the weather is cold'. The experience of 'living/developing under conditions of confinement' is understood as formative, with the Chinese term '*juanyang*' also meaning 'to breed in captivity' or 'to rear in an enclosure'. This is a term usually reserved for livestock.[69] This demarcation through exclusion, however, is not experienced passively: on the one hand, 'mainstream society marks you out', while on the other, 'you encircle yourselves together to protect yourselves'. 'The scene', for Liang Zongwei, refers to processes of exclusion, enclosure, confinement, but also to processes of self-encircling, becoming, belonging, and protection. Here, exclusion is constructed as a shared experience and, as such, it is also established as the basis for identification, commonality, care, and collective resistance. Men 'in the scene' 'live/develop under conditions of confinement', but these conditions also engender a sense of 'living together' and become the enabling possibility for articulating a shared

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[68] This is an argument comparable to claims that in certain Anglophone contexts 'acceptance' has dawned a 'post-gay' era (see Seidman, 2002 for discussion and critique).

[69] The use of animalistic discourse here is highly emotive; however, this was not found elsewhere amongst participants in their reflections on the meanings of 'the scene'. In other contexts however, there were suggestions of dehumanising 'mainstream' discourses. These are discussed in Chapter Six (page 255).

mode of life. This understanding of 'the scene' can be seen to hinge on the term's semantic multiplicity. This is suggested by Laing Zongwei's use of the same term for 'the scene' (*quan*/圈子) and 'to encircle' (*quancheng*/圈成). These are also both semantically linked to the phrase 'to develop under conditions of confinement' (*juanyan*/圈养). As the *experience* of exclusion, the *effect* of exclusion, and also a *response* to exclusion, the scene-as-exclusion-as-collectivity renders both 'mainstream society' and a 'small society' of 'people in the scene' knowable as social agents and articulates the nature of the relationship between the two. As will be seen throughout this chapter, understandings of 'the scene' are often linked to articulations of social-sexual agency.

This section has argued that 'the scene' is founded upon ambiguity and multiplicity. 'The scene' enables the articulation of notions of 'sameness', and claims to belonging, without the necessary imposition of clear criteria of membership, though this is not to say that boundaries are not elsewhere contextually articulated (as will be seen throughout this thesis). 'The Scene' can serve to collapse distinctions between sexual desires and practices, social interactions, and self-understandings in relation to identity labels. It can, therefore, operate as a social space within which claims to 'sameness' can be made in a range of ways that, nonetheless, engender belonging to 'the same scene'. This section has explored the accounts of men in this research who recognised the ambiguous and multiple meanings of 'the scene' as, to some extent, strategic. For these men, 'the scene' was a form of 'conceptual exchange' that 'points to something rare/few' and 'fixes it', 'marking out' both a 'small society', as a source 'protection', and a 'mainstream society' from which those 'in the scene' are excluded. While relatively few men in this research explicitly recognised these strategic functions of 'the scene', many did acknowledge that their own understandings of 'the scene' and what it meant to 'come in' were specific to themselves. As such, they were open to the possibility of alternative ways of 'coming in'. The following sections explore a range of ways in which participants narrated 'coming into the scene'. These are loosely categorised around themes of sexual desires and practices, the recognition

of forms of social intimacy, and the possession and accrual of certain form of knowledge.

'Coming In' Through Sexual Desires and Practices

The previous section explored Ah Gang and Xiao Pang's debate concerning various and complex meanings of 'the scene'. However, later in our interview, relating his own understanding of when he 'came into the scene', Xiao Pang claimed: 'I just think of it as meaning from when I first started liking men' (*xihuan nanren*) **(26, Wuzhishan)**. Similarly, when asked when it was that he 'came into the scene', Xiao Mai replied:

> I've heard a lot of people saying stuff like: 'I came into the scene when I was in my teens'. But I've been in since I was small, I've liked men since I was small **(18, Sanya, from Wenchang)**

Such assertions that 'coming into the scene' means 'start[ing] liking men' corroborate a foundational principle of a range of theories of 'sexual identity': that gendered sexual desires are articulated in terms of belonging to a shared sexual category (McIntosh, 1968; Stein, 1989). This said, very few men in this research understood 'liking men' and 'being in the scene' as analogous. Rather, as will be explored throughout this chapter, 'being in the scene' more often involved the complex intertwining of gendered sexual desires, the categorisation of selves and others as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*, engagement in social interactions with other such-identified men, and the accrual and sharing of particular kinds of knowledge.

At the same time, amidst this complexity, desiring sex with other men can be seen as a characteristic of all men who understood themselves as 'in the scene' and was understood by all participants as foundational in their categorisation of themselves and others as *gay*, *homosexual*, and *tongzhi*. This is elaborated later in this chapter and also in the following chapter. Throughout this thesis, I seek to maintain critical distance from understandings of 'desires for men' as the 'essential foundation' for

self-understandings, sexual identities, forms of belonging, social relations and interactions, seeing such understandings as dependent upon a heteronormative system of binary gender. However, this does not preclude recognition of the fact that, for many men in this research, this was precisely the way in which notions of 'desire' (*yuwang*) and 'liking men' (*xihuan nanren*) were constructed and experienced. That is, sexual desires were narrated and experienced as gendered, and gender was narrated and experienced as essential and foundational. This suggests the extent to which, for men in this research, binary gender functioned as 'a fundamental social division' (Jackson, 2006b: 107) around which sexual desires, identities, and myriad forms of sociality were organised. It is, therefore, difficult to begin exploring various meanings of 'the scene' and relationships between 'being in the scene' and 'being' *gay*, *homosexual* and/or *tongzhi* without first exploring the ways in which gendered sexual desires were implicated in these processes. This section explores the accounts of participants who associated 'coming into the scene' with desires for, and engagement in, (certain kinds of) sex with other men. For men in this research, gendered sexual desires were largely understood as a field of experience distinct from 'social interaction' (*shejiao*) and 'emotional intimacy' (*ganqing*). However, the following accounts also suggest the ways in which sexual desires are necessarily situated within symbolic and interactional contexts, as was argued by Gagnon and Simon (1973).

The originary status afforded to desires for sex with men was evident in Ya Nan's account of what it meant to 'come into the scene'. Ya Nan constructed 'coming into the scene' as the fulfilment of assumed *a priori* desires for sex with men through engagement in sexual practices:

> Actually, this thing, the first time that your body is owned by someone else (*ni de shenti bei renjia zhanyou*), that's what coming into the scene is. Usually, when you come into the scene you are brought in by someone else, because it's your first time and you don't understand, you don't know how to come in, you have to be pulled in by those old and worldly men (*lao jianghu*), those old *gays* (*lao gay*). Just like I said, you're like this from being small (*ni cong xiao jiushi zheyang*),

because this *gay* consciousness (*zhege gay de yishi*) is something natural that you are born with. The issue is that you haven't really… you haven't found the door to get in, to get in through this door. … There's always someone who brings you in … .After a *gay* is born, once he has his own consciousness (*you yishi zhihou*), he will have thoughts about men. Even though he hasn't come into the scene, in his head he will still have these thoughts, these things. It's just that he won't know how to get into this scene. It's only later when he comes into society (*jin shehui*) that he'll be pulled into this scene. **(28, Sanya, from Henan, Mainland PRC)**

Ya Nan was unique amongst men in this research in his insistence that '*gay consciousness is something natural that you are born with*'; most other men suggested the possibility of both 'natural/innate' (*tiansheng de*) and 'acquired' (*houtian de*) sexual desires. However, his understanding of desires for sex with men as a field of experience separate from sexual practices and social interactions represents a dominant ontological assumption articulated by most men in this research. In the above account, Ya Nan makes a clear distinction between 'being *gay*' and 'being in the scene'. The former is seen to reference essential, pre-social desires for sex with men. As he noted, 'when a gay is born … he will have thoughts about men … [e]ven though he hasn't come into the scene'. In contrast with Xiao Pang and Xiao Mai above, then, the relationship between desiring sex with men and 'coming into the scene', for Ya Nan, concerns the consummation of sexual desires through sexual practices, a process which Yan Nan described using the spatial metaphor of 'com[ing] through the door'.

Similarly, when asked whether or not he felt that 'the scene' was 'important' (*zhongyao*) in his life, Ah Tao recounted an understanding of 'the scene' as a space within which sex with other men is a readily accessible possibility:

I think it is pretty important … you like men; you want to have sex with men; so you have to come into contact with people in the scene. Because love and sex…

because you are this kind of person (*ni shi zhe zhong ren*), so you must come into contact with these things in the scene. If you don't, then all you can do is shoot your handgun (*da shouqiang*, 'masturbate') **(29, Qionghai)**

For both Yan Nan and Ah Tao, 'the scene' appears to be understood as a network of interpersonal relationships that enable desires for sex with men to culminate in sexual practices. 'The scene' is the space on the other side of 'the door', as Yan Nan put it, within which sex between men is seen as readily accessible. In both of these accounts, the distinction between 'being in the scene' and 'being outside of the scene' is made in terms of access to sexual interactions with other men. Here, desiring men (which, for Ya Nan, was understood as '*gay* consciousness' and, for Ah Tao, as being 'this kind of person'), does not confer status as 'in the scene', as it did for Xiao Pang and Xiao Mai. Rather, it was the consummation of these desires through sexual practices – 'the first time your body is owned by someone else' – that marked entry into 'the scene' as a social space within which sex with men was, thereafter, readily accessible. It is important to note that both of these accounts are more complex than the straightforward analogy between 'having sex with men' and 'coming into the scene' that they at first glance suggest. In Ah Tao's account, he distinguishes between 'sex' and 'shooting your hand gun'. In this sense, his account also depends on the disparate meanings of different sexual practices. This point is elaborated below. Ya Nan's account of 'coming into the scene' not only involves 'having sex with men', but also 'know[ing] how to come in [and] … be[ing] pulled in by those old and worldly men'. It is, therefore, also an account of social interaction and the accrual of certain kinds of knowledge. These points are elaborated in the following sections of this chapter.

Echoing both Ya Nan and Ah Tao, Xiao Zhou also associated 'being in the scene' with engagement in sexual practices. However, in his account below, the boundaries of 'the scene' are located not in distinctions between sexual desires and sexual practices, but in the contrast he drew between 'emotional relationships' (*tan lian'ai*) and 'bodily relations' (*routi guanxi*). He suggested that both are necessary in order to 'count as someone in the scene':

To be in the scene you need to have had some bodily relations (*fasheng dao routi guanxi*). If you've not, then… Well, you might not have had bodily relations, you might have had an emotional relationship with a man (*tan lian'ai*), but such platonic love (*bailatu shi de aiqing*), maybe that's in the scene too. But if in both spirit and body, both of these, you've got into this place, then that means you really count as someone in the scene (*jingshen routi liangzhi dou touru dao zhege difang qu jiu suan shi quanzi de ren*). **(24, Sanya, from Baisha)**

Here, Xiao Zhou offers an account of 'coming into the scene' that is premised on a binary distinction between 'spirit' (*jingshen*) and 'body' (*routi*). This is also a distinction between 'love' (*ai*) and 'sex' (*xing*). While Xiao Zhou notes that both sides of these binaries may pertain to 'the scene', he establishes gradients of belonging and certainty between men whose relation with other men are solely 'platonic' and men who, 'in *both* spirit and body, [have] got into this place'. His understanding of 'really count[ing] as someone in the scene' emphasises the materiality of 'bodily relation'. Importantly, the term Xiao Zhou used for 'body' was '*routi*', which may be more literally translated as 'fleshy body'. This could be seen as emphasising materiality, more so than the more commonly used term '*shenti*' or 'lived body' (Huang, 1982).[70] For Xiao Zhou, here, 'really count[ing] as someone in the scene' appears to require the coming together of 'spirit and body'. 'Being in the scene', in this sense, is constructed as the realisation of complementarity between perceived 'spiritual' and 'material' dimensions of life and self. For comparison, it can be seen that in Xiao Pang and Xiao Mai's accounts, 'liking men' was equated with 'being in the scene'; for Yan Nan and Ah Tao, 'liking men' *and* 'having sex with men' were equated with 'being in the scene'; for Xiao Zhou, 'liking men', 'having sex with men', *and* 'loving men' were equated with 'being in the scene'. As will be discussed later in this chapter, Xiao Zhou further qualified his understanding of 'really counting as someone in the scene', in suggesting that knowledge of the 'bodily relations' that he describes above must be shared with others.

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[70] '*Rou*' literally means 'meat', hence my translation of '*routi*' as 'fleshy body'. '*Shen*' can mean 'body', 'to live', 'to experience', and 'self', hence my translation above as 'lived body' (also see Tung, 1994).

All three of the above accounts suggest the ways in which, for some men in this research, 'coming into the scene' was seen to involve engagement in sexual practices with other men. More than this, however, they can also be seen to relate 'coming into the scene' to specific kinds of sexual practice. For example, Yan Nan referred to 'the first time that your body is owned by someone else', and Ah Tao distinguished 'shoot[ing] your handgun' from 'sex with men'. Later in our interview, Ah Tao further discussed the specific forms of sexual practice that he understood as conferring status as 'in the scene'. He did so as he considered whether or not a friend of his, Ah Dai, could be considered to have 'come into the scene'. Ah Tao and Ah Dai were part of a group of men who met nightly in Qionghai Park. Despite Ah Dai's social interactions with men 'in the scene', Ah Tao did not consider him to have 'really come into the scene' (yet) and identified him as 'a straight guy' (*zhinan*):

Ah Tao: I think he… he's on both sides (*ta shi liangmian de*), he can accept us *gays* chatting to him (*women gay gen ta liaotian*), he can also accept *gays* touching him (*mo ta*), but he couldn't have sex with a *gay* (*bu neng gen yige gay fasheng xing guanxi*), like this. Up to now, these are the limits of what he can accept, what will happen later? I don't know. Anyway, if I'm with him, I won't bring him in (*bu hui ba ta dai jinlai*); if he walks in himself (*ziji zoujinlai*), then that's nothing to do with me. It's like this.

James: What do you mean by 'bring him in'?

Ah Tao: To bring him in, it means, like, if he… if he were to have sex with a man (*gen nande fasheng xing guanxi*) and come into contact with this scene, to really come into this scene (*zhenzheng zoujin zhege quan*). So I won't bring him in.

James: If someone were to bring him in, how would that happen?

Ah Tao: If someone else wanted to bring him in then he'd need to have sex with that person, in this way he could come in. Because he's young and young people have strong sexual desires (*xingyu*) and, on top of that, he doesn't have a

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girlfriend. It's like this, if he just wants to let off some steam (*faxie*) then he might let someone shoot his handgun (*da shouqiang,* masturbate), but if he really had sex with a man, well, if he's done it once then he's gonna do it again, after the second time if he doesn't want to do it again then he won't come in, but if there's a third time, a fourth time, well then he's already come in (*ta jinle*). **(29, Qionghai)**

Ah Tao saw Ah Dai as positioned both partially inside and outside of 'the scene', identifying him as a 'straight guy' while also recognising that he was able to accept socialising with, and being 'touched' by, '*gays*'. Ah Dai's passive 'acceptance' of these social and sexual interactions situated him 'on both sides'. In this sense, trajectory 'into the scene' appeared to be understood along a continuum from active rejection of sexual interactions with men, to passive acceptance, to active engagement. At the same time, this also appears to be a continuum of disparate practices, from 'chatting', to 'touching', to 'having sex'. As Ah Tao imagined Ah Dai's entry into the scene, he narrated a process of transition from assumed asexual 'chatting', to passively accepted 'touching', to actively desired 'sex' with men.[71] Firstly, Ah Tao claims that to 'really come into this scene', Ah Dai would have to 'really have sex with a man'; the boundaries of 'the scene' are here articulated in relation to a notion of 'real sex'. Distinguished from 'touching' and 'shooting your handgun', it is implied that 'real sex' means penetrative anal intercourse. Ah Tao contended that being 'touched' by a man or allowing a man to 'shoot your handgun' may merely be a means of 'letting off steam' and satisfying 'strong sexual desires'. These were understood as displaced desires for women, resulting from the fact that Ah Dai 'doesn't have a girlfriend'. To 'really have sex with a man', on the other hand, was seen as performative of having 'come into the scene'. In Ah Tao's account, the relationship between engaging in 'real sex' and 'being in the scene' also concerns the frequency of these practices. He suggested that it is possible to 'really have sex with a

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[71] My analysis here is limited by my failure, during the interview, to question what it would mean for Ah Dai to 'walk in himself', as opposed to having someone else 'bring him in'. The former would seem to imply an active pursuit of sexual interaction with men. This seems paradoxical given that, for Ah Tao, such desires were themselves seen as engendering status as 'in the scene'.

man' twice before this sexual activity constitutes 'coming into the scene'. As he put it, 'it can happen once, … twice …but if there's a third time, a fourth time, well then he's already come in'. For Ah Tao, this regularisation of 'real sex' implied active desire for sexual interaction.[72] This imagined narrative of Ah Dai's entry into the scene, therefore, culminates in actively desired, habitual, and penetrative sex between men; this is a triumvirate of agentive engagement, temporal continuity, and definitional practice that would figure Ah Dai as 'really in the scene'.

This section has explored narratives in which 'coming into the scene' was associated with gendered sexual desires and sexual practices. A minority of men in this research, at times, gave seemingly straightforward accounts of 'being in the scene' as analogous to 'liking men'. More often, 'coming into the scene' was articulated as a process of transition from desiring sex with men to having sex with men. 'The scene', in this sense, was figured as a space within which sex with other men was readily accessible. Such relationships between 'the scene', sexual desires, and sexual practices were also mediated by binary distinctions between 'bodies' and 'spirits', and between 'passive' and 'active' sexual interactions. These were also shaped by the meanings invested in different sexual practices. Such understandings of 'the scene' in relation to gendered sexual desires and sexual practices already highlight the ways in which 'coming into the scene' is an interactional process. 'Coming in' is therefore a matter of complex entanglements of sexual desires, practices, socialities, embodiments, identities, and forms of knowledge. The following sections further unpack these entanglements.

'Coming in' Through Social Interactions and Intimacies

Already evident in accounts discussed in the previous sections are the ways in which 'coming into the scene' can refer to engagement in social interaction with other men recognised as *gay*, *tongzhi*, *homosexual*, and/or also 'in the scene'. As Ah Gang put it,

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[72] While articulated in various and disparate ways, this kind of association between perceived intentionality and the actualisation of certain modes of sexual 'being' is a recurrent theme throughout this thesis. This is discussed later in this chapter and in the following chapter.

'coming into the scene' means 'when … you first start coming into contact with *tongzhi*'. Also referencing forms of social interaction, for Liang Zongwei 'the scene' appeared to offer forms of social support that he described as 'huddling together for warmth'. 'The scene', in this sense, appears to be articulated in relation to forms of social interaction and social intimacy with others identified in particular ways. This section explores accounts within which 'coming into the scene' was understood in relation to engagement in social interaction, and the formation of social intimacies, with other men recognised as *gay*, *tongzhi*, *homosexual*, and as also 'in the scene'.

Xiao Lei had been 'in the scene' for 8 years and, as I found out upon spending an evening with him at Yese (the *gay* bar in Haikou), he was well-known and had many friends 'in the scene'. When asked what he understood 'coming into the scene' to mean, he replied:

> At the start I didn't understand; later, I asked a friend in the scene, he said, 'if you've started to come into contact with people in the scene, it means that you have already come into this scene (*zhi yao ni kaishi gen quan limian de ren jiechu ni jiu yijing jinru zhe quan limian*), even if you've only come into contact with just a few people'. Maybe because he explained it in that way, I never really thought about it much. I just started hanging out (*chulai wan*) with people, and slowly they would bring their good friends out too, we would hang out together. So, slowly, I came into this scene. **(27, Haikou)**

Similarly, Ah Tao suggested 'coming into the scene' to mean engagement in social interactions with other men who were also seen as 'in the scene'. Ah Tao was also very well-known in the Haikou 'scene', having previously worked at a *gay* bar in the city. Before entering into the below account of 'the scene', Ah Tao had been recounting 'the first time [he] made contact with someone like this' (*diyici jiechu zhezhongren*). He then contrasted this 'one-off' encounter with what he termed 'properly coming into contact' (*zhezheng jiechu*):

If you mean like properly coming in to contact, like clubs and places in the scene, then that was in 2012. In 2012, I came back from the mainland and started working at the *gay* bar in Haikou; that was when I really, really, (*zhenzheng, zhenzheng*) came into contact with this. … I suddenly knew a lot of people, it was only like this that I really came into contact, like completely came into contact (*wanquan jiechu*)… really stepped into this scene (*zhenzheng taru dao zhege quanzi*). Because if you've just met one or two, that doesn't count at all (*yagen dou busuan*). **(29, Qionghai)**

Xiao Lei and Ah Tao's accounts of 'coming into the scene' locate the boundaries of 'the scene' in 'contact', 'hanging out', and 'friendship' with other men also recognised as 'in the scene'. Broadly, such understandings of 'the scene' were shared by many men in this research. In these accounts, 'the scene' is figured as a matter of social interaction; 'being in the scene' means knowing and socialising with other men 'in the scene'. While Xiao Lei and Ah Tao's accounts are similar in their emphasis on 'the scene' as a collective social space produced in the social interaction of men mutually recognising one another as 'in the scene', they differ in their quantifications of these processes. For Xiao Lei, 'you have already come into this scene, even if you've only come into contact with just a few people'. In contrast, for Ah Tao, 'if you've just met one or two, that really doesn't count at all'.

Zhang Liang also discussed such issues of quantification. Zhang Liang was the only man in this research who did not see himself as having 'come into the scene'. He too saw 'coming into the scene' as a matter of social interaction, noting that although he did have a number of '*gay* friends', the infrequency of his interactions with other *gay* men meant that he did not see himself as having 'come into the scene':

James: Do think of yourself as having come into the scene?

Zhang Liang: No, … Because I very rarely see those… I've almost never been to that *gay* bar, and I very rarely go singing with a group of *gay* friends (*gen yi*

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qun gay de pengyou) or stuff like that. I sometimes go out with normal friends (*zhengchang pengyou*) and there might be one or two who everyone knows *are* (*dajia zhidao tamen shi*), but they're in the minority (*tamen shi shaoshu*). I very rarely hang out with a lot of people; I don't hang out in the scene (*hunquan*), so to say.

James: What does 'hanging out in the scene' mean to you?

Zhang Liang: For me it means that you only hang out with those kinds, those kinds of *gays*, you go with them for all your food, drinks and fun (*chi he wan le*). **(28, Haikou, from Fujian, mainland PRC)**

Zhang Liang understood 'coming into the scene' and 'hanging out in the scene' to refer to social interaction in exclusively '*gay*' social groups (*qun*). The facts that he had 'almost never been to that *gay* bar' and that within his group of 'normal friends' *gay* men were a 'minority' meant that he did not see himself as having 'come into the scene'.[73] Zhang Liang was unique amongst men in this research in his claim that 'being in the scene' meant that 'you only hang out … with *gays*'. However, as will be discussed in the final section of this chapter, other men did understand 'the scene' as 'a world for homosexuals' **(Xiao Mai, 18, Sanya, from Wenchang)** and suggested that 'when we say 'scene' what we mean is that they are all *gay*' **(Lu Ge, 45, Sanya, from Guizhou, Mainland PRC)**. Here, it is also suggested that 'the scene' is a social space defined by an exclusivity of sexual identities.

Many men in this research understood themselves as 'in the scene' in relation to their social interactions with other men who they saw as *gay*, *tongzhi*, *homosexual* and/or 'in the scene'. This was, however, not always a straightforward matter of whether or not, and with what frequency, they engaged in such interactions. Often, relationships between 'coming into the scene' and social interaction with other men understood as *gay*, *tongzhi*, *homosexual*, and/or as 'in the scene' were qualified in specific and

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[73] Later in our interview, I asked Zhang Liang to clarify what he meant by 'normal friends', he explained that this referred to 'classmate and colleagues, people you come to know through work relations'.

complex ways. These are explored in the remainder of this section.

In my interview with Da Shu, he related what he saw as dominant criteria by which men 'in the scene' recognised themselves as such. Later, he went on to offer his own interpretation of these issues. Both the dominant understanding of 'the scene' he recounts below and his own individual understanding, explored shortly, concerned specific forms of social interaction:

> If you use softwares to find friends then it's as though you place yourself within this boundary (*ba ziji huadao zhege fanwei nei*). … So, earlier in my life, why did I feel unsure about whether I was in this scene or not? It was because I hadn't come to know these people through the internet (*meiyou tongguo wangluo renshi zhexie ren*).[74] Most of the time, for this community (*zhege qunti*), people believe that the internet is the most effective way of socialising; it's become their mainstream view (*zhuliu de kanfa*). But my view is different from this mainstream view, so I felt that I was drifting on the outside of this scene (*youli zai zhege quanzi de waimian*). **(32, Haikou)**

Here Da Shu details what he saw as a 'mainstream view' of what it means to be 'in the scene'. He saw this as tied to norms of social connection and interaction through the use of 'softwares'. This is an understanding that, as the following chapter will show, is pervasive amongst men in this research. This suggests that what Da Shu described, here, as a 'mainstream view' is in fact just that. The scene, in this sense, can be seen as established through the recognition of norms of social interaction. For Da Shu, the 'use [of] softwares to find friends' is a defining characteristic of belonging to 'the scene'; it is a matter of 'place[ing] yourself within this boundary'. In Mandarin Chinese, 'boundary' was '*fanwei*', the same term used earlier by Xiao Zhou (page 133). As noted earlier, '*fanwei*' can also be translated as 'modality', suggesting that online interactions are a 'modality' of social interaction which is itself constitutive of 'being the scene'. For Da Shu, 'being in the scene' appears to entail

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[74] Da Shu used 'these people' to refer to his first and second male sexual partners whom we had been discussing earlier in the interview. One of these men he had met on a bus, the other he met at a swimming pool.

aligning oneself with this 'mainstream view'; a form of 'cultural belonging' through commitment to 'mainstream views' within 'the scene' (a number of other forms of belonging to 'the scene' that could be termed 'cultural' are discussed in the following section). Da Shu recognised that he did not share this 'mainstream view' and, as such, he 'felt that [he] was drifting on the outside of this scene … unsure of whether [he] was in this scene or not'. Earlier, Xiao Lei and Ah Tao suggested that 'being in the scene' means engaging in social interactions with other men 'in the scene'. In Da Shu's account of a 'mainstream view' within 'the scene', 'being in the scene' is not only a matter of whether or not one engages in social interactions but also concerns the specific ways in which such interactions are facilitated.

As Da Shu continued, he outlined his understanding of the forms of social interaction through which he had eventually come to see himself as 'in the scene'. This was based on his participation in a group of *tongzhi* men who met weekly to play badminton. This discussion came about following the below exchange:

Jerry: Do you think you have come into the scene now?[75]

Da Shu: Do you think that our badminton group counts?

Jerry: Well, that's more of a social group (*shejiao qun*)

Both Jerry and Da Shu participated in the badminton group. However, they differed in their understandings of whether or not participation in this group amounted to having 'come into the scene'. For Jerry, it did not; he defined the badminton group as 'a social group', suggesting that it was a social activity in which he participated, but this participation did not constitute a framework for a particular mode of self-definition. Da Shu, on the other hand, *did* see his involvement in the badminton group as constituting 'coming into the scene'. However, his recognition of himself as 'in the

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[75] As noted in the Methodology, my interview with Da Shu differed from those with other men in this research in that it took place at my home with my partner Jerry present and contributing to the interview. However, Jerry's contributions were minimal and are not referenced elsewhere in this thesis. As such, I have not included Jerry in the participant sample. This is in contrast to my interview with Ah Gang and Xiao Pang, both of whom spoke extensively during our interview and both of whom are referenced throughout this thesis.

scene' was not a matter of social interaction alone. This was evident as he continued:

> Now I'm part of a *tongzhi* group. I joined a group who play badminton; everyone is *tongzhi*; everyone plays badminton. I play with them; I socialise with them. This is a kind of normal social activity (*zhengchang shejiao*), right? So if we talk normally about our views on some topics, or about our feelings and emotions, have a laugh, then I guess that means I've come into the scene; this means that I have come into the heart of this community (*jinru dao zhege qunti dangzhong*); that I've come in deeply (*shenrule*). But if you mean having sex, that kind, then that depends on the individual … I don't think that this is an indication of having come into the scene (*ru quan de yige fama*). If you take it as depending on the depth of your social interactions (*shejiao de shenrudu*), or your communication and exchanges (*goutong xing*), I think I have properly come into contact with this community (*zhenzheng jiechu zhege qunti*) and have made friends with people. At least I feel that I am in deeper than I used to be (*bi yiqian geng shenru yi xie*). **(32, Haikou)**

Da Shu's understanding of himself as having 'come into the scene' was not a result of 'social activity' alone but was engendered by the sense of 'depth' that he attached to activities such as 'talk[ing] … about our feelings and emotions'. For Da Shu, sharing intimate details of his life with other *tongzhi* men was seen to evidence the 'depth of your social interactions'. This 'depth' was seen as indicative of the 'depth' to which he had 'come in the scene'. These abstract concepts of 'depth' suggest that 'coming into the scene' refers to processes of personal, intimate disclosure and to a sense of social commitment to other *tongzhi*. These are processes of 'communication and exchange' through which intimate and emotional details of life and self are shared with other *tongzhi*. These notions of emotional 'depth' and social commitment can be seen to delineate the distinction between practical participation, embodied in Jerry's notion of 'a social group', and processes of self-definition as 'in the scene', suggested by Da Shu. In the above account, it is the notion of emotional 'depth' that distinguishes between simply being 'part of a *tongzhi* group' and having 'come into

the scene'. For Da Shu, it appears that 'being in the scene' references an alignment of sexual identity (as *tongzhi*), social interaction (with *tongzhi*), and social-emotional intimacy. Da Shu's badminton group are understood to share a common sexual identity, as he puts it, 'everyone is *tongzhi*, everyone plays badminton'; in light of the above discussion, it is possible to add to this: 'we all talk about our feelings and emotions', therefore 'we are all in the scene'. On the basis of this understanding of 'coming into the scene', Da Shu refuted associations between 'being in the scene' and 'having sex [with men]', such as those discussed in the previous section.

Da Shu went further than most participants in elaborating the sense of intimacy he ascribed to his social relations with other *tongzhi* in relation to which he saw himself as having 'come into the scene'. However, others similarly associated 'coming into the scene' with forms of intimate communication and disclosure. For example, Xiao Qiao, who understood himself as having 'come into the scene' two years prior to our interview, gave the following account:

> In my understanding, I came into the scene when… erm… the first time that I spoke with a lot of people from the heart about (*xinli shang*)… even with friends online… the first time that I spoke from the heart, communicated with them, about this thing (*goutong guo zhege dongxi*), and I felt like I had come to know it (*liaojie le*); I more or less understood what sort of thing *tongzhi* is (*tongzhi shi ge shenme yang de shiqing*) and I knew that such a thing exists in the world (*shijie shang haiyou zheme yige dongxi*). I think that this meant that I had come into the scene. **(18, Chengmai)**

For Xiao Qiao, too, 'coming into the scene' concerned the intimate sharing of information about himself with others through what he described as speaking 'from the heart'. In a similar fashion to Ah Tao earlier, Xiao Qiao also quantified his social interactions with other men 'in the scene', noting that he had come into 'the scene' after he had 'spoke[n] with a lot of people'. Here, however, such sharing not only concerned forms of intimate interaction and communication with other men identified

as *tongzhi* (as in Da Shu's account). For Xiao Qiao, 'coming into the scene' concerned his arrival at an understanding of himself as *tongzhi* and the ways in which this was achieved and disclosed in dialogue with others. Xiao Qiao saw his status as 'in the scene' as conferred at the intersections of knowing 'what sort of thing *tongzhi* is', knowing that 'such a thing exists in the world', and the application of this knowledge to both himself and others in a form of intimate dialogue understood as speaking 'from the heart'. In this sense, Xiao Qiao's account of 'coming into the scene' appears to involve the crossing of related boundaries between the self and others, between the individual and the collective, and between the 'heart' and the 'world'. 'Coming into the scene' can, here, be seen as the process by which these boundaries are broken down through the recognition of the self as *tongzhi*, the recognition of *tongzhi* as a shared social-sexual identity, and the recognition of social intimacy with other *tongzhi*. In this account, then, 'being in the scene' and 'being *tongzhi*' appear inseparable, though they are not quite analogous. 'Being *tongzhi*' is seen as an objective 'truth', as a matter of both 'who one is' and 'what sort of things exist in the world'. 'Coming into the scene' describes a process by which this 'truth' is 'realisation' in intimate dialogue with others also understood as *tongzhi*.

Da Shu and Xiao Qiao differ how their understandings of themselves and others as *tongzhi* were implicated in their processes of 'coming into the scene'. Da Shu understood himself as *tongzhi* prior to the intimate social interactions with other *tongzhi* that he saw as conferring his status as 'in the scene'. Xiao Qiao, on the other hand, saw recognition of himself and others as *tongzhi*, and the accrual and sharing of this knowledge in intimate social interaction, to have conferred his status as 'in the scene'. In both accounts, however, 'coming into the scene' involved the recognition and embrace of a particular 'kind' of self in interaction with others. These can also be seen as processes through which particular kinds of selves are produced as social agents in interaction with others; that is, processes by which 'being *tongzhi*' (to continue with the term used by Da Shu and Xiao Qiao) comes to be perceived as the basis for particular forms of social interaction. Such relationships between 'the scene',

sexual identity, and the articulation of agency in social interaction were more clearly evident in Liang Zongwei's below account. Liang Zongwei echoed Xiao Lei's earlier claim that 'if you've started to come into contact with people in this scene, it means that you have already come into this scene'. However, he placed more emphasis on the *active pursuit* of such 'contact'. When asked when it was that he saw himself as having 'come into the scene', Liang Zongwei replied:

> It's very vague, because I came to know myself very early (*wo renshi ziji feichang zao*), when I was in primary school. In primary school, I had already realised that I was someone on this side (*zhe yi fangmian de ren*). And then in middle school, without really thinking, I started to see some videos of this kind, you know, *GV*s (*gay* videos), and that made me even more certain that I was something of this side (*zhe fangmian de dongxi*). Then, when I was in my first year of high school, the summer of my first year of high school, that was the first time that I met someone in the scene (*di yi ci jian yige quannei ren*), yeah. And then… You could say that… I think coming into the scene means starting to actively come into contact with people in the scene (*zhudong jiechu quanzi li de ren*), that's when it starts. So if you ask me, I started actively coming into contact with people in the scene when I was in my first year of high school, so I would say that I started coming into the scene in the summer of my first year of high school, yeah. **(26, Haikou)**

In contrast to Xiao Qiao, Liang Zongwei saw his entry into the scene as having little to do with his arrival at a particular mode of self-understanding, which, as he contended, long preceded his 'contact' with 'the scene' (although he described his understanding of himself, here, quite ambiguously as 'someone on this side'). Here too, however, 'coming into the scene' remains centred on social interaction with other men with whom a sense of sameness is shared – it remains a matter of 'coming into contact with people in the scene'. More than this, in the above account, 'coming into the scene means starting to *actively* come into contact with people in the scene'; status as either 'inside' or 'outside' of 'the scene' is defined in terms of a distinction

between *active* pursuit of social interaction and *passive* or *coincidental* 'contact'. This notion of 'actively coming into contact with the scene' emerges in contrast an account of childhood contact with '*gay* videos', which Liang Zongwei saw as having occurred 'without really thinking'. The perceived change that constituted 'coming into the scene' was therefore not a shift in self-understanding; Liang Zongwei understood himself as 'this kind of thing' both before and after 'coming into the scene'. Rather, in this account, is was a shift from passive to active social interaction with 'people in the scene' that constituted Liang Zongwei's own process of 'coming into the scene'. In this sense, 'coming into the scene', refers to a process whereby the self is recognised as the active and desiring author of social interaction with others also recognised as 'in the scene' and as sharing a common sexual identity. Such an understanding of 'scene' further suggests the concept's centrality to the articulation of sexual agency. Here, Liang Zongwei discussed 'coming into the scene' as invested in his recognition of himself as actively pursuing social interaction with other men in the scene. However, this can also be compared to Ah Tao's earlier account, in which the boundaries of 'the scene' were delineated in distinctions between passive acceptance and active pursuit of sex with men.[76]

The excerpts analysed in this section represent various interpretations of 'coming into the scene'. However, each excerpt has highlighted the ways in which the 'scene' was constructed as a boundary crossed through forms of social interaction with other men understood as *gay*, *tongzhi*, *homosexual*, and/or 'in the scene'. Such interactions were quantified and qualified in a range of ways. Quantifications concerned the frequency and exclusivity of social interactions with other men recognised as *gay*, *tongzhi*, *homosexual*, and/or 'in the scene'. Qualifications concerned the extent to which these interactions were understood as intimate, as coming 'from the heart' or as 'deep', and the extent to which these interactions were seen as actively pursued.

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[76] There is also a point to be made in relation to the above account about the importance afforded to embodied 'contact' with other men in the scene, as opposed to 'seeing videos of this kind'. In-depth discussion of relations between the scene, embodiment, visuality, space, identity and agency is taken up in the following chapter.

'Coming in' Through Knowing and Being Known

As already noted above, for Xiao Qiao, being 'in the scene' had much to do with the exchange of certain forms of knowledge – certain ways of knowing selves, as well as knowing, and being known by, others. In the previous section, Xiao Qiao's account was analysed in terms of the sense of social intimacy that he saw as characterising the interactions through with this knowledge was shared. However, his account also highlighted the ways in which 'coming into the scene' can involve practices of knowing – the accrual and exchange of particular forms of knowledge. Such concerns for 'knowing' were evident in the ways that many men in this research understood themselves as 'in the scene'. These are not only concerns for the content of knowledge (*zhishi*) – what is known *about* a certain person or thing – but also for practices of knowing and being known (*zhidao/renshi*). These issues also concerned the performance of knowing by showing oneself to be 'in the know'. This section explores the accounts of participants who saw 'coming into the scene' and 'being in the scene' as matters of knowing certain things and being known by others in certain ways.

As was suggested earlier in reference to Da Shu's account of 'coming into the scene', 'the scene' was at times recognised as a form of 'cultural belonging' performed through adherence to certain norms of interaction. The cultural norm that Da Shu deemed a marker of 'being in the scene' was the 'use [of] softwares to find friends'. I use the term 'culture', here, as defined by Clifford Geertz (1973: 89) as an 'historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, as systems of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men [*sic*] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes towards life'. 'Cultural belonging', therefore, can be understood as a matter of knowing such 'patterns of meaning' and performing of this knowledge in interaction. This was evident in Ah Zheng's account of 'the scene'. Ah Zheng was affectionately known in 'the scene' as 'Fruit Sister'; he regularly visited Linlan Park and Tianchi

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(Sanya's *gay* bar) and had previously been involved in AIDS-prevention work in Sanya. He was, therefore, a fountain of knowledge about all things 'in the scene'. When I asked him to define 'the scene', Ah Zheng initially suggested that the term refers to 'not straight men' (*bu shi zhinan*). This suggests the foundational status of gender and sexual identities in articulations of 'the scene', as has been noted in the previous section. Here, this is articulated as the negation of 'straight men', rather than through the affirmative terms '*gay*' or '*tongzhi*'. However, as Ah Zheng further elaborated the meanings of 'the scene', he entered into a lengthy exposition of things known by men 'in the scene'. I cite this account at length to preserve the sense of inventory by which it was characterised:

James: So when we say 'scene', this word, what does this mean to you?

Ah Zheng: It means, like, not straight men, right? Like not *gay*, straight men. ... And usually, if you do zero (*ling*), then they call you big sister (*jiejie*), big sister. They call one (*yi*), one, and zero, right?[77] Those who do one, they do one, zeros just do zero, zero and one, like this, they're different, this is how we describe it. … Those who haven't come in (*jinlai*) are just called *anchang*, those who have come into our scene, come into our scene, we just say they've come in (*jinlai*), come into our *gay* scene (*gay quan*); if they haven't come in, then they're called *anchang*.[78] And we say 'how long have you been in', that kind of thing, we say 'come in'. It's like, if you often come to these places then you've come in, … like the club, the company (*gongsi*), err, the park (*gongyuan*), we call the park the company … it's like a company for people like us, normally when we go to the park with friends we all call it the company … So, if you say 'the company' they know that you want to go to that place, go to the park, we just call it the

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[77] 'One' (*yi*) refers to men who, during anal sex, prefer to penetrate other men; 'zero' (*ling*) refers to men who prefer to be penetrated. These terms not only indicate sex-roles, but are also understood as gendered sexual identities; 'ones' tend to be considered 'masculine' (*nanaxinghua*) and 'zeros' feminine (*nüxinghua*), hence Ah Zheng's claim that zeros call each other 'sisters'. The gendering of sex-role identities is not explored in detail in this thesis as these issues were not problematised or discussed at length by many men in this in this research during our interviews (for in-depth discussion of 'one' and 'zero' identities see Zheng, 2015; for critique of Zheng's account see Wei, 2016)

[78] The term *anchang* is elaborated shortly and will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.

company … and that bamboo grove at the company, we call it the bamboo grove (*zhulin*), that's the centre and there are more people there in the centre. And then other names, there's nothing much, we all call each other sisters, when we see each other we say something like 'hey sister' haha. Yeah, we usually call each other sister, people like us. … If you're talking about doing it (*zuo*) then 0.5 means that you can do both sides, pure one (*chunyi*) means exclusively penetrating other people, and pure zeros (*chunling*) get penetrated by other people, it's just like this; 0.5 means you can do both sides. And bisexuals (*shuangxinglian*) like men and like women, that kind, they also penetrate you but don't let you penetrate them, normally pure ones don't let you penetrate them, 0.5s can do both sides. In the scene, we also call someone you like your 'dish' (*nide cai*), your dish is like someone that, as soon as you meet them, you just 419 with them. 419 you probably know right? Normally, when we talk about those who sell themselves, we say *MB*. 419, MB, these are some of the words. And 369, that's what we call those people who talk a lot of rubbish, we call them 369, those who tell a lot of lies, saying stuff that isn't true, we call them 369, you can't trust them, they talk 369.[79] **(54, Sanya)**

Seemingly dissatisfied with his initial definition of 'the scene' as a way of collectively describing 'not straight men', Ah Zheng went on to list the names, practices, norms, and places that are drawn together under the rubric of 'the scene' and are drawn upon by 'not straight men' in their social and sexual interactions with one another. For Ah Zheng, 'the scene' refers to a shared body of cultural knowledge. The possession of this knowledge was seen to confer status as 'in the scene'. In this sense, 'the scene' can be understood as what Anthony Giddens terms a field of 'knowledgeability': 'all the things which actors know tacitly about how to "go on" in the context of social life' (1984, p. xxiii). Within Ah Zheng's listing of the myriad ways in which 'people in the scene' 'go on', 'the scene' is articulated as a social-cultural-sexual collectivity.

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[79] 'MB' is an acronym of the English 'money boy'. '419' is used is for its likeness with the English words 'for one night', thereby implying a casual sexual encounter; however, the numbers are spoken in Mandarin Chinese as '*siyaojiu*'. Generally neither term is recognised as derived from English. The number three in Chinese is associated with excess, '369' therefore implies excessive speech.

Phrases such as 'they call you big sister … we call it the company … this is how we describe it …we just say they've come in, … people like us … normally we talk about …' are instances of the identification and performance of cultural collectivity; the phrases articulate a 'we' and an 'us' who do and say things in particular and shared ways. Such knowledgeability also included the different ways in which gender is performed 'in the scene' by 'ones' and 'zeros', with the latter referring to one another as 'sisters'. This could be seen as what Norman Fairclough (2013: 9) refers to as 'members' resources' (also Leap and Provencher, 2011). These are matters of knowing the 'how', 'what', 'where', and 'who' through which social and sexual interactions between men 'in the scene' unfold.

Later in our interview, Ah Zheng explained the term '*anchang*' used in the above excerpt; this term literally means 'hidden/dark whores'. Ah Zheng defined *anchang* as men 'who haven't come in to the scene'; this was in relation to the range of things *anchang* 'don't know'. As he put it:

> There are still some who haven't come in to the scene, so you don't know them (*ni bu zhidao tamen*), like those *anchang* who don't come out into the scene, you don't know them. … *Anchang*, haha, *anchang* is what we call people who don't know about the places for this side of things (*zhe fangmian de defang*), like, they are in the dark, dark places (*heian de defang*), do you know what I mean? … Those *anchang* in the countryside, they don't even know what a condom is; there are even some who've never seen a condom, never seen one! They don't have this kind of knowledge (*tamen meiyou zhezhong zhishi*), so you can tell them about the importance of this and then they know. … People who've come into the scene, who've lived in the scene for a while, we call ourselves *gay* (*women jiao ziji shi gay*). And homosexual (*tongxinglian*), that's for those *anchang* who don't often… who haven't come into this scene, right? Anchang don't know *gay*, so you just say homosexual to them and they understand. **(54, Sanya)**

For Ah Zheng, outside of 'the scene' there were not only 'straight men', but also

anchang. These were men who were understood as 'homosexual', but who did not 'come into the scene'. *Anchang* can be seen to be constructed as 'Other' to 'men in the scene'. This 'Otherness' – the status of *anchang* as 'outside of the scene' – was articulated in relation to the range of things that *anchang* were assumed not to know. In Ah Zheng's above account, each of the ways in which *anchang* were figured as having not 'come in' concerned an imagined lack of knowledge: *anchang* 'don't know about the places for this side of things …don't even know what a condom is … [and] don't know *gay*'. This understanding of *anchang* further suggests the ways in which 'the scene' is constructed as a field of shared knowledge. 'Coming into the scene' and 'being someone in the scene', in this sense, can be seen as to concern the accrual, possession, and performance of particular kinds of knowledge.

In Ah Zheng's account, *anchang* were not only men who lacked certain kinds of knowledge but who were themselves 'not known'. As he put it: 'you don't know them'. *Anchang* were only discussed by one other participant during interviews (discussed in the following chapter). However, the role of *anchang* as a 'constitutive outside' (Hall, 2000: 3) of 'the scene' was evident beyond the interviews. One evening, while I was visiting Qionghai, Ah Tao took me on a tour of 'the scene'. As we walked between various 'meeting places', Ah Tao stopped and pointed down a stairwell that led to the basement of a house built on a steep embankment. 'An *anchang* lives down there', he said, as he pointed into the darkness (note, here, Ah Zheng's above reference to 'dark places'). I asked Ah Tao if he knew the man who lived at the bottom of this dark stairwell, Ah Tao explained that had seen him once, but did not know him (*bu renshi ta*). In contrast with the 'meeting places' to which Ah Tao had also taken me that evening, where I had met and had come to know other men 'in the scene', what Ah Tao pointed to at the bottom of that dark stairwell was precisely a lack of knowledge, it was the absent presence of someone unknown. The function *anchang* as an absent presence and 'constitutive outside' of 'the scene' is further explored in the following chapter.

To returning to Ah Zheng's earlier account of all things known 'in the scene', as he

continued, he outlined an understanding of 'the scene' as not only as a social-sexual collectivity produced through the performance of shared cultural knowledge but also as a social space within which selves and others are known in particular ways. In doing so, he concluded his earlier account of 'the scene' by shifting his emphasis from a shared field of knowledge to a social field within which individuals are known in particular ways:

> People in this scene like to joke, back and forth, about everything; they say I'm rotten (*lan*).[80] For me, whatever other people say, I don't care; let them say what they want, it won't affect my mood … Anyway, they're all people in this scene too (*fanzheng dou shi zhege quanzi li de ren*). This is my personal view. … Some people, if they know you've done it, they start spreading rumours all around, saying 'oh, how many people have you done it with today', 'how many people have you given blowjobs (*kou*)', 'you've been eating sperm again', haha! They'll say anything, when we're together, they'll say anything. In this scene, we can say anything *(shenme dou shuo zai zhege quanzi li)*. Well, we're all sisters together (*dou shi jiemei zai yiqi*), we all say these things, right? **(54, Sanya)**

In this account, Ah Zheng continued to see 'the scene' as invested in shared ways of doing and saying things. He also associated 'the scene' with norms of 'jok[ing] back and forth'. However, in describing the ways in which men 'in the scene' 'joke back and forth', he shifted from an account of all things known 'in the scene' to an account of the ways in which particular individuals are known. At the same time, this account still draws upon sexual-cultural practices, such as 'doing it', 'giving blowjobs', and 'eating sperm'. It is in relation to such practices that individuals become known. Ah Zheng therefore highlights the ways in which 'the scene', as a field of knowledge, concerns both knowing certain terms and practices and knowing certain individuals through those terms and as having engaged in those practices. For Ah Zheng, 'the scene' was a space of mutuality within which he could accept being known in

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[80] 'Rotten' (*lan*) is used as an insult against men who are seen to have 'too much sex' with other men; this is often in tandem with the term 'messed-up' (*luan*). These terms point to the ways in which sexual interactions are regulated by discourses of order and cleanliness. These are explored in more detail in the following chapter.

particular ways. As he put it: 'anyway, we're all people in the scene … we're all sisters, we all say these things'.[81] The scene, in this sense, is not only a field of cultural knowledge but a contained, networked, and permissive social space within which certain forms of knowledge about selves and others travels. Within this space, selves and others are produced as 'in the scene' in relation to the ways in which they are known. In Ah Zheng's account, knowing selves and others as 'in the scene', the ways in which they are known within 'the scene', and knowing the cultural contents of 'the scene' are all intertwined. Selves and others circulate within 'the scene' as a field of knowledge to the extent that they are known through labels such as 'sister', 'one', 'zero', or '0.5', known as frequenting certain places such as the 'club' or the 'company', and known for the practices they have, or are at least rumoured to have, engaged in. Through these practices of knowing, individuals can themselves become objects of knowledge and cultural components of 'the scene'; they can become part of 'the scene's' cultural repertoire in a given locale. It is in this sense that knowing Ah Zheng not as 'Ah Zheng' but as 'Fruit Sister', and knowing that in Sanya this is how he is known by other men 'in the scene', is one way in which I recognise and perform my own belonging to the Sanya 'scene'.[82]

Xiao Zhou also gave an account of 'being in the scene' that was similarly centred on issues of 'being known'. In contrast to his earlier claim that 'the scene' was 'too vague, … too big, and its margins aren't so clear', Xiao Zhou's below account of 'the scene' is precisely qualified and quantified:

> **Xiao Zhou:** Someone who really belongs to the scene (*zhenzheng shuyu quanzi de ren*) is someone that you know (*jingguo ni de renshi*) and that more than three of your friends know too, know some stuff about them, all that kind of stuff, that's someone who's really in the scene …

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[81] Of course, not all participants were as comfortable as Ah Zheng with knowledge of themselves and their sexual practices circulating in the scene. As will be explored in the following Chapter, many participants expressed anxiety over what they saw as 'appropriate' and 'balanced' sexual practices and those they termed 'messed-up' (*luan*).

[82] 'Scene' operates as both a general concept and one that can be localised as, for example, 'the Sanya scene' (*sanya de quanzi*) or 'the Haikou scene'. For men in this research, belonging to a localised 'scene' was not distinguished from the general notion of 'being someone in the scene' that this chapter explores.

James: What sort of stuff?

Xiao Zhou: Very private stuff (*hen simi de*), stuff that you wouldn't… wouldn't normally discuss, like the stuff that only two people should know. This is what I count as 'in the scene', some people are different. … Yeah, the stuff that they know about you, it has to be that kind of really private stuff, who you've been with in the past, which guys you've had fun with, that's what makes it real (*cai chengle zhenzheng*). **(24, Sanya, from Baisha)**

For Xiao Zhou, here, the status of any person as 'in the scene' requires certain kinds of knowledge about that person to be held by at least four others who themselves are 'friends'. This understanding of 'being in the scene' can be compared to Da Shu's account, explored earlier under the theme of 'social intimacy'. For Da Shu, it was 'talk[ing] … about our feelings and emotions' with other *tongzhi* that conferred his status as 'in the scene'. Similarly, for Xiao Zhou it is shared knowledge of 'really private stuff' that confers a person's status as 'in the scene'. Both accounts concern the sharing of intimate personal information, though they can be seen to differ in their respective emphases on emotional and sexual intimacies. Xiao Zhou's claim that in order to be considered to have 'come into the scene' others must know 'who you've been with in the past, which guys you've had fun with' also echoes Ah Zheng's understanding of 'the scene' as a network of social relationships within which selves and others are known through the sexual practices in which they are said to have engaged. Xiao Zhou's account, therefore, evidences the intertwining of networks of shared knowledge, intimate social relationships, and sexual practices. These are brought together under the rubric of 'the scene'. In this sense, while Xiao Zhou's above account of 'the scene' is carefully quantified and qualified, it also points to the multiple dynamics of sexual practices, social interactions and intimacies, and ways of knowing and being known that overlap and intersect within understandings of 'the scene'. As such, it should also be pointed out that, alongside this relatively unambiguous account of what it means to 'be in the scene', Xiao Zhou recognised that 'some people are different'. He thereby reaffirmed potentially multiple ways in

which 'the scene' may be constructed and experienced and reiterated the function of 'the scene' as a floating signifier, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Indeed, this chapter has now explored three disparate accounts of 'the scene' given by Xiao Zhou himself.

The above excerpts have suggested the ways in which participants understood 'the scene' as a social space within which certain forms of knowledge are exchanged and within which selves and others are known in certain ways. The accrual and performance of this knowledge can constitute 'coming into the scene', while being known in certain ways can confer status as 'in the scene'. In line with these insights, it should also be noted that 'outside of the scene', certain forms of knowledge are carefully guarded and are prevented from circulating. This was evident one evening when I met with Gao Quan to go for dinner at Snack City in Sanya. Snack City was a densely packed maze of fast-food stalls on the ground floor of a shopping centre on Jiefang Rd., Sanya's central artery. As Gao Quan and I sat side by side eating bowls of boiled seafood, he asked me to describe my 'partner' (*duixiang*) and I began: 'my boyfriend (*nan pengyou*) is…' Without drawing attention to himself, Gao Quan slid his hand up the back of my chair and began pinching the skin on my back. Taking this as a sign of affection, I turned to him and smiled, but found him glaring back at me with a look of anxious urgency. Seeing that I was clueless as to the meaning of his action, he glanced at the waitress tending to the piles of crab and prawns just over a metre away. He tilted his head towards her and then glared at me again, widening his eyes. All the while, he did not say a word. I realised, then, that use of the word 'boyfriend' was contraband outside of 'the scene' and, following Gao Quan, I switched to using the gender-neutral term 'partner'. This further highlights the ways in which the boundaries of the scene, as Ah Zheng emphasised earlier, are perceived in relation to specific uses of language – there are things that *can* be said 'in the scene' and, consequently, ways in which selves and others *can* be known; these are also things that *cannot* be said outside of 'the scene' and ways in which selves and others *cannot* be known.

The following section will more fully unpack relationships between 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, and *tongzhi* and being 'someone in the scene'. It is worth noting, here, that for many participants 'the scene' was recognised as a social space within which they were willing to be known by others as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*, that is, known through discourses of sexual identity.[83] A few days after the above-described dinner, Gao Quan and I met again to conduct a recorded interview. During our interview, I asked Gao Quan how many of his friends knew that he was *gay*, after he had referred to himself as such; he replied:

Gao Quan: I don't tell anyone, I don't let my friends know.

James: In Sanya? Or where?

Gao Quan: Wherever, I don't let people around me know. … Of course, people in the scene know, but if they're not in the scene then I keep it secret. **(24, Sanya, from Ledong)**

For Gao Quan, 'the scene' was the social space within which he was known by others as *gay*. This knowledge was 'kept secret' outside of the scene. The boundaries between people and places 'in the scene' and those 'outside of the scene' were thus marked by the ways in which sexual identities are known or 'kept secret'. Below, Liang Zongwei further exemplifies the ways in which 'being in the scene' can refer to dynamics of being known as *gay*. Liang Zongwei had been discussing how he came to 'understand [him]self' (*liaojie dao ziji*) after watching online *gay* pornography (*GV*) in middle school. At that point, however, he did not consider himself to be 'in the scene'. The asked why this was, he replies:

Because there still wasn't anyone who actually knew that I was *gay* (*shiji shang hai meiyou ren zhidao wo shi gay*). I think that the first time I came into contact… The first time I met up with someone and then there was another

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[83] These issues are explored further in the following chapter, which will discuss the ways in which the majority of men in this research came to understand themselves as *gay*, *homosexual* and/or *tongzhi* through online interactions with other men, mutually identifying one another under these terms in relation to their co-presence within online '*gay* spaces'. For many, this was understood as a process of 'coming into the scene'.

person who knew that I was *gay*, it was only then that I counted as a *gay* (*cai suan shi yige gay*). When there is someone else who knows your identity (*renshi ni de shenfen*), that's when you count as having come into the scene. Because before then, there's only you looking and stuff, there's no one else who knows. **(26, Haikou)**

This account highlights the complexity of relationships between the construction of sexual identities and processes of 'coming into the scene'. These are explored further in the following section. For Liang Zongwei, here, in order to 'count as a *gay*' this 'identity' must be known by another person. This process of becoming known as *gay* was seen as one of 'coming into the scene'. 'The scene' is, therefore, the social space within which one becomes known as *gay* and within which being *gay* come to 'count', that is, becomes a reality. 'The scene', in this sense, is the epistemological space within which 'being' *gay* gains ontological integrity. This is elaborated in the following section, where it is suggested that, for some men in this research, 'the scene' was understood as a 'life world' within which it becomes possible to orient and to live 'a *gay* life'. It is important to point out that Liang Zongwei's account of 'coming into the scene', becoming 'known as *gay*', and 'coming to count as a *gay*' also centres on the notion of 'contact'. This is distinguished from 'looking and stuff'. This points to complex relations between online and offline spaces and interactions and the visibility, embodiment, and materialisation of sexual identities. These issues are the focus of the following chapter.

As Cathrine Degnen (2013: 568) notes:

> Knowing … is an expression and a set of cultural practices. … [P]aying critical attention to the ways in which knowing is put to work socially and culturally permits fruitful insight into multiple and overlapping relations. These relations are understood to be central to the ways in which people are made meaningful and become connected to the world they live in.

This section has explored 'the scene' as both a field of knowledge and a way of knowing selves and others. It has been suggested that 'the scene' operates as a

social-epistemological space within which 'people are made meaningful' through such knowledge practices. 'Knowing', in this sense, is central to the ways in which selves, others, sexual identities, and notions of being and belonging are made 'real'. Of course, as discussed in the Literature Review, this is a central tenet of a broad range of constructionist understandings of social reality. What this section has shown, however, is that this function of 'knowing' is far from an abstract theoretical inference; for men in the scene, 'knowing' was an everyday reflexive practice that constituted ways of 'being in the world', both of 'being in the scene' and 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, '*tongzhi*", or, as Ah Zheng put it, 'not straight'.

'Being in the Scene' and 'Being' *Gay*, *Homosexual*, and/or *Tongzhi*

So far, this chapter has explored meanings of 'the scene' and 'coming in' as articulated in relation to gendered sexual desires and practices, social interactions and intimacies, and the accrual and performance certain forms of knowledge. Each section has also touched upon relations between the recognition of selves and others as 'in the scene' and as *gay*, *homosexual* and *tongzhi*. This final section draws together insight gained across the previous sections to explore these relations in more detail.

It is impossible to offer more than a broad (and therefore reductive), interpretive account of relationships between 'being in the scene' and 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* as articulated by men in this research. As has been implicit over the course of this chapter, 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* meant different things to different men in different contexts. It is possible, however, to outline a range of meanings implicit in these identity labels in relation to the various processes of 'coming into the scene' that have been discussed in this chapter: 1) when 'coming into the scene' was articulated in terms of a transition from gendered sexual desires to sexual practices, sexual identity terms were conceived as the labelling of gendered sexual desires; 2) when 'coming into the scene' was articulated in terms of the formation of intimate social relationships, sexual identity terms were conceived as the labelling of gendered sexual desires *and* as the basis for the formation of intimate

social relationships; 3) when 'coming into the scene' was articulated as the accrual of, and integration into, certain forms of shared knowledge, sexual identity terms are conceived as the labelling of gendered desires *and* as the basis for the formation of social relationships *and* as modes of cultural belonging and ways of knowing, and being known by, others. The stability and coherence of these distinctions is problematised, however, by the fact that, as discussed in the first section of this chapter: 4) when 'coming into the scene' is articulated as an inherently ambiguous process that is open to multiple, subjective interpretations, sexual identity terms were conceived as contextually and subjectively referencing fields of gendered sexual desire and practices, social interactions and intimacies, and/or practices of knowing and being known.

Without wishing to deny this complexity, it can be seen that each of these iteration of 'the scene' and its relationship to 'being' *gay*, *homosexual* and *tongzhi* concerns transitions from individual to collective modes of 'sexual being'. For men in this research, it was possible to 'be' *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* outside of 'the scene'. However, it appears that it is through 'coming into the scene' that 'being' *gay*, *homosexual* and/or *tongzhi* become modes of 'being together' – ways of interacting (sexually, socially, culturally, epistemologically) on the basis of perceived 'sexual sameness' with others. Such distinctions between individual and collective modes of sexual 'being' and the role of 'the scene' in mediating between the two are apparent in the following excerpts:

> The scene, my own opinion is that it is a collective description (*tongcheng*) for a group of people (*yiqun ren*). Us *gays*, this group (*qun*), this kind of people, can be collectively described as a scene (*quan*); that's what I think. **(Xiao Lei, 27, Haikou)**

> I just have such a simple understanding of it: all those in the scene are definitely *gay* (*quanzi limian de yiding shi gay*), part of the same group of people (*tong yi qun ren*). **(Lu Ge, 45, Sanya, from Guizhou, Mainland PRC)**

The scene means that they are all homosexuals (*quan de yisi jiushi dou shi tongxinglian*), the word we use is 'scene'. People in the scene, we have… Like, people of the same kind are a scene (*tong yi lei ren shi yige quan*). **(Gao Quan, 24, Sanya, from Ledong)**

In each of the above accounts, 'the scene' is understood as a way of referring to *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* men 'collectively' as 'a group of people'. The scene, in this sense, could be understood as a boundary between recognition of the individual-self as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*, and the recognition of the self as belonging to a collective sexual category as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*. This has been apparent in many of the accounts of 'coming into the scene' analysed in this chapter, which concerned various ways in which individuals redefined themselves in terms of collective modes of sexual 'being' through interaction with others.

Liang Zongwei gave an account of 'the scene' that illustrates these dynamics of recognition of self and collectivity as they unfold through processes of 'coming into the scene':

Coming into the scene is… It's like you recognise (*renzhi*)… erm… How should I put it? It's like you start to understand that your sexual orientation is in this scene (*mingbai ziji de xingxiang shi zai zhege quanzi li*), you start coming into contact with people in here, you start to approximate your own people (*kaishi zoujin ziji de ren*, lit: 'walk close to people of yourself'), and these people slowly start to know you and then you come to belong as someone in the scene (*shuyu quanzi li de ren*). **(26, Haikou)**

In this account, 'sexual orientation' is understood as a possessive property of the individual – it is '*your* sexual orientation' (*nide xingquxiang*). At the same time, this assumed property of the individual comes to be 'understood' (*mingbai*) only through its 'recognition' (*renzhi*) as situated within a collective social space. While it may be '*your* sexual orientation' it is also 'in this scene'; it is both individual and

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shared/collective; the recognition of both requires a process of 'coming into the scene'. This sense of the coming together of the individual and the collective is reiterated in Laing Zongwei's reference to 'approximat[ing] your own people', in which assumed relations of *a priori* 'sameness' between the individual and the collective must, nonetheless, be realised through a process of 'approximation'. This sense of *'becoming something you always were'* is implicit in the term '*renzhi*'. This is translated above as 'recognise'; however, a more literal translation would read 'to approve knowledge of something'. '*Renzhi*' therefore implies a process whereby an object of knowledge (*zhi*) becomes an accepted 'truth' through a social process of approval (*ren*), thereby becoming 'a thing in the world'. For Liang Zongwei, the 'true thing' recognised here is 'sexual orientation' inscribed as a mode of collective 'belonging' – as a commonality between the self and others. 'The scene' acts, here, as a framing concept to define the social-interactional space/process within which this 'recognition' takes place and within which the 'sameness' of the individual and the collective is realised.

Drawing upon Sara Ahmed's re-thinking of 'sexual orientation' (2006a; 2006b), it is possible to think of 'the scene' as the social space, or framework of social-sexual relations, within and towards which 'people in the scene' are socially (and, as the following chapter will suggest, spatially and temporally) 'oriented'. For Ahmed (2006a: 553-557), the notion of sexual orientation is not only a matter of gendered sexual desires, but a way of 'orienting ourselves towards some objects more than others, including physical objects, … but also objects of thought, feeling, and judgment, and objects in the sense of aims, aspirations, and objectives' as well as 'values, capital, … projects and styles'. These orientations constitute 'direction[s] (taken) towards objects and others … ways of inhabiting and extending into space' (ibid.: 557). In this sense, 'coming into the scene' not only concerns the ways in which notions of 'sexual orientation' or 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* are realised as both a property of the individual and as engendering collective 'sameness', it also concerns the ways in which individuals become 'oriented' as relationships are

established with a range of objects and others figured as 'inside' or 'outside' of 'the scene'. Clearly, diverse processes of 'coming into the scene', in their multiplicity described throughout this chapter, share an implicit directionality: 'coming in' is a social and spatial orientation towards people and places 'in the scene'; it is also a temporal orientation that distinguishes between a past and present self (the question of to what extent 'the scene' provides orientations towards the future is explored in Chapter Six). What is more, for Liang Zongwei, 'coming into the scene' is also an 'approximation', a 'coming close to' that is also a matter of 'becoming like' 'people of yourself' – it is both an orientation towards others and towards a particular kind of self recognised in relation to others.

The relationship between notions of 'being' *gay*, *tongzhi*, and *homosexual* and 'coming into the scene' can be seen to concern the ways in which these sexual categories become meaningful beyond the individual as shared modes of 'being' and belonging. 'The scene' is the space within which such 'being' is embodied in the presence of others (though this embodiment and presence is often complex and contested, as explored in the following chapter). It is also the space within which such sexual 'being' is taken up as a mode of 'being oneself' and is 'oriented' as a way of living together with others. This notion of 'the scene' as orienting a particular mode of life was suggested by Lu Ge, who defined 'the scene' as a 'category of life'. It was also highlighted by Xiao Mai, who saw 'the scene' as 'a world for homosexuals':

> When we say 'scene' what we mean is that they are all *gay*, this *tongzhi* group (*tongzhi de zheyiqun ren limian*), this category of life/mode of life (*shenghuo de fanchou*), the category of their social interactions and the people they come into contact with (*tamen jiechu jiaowang de fanchou*), this is the scene. (**Lu Ge, 45, Sanya, from Guizhou, Mainland PRC**)

> It's just us homosexuals (*jiushi women tongxinglian ren*), it belongs to us homosexuals (*shuyu women tongxinglian*), really it's like… like a world for homosexuals (*tongxinglian ren de diqiu*); we are people in a scene, just like that.

It's a family/home (*jia*), we're all in here, that's what it means to me. …Yeah, it's like a family/home, we're all in here, people like us are all in here (*women zhe yi lei ren dou zai limian*). **(Xiao Mai, 18, Sanya, from Wenchang)**

The scene, for Lu Ge and Xiao Mai, was seen to collate a broad range of objects, others, relations and practices, imbuing them with discursive unity such that they constitute a categorical 'mode of life', a delimited 'world' to which belonging can be claimed. Gao Quan similarly associated 'the scene' with the construction and recognition of a particular kind of life; as he put it:

Actually, this scene is also… it's like being in another life (*lingwai yige shenghuo*), it's good too. **(24, Sanya, from Ledong)**

For Lailai, this understanding of 'being in the scene' as a 'mode of life' was articulated in contrast to a 'normal life' outside of the scene:

Some people say that they don't hang out in the scene (*hun quan*). They mean that they don't come into contact with people in the scene and they don't go on apps, things like that, they just live their so-called 'normal' life, find a wife and have kids (*quqi shengzi*), they think of this as not hanging out in the scene. **(18, Baoting)**

These accounts of 'the scene' as 'a way of life' suggest that for many men in this research 'the scene' could be seen to constitute a 'life-world', evocatively defined by Edmund Husserl (1936: 108) as 'a coherent universe of existing objects, … all of us together, belong to the world as living with one another in the world; and the world is our world, valid for our consciousness as existing precisely through this "living together"'. In this sense, 'coming into the scene' entails processes whereby 'being' *gay*, *homosexual* and/or *tongzhi* are taken up as collective modes of 'being' – ways of 'being together'. It is within 'the scene' that 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* become oriented as modes of 'living'. 'In the scene', these sexual categories become ways of 'living together' as 'a group of people' with a shared 'mode of life', a life that

is lived within 'a world for homosexuals … a home'. Foucault (1989: 206-207) once asked '[i]s it possible to create a homosexual mode of life? … A way of life [that] can be shared among individuals'; it seems that for many men in this research the response to such a question would be: 'yes, by coming into the scene'.

This section has explored possible relationships between 'coming into the scene' and 'being in the scene' and the identification of selves and others as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*. Given the multiple and contextual ways in which participants understood what it meant to 'be' *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*, and the range of interactional processes that were seen to constitute 'coming into the scene', it is impossible to offer a stable account of relations between 'being' *gay*, *homosexual* and/or *tongzhi* and 'being someone in the scene'. At the same time, 'coming into the scene' often seemed to entail processes whereby 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or '*tongzhi* was seen to become meaningful as a matter of belonging to a collective sexual category. In this sense, 'coming into the scene' could be seen as a range of processes through which individuals recognised themselves as 'the same' as others in relation to collective sexual categories. 'The scene', in this sense, can be recognised as a life-world within which modes of sexual 'being' become ways of 'living together' with others. Above, Lailai pointed to the ways in which 'a life in the scene' was understood in contrast to 'a normal life', oriented towards 'finding a wife and having kids'. These issues are returned to in Chapter Six.

Conclusion

Motivated by the ways in which all men in this research engaged with the concept of 'the scene/*quan*' as they gave accounts of themselves and their relationships and interactions with other men recognised as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi* and/or also 'in the scene', this chapter has explored a range of meanings attributed to 'the scene' and various processes of 'coming in'. It was suggested that 'the scene' is an ambiguous concept that carries a range of meanings. This was evident in the ways in which many participants claimed that 'the scene' has no fixed meaning and, yet, they also offered

complex and intricate accounts of what 'coming into the scene' and 'being in the scene' meant to them. In light of this multiplicity, this chapter has not sought to offer a clear 'mapping' of various meanings of 'the scene' and their relations to the ways in which participants also understood themselves and others as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*. Rather, this chapter has explored a range of complex and nuanced ways in which 'the scene' was imagined and experienced. These were organised around a series of thematic categories; however, many of the stories of 'coming into the scene' explored in this chapter could be seen to pervade these thematic categories. This exploration of 'the scene' therefore speaks of the ways in which '[w]e create communities of concern and areas of activity … [a]nd the meanings we evoke and the worlds we craft ebb and flow, but remain emergent: never fixed, always indeterminate, ceaselessly contested' (Plummer, 1995: 20).

The concept of 'the scene' is not specific to Hainan and researchers have noted its use by *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* men elsewhere in the PRC (Chapman et al., 2009; Sun, Farrer and Choi, 2006; in these studies '*quan*' is translated as 'circle'). However, these studies have not explored the concept in great detail. Addressing this gap, this chapter posed the rather straightforward question: what is 'the scene' as it was understood and experienced by men in this research? There is, however, no straightforward answer to this question. Based on key ways in which men in this research discussed 'the scene', this chapter has argued the following points: 1) 'The scene' may be a floating signifier recognised as void of fixed meaning and used contextually; it may refer equally to forms of 'sameness' and collectivity invested in sexual desires, practices, socialities, and identities; it may enable the imagination of a sexual minority, while remaining strategically ambiguous in regard to how belonging to such a minority is conferred. 2) 'The scene' may be a network of interpersonal relationships within which sex between men is an everyday possibility and within which men actively seek (particular kinds of) sex with other men. 3) 'The scene' may refer to forms of social interaction and intimacy between men who recognise one another as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*. 4) 'The scene' may be a field of things

that are known; it may be both a repertoire of cultural knowledge concerning norms of interaction and an epistemological field in which individuals are known by others in particular ways. 5) 'The scene' may be all of the above; it can refer to a broad range of interactional processes and contexts through which individuals recognise themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* and through which these terms become intelligible as makers of collective 'sameness'. Such claims to 'sameness' with others were also ways of becoming oriented in relation to others; through 'coming into the scene', 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* were not only forms of sexual self-categorisation in relation to others but also ways of 'living together' with others.

This final point was particularly clear in relation to Zhang Liang who, as noted earlier in this chapter, was the only man in this research who did not see himself as 'in the scene'. While he did understand himself as *gay*, he did not see this as cause for social interaction with other *gay* men or as an orientation towards a particular kind of life. Instead, he emphasised his 'sameness' with his 'normal friends' outside of 'the scene' and he was certain that he would marry a woman and have children in the future. The ways in which orientations towards marriage and reproduction were understood as orientations 'away from the scene' are returned to in Chapter Six. The following chapter continues to explore what it meant to 'be' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi* and/or 'in the scene' for men in this research. This is explored in relation to the central role that almost all participants saw internet technologies to have played in their arrival at particular modes of self-understandings. These technologies can also be seen to enable such self-understandings to be practiced and performed in everyday life.

Chapter Five: Being On-and-Off-line

Introduction

The previous chapter explored a range of interactions through which participants understood themselves to have 'come into the scene' and recognised 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, and *tongzhi* as ways of 'being the same' as others. Many of the interactional processes discussed in the previous chapter took place in, and in relation to, particular spaces. Ah Tao, for example, spoke of 'properly coming in to contact, like clubs and places in the scene' (page 147), and Ah Zheng suggested that 'if you often come to these places then you've come in' (page 158). The spatiality of 'coming in to the scene' and of the ways in which selves and others are recognised as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* was not only evident in explicit references to particular places. Spatial dynamics could be seen as relevant to all of the interactional processes discussed in the previous chapter. As many spatial theorists have argued, social interaction is inherently spatial; it takes place in space and produces space (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 1994; Thrift, 1983). This chapter focuses on a spatial-interactional context that was discussed at length by all men in this research: the internet (*wangluo*). This chapter explores the ways in which most participants understood themselves as having 'come into the scene' and arrived at understandings of themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* through online interactions with other men.[84]

Scholars have questioned the appropriateness of 'space' as a conceptual framework for analyses of internet use, arguing that 'many of the ways in which we discuss, imagine, and envision the internet rely on inaccurate and unhelpful spatial metaphors' (Graham, 2013: 2). Space is understood in this thesis as defined by Michel de Certeau (1984: 117), who notes that:

> [a] space exists when one takes into account vectors of direction, velocities, and time

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[84] Throughout this chapter I often use the term 'the internet' in the singular, this is in line with the ways 'the internet' (*wangluo*) tended to be discussed by participants as a singular objects or space. Over the course of this chapter, however, it will become apparent that discussions of 'the internet' often concerned complex and multiple spatial-interactional contexts and dynamics.

variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities.

From this perspective, space both shapes and is shaped by social interaction; space is engaged through social interaction and, at the same time, enables and curtails specific modes of interaction. Space, therefore, exists in dialogue with the ways in which it is occupied, used, and experienced in interaction and constructed discursively and narratively. In this sense, the internet can be considered a space in relation to the ways in which, for all participants, it was an important means by which they met other men and was seen as a space within which selves and other became recognisable as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*. It was, therefore, a space that was seen to enable particular modes of 'being' by virtue of 'being' in a particular space. Focusing on the internet directs attention towards the active production and enactment of space through and within interactions, as well as discursive practices that construct 'the internet' as a space occupied in particular ways. Interactions that produce the internet occur, at once, between selves and others, people and technologies, and online and offline modes of presence (Boellstorff, 2008; Farman, 2014). This production of the internet as a complex of social-material-discursive-technological relations brings into focus the relational co-constitution of spaces, selves, and others (Gregson and Rose, 2000).

This chapter focuses on the internet to the exclusion of other spaces discussed by some participants (*gay* bars and parks, amongst others). This narrowing of the spatial contexts under inquiry was decided in relation to the central role attributed to the internet by all participants in relation to their self-understandings and everyday lives.[85] For many, the internet was conceived as a space of sexual possibilities otherwise curtailed within most offline spaces characterised by heteronormative relations of family and work. Noting similar findings in other East Asian contexts,

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[85] A minority of participants regularly visited *gay* bars (7 men) and parks (5 men). All 31 participants discussed their use of the internet to find other men with whom to socialise and have sex and the majority also recounted the formative role they saw the internet to have played in their arrival at understandings of themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* and in their processes of 'coming into the scene'.

Berry, Martin, and Yue (2003: 1) posit that:

> the recent emergence of gay and lesbian identities in Asia and its diaspora is intimately linked to the development of information technology … information has enabled the expression of sexual identities in a region that is notorious for the regulation of both information and sexual conduct.

This important function of internet technologies has not gone unnoticed by researchers of *gay*, *tongzhi,* and *lala* identities in the PRC. However, the current literature has largely focused on the analysis of online content (Deklerck and Wei, 2015; Ho, 2010; Shaw and Zhang, 2017). In contrast, this chapter explores the ways in which, for men in this research, the primary function of the internet was to enable access to other men seeking men; it was within these processes of connection and subsequent interactions, more so than through engagement with online media content, that certain understandings of selves and others were negotiated. As such, it may be more apt to approach the internet as a mediated space of interaction, rather than simply as a repository for media content.

The first section of this chapter explores participants' accounts of their first 'contact with the scene', with alternative sexual discourses to heterosexual marriage and reproduction, and with other men recognised as *gay*, *homosexual*, and *tongzhi* as enabled by the internet. Section two considers the implications of this 'contact' for participants' understandings of themselves. Section three follows these issues further, exploring the construction of the internet as a space of 'self-discovery'. Section four explores how understandings of selves and others that emerge in online interaction were seen to be taken up in embodied, offline interactions mediated by the *gay* geosocial networking app Blued. Following this, section five outlines relationships between presence and modes of self-presentation in the 'layering' of online and offline spaces, identities and selves that occurs through Blued. Finally, section six explores the ways in which the novel ability to find other *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* men online generated concerns over the extent to which the internet should be used in the pursuit of hook ups (*yuepao*), friendship, and/or romantic relationships.

Finding Others Online

One evening during a trip with Ah Ji back to his home village in rural northern Hainan, we visited a roadside bar that we had spotted on the outskirts of a nearby town earlier in the day. Neither of us had ever been to a 'rural bar' (*nongcun jiuba*) and, associating bars with urban environments, we were both intrigued by what seemed to us to be a spatial juxtaposition. When we arrived at the bar, we took a table in the middle of the room; a spinning disco ball shed blue light onto a bare cement floor and white walls flanked by six leatherette booths. After being in the bar for around 20 minutes, Ah Ji looked both bored and agitated. He sat back in his chair and looked around the room. 'Look at him over there', he said, tilting his head towards a group of men standing around a table; 'that guy with the tattoo is pretty sexy … but there's no way any of them are *gay* (*bu keneng shi gay*)'. He surveyed the room once more. This time, his gaze fell on a young woman staggering back from the bar. As she reached the booth where her friends were sitting, she tripped and collapsed onto the laps of two men who grabbed her by the torso. She squealed, the men laughed, and Ah Ji sneered, 'What a rotten woman!' He looked exasperated. 'It's so boring here, we need some *gays*!' He pulled an IPhone4 with a badly cracked screen out of his pocket and opened his Blued profile. 'Let's get some *gay*s to come here, you look too'. I did as I was told. With nothing more than a finger laid upon glass and a five second pause for the app to load, an endless stream of men appeared in the palms of our hands, illuminated and arranged by their distance from our current location, each one a thumbnail image of a naked torso or cartoon figure. Their height, weight, and preferred sex-role were all clearly stated, though very few showed a face. Our roadside bar on the outskirts of a small town in north Hainan was now the centre of a *gay* universe that extended as far as our fingers cared to scroll.[86]

Opening a Blued profile and surveying users in the local area is both a mundane and extraordinary spatial-sexual practice within a social context of pervasive

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[86] I will resume this vignette later in this chapter.

heteronormativity. The above vignette highlights a range of dynamics that will be returned to across this chapter. Primarily, it suggests the function of online spaces as an alternative to offline spaces seen and experienced as heteronormative – spaces shared with others, but characterised by a sense that 'there's no way any of them are *gay*'. Censorship laws in the PRC largely limit mainstream media representations of sexual identities, intimacies, and practices to reproductive heterosexuality. At the same time, the watchful eyes of family and work colleagues leave limited room for the offline practice and performance of sexual diversity. In recent years, censorship of online media has also increased; however, at the time of our interviews, all men in this research still recognised the central role played by the internet in their everyday lives.

As suggested by the above vignette, the internet was an everyday space within which men in this research spent time. However, the unprecedented access that the internet was seen to offer to diverse sexual discourses and other men recognisable as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* was most clearly articulated in narratives of the arrival of the internet in the late 1990s. For men old enough to have witnessed and taken part in the rapid popularisation of the internet, this was narrated as a sexual watershed and a dawning of new possibilities for social and sexual interaction. When asked how it was that he 'came into the scene', Lu Ge replied:

> Erm, when was it? 1999, 98 or 99. It wasn't until then that there was *internet* (spoken in English). Back then, Sanya only had one public internet cafe, it was on the ground floor of a hotel. Before then, I'd already been in Sanya for many years but I had never met a single person, neither had I gone looking … There was nothing (*shenme dou meiyou*). Later, when the internet arrived, I could get online and I'd often go to that internet café to go online. So, through the internet, I contacted someone else. … Sanya finally developed to the point that you could get online anywhere as long as you had a phone line, so I would go online at home. Once everyone was able to get online, there were some people in Sanya who studied computing, so they started to set up websites; someone made the first site specifically for Sanya, a *tongzhi* site; they put up some pictures of men, stuff

like this. So I found this site and contacted the guy who made it, he was also in Sanya, so I started to communicate with him. This was how I met the first person in Sanya (*zai sanya renshi de diyige ren*). Then, through that site, slowly there were a few more people. So, slowly we started meeting up, going out for drinks, chatting, going for food in the evenings; slowly we got to know each other; this was how it started (*jiu shi zheyang kaishi de*). Later, it wasn't an issue; the internet became more and more developed; things changed very quickly and things started moving (*kaishi xingdong qilai*). **(45, Sanya, from Guizhou, Mainland PRC)**

For Lu Ge, the arrival of the internet marked a seemingly fundamental transition from having 'never met a single person' and having no means to 'go looking' to having relatively easy access to other men seeking men. Prior to the arrival of the internet, Sanya was seen as void of sexual-social interactions between men, as Lu Ge put it, 'there was nothing'. This is contrasted with the 'slow' (though evidently rapid) emergence of online '*tongzhi*' spaces, followed by online, and later offline, social networks of men that constituted a collective 'we'. Echoing the findings of the previous chapter, for Lu Ge, the articulation and experience of this collective 'we' was understood as a process of 'coming into the scene'. This account suggests the ways in which, within a context of pervasive heteronormativity, the internet was understood as playing a vital role in the dissemination of diverse sexual discourses and the facilitation of social interactions within which such discourses were deployed and developed. Lu Ge emphasised distinctions between a pre--internet era and the current epoch that he later described as 'the age of the internet' (*wangluo shidai*). The former is constructed as a time of sexual isolation, the latter as one of proliferating social relations between *tongzhi*. Such narratives of the arrival of the internet, which were also given by other participants, suggest the ways in which shifting technological landscapes enable forms of social interaction that shape the meanings of sexual desires, practices, and identities.

Such shifting meanings were evident when participants recounted seemingly sporadic

and coincidental sexual encounters with other men prior to the arrival of the internet and compared these to the contemporary ability to find other *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* men online. The former were seen as characterised by uncertainty, the latter by the assumed clarity of sexual categories online. Ah Gang and Xiao Pang discussed these issues:

> **Ah Gang:** Even at high school, I found that some of my classmates… Back then I wasn't certain about myself (*dui ziji hai bu queding*), but I could sense others (*ganjue dedao duifang*). Back then, before there were these softwares, no WeChat,[87] no apps, these things, if a *tongzhi* wanted to find out if someone else was the same as them, you could only go by your senses (*zhi neng pin ganjue*).

> **Xiao Pang:** Or use Renren.[88]

> **Ah Gang:** Maybe you used Renren, but for me, I had a classmate, back then we were living in the school, while we were living in the school we had never talked about this side of things; neither of us was sure about the other (*liangge ren hai meiyou queding duifang*). But one night, we had bodily contact (*shenti de jiechu*), we kissed. The next day we just went to class. … Sometimes it really was through these other ways (*qita de fangshi*). Before there were these softwares and websites you could rely on.

> **Xiao Pang:** It would have been so difficult to find anyone. **(29 and 26, Wuzhishan)**

Ah Gang suggested that previously 'if a *tongzhi* wanted to find out if someone else was the same as them, you could only go by your senses'. Here, the recognition of others as '*tongzhi*' and as 'the same' was seen to occur through sexual practices, through 'bodily contact' and 'kissing', and through uncertain forms of perception

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[87] WeChat is currently the most popular mobile social networking app in the PRC.
[88] Renren was the PRC's earliest widely used social media website, comparable to Facebook. It is no longer widely used.

understood as 'going by your senses'. These 'other ways' were contrasted with a contemporary context in which 'there [are] these softwares and websites you [can] rely on'; within these technological spaces, 'being *tongzhi*' is assumed as self-evident. It is worth pointing out that, as seen in the previous chapter, engagement in sexual practices still serves as key ways in which some men in this research placed themselves and others within sexual categories as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene'. What was distinctive about the ways in which many participants discussed online interactions, as is evident in Ah Gang's above account, was the emphasis placed on the apparent objectivity, clarity, certainty, and ease with which others could be identified as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* online (whether or not these online others were also understood as 'in the scene' would depend on how 'the scene' was understood by a particular individual). Xiao Pang reiterated these dynamics, noting that 'it would have been so difficult to find anyone', emphasising the apparent ease with which other men are 'found' online. These comments also echo Lu Ge's above contrast between apparent offline sexual isolation and online sexual profusion and connectivity.

Xiaoyu also emphasised the function of the internet as space within which men can be found on the basis of assumed sexual categorisation. Xiaoyu had been discussing the first time he had sex with a man, this had been with a university lecturer who had invited Xiaoyu to spend the night at his house. Xiaoyu explained that, prior to this encounter, he had 'never imagined that two men can have sex' (*mei xiangguo liang ge nande ye keyi zuoai*). Afterwards, he continued to search of 'people like this':

> That was my first time … The next day he showed me the QQ group.[89] Back then, there wasn't WeChat, no Blued, nothing like that. Back then, people used QQ groups to chat. So I added the group and started chatting to them. Slowly, I started to understand how to find people, so I started looking for people (*zhao ren*). If you see someone on the street, you don't know who is and who isn't (*shei*

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[89] QQ is a social networking website and mobile app. It is used to maintain contact with individuals as well as to partake in common-interest chat groups (*liaotian qun*).

shi shei bushi), in my heart I wasn't sure, 'where can I find people like this?' It was only after he showed me how to use QQ that I knew. **(33, Haikou, from Wuzhishan)**

For Xiaoyu, 'looking for people' online was seen as a certified way of recognising 'who is and who isn't', something that was seen as impossible 'on the street'. As in Ah Gang's account above, the notion of 'people like this' emerged through sexual practices with other men. However, 'people like this' was seen to become an objective sexual category upon which others could be searched for and found only in online interaction. Within certain online spaces, sexual categories were apparently given by the fact of presence.

For many men in this research, the internet was seen to facilitate sexual and social interactions within which the identification of others as *homosexual*, *gay*, and/or *tongzhi* was assumed on the basis their presence on a particular website or app. As Da Shu commented:

> If you meet someone in real life (*zai xianshi shenghuo zhong*), in daily interactions, then at first you don't know that that person is *gay*. But if it's on some sort of software then it's already very clear, they just are (*yijing hen qingchu, ta jiu shi*), and whether you get to know them or they get to know you, both your aims are already clear. … If you meet someone through software, then, to put it simply, from the first time you see them you're like, 'ok, I know that this person is *gay*' and you will think about this person from a *gay* perspective (*cong yi gay de jiaodu lai kaolü zhege ren*).**(32, Haikou)**

Here, 'softwares' are understood as spaces within which presence can confer a sexual identity. Noting this function of the UK-based website Gaydar, Sharif Mowlabocus (2010: 93, emphasis in original) comments that 'the user profile represents … a space where *the natural assumption is that you are gay* … you do not need to act gay or speak gay, you can simply *be* gay'. For Da Shu, the fact of having met someone 'on

some sort of software' is taken to mean 'that this person is *gay*'. Being online, here, is equated with 'being *gay*'. The potential uncertainty of relations between sexual desires, practices, and understandings of selves and others offline, as described by Ah Gang earlier, contrasts with online interactions in which 'it's already very clear, they just are [*gay*]'. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the ability to 'think of this person from a *gay* perspective' was seen by some participants to orient subsequent interactions in particular ways.

This section has discussed the key role that almost all participants attributed to the internet as a means of finding other men which whom to engage in sexual and social interactions and relationships. It was widely recognised that certain online spaces served as spaces within which presence could be taken to confer belonging to sexual categories, such that being on a particular app or website was equated with 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*. This assumed certainty of sexual identities online was often contrasted with the difficulty of recognising 'this kind of person' offline.[90] This should be understood in the context of the pervasive heteronormativity that characterises most offline spaces, in which heterosexuality was a 'natural' assumption (such assumptions were also often made by participants themselves, as in the vignette at the beginning of this section). As will be discussed later, this was an assumption that some participants strove to uphold, leading to the maintenance of strict boundaries between their online and offline contexts of identification. Following sections of this chapter explore participants' accounts of various implications of these relationships between online spaces and practices of sexual categorisation. It is worth noting, here, that in my everyday use of Blued in Hainan I did encounter men who identified themselves as 'straight' (*zhi*) and 'bisexual' (*shuangxinglian*); however, this was very infrequent. Such dynamics of 'being' straight or bisexual in what were

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[90] Participants who frequented *gay* bars also pointed to the similar function of these spaces, as spaces within which 'being there' could be equated with 'being *gay*'. As noted earlier, however, only a minority of men in this research frequented *gay* bars. All of these men also noted that they had become aware of the existence of *gay* bars through online interactions. In this sense, for participants, it was within online spaces that they first began to understand themselves and others as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*, before these were taken up as embodied ways of 'being' in offline spaces. These issues are discussed throughout this chapter. On this point, it is important to recognise that the arrival of the internet in Hainan preceded the emergence of *gay* bars, as recalled by men in this research (see Introduction, page 11).

understood as online *gay* spaces were not discussed during interviews. However, when I discussed the issue of 'straight guys' (*zhinan*) on Blued with Xiao Mai outside of our interview, he suggested that self-identification as 'straight' on Blued was an act of self-preservation by men fearing exposure as *gay*. This suggests the extent to which 'being in *gay* space' was equated with 'being' *gay*. Online identification as 'bisexual' was not discussed. The ways in which some participants discussed bisexual identities in other contexts are addressed in the following chapter.

Finding Selves Online

For many participants, the internet was not only as a space within which other *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* men were recognisable and accessible but one within which they had come to understand themselves these ways. This was particularly the case for younger participants (aged 18-30), many of whom noted that they had come to know the words '*gay*' and '*homosexual*' only after searching online for the meanings of their emergent desires for men.[91] Some, though not all, older men noted that they came to know the word '*homosexual*' in offline contexts. Lu Ge, aged 45, had read a newspaper article about '*homosexuality*/*homosexuals*' (*tongxinglian*) when in his early twenties. Ah Ben, aged 36, recalled reading the words 'meet *homosexual* friends' (*tongxinglian jiaoyou*), followed by a phone number, scrawled on the wall of a public toilet cubicle in the year 2000, though he later searched online for the meaning of the word '*homosexual*'. Dajun Ge, aged 63, noted that he had come to understand himself as *bisexual* (*shuangxinglian*) after reading about '*bisexuality*/*bisexuals*' in Li Yinhe's *Homosexual Subculture* (1998), which he found by chance in a bookstore. For many younger participants, it was through internet searches that they had become aware of the existence of other men who desire men and had come to understand themselves and others as *gay*, *homosexual*, and *tongzhi*. Below, Mingzai and Dingfeng offer typical accounts:

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[91] Many claimed they had always known the term '*tongzhi*', but only in the official sense of 'comrade' as a formal term of address used by government officials.

Mingzai: Back then, back when I was in school, I rarely went to the internet café, so I didn't know these things (*bu zhidao zhexie dongxi*). … It was only after going online and searching that I walked into this scene (*zoujin zhege quanzi*). … I could never have imagined that here in Qionghai there are so many people who are… including even your neighbours. Back then, I really was so conservative (*baoshou*). **(26, Qionghai)**

Dingfeng: These apps give us a way of knowing that this hidden world exists (*zhege heian shijie de cunzai*); you don't feel so lonely; it's like they shine a light onto this hidden world and let you sense it, let you know that it exists. Otherwise, it would just be like when we were small, … you would always feel lonely, like you are only person like this in the world. I think that apps are useful in this way, they offer access to information; they let you know that you're not alone. **(24, Sanya, from Guangzhou, Mainland PRC)**

Both Mingzai and Dingfeng made connections between accessing the internet, becoming aware of the existence of 'people who are', and becoming aware that 'you are [not] the only person like this'. For them, as for many participants, it was through internet searches that 'people like this' became an intelligible collective category within which selves and others were placed. For Mingzai, echoing numerous accounts discussed in the previous chapter, this was understood as a matter of 'walk[ing] into the scene'. For Dingfeng, it was in this way that the existence of 'this hidden world' came to be known. While these narratives refer to individual life histories, they can also be compared to accounts such as Lu Ge's, earlier in this chapter, which framed the arrival of the internet in terms of a transition from 'sexual isolation' to 'sexual connectivity'; they emphasise the role of the internet in facilitating the recognition of selves and others as belonging to a collective sexual category and in allowing access to others understood as 'the same'.

Earlier in this chapter, Ah Gang drew contrast between the perception of others as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* offline and online. He saw the former as a matter of

'going by your senses' that produced uncertain forms of knowledge, and the latter as a matter of apparently self-evident sexual categories online. Similar themes were reflected in the ways that some men discussed their understandings of themselves before and after the kinds of online searches describe above. For Shasha, searching online was seen to have engendered a transition from ambiguous feelings of 'difference' and 'inclination' (*qingxiang*) to an understanding of himself as '*homosexual*':

> **James:** How was it that you first came into contact with these things?
>
> **Shasha:** Erm, through my mobile phone and going online, I slowly came into contact with this. … At first I didn't know; at first I used Baidu.[92] I felt like I was different from other boys so I searched on Baidu to see what this inclination meant (*zhege qingxing shi shenme yisi*). So I looked on Baidu and it came up with 'homosexual' (*tongxinglian*). So, just like this, I found out that there were also other people who were the same as me (*wo faxian you bieren gen wo shi yiyang de*). I kept searching and somehow added someone on QQ and I started chatting with him and then I properly came into this scene (*zhengshi jinru zhege quanzi*).
> **(21, Qionghai)**

Many younger participants offered accounts, such as Shasha's, of having first encountered sexual discourses beyond heterosexual marriage and reproduction following internet searches, driven by curiosity and fear, for the meanings of their emergent desires for men. Such stories speak of the ways in which uncertain notions of sexual 'inclination' were reconceptualised as modes of sexual 'being' – 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*. These practices of searching the internet can be seen as what Plummer (1995: 85, emphasis in original) calls 'the *textual search*: a scanning of the stories available to help see who one is'. These searches, however, should be seen as not only 'textual' but also interactional; they involved both encounters with novel sexual discourses and engagement in interactions with other men figured within the

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[92] The most popular search engine in the PRC.

terms of those discourses. For Shasha, it was not only through his encounter with a discourse of 'being *homosexual*' that he came to understand himself in this way; the above account also describes a change in the 'significant others' (Hall, 1997: 597) who relationally conferred Shasha's understanding of himself. This was a shift from 'other boys', from whom Shasha felt 'different', to men encountered online, who were understood as '*homosexual*' and 'the same as me'. In line with the findings of the previous chapter, this process of recognising '*homosexual*' as a collective category of 'sameness' and engagement in social interactions with other *homosexual* men constituted 'properly coming into the scene'.

While accounts of searching the internet, arriving at self-understandings as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*, engaging in social interactions with other men understood as 'the same', and 'coming into the scene' were most common amongst younger participants, they were not unique to these men. Ah Zheng, aged 54, commented: 'I first found out about it online, I wouldn't have found it by myself … I was already married and had kids' (**Sanya**). Xiao Pang and Ah Gang also described their conversations with older men as follows:

> **Xiao Pang:** I've spoken to some middle-aged men; they said that in the past they thought that they were just interested in men's bodies (*zhi shi dui nanxing de shenti you haoqi*), it was only after they started to use the internet (*kaishi shang wang*) that they would search.

> **Ah Gang:** Yang Ge said that it was only after he got married and then went online that he realised (*faxian*).

> **Xiao Pang:** A lot of people only realise after they've got married and then gone online; Mitao is a prime example.[93] (**26 and 29, Wuzhishan**)

Comparable to Shasha's earlier reference to an ambiguous notion of 'inclination', Xiao Pang recalled that older men with whom he had spoken had also experienced

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[93] Yang Ge and Mitao were men in their late forties who Xiao Pang and Ah Gang knew in Wuzhishan.

shifts from a sense of being 'interested in men's bodies' to 'realising' an assumed *a priori* 'truth' about themselves. Although Xiao Pang and Ah Gang did not elaborate what it was that these older men 'realised', the above excerpt, as it was given in our interview, immediately followed their earlier discussion of the assumed clarity and certainty of sexual categories in online interaction. They therefore appeared to imply that for these older men, too, it was 'only after they started to use the internet' that they came to understand their 'interest[…] in men's bodies' as conferring belonging to a particular collective sexual category.

This section has explored accounts in which participants discussed their arrival at understandings of themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, and *tongzhi*, as 'this kind of person', and as belonging to a formerly 'hidden world' through searching the internet. These processes were often seen as entailing shifts from ambiguous 'inclinations' and 'interests' to definitional modes of sexual categorisation, constructed as matters of 'being'. Such narratives were especially common amongst younger men in this research. These stories were often framed in terms of 'realising' and, as such, definitive sexual categories were constructed as an *a priori* 'truth' waiting to be 'realised' through access to information and other men online. This could be seen as constituting a normative discourse of sexual 'self-awareness' (*ziwo yishi*) that figured the 'realisation' of belonging to collective sexual categories as a normative goal. These issues are discussed in the following section.

The Internet as 'Sexual Progress'

In their narratives of 'realisation', such as those discussed above, some participants were critical of others who were imagined as failing to achieve such 'realisation'. Such criticism was implicit in in Xiao Qiao's account of the 'usefulness of the internet', in which he compared using the internet to realise 'that there are other people like this' to processes of 'human evolution':

    James: If there was no internet, do you think that this *gay* scene would be

different?

Xiao Qiao: I think people wouldn't get to know each other, to know so many people, there wouldn't be… Like, for example, **w**hen you just start to understand this thing (*kaishi mingbai zhege dongxi*), those young boys, those in middle school, they're just finding out about this thing, about this *gay* thing (*gay zhege dongxi*). In their hearts, they feel like there's no one else like this around them. They don't know that there are people like this and they hide this secret in their hearts, they won't tell anyone. The internet is very similar to something else; it's very similar to history (*lishi*).

James: History?

Xiao Qiao: When you study history, like, as time moves along the good is kept and the bad is cast off (*ququ jinghuan, poqi zaota*). It's like, like when humans first began to evolve (*renlei zuizao kaishi jinhua*), they didn't understand anything; you have to slowly get to know the world. The internet is like this, it makes you what you are today (*ta dailai ni xianzai de chengjiu*, literally: 'it brings to you your current accomplishment'). Like our society today, it presents you with an immediate society (*ta zhijie geini yige xiancheng de shehui*); you don't have to be like a primitive person (*yuanshi ren*) stepping into a dark forests to go searching yourself. So the internet… This is its important impact; this is usefulness of the internet. **(18, Chengmai)**

For Xiao Qiao, 'those young boys … just finding out … about this *gay* thing' were comparable to 'a primitive person … stepping into a dark forest'. Here, an individual narrative of sexual 'self-discovery' is taken as a microcosmic process of 'human evolution'. For Xiao Qiao, the internet was seen to have radically accelerated these processes of 'sexual evolution', as knowledge 'about this *gay* thing' was no longer something that you must 'go searching [for] yourself', but something presented in the form of an 'immediate society' – an apparently self-evident set of discourses,

identifications, and social relations that 'makes you what you are today'. With the 'dark forest' thus illuminated, this was quite literally a narrative of 'enlightenment'.[94] As such, for Xiao Qiao, the use of the internet to arrive at particular modes of self-understanding was not only a matter of change but also one of 'progress' and 'betterment'. The emergence of sexual 'certainty' and 'self-awareness' was seen as a process along which 'the good is kept and the bad is cast off'. Finally, this narrative, in common with those discussed earlier, speaks of transitions from obscurity to clarity and visibility. Xiao Qiao rejected the tendency of 'those young boys' to 'hide this secret in their hearts' and thereby associated 'hiding' with an erroneous past. In this way, the process of 'keeping the good' and 'casting off the bad' was seen as a matter of achieving 'self-awareness' and making oneself visible to others. Xiao Qiao's comparison of 'human evolution' to processes of arrival at 'self-awareness' through online interaction can be seen to figure the internet as a space of 'sexual modernity'. This can also be seen as evident in the various ways in which accounts discussed in the previous sections associated the internet with transitions from uncertainty to certainty, from obscurity to clarity, and from isolation to connectivity.

Understandings of the internet as a space of 'sexual modernity' were not only premised on narratives of progress; they also entailed the construction of sexually 'unmodern Others'. This was evident in Xiao Qiao's above account of the sexually 'primitive person' seen as yet to access the internet, 'understand … this *gay* thing', and share 'this secret in their hearts'. Such 'unmodern Others' were not only located in the past. As seen in the previous chapter, Ah Zheng was a man who prided himself on his extensive knowledge of the all things 'in the scene'; he used the term '*anchang*' to refer to men who were assumed to lack this knowledge. As he further elaborated his understanding of *anchang*, he gave an account of men whose rural residence and

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[94] While I do not have space to elaborate the point, it is worth noting that metaphors of 'dark' and 'light' were a recurrent theme across interviews and everyday conversations and experiences in Hainan. The term '*mingbai*' ('to understand') used above by Xiao Qiao, and by many other participants, literally means 'bright/light white'. This is relevant to appreciating the ways in which some participants discussed 'self-awareness' and an assumed 'lack of self-awareness' through metaphors of 'light' and 'dark'. This is evident in the discussion of *anchang* in the previous chapter, as well as later in this chapter, where *anchang* were seen to inhabit 'dark places' ('*an*' also means 'dark'). It is also relevant to associations made by some participants between 'visibility' and 'self-acceptance'. These are discussed later in this chapter.

technological illiteracy left them apparently unable to use 'these kinds of apps'; this prevented them from 'coming into the scene':

Ah Zheng: There are a lot of *anchang* who don't come and hang out, those in the countryside (*nongcun*).

James: *Anchang*? What does this mean?

Ah Zheng: *Anchang* are outside and they don't come into contact with people like us. They're not together with us, they don't talk to us in the scene … it's like they're separated from us (*tamen gen women shi fenkai de*), right? There are a lot of people like this now, a lot. This group of people mainly live in the countryside and down in the counties (*xiamian shixian*), this group of people. And when they want it they really want it, really want it, but they can only satisfy themselves; once they're satisfied, they feel better, but even if they satisfy themselves they still want it.[95]

James: This kind of person, why don't they come into the scene?

Ah Zheng: There are some, like, it's hard for them to get the information, it's backward (*luohou*), it's backward in the countryside, and they live there so they don't get this kind of information (*zhezhong xinxi*), these softwares; they don't understand how to use these kinds of apps; you know, they're backward. **(54, Sanya)**

Ah Zheng's understanding of *anchang* evidences the conceptual alignment of a range of social-spatial binaries – online/offline, urban/rural, progressive/backward, known/unknown, visible/hidden. Together, these could be seen to constitute a vague but pervasive discourse of 'sexual un/modernity'. While Xiao Qiao's sexually

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[95] Note here that Ah Zheng also suggests that *anchang* are men who 'want it' but are unable to 'satisfy' their desires for sex with men. This is relevant to the discussion in the previous chapter of the ways in which 'coming into the scene' was seen by some men as a transition from 'desiring sex with men' to 'having sex with men'. It can be seen, then, that for Ah Zheng there were a range of ways in which *anchang* were imagined as 'outside of the scene'. This further illustrates the multiple meanings that were invested in the notion of 'the scene' as discussed in the previous chapter.

'primitive person' was relegated to the pejorative side of the temporal binary past/present, Ah Zheng's *anchang* are constructed as occupying the equally pejorative space of a 'backwards countryside'. The defining quality of this 'rural backwardness' is apparently limited access to 'this kind of information' and knowledge of 'these softwares … these kinds of Apps'. This lack of information was seen to leave *anchang* unable to 'come into contact with people like us'.

Other participants made similar associations between rural residence, limited internet access/literacy, and apparent sexual isolation. Ah Gang and Xiao Pang, for example, discussed men in 'far off villages' who were imagined as barred from the knowledge that 'they are homosexual':

> **Ah Gang:** The other day we were talking about local *gays* (*bendi de gay*), about what it would be like for someone in one of those far off villages (*yaoyuan de cunluo*).
>
> **Xiao Pang:** Without internet, so far away.
>
> **Ah Gang:** There was a guy we met who told us this story. He said that he knew someone who realised that they liked men while they were still in their village, that's quite a feat (*hen lihai*), in that kind of village.
>
> **Xiao Pang:** There would be no one to tell him.
>
> **Ah Gang:** In those villages, they don't have internet, they come into the city to go to school and find out that they are *gay* (*faxian ziji shi gay*). … There are a lot of villages like this in the centre of Hainan. They come here to go to middle school or high school and find out that they are homosexual (*faxian ziji shi tongxinglian*). **(29 and 26, Wuzhishan)**

Here, 'villages' are constructed as isolated not only in the sense of their physical distance from urban centres but in relation to their assumed limited access to the internet. 'Com[ing] into the city' is therefore represented as inseparable from

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accessing the internet; both are seen as processes through which rural men 'find out that they are *gay*'. This realisation of a mode of sexual 'being' is contrasted with an earlier 'realis[ation] that they liked men while they were still in their village', echoing references in the previous sections to 'inclinations' and 'interests in men's bodies' prior to searching the internet. In his account of *anchang* above, Ah Zheng similarly emphasised a notion of unnamed sexual desire as he repeated 'when they want it, they really want it, really want it'. In these accounts, geographic, technological, and sexual binaries are intertwined in the construction of contrasting images of rural, offline men who are aware only of their sexual desires and urban, online men who understand themselves as *gay* and/or *homosexual*. These latter men were seen as incorporated into networks of social belonging; as Ah Zheng put it: 'they are together with us'.

It is important to note that these assumptions of limited internet access and literacy in Hainan's rural areas contrast with my own experience of visiting villages and smaller towns across Hainan, including the central mountainous areas that Gang and Xiao Pang describe above. Some participants in fact suggested high levels of internet use in rural areas and interconnection between men in local 'scenes'. Speaking of his hometown, a semi-rural town in Chengmai County, Ah Run noted that: 'our *gay* scene back there is like this, I found that softwares are just like *gay* bars for us' **(23)**. Additionally, for Ah Gang and Xiao Pang, their own 'city' of Wuzhishan was seen as an internet-connected urban centre in which men 'realise they are *gay*'; this was in contrast to 'those far off villages'. However, for Ah Zheng, speaking from Sanya, it was precisely 'down in the counties' (*xiamian shixian*) locations such as Wuzhishan that epitomised the 'backwards countryside' in which *anchang* were claimed to live.[96] In this sense, the above accounts may not represent an actually existing 'digital divide' along urban/rural lines. Rather, they suggest that the conflation of urbanity with internet access serves as a means by which internet-enabled interactions between men recognising themselves and each other as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* come to symbolise 'sexual modernity'. This is in contrast to the imagined 'backwardness' of

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[96] Sanya is Hainan's second largest city, with a population of 550,000. Wuzhishan City is the county capital of Wuzhishan County in central Hainan, it has a population of 51,783 (Statistical Bureau of Hainan Province, 2017).

digitally isolated and internet illiterate men who were seen as yet to realise their sexual desires as modes of 'being'. Mark Graham (2011: 212) has noted that the concept of a ''digital divide' is frequently used to describe an obstacle to movement of people and places temporally along a pre-defined path'. In this sense, the ways in which some participants imagined a digital divide between urban and rural areas, and saw this as inhibiting rural men who 'like men' from realising their desires as modes of 'being', can be seen to figure such 'realisation' as 'a pre-defined path' and a normative ideal.

Locating Selves and Others On-*and*-Off-line

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, some scholars have critiqued understandings of the internet as 'a space', seeing this to suggest an autonomous and singular realm that can be occupied and traversed – a 'virtual space' that mirrors, though remains the binary opposite of, 'physical space' (Graham, 2013; Rey, 2012). This spatial metaphor runs counter to more nuanced understandings of the internet as an amorphous, porous, though unevenly distributed, complex of technologies, information, and human users and interactions that is at once physical-and-virtual (Castells, 2001; Cohen, 2007). Singular concepts of 'the internet' and 'cyberspace' have therefore been described a 'consensual hallucination' (Gibson, 1984: 128). A 'hallucination' they may be, yet, as the previous sections have shown, notions of 'the internet' as a singular, unified, even era-defining space powerfully shaped the spatial and temporal imaginations and life-course narratives of many men in this research, who often talked about 'the internet' in singular terms and would make binary distinctions between 'online' and 'offline' spaces and social interactions.

In many of the above accounts, however, it is clear that discussions of the internet, online interaction, and their relations to processes of sexual categorisation in fact concern particular online spaces – websites and apps that were themselves categorised as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* spaces. This suggests that while, at times, the internet was narratively constructed as monolithic, such that it was possible to speak

of, in Lu Ge's terms, 'the age of the internet', at the same time, the internet was experienced as a series of differently occupied and sexualised spaces. This section and the following one focus on the geo-social networking app Blued. These sections highlight the ways in which Blued problematised the binary division of online and offline spaces and generated debates concerning the meanings of visibility, presence and sexual identities on-and-offline. Returning to this chapter's opening vignette, these issues were evident for Ah Ji and me that night in a 'rural bar':

Our roadside bar on the outskirts of a small town in north Hainan was now the centre of a *gay* universe that extended as far as our fingers cared to scroll. As luck would have it, I had already received a message from someone nearby. Profile image: a yellow spiral against a red background; distance: 0.32km; name: Tai; age: 24; height: 180cm; weight: 60kg; sex role: one. The message read:

    Tai: Ejaculate (*shejing*)

I showed it to Ah Ji. 'Ergh! Not him!'; 'do you know him?'; 'I met up with him once in Haikou, he took me to a hotel and wanted to fuck me (*xiang cao wo*), but I wouldn't let him; he showed me his cock (*jiba*), but I didn't touch it'. Next: 0.74km, Dachen, 18, 173cm, 52kg, other:

    James: Hi, I'm having a drink with a friend, would you like to join?
    Dachen: (No reply)

Next: 4.66km, Yuanfen, 23, 168cm, 63kg, 0.5:

    James: (same message)
    Yuanfen: Where are you?
    James: Dongshan
    Yuanfen: Too far away
    James: Where are you?
    Yuanfen: Wanlong

'Anything?' Ah Ji asked, 'a guy in Wanlong, but he said it's too far', 'tell him to fuck off (*rang ta gun*)! Shall we go home?' said Ah Ji. This was less a suggestion than a command. He gathered our unopened bottles of beer and carried them back to the bar. As he slowly walked back to the table, his wooden-soled flip-flops with a platform base of black foam scuffed the floor with resounding disappointment. Black sleeveless shirt, pinstriped trousers, and all that hairspray for nothing.

As the above vignette highlights, in the everyday use of internet technologies in pursuit of social and sexual interactions with other men, online and offline spaces intersect and bodies are both present and absent both online and offline. The internet may facilitate access to other men. However, in their everyday lives, participants valued this access largely to the extent that it facilitated offline encounters between embodied subjects. That night in a 'rural bar', Ah Ji and I sensed the potential for the internet to transform the offline space that we occupied into a setting for social interactions between men visible to one another as *gay*, owing to the forging of our social connections through the online *gay* space of Blued. We also experienced disappointment when our online interactions with other *gay* men failed to garner their embodied presence within the offline space that we occupied and sorely desired to subvert. Our '*gay* universe that extended as far as our fingers cared to scroll' seemed to matter little, for it failed to materialise in the embodied presence of other *gay* men there in our 'rural bar'.

Many of the narratives discussed in the previous section already pointed to the interrelation of online and offline spaces. Earlier, Lu Ge described changes in the offline locations at which he accessed the internet, from 'a public internet cafe … on the ground floor of a hotel' to when 'Sanya finally developed to the point that you could get online anywhere as long as you had a phone line'. As he described the first time he used QQ to meet 'someone like this' (*zhe zhong ren*), Mengxi emphasised long-standing relationships between offline locations and online interactions. The interactions he describes below took place 8 years prior to our interview:

You could click on people and see where they were; it didn't tell you where someone was, but you could look at their information and see where they were. Some people put their location (*suozai didian*) in their information and you could pick someone who was nearby. So I went looking, but there was no one nearby, just one in Sanya, so I started chatting to him. **(Chengmai, 28)**

Participants valued the internet not only as a space within which sexual categories were assumed to be perceptible but also for its simultaneous ability to locate 'people like this' within offline space at varying degrees of proximity and distance. As Mengxi suggested, offline locations have long been central to the ways that men seeking men present themselves, search for, and interact with one another online. For Mengxi, being 'nearby' was a deciding factor in choosing who to interact with online. Despite the immediate access the internet offers to other men recognised on the basis of assumed shared sexual categories, online others continue to be perceived as 'nearby' or 'distant' in relation to their offline locations. This suggests the extent to which the offline body, located in offline space, remains the meaningful location of the subject – an apparent primary ontological integrity to which online presence is deferred.

The arrival of mobile internet and smartphone technologies in the PRC in the late-2000s can be seen to have both intensified these concerns for offline locations and to have reconfigured relationships between online and offline spaces, selves, and others. As the internet has become mobile, offline locations have transitioned from additional pieces of 'information' to be searched for, as in Mengxi's above account, to fundamental structural features of online spaces, presences, and interactions (Sutko and de Souza e Silva, 2011). For many men in this research, this transition was noted as a shift from the use of computer-based websites as a primary route into social-sexual interactions with other men to the location-aware mobile app Blued, following its launch in 2012 and subsequent rise to market dominance.[97]

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[97] All participants, with the exception of Da Shu (for reasons discussed later), were regular Blued users. Blued

Below, Xiao Lei narrates his experience of this transition and its implications for his perception of the presence of other 'people like this … all around' him. Recalling his first time accessing a '*tongzhi* website', together with a high school classmate, he commented:

> **Xiao Lei:** He asked me to go with him to an internet cafe to log on to this website, so slowly we learned that, like: 'oh, this is *gay*' (*liaojie le: 'oh, zhege shi gay'*). At first it was very difficult; I felt that I was a pervert (*biantai*). … Before I found out that there were so many people like this all around me, I thought that there was only me, I hadn't found out that anyone around you might potentially be… be someone in the scene (*dou you keneng shi… keneng shi quan limian de ren*).
>
> **James:** What sort of information did you find on that website?
>
> **Xiao Lei:** … I can't remember exactly, it's been a long time since I've logged on to that website.
>
> **James:** Why is that?
>
> **Xiao Lei:** Because now there is Blued, haha! This is an important issue. Now you can use Blued to chat on your phone; it's a lot more convenient than using a computer. If you're out with your friends and you're bored, you can have a look who's around you, see what handsome guys are in the vicinity (*fujin dou you shenme shuaige*), haha! **(27, Haikou)**

Echoing many of the narratives discussed in the previous sections, Xiao Lei described a transition, facilitated by his online searches, from feelings of isolation and 'perversion' to 'learn[ing] that … this is *gay*'. This process involved the reconceptualization of his desires for men as a matter of belonging to the category

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boasts 27 million users, making it not only the PRC's but the world's most popular male-male dating and social networking application. 80% of Blued accounts are registered in the PRC (Blued, 2016a). Blued is one of three male-male dating and social networking apps available to download in the PRC, others are Aloha and Jack'd. Aloha was used by one participant, as was Jack'd. Blued maintains amicable relations with government censors by framing itself as contributing to AIDS awareness and prevention (Lopez, 2014). The app has a feature that can be used to locate the nearest HIV test centre.

'*gay*' and was centred the realisation that there are 'so many people like this all around me'. As Stempfhuber and Liegal (2016: 52) note, mobile locative software has 'instantiated new regimes of mobility and have instigated a process of renegotiation of what it means to "be with" someone else or be co-present'. For Xiao Lei, the arrival of Blued had fundamentally altered the spatiality of his co-presence with other *gay* men. Through Blued, the ability to 'see' other men online recognised as belonging to shared sexual categories, much celebrated in the previous section, became the ability to see these men as located at once online and within one's immediate offline 'vicinity'.
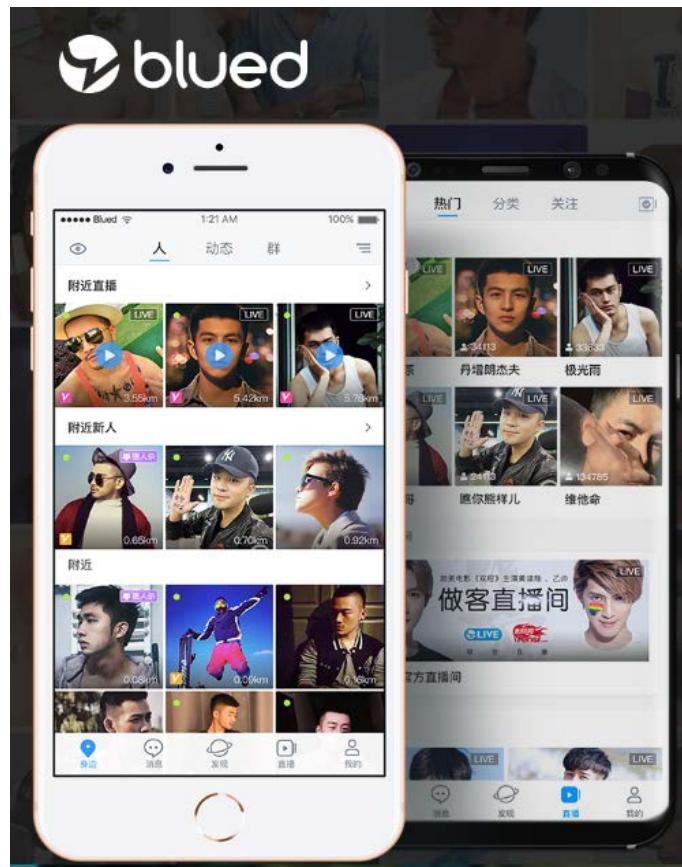
Fig.8 Blued Interface (blued, 2016b)

In common with a number of locative mobile apps used by men seeking men in other cultural contexts (Bonner-Thompson, 2017: Grindr, UK; Roth, 2014: Scruff, USA), Blued's primary interface (shown in Fig.8) is composed of thumbnail images representing other users and arranged in correspondence with their offline proximity to a user's current location. Scrolling down the grid of images brings into view users

at increasing offline distances. In this way, Blued produces a particular form of space that is at once on-and-offline, functioning as the digital representation of offline locations and establishing offline proximity as a fundamental relationship between online selves and others. Blued thereby figures online selves and others, positioned within particular sexual categories owing to their presence on the app, as embodied subjects occupying offline spaces. As Jason Farman (2012: 67) puts it in discussing locative media more generally, '[s]ince a sense of intimacy has been produced in online social media, the move to locative social media transforms the metaphor of closeness into a geographical actualization'. As Xiao Lei noted in the above account, through Blued, an abstract sense that 'anyone around you … might potentially be … someone in the scene' is transformed into the concrete ability to 'have a look who's around you'. The potential presence of other men as '*gay*', as 'people like this' and as 'in the scene' becomes a visible reality as these men are reconstituted through the intertwining on online and offline spaces embodied subjects located offline spaces. These shifts concern the tripartite and inseparable production of selves, others, and the relational space of their co-presence on-and-off-line.

Blued can be seen to enable the perception of 'people like this' as embodied subjects located within offline spaces; it also enables the perception of the self as occupying that same offline space through relations of proximity and distance to others. In this way, 'being someone like this', 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' become ways of occupying offline spaces. This also allows offline spaces to be redefined and experienced in relation to their occupation by others recognised as belonging to these categories. These dynamics are not necessarily unique to Blued. Within several of the narratives explored in the previous sections, the recognition of others online was seen to redefine offline sites. To quote Lu Ge: 'someone made the first site specifically for Sanya, a *tongzhi* site'. As such, Sanya became a space perceptibly inhabited by *tongzhi*. Similarly, Mingzai noted that prior to 'going online and searching' he 'could never have imagined that here in Qionghai there are so many people who are'. The results of his online search therefore redefined the kind of

(sexual) space Qionghai was seen to be.

Blued can be seen to intensify processes by which spaces are produced in relation to the online presence of men recognised as belonging to shared sexual categories. The relative 'profusion' and 'scarcity' of Blued users was, for some participants, incorporated into distinctions made between spaces at various geographic scales. As Lu Ge noted:

> Sometimes when we go down to the counties, smaller places, like Wuzhishan, somewhere like that, you won't see a single person all night, there's no one on that app (*nage ruanjian shang dou meiyou ren*), haha! It's like there's no one there. (**45, Sanya, from Guizhou, Mainland PRC**)

Here, the presence and absence of other men 'on that app' within a particular geographic demarcation ('down in the counties … smaller places … somewhere like that') appears to be a central feature in relation to which that demarcation is itself articulated. For Lu Ge, the apparent paucity of men 'on that app' in 'the counties' and 'smaller places' became a definitional quality of those spaces themselves; it became part of the ways in which such places were categorised as 'somewhere like that'.[98] While Lu Ge's account uses terms of profusion and scarcity, given the nature of Blued's locative function, these are in fact relations of proximity and distance. Blued establishes offline proximity as the primary spatial relationship between users and, as such, enables perception of the number of users within a certain geographic radius. Given assumptions of parity between presence on Blued and 'being' *gay*, *homosexual* and/or *tongzhi*, such proximity between Blued users was often perceived as indicative of the number of *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* men within a given offline space, be it a town, a city, a particular district, or some other spatial frame of reference. Below, Manyu recounts this function:

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[98] As noted in the previous section, claims made by some (urban) participants that rural men seeking men are absent from online *gay* spaces are at odds with my own experience of being in county-level cities, towns, and villages. These claims also contrast with the experiences of participants who were themselves living in such places. Rather than a purported 'absence' of men on Blued, such claims may perhaps reference increased distances between Blued users in these areas, made evident by Blued's locative function, compared to the proximity of users in Sanya and Haikou.

Manyu: The first time I made contact with another *gay* (*jiechu lingwai yige gay*) was through Blued.[99]

James: Back then, how did you find out about apps like Blued and when did you start using these things?

Manyu: Erm, I downloaded this app when I was in my third year of high school; I downloaded it for a while but thought it was boring so I deleted it. When I went to university [in Henan, mainland PRC] I thought 'hey, I should download that app and see how many people there are on campus on it' (*xiaoyuan you duoshao ren zai shangmian*). So, I downloaded it and saw my classmate on there. I've been using it ever since then, I never deleted it again.

James: The first time you used it, that was in your third year of high school, right?

Manyu: Yeah.

James: Back then, in Danzhou, were there many people on it?

Manyu: In Danzhou, back then, there weren't many people, just… Well, the closest person to me would have been about 0.5km away, 500m more or less. When I was at university, the closest person would have been 0.01km, haha! There was a guy who lived on the floor above me in our dorm building. There were so many people just on the campus. I think there are more on the mainland than on Hainan (*gen Hainan bi, dalu you geng duo*). **(22, Danzhou)**

Blued offers a way of experiencing offline spaces in relation to their occupation by men recognised as belonging to a collective sexual category; this enables imagination of the 'population density' of such men at a given geographic scale. Having left Hainan for the first time to attend university in Henan on the mainland, Manyu recalled his decision to 'download that app and see how many people there are on campus

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[99] Prior to this 'first contact', Manyu had been in a relationship with a man; however he defined this man as 'straight' (*zhi*), noting 'I don't think he was *gay*, he could just accept being with me'

on it'. This suggests his desire to explore his new surroundings in relation to the presence of other Blued users. The phrase 'on campus on it' encapsulates the simultaneity of on-and-off-line presence that Blued enables. Blued can be seen to have shaped Manyu's understanding of the university campus as a space densely populated by *gay* men. As he described it, 'there were so many people just on the campus'. He went on to compare the density of Blued users on his university campus to his earlier experience of using Blued while still in Danzhou, where the nearest user had been half a kilometre away. Through such comparisons, Manyu's perception of space in relation to the 'population density' of *gay* men extended beyond the scale of his university campus and beyond the scale of Danzhou. He scaled-up these figures to conclude that 'there are more on the Mainland than on Hainan'. Through Blued, the perceived presence and absence of *gay* men can shape the definition and experience of spatial demarcations ranging from a university campus, a town, a province, to the majority landmass of an entire nation. Of course, Manyu's observations may correlate to general disparities in population density between the sites that he compared. However, the extraordinary point here is precisely the way in which, through Blued, men understood as belonging to a collective sexual category become recognisable as a component of an imagined general population; they are therefore integrated into an otherwise heteronormative demography and into the production of space at a range of scales.

The density of Blued users within a given space could be seen to shape the geographic imaginations and everyday lives of many men that I spent time with in Hainan. In Haikou, for example, Blued served to identify certain spaces within the city as densely populated by *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* men, rendering these spaces landmarks in sexual geographies of the city. These geographies shaped the ways in which men that I socialised with in Haikou traversed and occupied the urban landscape. For example, in Haikou, I would regularly accompany friends to the city's bustling Jiefang West district to visit the menswear section on the fifth floor of Yuanxin Plaza, a densely packed and windowless warren of string vests, skinny jeans,

and flip-flops. With our phones in our hands, we would spend our evenings feigning interest in clothes and shoes as we cast glances at shop owners and fellow shoppers, trying our best to recognise these men as those that Blued told us were just metres away. On the way home, we might stop off at another regular haunt, an inconspicuous tea shop in Haikou's old town. Here we would drink what we came to call '*gay* milk tea' (*gay naicha*). We visited this site regularly, as much to enjoy the superior flavour of the tea as to continue our deliberations over which members of staff corresponded to the handful of Blued profiles that were visible each time we visited, apparently also connected to the teashop Wi-Fi. As Blued locates users in relation to one another within offline spaces, these spaces themselves come to figure in users' sexual-social geographies and everyday movements through the city. In this way, understandings of selves and the perception of others on the basis of assumed shared sexual categories become modes of inhabiting and traversing offline spaces, all the while seeing, being seen by, and engaging with others. As will be discussed in the following section, however, there are dangers, as well as pleasures, experienced in these dynamics of seeing and being seen as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* at the intersections of online and offline spaces.

As Farman (2012: 27) has suggested, 'our interactions with online social networks that are now locative have transformed the relationship between embodied identity and social space'. This section has explored participants' accounts of some of these transformations as they have been brought about through Blued. Four key social-sexual-spatial transformations can be summarised: 1) online interactional space is figured as a representation of the offline distribution of embodied subjects, it becomes a 'representation of space' (Lefebvre, 1990: 38-39), a map, and is therefore constructed as secondary to the assumed primacy of offline locations; 2) online practices of sexual categorisation intersect with relations of offline spatial proximity, such categories may, therefore, become perceptible within offline spaces; 3) online selves, others, and the sexual categories within which they are placed become mobile, they accompany embodied selves and others as they move through offline spaces; 4)

offline spaces are redefined and used in relation to the proximities that they afford to other men recognised as belonging to shared sexual categories, these proximities are mapped by Blued. These shifts problematise the binary division of online and offline spaces. As such, they problematise the perception of offline spaces as uniformly heterosexual.[100] If, as Dingfeng noted earlier in this chapter, 'these apps give us a way of knowing that this hidden world exists', then Blued's proximity-based locative function offers a way of knowing that this 'hidden world' exists right in the midst of one's immediate offline vicinity.

Being Seen

The first three sections of this chapter explored the ways in which participants understood certain online spaces as spaces within which presence could be equated with 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene'. The previous section went on to suggest that, through Blued, such practices of sexual categorisation can occur in the overlap of online and offline spaces. These issues concern norms of recognition established in relation to the spaces within which recognition not only takes place but become possible at all. In this sense, the recognition of 'sexual being' is intertwined with ways of 'sexual seeing'; the sexual 'beings' that others are *seen as* are dependent upon the spaces they are *seen in*. Seeing, however, is not a unilateral practice; it involves both recognition of, and by, others and the presentation of selves in particular ways (Dolezal, 2017; Goffman, 1959). It is not surprising, then, that for many participants the ability to see and engage with other men online was understood as mediated by the ways in which others presented themselves. At the same time, many participants discussed the ways in which they presented themselves online in the knowledge of their visibility to others. This section explores these issues, focusing on the ways in which participants discussed the images that they and other men used to present themselves online.

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[100] This said, these dynamics may also reinstate the status of certain spaces as 'heterosexual' when spaces are recognised in relation to the absence or low density of Blued users.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964: 125) has described the inseparability of visibility and presence, noting that 'a human body is present when, between the see-er and the visible, … between one eye and the other, … a kind of crossover occurs, when the spark of the sensing/sensible is lit'. Here, Merleau-Ponty points to the ways in which visibility, presence, and embodiment constitute what others have termed a 'grid of intelligibility' (Butler, 2004: 67; Foucault, 1978: 93) through which selves and others become intelligible as subjects. This assertion is both poignant and problematic in the context of online presence, given the ways in which the internet allows for the decoupling of presence from embodiment (Turkle, 1997). For many participants, discussions of online presence and presentation largely concerned the visibility of online others and the presentation of selves as embodied subjects.[101] Noting both the continuity of concerns for offline bodies in online interaction and the newfound visibility of bodies on contemporary apps, Xipeng joyfully remarked:

> Blued and Jack'd are wonderful inventions! In the past, in chatrooms you had to chat, like, 'hello', 'oh, hello', 'where are you?', 'do you have any photos?', 'what do you look like?' You couldn't send photos in chatrooms, you could ask 'what do you look like?' and they'd say 'I'm not bad'; what an evasive expression (*hao weiwan de shuofa*)! In the past, you would ask about someone's 'situation' (*qingkuang*), but now everything is there on your profile.[102] **(39, Haikou, from Shanghai, Mainland PRC)**

Echoing Mengxi earlier, Xipeng described perennial concerns for the offline locations of online others, with 'where are you?' the first in a series of questions asked even 'in the past in chatrooms'. In addition, he recounted long-standing concerns for offline bodies and 'what [they] look like'. For Xipeng, apps such as Blued and Jack'd have brought the visible body into online interactions such that it is no longer necessary to

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[101] In this section I do not distinguish between 'bodies' and 'faces', understanding the face as part of the body and therefore part of the processes through which online interactants recognise one another as embodied subjects. This section does, however, recognise the special function of the face as a locus of individual, named, personhood that is not usually extended to other bodily regions. This will be touched upon later.

[102] 'Situation' is generally used to refer to height, weight, body type, preferred sexual role, and location – precisely the range of issues that, as the previous sections opening vignette showed, and as Xipeng notes here, are 'there on your profile'.

as such questions. Appearing to contradict himself, Xipeng noted that 'you couldn't send photos in chatrooms' while also citing the way online interactants would ask one another 'do you have any photos?'. To clarify, while images could not be shared using early chatroom technologies, the exchange of images was possible through private messaging and email (Campbell, 2004). As such, the shift to having 'everything there on your profile' that Xipeng described was perhaps not an absolute transition from the construction of bodies in verbal communication, what Xipeng deemed 'evasive expression[s]', to the photographic presentation of bodies. Rather, Xipeng's account suggests the contemporary installation of visible bodies as the primary interface through which men engage one another online. As the profile image has come to constitute visible presence on such apps, the visible body has come to precede and regulate online interactions.

As noted earlier, online spaces allow for forms of presence/presentation that are decoupled from offline bodies. Briefly browsing Blued's grid of thumbnail images evidences a range of images through which users present themselves.[103] As many scholars have noted, it is the anonymity of online interactions that makes the internet a 'safe space' within offline contexts of potential hostility towards diverse sexual desires, practices, and identities (Döring, 2009; Gudelunas, 2012). At the same time, however, many participants voiced expectations that other Blued users present themselves using images that render them visible as embodied subjects. Such expectations were often voiced in terms of the use of 'real photos' (*zhende zhaopian*), or one's 'own photo' (*benren zhao*), and 'fake photos' (*jia zhaopian*). Such distinctions were discussed by the majority of participants and could be seen to regulate their online interactions with other men. For Ah Ben and Zhang Liang, for example, 'real photos' were prerequisites for engaging in online interaction with others:

> **Ah Ben:** The only thing you have is that one photo, if you don't have a photo

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[103] In this sense, it should be pointed out that Fig.8, which was taken from Blued's official website, is an idealised representation of the app's profile grid, with all profiles featuring images showing users' faces.

then people won't even look at you. If you've not got a profile picture, not got a photo, no one will look at you. This is a necessity (*zhe shi bixu de*). … [I]f they don't have a profile picture then I'm not willing to talk with them. **(36, Danzhou)**

Zhang Liang: I think that when I'm talking to someone on there, it's like: 'we've never met each other before, you might say you're a nice person, but I don't know what's nice about you; I don't know what your personality will be like. So the first thing I want to see is what you look like'. … I think that when you're talking to a stranger, the first thing you want to know is what they look like. And under these sorts of conditions, coming to know someone in this way, of course I want to know what you look like. **(28, Haikou, from Fujian, mainland PRC)**

Such regulatory demands that offline bodies are rendered visible online suggest desires for online interactions to remain 'predicated on significations derived from the corporeal world' (Elund, 2015: 2). For Ah Ben and Zhang Liang, rather than displacing the body as a mediator of social-sexual interaction, the anonymity of the internet re-doubled its decisive role. The anonymity of 'coming to know someone under these conditions' appeared to require grounding in the assumed offline reality of 'what you look like'. Only when offline bodies were presented online was it possible to begin 'talking to a stranger'. The fact that discourses of bodies and their 'attractiveness' can be as regulatory online as they are offline has been noted in many studies of online sexual cultures (Bonner-Thompson, 2017; Campbell 2004; Roth, 2014). From a phenomenological perspective, the above excerpts suggest more than concerns for 'attractiveness'; they highlight the continued function of the body online as the primary interface of social interaction and as a foundation for the recognition of others as subjects. As Zhang Liang suggested, the visibility of the body online facilitates interaction with 'strangers'. In this sense, the body appears to be key in processes whereby online 'strangers' become 'known'. These are processes through which the 'stranger', as a figure of 'Otherness' (Ahmed, 2000; Rodemeyer, 2006), is

recognised as another subject capable of being engaged in social interaction.[104]

These pervasive concerns for the visibility of embodied subjects could be seen to shape the ways in which some men in this research presented themselves online. For reasons discussed below, many participants chose not to present themselves using their 'own photos' (including some of those who were most vehement in making such demands of others).[105] Some participants who did use their 'own photos' could be seen to associate the use of such images with the performance of subjectivity online. Discussing his decision to submit an image of himself for 'verification' on Blued (see previous footnote), Chen Chen noted:

> If people ask for my photo, I just tell them to look at my profile photo, 'that's me' … If they are interested, then it's better because my photo is already there. Anyway, I can just say 'that's me in my photo, don't bother asking for more photos. No matter what you're looking for, that's my photo, that's me'. This is the main reason that I verified my photo. **(28, Baoting)**

For Chen Chen, the use of his 'own photo' and subsequent 'verification' of the image were seen to have brought together his online presence and offline self. As he repeated 'that's me in my photo … that's me', he highlighted the way in which the use of his 'own photo' was understood not only as a matter of the presentation of his body online but as the presentation of his embodied subjectivity – the presentation *of himself as himself.* In her analysis of 'queer self-portraiture', Amelia Jones (2002: 950, emphasis in original) contends that 'the self-portrait photograph is an example … of the way in which technology not only *mediates* but *produces* subjectivities in the contemporary world'. From this perspective, Chen Chen's use of his 'own image'

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[104] Demands for the use of 'real photos' are not only made by Blued users but also structure the technological landscape of the app itself. In response to user anxieties surrounding the prevalence of 'fake photos', the app's 'Blued4.3.0' update, released in 2015, introduced a 'profile picture verification' (*touxiang renzheng*) system (Blued, 2015). The system invites users to submit a video recording of themselves against which 'real' images are 'verified'. The 'veracity' of such images is indicated to other users via an illuminated tick visible on the app's primary grid of thumbnail images. Users who 'verify' their profile photos are rewarded with access to a range of special functions that are not available to 'unverified' users.

[105] Despite expressing their desires for other men to present themselves as embodied subject online, neither Xipeng nor Zhang Liang did so themselves, noting their fears of exposure to both family and colleagues. These issues will be discussed shortly.

could be seen as not only representing his offline subjectivity within the online space of Blued, and within his online interactions with other men, but as producing his embodied subjectivity as located on-and-offline. The photographic body, in this sense, bridges the gap between online and offline spaces and allows subjectivities to be produced, articulated, and flow between the two.

The use of 'real photos' on Blued figures online presence as that of an embodied subject. As online and offline presence becomes that of the same embodied subject, it also becomes possible for individuals to be recognised by others offline in relation to the sexual categories that their presence in certain online spaces is seen to confer. In other words, as online *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* presence becomes visible as the presence of an embodied subject, the offline presence of an embodied subject becomes visible as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*. As will be discussed shortly, many men in this research were fearful of being recognised in these ways in offline spaces. For a small number of participants, however, willingness to be recognised as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* offline was valorised as indicative of 'self-acceptance' (*jieshou ziji*). Ah Run exemplified this as he narrated his decision to use his 'own photo' on Blued:

> **Ah Run:** After I'd been in for two years, I just thought that I was a *gay* (*wo jiu juede wo shi ge gay*); I knew that I definitely wanted to be with a man. But at work I would still pretend (*jiazhuang*); other people might say something, but I would just hide it. … I've been in the scene for 3 years now, now I can accept myself, entirely accept myself (*wanquan jieshou wo ziji*). It's only recently that I started putting my own photo on my profile online; this is a big change (*zhe shi yige hen da de bianhua*). I've been in the scene for so long and I've never used my own picture. This really is a big change for me. …
>
> I'm more open now (*wo xian zai geng kaifang*). Now that I've changed my profile picture to my own photo I feel very happy. … I won't ever use those pictures of celebrities, pictures of muscular bodies, again. I just put my own

photo up there. I change my photo a lot depending on my mood. I try out different photos, changing them all the time. I think that now, more and more, I'm living as myself (*wo xianzai huo de yue lai yue ziwo*).

James: Why were you afraid of putting your photo on Blued?

Ah Run: It was that someone would see my photo and then recognise me (*renchu wo*). I just thought it wasn't very good, that was it. It's only recently that I've started using my own photo. **(23, Sanya, from Chengmai)**

Ah Run was one of nine participants who actively requested to be interviewed; he saw the interview as an opportunity to document his 'self-acceptance'. In the above account, Ah Run's use of his 'own photo' can be seen to have engendered the potential for what Stefanie Duguay (2016: 892) terms 'context collapse': 'a flattening of the spatial, temporal, and social boundaries that otherwise separate audiences ... an event through which individuals might intentionally or unintentionally have their identity redefined across audiences'. For Ah Run, the use of his 'own photo' collapsed his online and offline contexts of sexual identification. His presence on Blued was made visible as that of an embodied subject – a particular individual potentially recognisable to others as 'Ah Run'. At the same time, in the offline space of his workplace, in which he would previously 'just hide it', the use of his 'own photo' on Blued rendered him potentially visible to others as '*gay*'. The online/offline boundary is therefore deconstructed and transformed into a unified (though still limited) social space within which online sexual identification and offline embodiment are brought together. Within this on-and-off-line space, an embodied subject becomes identifiable as *gay* and as Ah Run. Of course, this remains a 'strategic outness' (Orne, 2012) in that Ah Run became perceptible as *gay* only to those who knew him in both online and offline contexts, such as the *gay* co-workers he describes below.

Ah Run asserted that prior to using his 'own photo' on Blued '[he] thought that [he] was *gay*, [he] wanted to be with a man'. Yet he emphasised that after using his own

photo on Blued he felt that 'more and more, [he was] living as [him]self'. This can be seen to suggest the way in which, for Ah Run, 'being' *gay* become a lived, embodied reality, rather than something he 'thought', to the extent that 'being' *gay* was made visible to others offline. His account suggests that 'living as oneself' was understood to entail being visible as *gay* to others offline. Ah Run elaborated this ontology of the 'being' *gay* as he continued the above account:

> A lot of people are really afraid of using their own photo. [Where I work] in Sanya, a lot of us are *gay* (*he duo dou shi gay*), there must be over 20, a lot of *gays*. But they are almost all very afraid of using their own photos. They say stuff like: 'we all work together here'. I find it really depressing now because they can see me, but I can't see their existence (*kan bu dao tamen de cunzai*), they could be the person sitting right next to you. I do feel really uncomfortable, but I don't care, just let them know. **(23, Sanya, from Chengmai)**

The above passage requires some clarification. Ah Run worked at a large shopping centre; the conversations with his work colleagues described above took place on Blued after he had messaged nearby users. These others declined to send him their photos, stating 'we all work together here'. As such, he knew these online others as *gay* and as work colleagues, but was unable to recognise them as embodied subjects offline. For Ah Run, a consequence of these dynamics, and of his use of his 'own photo' on Blued, was that 'they can see me, but I can't see their existence'. The 'existence' of 'me' is, here, invested in Ah Run's visibility to others in his workplace as one-and-the-same with his online presence and identification as *gay*. Such 'existence', therefore, appears dependent on the presentation of self online using one's 'own photo' and the corollary breakdown of the online/offline boundary. The refusal of other men to transcend these boundaries left Ah Run unable to 'see their existence'. As he emphasised, this was despite the fact of their potential bodily, material, presence 'sitting right next to you'. In this account, the ability to 'see' other *gay* men as embodied subjects within offline spaces can be seen to constitute, in Louis Altusser's terms (1970: 11), 'a material ritual practice of ideological recognition in

everyday life … [that] interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects'. For Ah Run, the 'existence' of other *gay* men in his workplace, their 'concrete subjectivity', remained uncertain so long as their digital presence on Blued remained disassociated from their embodied presence 'sitting right next to you'.

Ah Run stood out amongst men in this research for the level of reflection he engaged in regarding his transition to using his 'own photo' and the implications of this for his sense of 'living as [him]self'. However, other men similarly articulated a sense of self-assured confidence in relation to the use of their 'own photos' on Blued and their openness to offline recognition as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*. For example, when asked about his decision to use his 'own photo' on Blued, Liang Zongwei replied:

> I didn't think that it was a big deal (*mei shenme dabuliao de*). I'm not afraid of being recognised (*renchulai*) by other people, … When I'm out I might receive a message that says, 'hey, I've just seen you at such-and-such a place'. I just think, 'whatever' (*wusuowei*). But I have a friend who gets very nervous (*jinzhang*), he'll say, 'oh no, I've been recognised!' I just think, 'it's not like they're trying to attack you (*gongji ni*)' It's really sad that he feels that way. **(24, Haikou)**

As for Ah Run above, to some extent here for Liang Zongwei, the use of ones 'own photo' on Blued and the possibility of 'context collapse' in the form of 'being recognised' within offline spaces constituted affirmative performances of the *gay* self in everyday life. This is suggested by Liang Zongwei 'whatever' attitude. However, Liang Zongwei went on to note that this is was far from the case for most men:

James: … what is it that your friend is afraid of?

Liang Zongwei: There are people who don't put their own photos on there, they will threaten you (*hui weixie ni*). I have a friend who has been threatened. Someone threatened to expose him in his work place (*zai danwei ba ta baolu*); it was one of his colleagues, you know, … he said he had to do what they told him.

But I think, 'whatever, expose me, I'm not doing anything wrong!' (*wo meizuo shenme huaishi*) (**24, Haikou**)

As Liang Zongwei illustrates, Blued users' uneven use of 'their own photos' leaves those who do present themselves using such images open to blackmail. The fear of 'exposure' that Liang Zongwei attributed to his friend was noted by other participants in relation to their use, or indeed avoidance of using, their 'own photos' online. Discussing his refusal to send his 'own photo' to a classmate he had been speaking to online, Mengxi commented:[106]

There's no way I would send my own photo, I was studying there and it was in Wenchang, such a small place, so I thought… I was worried that if I sent a photo my other classmates would see; it wouldn't be good if they were to know. … I did worry about things like this. I had a friend, a friend in the scene, he's studying in Sanya now, he was found out (*bei faxian*) by his friends and he still cries about it now; now his classmates don't want anything to do with him. (**28, Chengmai**)

Such painful accounts of 'exposure' and being 'found out' contrast sharply with Ah Run's earlier celebratory narrative of 'self-acceptance' performed through the use of his 'own photo' on Blued. This disparity concerns the ability to maintain what Jason Orne (2011: 682) terms ''strategic outness' – the continual contextual management of sexual identity'. Almost all participants expressed varying degrees of fear of 'exposure' and articulated desires to limit the range of social relations and spaces within which they become visible to others as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*.[107] The boundaries of such 'strategic outness' differed between individuals; as in Liang Zongwei's story about his 'friend', many men fear 'exposure' in the work place, while, as for Mengxi, others fear 'exposure' to classmates. These fears of exposure

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[106] This was despite this classmate having sent his 'own photo' to Mengxi.

[107] Here, it would perhaps be more precise to say 'visible as homosexual', as this was understood by most participants to be the term by which they would be understood as a result of their 'exposure' to others 'outside of the scene'. The following chapter explores the meanings of 'being homosexual' 'outside of the scene' in relation to issues of family and reproduction. The only participants who did not discusses such fears of 'exposure' were Lu Ge and Ah Ben, who, as will be seen in the following chapter, were vehement advocates of 'self-acceptance' and practices of 'living a gay life'.

are particularly intense in 'small place[s]', as Mengxi also suggested. For the majority of men in this research, as the following chapter will explore, their ultimate fear was 'exposure' to their families. As was outlined in the previous chapter, these are spaces and social relations (school, work, family) that were understood as 'outside of the scene'. Recognising these pervasive fears of 'exposure', it is important to note that although many participants valorised the use of images that figure online presence as that of an embodied subject and complained about users who did not present themselves in these ways, many were apprehensive about using such images themselves. At the time of our interviews, 12 of the 30 men interviewed for this research who were regular Blued users presented themselves on the app using their 'own photos'.[108]

The previous sections of this chapter suggested that for many participants, the presence of others in certain online spaces was seen to enable the recognition of these others as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*. This section has elaborated and complicated these issues by exploring the ways in which online visibility is shaped by disparate modes of self-presentation and dominant modes of recognition. These dynamics of visibility have been explored in relation to the use of 'real photos', understood as images that render offline embodied subjects visible in online interaction. These issues suggest the extent to which the recognition of subjectivity remains predicated on the visibility and presence of bodies, even in online interaction. Such presentation of the self online as an embodied subject has the effect of rendering offline subjects potentially visible to others as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*. This collapse of online and offline contexts of identification and subjectivity was seen by some men as a way of 'being oneself' on-and-off-line. Many more men, however, feared recognition as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* outside of certain spaces and social relations. They therefore chose not to use their 'own photos' online. The online spaces and forms of presence, visibility, identity, and subjectivity explored across this chapter can therefore be seen as shaped by the juxtaposition of desires for visibility as

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[108] The total is '30' here due to the fact that Da Shu was not a regular Blued user.

gay, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* and fears of this same visibility.

Finding Hook Ups, Friends, and Boyfriends Online

The previous sections of this chapter have explored the ways in which participants understood the internet as a space within which others could be recognised as belonging to shared sexual categories. With the arrival of Blued, these others have become present on-and-off-line. This section explores forms of social, sexual, and intimate relations that participants saw as facilitated by the pervasive access the internet offered to other *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* men. Many participants expressed concerns over the varying extents to which this access was used in pursuit of casual sex, emotional relationships, and friendships. These relationships often figured as mutually exclusive. Exploring these issues offers insight into the emergent and contested meanings of sexual categories and the ways in which the meanings of these categories are entangled with the meanings of the spaces within which they become perceptible.

Binary distinctions between social and sexual interactions were a key framework through which many participants interpreted the novel and pervasive access to other *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* men that the internet was seen to offer. These distinctions led to perceptions of opposed functions of the internet as a tool for the pursuit of sexual interactions, on the one hand, and for the establishment of social and emotional relationships, on the other. Jiang Quan provided a typical example of this sexual/social binary as he discussed contrasting uses of Blued:

> For most people, that app is just used for hook ups (*yuepao*), that's what people think. There are few people who are looking to chat and make friends, more genuine people (*geng zhenxin de ren*), because it seems that this things itself hasn't really become a sort of culture (*ta benshen meiyou xingcheng yizhong wenhua*), it is just more about finding release for your desires (*faxie yuwang*). **(31, Sanya, from Jiangsu, mainland PRC)**

Jiang Quan distinguished between the use of Blued 'for hook ups' and 'to chat and make friends'. He appeared to valorise the latter as the preference of 'more genuine people' and as indicative of the emergence of 'a sort of culture'. 'Hook ups', on the other hand, are figured as 'just more about finding a release for your desires'. As such, 'hook ups' were constructed as a solely 'sexual' interaction, apparently driven by innate 'desires' that require 'release' and were seen to be situated outside of the sphere of 'culture'. This sexual/social binary and the rejection of 'hook ups' as lacking social and cultural meaning were characteristic of the ways that many participants discussed the pervasive access the internet offers to others recognised as belonging to a shared sexual category. These discourses suggest concerns over the meanings and functions of the internet – either as a tool that renders other men visible and accessible as potential sexual partners or as a means of identifying those with whom a common sociocultural disposition and capacity for emotional connection is seen to be shared. As such, debates over the meanings and functions of the internet were also debates over the meanings of sexual categories.

As men recognise one another within online interactions as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi* and/or 'in the scene', the meanings of these categories are shaped by the perceived purpose of this online presence and the perceived nature of subsequent offline interactions. Having 'come into the scene' online, Xiao Qiao described the ways in which his initial understanding of 'the scene' was shaped by his perception how others 'in the scene' used the internet:

James: So after you came into this scene, what impression did you have of it?

Xiao Qiao: That it was really messed-up (*hen luan*), messed-up because… because software and the internet are very developed now, there are a lot of people hooking up on there, like, 'let's hook up, let's hook up'. But, of course, that doesn't mean that there aren't some people who are really serious (*hen renzhen*) about these things. But overall, because those that hook up often, those guys, they're more active (*huodong nengli bijiao da*), so it make you feel that this

scene is pretty messed-up. It's just like, like for those guys, in their minds it's just a kind of fun (*zhishi yizhong yule*). **(18, Chengmai)**

While Jiang Quan's earlier valorisation of the use of the internet 'to chat and make friends' and his condemnation of 'hook ups' were implicit, many other participants more resolutely critiqued the use of the internet for 'hook ups', as in Xiao Qiao's above account. Such condemnation of 'hook ups' often took the form of their definition as 'messed up' (*luan*). *Luan* is a pervasive term in the PRC that scholars have translated as 'chaotic'; it has been argued that the term is derived from Communist Party political rhetoric (Latham, 2000). The term was used by many men in this research to lambaste what they saw as 'sexually excessive' practices. When asked to define 'messed up', Xiao Qiao replied: 'it's like hooking up every day, that's really messed up. It makes me feel like, today you're with this guy, tomorrow with that guy, it just seems messed-up to me'. As he continued, he highlighted the political undertones of the concept 'messed-up' and described hook ups as a form of 'social pollution':

James: So, what do you think of Blued? Do you like using it?

Xiao Qiao: It allows me to make more friends in the scene and for the sake of finding a boyfriend I will keep on using it. I think there are positives and negatives to this app. The positive thing is that you can make a lot of friends on it and maybe you'll meet your boyfriend, but… but also you ease your loneliness (*paichu jimo*) through hook ups, through sexual means (*xing de fangshi*), so it pollutes society (*rang shehui geng jia fanlan*, literally: 'it causes society to become more rotten').

James: Pollutes? What do you mean?

Xiao Qiao: Polluted is like really messed-up. **(18, Chengmai)**

Echoing other participants, Xiao Qiao framed uses of Blued as a matter of choice

between the pursuit of friends and boyfriends or the pursuit of hook ups. For Xiao Qiao, how Blued was used was seen to have an impact on 'society' more generally. He constructed hook ups as practices that 'pollute society', deploying popular discourses that associate 'sexual conservatism' with social order (Sigley, 2006). By contrast, the use of Blued to find friends and boyfriends appears to represent social stability and 'cleanliness'. Other participants similarly deployed discourses of 'pollution' and 'cleanliness' in condemning the use of Blued to facilitate hook ups. As Dajun Ge put it:

> I know two or three guys, they're just online every day, on Blued, fishing (*diaoyu*). Sometimes, when they've finished work and had dinner, they arrange to meet one, two, three, even four people! … I think it's scary (*kepa*), it's pretty scary! This kind of life, I think it's like living in a sewer, a dustbin (*xiashuidao, lajitong*). **(63, Haikou, from Shaanxi, mainland PRC)**

Such discourses of 'dirt' and 'pollution' construct 'hook ups' as a form of 'inappropriate' and 'anti-social' sexual practice (Douglas, 1966). Such accounts can be seen to draw on a broader fields of sexual discourses, including those concerning AIDS prevention, the delimitation of sex to private spaces, and the denigration of sex work; these have been recognised as key discursive fields within which in-/appropriate sexual desires, practices, and identities are constructed and regulated in the contemporary PRC (Jones, 2007; He and Rofel, 2010; Zheng, 2009). As has been argued throughout this chapter, the meanings of sexual categories within which participants placed themselves and others were negotiated, to a great extent, in online interaction. As such, ardent condemnations of the use of Blued to facilitate hook ups can be seen as attempts to regulate online interaction and, thereby, construct *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* desires, practices, and identities within the terms of accepted 'sexual morality' (Sigley, 2006: 58)

It is important to note that these contestations concern the perceived *primary* meanings and functions of the internet in the lives of *gay*, *homosexual,* and/or *tongzhi*

men. Participants who argued that the internet should be used to find friends and emotional relationships (*ganqing*) did not necessarily argue that the internet should not also facilitate occasional hook ups. Indeed, later in our interview, Xiao Qiao noted, 'when you're lonely you can hook-up with someone, but you shouldn't make it too often'. Echoing these concerns, Lu Ge contrasted between men whose interactions in 'the scene' he saw as limited to internet-enabled hook ups and men he saw as engaging in diverse social interactions both online and offline:

> In this scene, well, the kinds that you will usually come into contact with, there are those who often hang out at the club, their sense of self is better (*ziwo rentong bijiao hao*), so they come and hang out, they have a public life (*gongzhong de shenghuo*) … So, they come out and meet people, meet friends, go on dates, this is all normal (*dou hen zhengchang*), you can see him (*kandao ta*), you know him, we can all get to know each other, and his friends too; he'll come and hang out with his friends. Then there are some who are *invisible* (spoken in English) … but they might still hook up with people they have met online. We jokingly call them *anchang*, … we say *anchang*, *anchang* means someone who is also looking for men, but who doesn't come out and live publically; he just sneaks around contacting people individually online; he'll contact you through the internet, maybe meet up and have a one night stand, *for one night* (spoken in English), this kind of secretive activity in the background (*beihou simi de huodong*). … They don't come and hang out (*chulai*) because they just use those softwares to hook up with people, they don't use them to make friends. **(45, Sanya, from Guizhou, Mainland PRC)**

For Lu Ge, men whose interactions 'in the scene' were seen as limited to internet-enabled hook ups constituted an identifiable 'kind that you will come into contact with'. He defined such men as *anchang*. In contrast with Ah Zheng's earlier definition of *anchang* as internet illiterate, rural men incapable of contacting and interacting with men 'in the scene', for Lu Ge, *anchang* were men who 'just use those softwares to hook-up with people, they don't use them to make friends'. In this

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account, however, *anchang* were no less 'Othered' than in Ah Zheng's earlier description. Here, the axis of exclusion by which *anchang* were rendered 'Other' to a collective 'us in the scene' was not their inability to use the internet, but their inability and unwillingness to use the internet 'to make friends' – to establish temporally enduring social relationships that extend beyond 'one night'. Importantly, in light of the finding of the previous section, as well as the discussion of collectivity in the previous chapter, in Lu Ge's account *anchang* were constructed as refusing to establish social relationships that unfold offline and in collective view of others. Such visibility was seen to constitute a form of 'public life' and was valorised as 'normal'. Instead, Lu Ge suggested that *anchang* are 'invisible', they 'sneak[…] around contacting people individually online'. As such, in line with issues discussed in the previous section, Lu Ge can be seen to link the recognition of subjectivity to visible, embodied presence in offline spaces. To this, he added an association between subjectivity and the use of the internet to 'make friends', as opposed to the sole use of the internet in pursuit of 'hook ups'.

While many participants made distinctions between 'social', 'emotional', and 'sexual' relationships and interactions, the majority understood the internet to facilitate all three. The extent to which the internet was used in pursuit of these forms of interaction was therefore seen to be a matter of 'moral' choice. For some participants, however, the internet was perceived as a space that fundamentally oriented interactions between men towards sex. Chen Chen, for example, complained that:

> Now people really depend on their mobile phones and this has sped-up the rhythm of everything (*shenme jiezou dou hen kuai*). … To make things quicker, more efficient, people are in the habit of being like 'show me your photo, if you're suitable let's get into bed'. If someone isn't suitable, then they go looking for the next person. It's already got to the point now that I feel like if you are looking for a boyfriend other people are just looking to satisfy their sexual desire (*manzu tamen de xingyu*) **(28, Baoting)**

Chen Chen's understanding of internet technologies as having 'sped up the rhythm of everything' was also shared by Da Shu. In the first section of this chapter, Da Shu gave a clear example of the ways in which presence in certain online spaces was understood to confer belonging to certain sexual categories. For Da Shu, meeting other men online meant that 'you will think of them from a *gay* perspective'. As he continued, however, he suggested that when men view one another from this '*gay* perspective' their interactions are oriented towards sex:

> I've never used softwares to look for a partner or anything like that, because in my subconscious (*qianyishi*) I think I've always hoped that I can be like a *straight* (spoken in English) and use some normal methods (*zhengchang de tujing*), like meeting someone through some very true-to-life methods (*hen shenghuohua de yixie tujing*). I've thought about why there are people these days who don't like to use softwares; it's because they feel like they what to find people of the same kind (*tonglei ren*), people in our scene, but they don't want to be so clear about who that person is. It's like, people like that feeling of having first been friends and then at some point finding out: 'hey, I like you, you like me, we're both the same kind of person'. This feeling is different from knowing that someone is *gay* from the first time that you meet them; that's too purposeful (*mudi xing tai qiang le*). … In my opinion, these softwares, here in China, whether it's Blued or Jack'd, it feels more like a hunting ground (*shoulie chang*). You expose yourself on there (*baolu ziji*); you put yourself on there and if someone sees you and thinks you're suitable then, ok, you can meet up and then… **(32, Haikou)**

In many of the accounts explored in the first and second sections of this chapter the assumed 'clarity' and 'certainty' of sexual identities online was valorised. Here, however, Da Shu appeared to lament the assumed self-evidence of 'being *gay*' online. For Da Shu, as men view one another 'from a gay perspective' their interactions become oriented towards sex and the constitutive gaze is limited to a concern for one's 'suitability' – a synonym for 'attractiveness'. Here, the internet does not

function as a radical site of self-discovery, as in accounts discussed earlier, but as a 'hunting ground' on which 'you expose yourself'. In contrast to narratives in the previous section, in which forms self-presentation online occasioned the articulation of subjectivity, Da Shu's above account suggests what Mowlabocus (2010: 94) describes as 'the reduction of the virtual gay male body to that of an object of desire … at the very point at which [gay men] are rendering themselves visible and forming digital self-representations'. 'Being (seen as) *gay*' online was here equated with being both 'hunted' and a 'hunter' on a 'hunting ground' – a mutually constitutive triad of identity, purpose, and space. Poignantly, while Da Shu noted his discomfort with the way in which meeting online meant 'knowing that [they are] *gay* from the first time that you meet them', he also highlighted the pervasive heteronormativity that shapes offline, everyday social interaction, recognising such 'true-to-life circumstances' as a matter of 'be[ing] like a *straight*'.

While disapproval of ('excessive') online hook ups was pervasive amongst men in this research, as a final point, it must be noted that not all participants expressed these views. For Mengxi, the use of Blued in pursuit of hook ups was invested with a sense of cultural value and was seen as performative of being someone 'in this scene of ours':

Mengxi: There are people who say there [on Blued] that they're not looking for hook ups, 'I don't hook up! Don't hook up!' If you don't hook up, what are you looking to do on there? Haha! …

James: So why do you think it is that so many people say 'I don't hook up'?

Mengxi: They're stuck up (*zhuangbi*)! I was chatting about this with some friends in Haikou; they said I've got a vicious tongue haha! I'm only saying out loud what you want to say in your head. And he said, 'yeah, we… we're all…' he said that we've seen it all (*women dou shi guolai ren*; also: we've been through it all); we're not innocent (*chunjie*) and don't pretend to be innocent. Those that

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pretend to be innocent, my friend said, they're all pure white on the outside, but underneath they're no better than anyone else (*bailianhua*; idiom; literally: 'white lotus'). They pretend to be all innocent, but in this scene of ours there's no such thing as innocence, haha! (*women zhege quanzili shi bu cunzai shenme chunjie de*) **(28, Chengmai)**

In common with Da Shu and Chen Chen above, Mengxi defined the primary function of Blued as the facilitation of hook ups; as he put it, '[i]f you don't hook up, what are you looking to do on there?' However, in contrast with the denigration of hook ups, seen elsewhere in this section, and their construction as having limited socio-cultural meaning, Mengxi celebrated the use of Blued to engage in hook ups. For him, hook ups were recognised as a sexual-cultural practice that conferred belonging to 'this scene of ours'. Using Blued in pursuit of hook ups appeared constitutive of a collective 'we' who have 'seen it all'. As such, to deny having used Blued to hook up was, here, taken as a mark of insincerity. Mengxi noted that 'in this scene of ours there is no such thing as 'innocence'. As such, men who acknowledge their use of Blued in pursuit of hook ups, men who are 'not innocent and don't pretend to be', were recognised as 'authentic' members of 'the scene'.

This section has explored concerns amongst participants about the extent to which internet technologies were used to find hook ups, friends, and boyfriends. Given the ways in which emergent sexual categories were often seen as negotiated in online interaction, concerns for the purpose of online interactions are also concerns for meanings of sexual categories. The accounts explored in this section questioned the extent to which the recognition of others as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* online meant the recognition of potential sexual partners, of men with whom a socio-cultural disposition was shared, and/or of men with whom romantic relationships could be established. These are, therefore, contests over the emergent meanings of 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene'. There was a clear trend amongst participants toward the denigration of the ('excessive') use of internet technologies in pursuit of hook ups. Hook ups were often deemed to be meaningless and were even

seen by some as a form of social 'pollution'. This suggests pervasive desires amongst men in this research to construct *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* identities and practices in line with dominant frameworks of 'sexual morality'. Internet technologies and their uses can be seen as key sites within which, and in relation to which, this construction takes place.

Conclusion

The internet was afforded a pivotal position in the life-course narratives of almost all men in this research. It could also be seen to play a central role in their everyday lives, which were to a lesser or greater extent lived across and between online and offline spaces. Nash and Gorman-Murray (2016: 353) suggest that internet technologies 'appear to be fomenting a new 'sexual revolution', one that is rewriting how we understand what our bodies can 'do' and how we comprehend ourselves as sexual beings'. While this suggestion of 'revolution' may be somewhat hyperbolic, it was clear that for the majority of participants, information technologies were indeed central to the ways in which they comprehended themselves as 'sexual beings'. This chapter has approached these issues from the perspective of 'space', understanding 'space' not as the *a priori* material arena within which social relations unfold but as produced precisely in the play of everyday interaction. Spaces are, as Doreen Massey (1994: 4) has put it, 'stretched-out social relations'. In this sense, the internet can be conceived as a space to the extent that it is both a mode of social connection, and therefore relation, and embodies a range of material capacities and limitations that shape those connections and relations. This chapter has explored the complex social relations of identity, visibility, presence, embodiment, subjectivity, and 'morality' that were articulated in the ways that participants discussed the uses and usefulness of the internet.

This chapter began by exploring the ways in which the internet was conceived by men in this research as a space within which the presence of others on certain websites and apps enabled recognition of these others as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi*. At the

same time, for many men in this research, online spaces not only allowed for the identification of others as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* but it was through internet searches and within online interaction that they came to understand themselves in these ways. For several men in this research, these online processes of recognising selves and others as belonging to certain sexual categories were framed in terms of 'progress' and 'enlightenment' and the internet was construct as a space within which it was possible to 'realise' the 'truth' of one's 'sexual being'. With the arrival of mobile, locative technologies, in the form of Blued, as men recognise one another as *gay*, *homosexual*, and *tongzhi* online, they simultaneously recognised one another as occupying offline spaces. This allows offline spaces to be defined and used in particular ways in relation to their perceived occupation by *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* men. These dynamics of presence involve relations of 'seeing' and 'being seen' and new mobile media can be seen to have established the profile picture as a primary mode of online presence/presentation. As some participants demanded that online others make themselves visible online as embodied subjects, they highlighted the continued role of the body as a locus of subjectivity, even in otherwise radically disembodied online interactions. Some men chose to present themselves online as embodied subjects and perceived this as way of 'being oneself'. For many more, however, the risks associated with being recognised as *gay, homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* offline were too great to warrant the use of their 'own photos' online. Each of the above points attests to the central role played by the internet in the recognition of selves and others as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* on-and-off-line. As such, the meanings of these categories were often seen as conferred by the range of uses to which internet technologies were put.

This focus on the uses and usefulness of the internet has been pursued in contrast to much of the current literature on relationships between internet technologies and non-heterosexual identities in the PRC. Work by a number of scholars has emphasised the role of the internet as a vector of both regulatory and subversive discourses (Deklerck and Wei, 2015; Ho, 2010; Shaw and Zhang, 2017). This has directed

analysis toward online content, rather than lived experiences of online connection and interaction. This chapter has recognised that, for men in this research, the internet was valued for the access it was seen to offer to other men who could be recognised as belonging to shared sexual categories. As such, the internet can be seen as a space in which identities and subjectivities are performed on-and-off-line through relations of co-presence and recognition.

While both this chapter and the previous one have pointed to the ways in which participants' self-understandings and everyday lives were shaped by pervasive heteronormativity, embodied in both the state and the family, heteronormativity has so far been positioned as the 'background' to articulations of 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene'. There remains a need for a more thorough exploration of heteronormativity as invested in a range of discursive and material relations that shaped the self-understandings and everyday lives of men in this research. The following chapter explores sociocultural and material relations of family, marriage, and reproduction. These were issues that dominated the ways in which many participants narrated the future. As such, these issues are explored in the following chapter thorough the conceptual framework of temporality.

Chapter Six: Life-Times

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter Four, the majority of men in this research narrated 'coming into the scene' as an epiphanal point in their life course narratives. Chapter Five went on to explore a range of meanings and uses that participants attributed to 'the internet' in relation to their self-understandings and everyday interactions with other men recognisable as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene'. For many, internet technologies were couched in terms of 'beginning' and 'newness', figured as gateways into a 'new world' or as marking the dawning of a 'new era' of sexual 'certainty' and 'modernity'. As such, while the previous two chapters have focused on themes of sociality and spatiality, there is also a temporal quality to the issues discussed in this thesis so far – they concern the ways in which participants made sense of past social-sexual experiences and constructed present modes of 'being'. This chapter takes up these implicit themes of temporal 'being' and turns towards a temporal frame that is largely absent from the previous chapters: the future.

The future was an urgent concern for many participants, especially, though not exclusively, those under the age of 30 (the majority of interviewees). At the time of our interviews, many of these men were facing pressures to conform to heteronormative life scripts and their parents' demands that they marry and have children. This was also evident outside of interviews. The everyday conversations of young men I spent time with in Hainan would often turn to questions of the future, questions such as: 'How will you face your parents?'; 'Will you get married?'; 'Do you want to have children?'; 'Will you come out (*chugui*)?' Older participants, on the other hand, often looked back on their lives as shaped by their own responses to similar questions, articulating the present as the future of their past decisions. In this sense, the future is perhaps less a question of the passage of time than one of the negotiation of relations to a range of others with whom lives are, or will potentially be,

lived: parents, families, wives, and children, and, less frequently, boyfriends. As discussed in the Literature Review, relationships between family, marriage, reproduction, and the construction of non-heterosexual identities in the PRC have been a key concern for a number of researchers (Chou, 2008; 2000; Engebretsen, 2017; Hildebrandt, 2018). This chapter adds to this literature by exploring the temporality of these relations – that is, the particular ways of thinking about and living in time that instantiate and in relation to which participants articulated 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' as ways of being dis/oriented in time.

Narrating the future poses questions concerning the ways of living that become imaginable and are made im/possible in living together with others (Rodemeyer, 2006). Exploring the kinds of futures towards which participants oriented themselves is necessarily an exploration of the play of power in the production of particular modes of sexual 'being' as ways of being oriented, and disoriented, in time (Ahmed, 2006b). Certain modes of life are rendered perceptible and are established as normative goals towards which lives are oriented, while others are rendered problematic, unsustainable, and even deadly (Edelman, 2004). As heteronormativity curtails the range of imaginable and liveable life courses available within dominant discourses and specific material contexts, to pose questions of the future is to engage with 'the sexual arrangement of the time of life' (Luciano, 2007: 9). The chapter draws upon these insights, while remaining sensitive to specific forms of heteronormative temporality that are embodied in the notion of 'filial piety' as discussed and experienced by men in this research.

In addressing these issues, this chapter is divided into four sections. The first section discusses the sense of uncertainty that many participants expressed as they imagined the future, linking this sense of futurelessness to a paucity of alternative life course narratives to those of marriage and reproduction as well as material issues of aging and elder care. The second section explores futurelessness as a temporal frame within which '*homosexuality*/being *homosexual*' is constructed as a temporally delimited mode of existence; here, I pay particular attention to participants' accounts of their

parents' 'opposition to *homosexuality*' and the temporal dynamics of filial piety. The third section explores ways in which some participants deployed essentialising discourses of sexual identity that aligned 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* with the rejection of marriage and reproduction. Such rejection, therefore, became a normative, affirmative, and future-oriented life-script. The final section explores ways in which some participants accommodated marriage and reproduction, or anticipated such accommodations in the future, while continuing to live lives 'in the scene'.

The Future?

One evening in February 2016, Xiao Mai and I sat down in front of my laptop on the sofa of my rented apartment in Haikou. As had become our habit three times a week, we opened the homepage of iQiyi, one of the PRC's largest online video streaming platforms, scrolled to the search box, and typed 'addicted' (*shangyin*). Over the past months we had joined millions of young men, and many young women, across the PRC in watching *Addicted* (Ding Wei, 2016), the story of a blossoming relationship between two young men, Gu Hai and Bai Luoyin, who were slowly coming to terms with their desires for one another. As *Addicted*'s narrative unfolded, we watched these two young men move from querulous classmates in Episode One, through the flirtations of Episode Three, and the tense eroticism of shared showers and lingering hands on shoulders in Episodes Five through Seven. As Gu Hai slipped into Bai Luoyin's bed before the credits rolled in Episode Eight, we yearned to know if they would finally consummate their unacknowledged relationship. The crumpled tissues on the bedside table in the opening shot of Episode Nine told us that they had. We yearned to know other things too. Was Bai Luoyin's father already tacitly aware that the two men felt more than brotherly love for one another? How would he react when the run of near-misses inevitably broke and he opened the bedroom door to find them lying in each other's arms? Could he accept it? Would their plans to rent an apartment together come to fruition? And what tantalising freedoms would their cohabitation permit? We had heard rumours of what was to come. They would both tell their

families; smiling, they would sit down together with their parents for Spring Festival and eat boiled dumpling; they would travel to the USA and register their marriage. To our dismay, that evening, as Xiao Mai and I sat in front of my laptop on the sofa of my rented apartment in Haikou, in the place of Episode Sixteen, lime-green lettering on a black background read: 'Sorry! The video you have searched for is no longer available'. The next day, social media was awash with the sorrow and scorn of almost every *gay* man I knew, decrying the government's banning of *Addicted* and deletion of all episodes. Our yearnings to know what came next were left unsatisfied.

For many of the men in this research, narratives of the future were characterised by uncertainty. The banning of *Addicted* is but one example of the many narratives of desire and love between men and the modes of life they incite that become available on the PRC's online media platforms, only for them to come to the attention of government censors and to be removed precisely at the point when their popularity may have installed them as available scripts for the living of non-heterosexual lives. State censorship clearly plays an important role in curtailing the imagination of lives oriented in ways other than toward marriage and reproduction. However, everyday heteronormativities in the PRC are more pervasive than the state's monopoly over representations of gendered and sexual relationships in the media. Rather, heteronormativity can be seen to saturate everyday life, engendering a paucity of life course narratives beyond heterosexual romance, marriage, child birth, and parenthood. As such, many men in this research were unsure of the meanings and possibilities of lives outside of this hegemonic trajectory. This uncertainty can be seen to institute what Lee Edelman (2004: 2) has called 'reproductive futurism': the symbolic inseparability of the concept of 'future' from heteronormative dictates of marriage and reproduction. As this section will also suggest, 'reproductive futurism', as experienced by men in this research, is not only symbolic, it also entails material concerns.

As explored in Chapter Four, 'the scene' was a central framework through which participants understood themselves as socially-sexually oriented in relation to other

men understood as 'the same'. 'The scene' is constructed in stories of the past, of 'coming in', and of the present, of 'being in'. For many participants, however, 'the scene' offered little in terms of orientations towards the future. As such, narratives of 'coming into the scene' were often paralleled by the problematisation of the social-sexual relations to which anticipated futures had been oriented – family (*jiaren*), responsibility (*zeren*), marriage (*hunyin*), and reproduction (*shengyu*). At the time of our interview, Xiao Mai had recently come into 'the scene'; for much of the interview he described the joys that 'coming in' offered. However, he also pointed to emergent difficulties and worries:

> The things that make me happy are the *gay* friends that I've made, friends like you, it makes me very happy. There are also some things that I find difficult. Like, in the future, how I should face my family (*yihou wo yao zenme mianlin wo jiaren*)? I'm still young now, but when I'm in my 20s and I've still not married, what should I do? How should I face my family? What should I do if they force me to marry? How can I explain it to them? These things I find very difficult. But the things that make me happy are the friends I've made, we have a lot to talk about, and we belong to the same scene, we're all homosexuals (*women shuyu yige quanzi, dou shi tongxinglian*). … But it's difficult thinking about how to marry in the future, these kinds of issues. **(18, Sanya, from Wenchang)**

For Xiao Mai, here, 'the scene' appears to offer new forms of sociality, belonging, and self-understandings. At the same time, it raises a range of questions concerning the future. As 'the scene' orients men who are 'all homosexuals' towards one another within a shared life-world (as discussed in Chapter Four), orientations towards family and marriage appear to become problematic. More than problematic, for some men, coming to terms with their desires for men and emergent understandings of themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' was seen to threaten the possibility of the future. For example, Xiao Qiao, who had been 'in the scene' for two years, aligned his 'coming in to the scene' with the dissolution of the future:

Back then, I thought it was pretty good. I really liked to look at other handsome boys. I didn't feel strange. I thought maybe in the future this thing would change and I would go back to the old rules, just like normal, get married and have kids (*hui genzhe yuanlai de guiju, xiang zhengchang jiehun sheng xiaohai*), just like that. Later on, I spoke to more people in the scene, erm, at first I felt curious and then later, after I came into contact with more, I just felt like, like I didn't know if I would have a future or not (*hui bu hui you yihou*), because I had never seen this kind of thing around me before. **(18, Chengmai)**

Here, Xiao Qiao narrates his transition from an abstract and potentially fluid desire to 'look at other handsome boys', which was not seen to problematise his plans to 'get married and have kids', through increasing social interaction with men 'in the scene', to the fundamental disorientation of his anticipated life course. Both Xiao Mai and Xiao Qiao's narratives can be seen as characterised by antiparallel movements: as their understandings of themselves as belonging to certain sexual categories became increasingly tangible and fixed, 'the old rules' appeared to become increasingly distant and uncertain. In this sense, their self-understandings as 'in the scene' and as *gay* and/or *homosexual* can be seen as emerging alongside the displacement of futures oriented towards 'gett[ing] married and hav[ing] kids'. For Xiao Mai, the future seemed to become a list of unanswered questions; Xiao Qiao was left asking 'if [he] would have a future or not'. Importantly, Xiao Qiao implicitly references a lack of available scripts for imagining alternative lives to marriage and reproduction, seeing this as the cause of his uncertainty; as he noted, he had 'never seen this kind of thing … before'.

These are perhaps not best understood as 'parallel' narratives of the increasing certainty of self-understanding as *gay* and 'in the scene', on the one hand, and the increasing uncertainty of futures oriented towards marriage and reproduction, on the other. Instead, these dynamics may suggest that 'being' *gay* and 'in the scene' are modes of 'being' understood and experienced as situated within, and limited to, the present – that is, they are characterised by a problematic relationship to the future. An

important point, then, is not only that self-understandings in terms of 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' emerge within a social context in which imaginable futures for such ways of 'being' are not readily available. It can also be said that the uncertainty of the future, indeed futurelessness, may be a defining temporal context within which such self-understandings are constructed and experienced. Put simply, for some participants, futurelessness appeared to be a definitional characteristic of 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene'.

Relationships between 'being in the scene' and futures of marriage and reproduction were not only a concern for men who had recently 'come in'. Participants who were approaching ages at which pressures to marry become increasingly acute (roughly 24+) similarly understood 'being in the scene' as jeopardising the possibility of the future. At 26 years old, Mingzai was under constant pressure from, as he put it, '[his] family, [his] granddad, grandma, uncle … to hurry up and find a girl and get married'. He saw proximity to 'the scene' as a threat to a future that depended upon the maintenance of desires for women:

> **Mingzai:** … I don't know if I've really walked into this scene or if I still belong to bisexual (*bu zhidao wo shi bu shi zhenzheng zouru zhege quan haishi shi shuyu shuangxing*). … Because I really have liked a girl in the past (*xihuan guo yige nühai*), but I also like men; I don't know if I really belong to bisexual or to *tongzhi*. So I, well, like, I have a bit… a bit of that kind of bisexual feeling (*na zhong shuangxinglian de ganjue*). So now I'm still a bit uncertain; maybe if I'm bisexual, but I keep walking, getting too close (*yue zou tai jin*), maybe I'll lose all interest in girls. I'm worried about this, because, you know, I need to get married. So, recently I've tried to keep my distance, distance from people in the scene. I don't want to get too far in, I'm afraid it will impact on my future marriage and reproduction (*yihou de jiehun shengyu*). … To be honest, in the future I won't… If I really do get married, I will slowly fade out of this scene (*wo zai zhege quanzi hui danle*), but I won't give it up. I'll just fade out. …

James: … What do you mean by 'fade out', what would this be like?

Mingzai: Fade out, fade out, I don't mean that I'll become any less interested in sex; how should I put it? It's that I'll come into contact with this scene a lot less, I'll very rarely socialise with them. **(Qionghai)**

Mingzai understood 'the scene' as a threat to his desires for women and therefore to his 'future marriage and reproduction'. As explored in Chapter Four, some participants understood 'being in the scene' as conferred by an exclusivity of sexual desires for men. Gendered sexual desires were also understood by some participants as shifting in relation to engagement in sexual and social interactions with other men 'in the scene'; this was described by Ah Tao as being 'brought into the scene' (page 144). Mingzai echoed these understandings of relationships between gendered sexual desires and 'the scene', suggesting that if he came 'too close' to 'the scene' he could 'lose all interest in girls'. Preserving the possibility of his 'future marriage and reproduction' therefore appeared to demand that he distanced himself from 'the scene'. Xiao Zhou similarly regulated his involvement in 'the scene', noting that:

If I go out to KTV, for example, and there are another four people there, if there are more than three people who are in the scene and who I don't already know, then I won't stay there for longer than 30 minutes. … If they're in the scene and there are more than three of them, then I'll just leave, I won't stay more than half an hour. **(24, Sanya, from Baisha)**

When asked why he limited his interactions with men 'in the scene' in this way, Xiao Zhou explained that this was as a means of safeguarding a future oriented towards marriage:

One day I'm going to get married. Since I've decided I'm going to get married, then I should limit my interactions with these people (*gen zhexie ren shao dian jiaowang*). I have some feelings for women now and I'll try to maintain these.

For other men, the prospect of marriage was seen to require not only limiting their interactions with 'the scene' but avoiding 'the scene' altogether, as Mengxi put it:

> If I get married, I think I will just quietly support my family, this family. I won't go out with those guys anymore (*naxie ren*); if I get married, I won't meet up with them anymore. I would have to be responsible for my family. … So in the future, if I do decide to get married, it would be best not to come in again, because there are some people who will cause trouble. I'm just worried that they will cause trouble. … So, if one day I do get married, I'll just do my best not to go out anymore (*chulai*), do my best not to go out … it's best to stick to your duties (*shou benfen yidian*). **(28, Chengmai)**

Mingzai, Xiao Zhou, and Mengxi's narratives were echoed by others of participants in their mid-to-late-20s and early-30s, many of whom saw marriage and reproduction as almost unquestionable necessities. Their narratives can be seen as the reversal of those offered by Xiao Mai and Xiao Qiao, discussed earlier. These younger men (both 18 years old) associated 'coming into the scene' with the problematisation of futures oriented towards marriage and reproduction. Older men who were facing increased pressures to conform to this hegemonic life script saw 'leaving the scene', 'fad[ing] out', or at least keeping their distance, as ways of re-orientating themselves towards futures of marriage and reproduction. Some men, for example Mingzai above, did imagine that following marriage and reproduction they would continue to maintain minimal, 'faded' connections to 'the scene'. However, this was not framed in terms of living a 'double life'. Rather, this appeared to involve the binary division of sexual and social interactions; it was to anticipate that 'the scene' would become a source of sexual interactions, but would no longer function as a space of social life (*shenghuo de fanchou*) as it was currently constructed. It was in this sense that Mingzai suggested that in distancing himself from 'the scene' he would not 'become any less interested in sex'; he would, however, 'come into contact with this scene a lot less [and] very rarely socialise with them'.

While being 'in the scene' is thus figured as a problematic relation to the future, 'the scene' can, by this same token, be understood as providing a minimal future-oriented life script. The future becomes thinkable in relation to the scene, but only as a relation of negation. This was evident as Mengxi reflected on his time 'in the scene' and his plans for the future:

> I try my best to stay away now (*jinliang bikai*), not to go looking. Anyway, I've seen everything I've wanted to see; I've had about as much fun as I want, so… I've been in the scene for many years, 8 or 9 years, from the start up to now, 2006, so almost 10 years. I think I've seen everything there is to see (*wo juede wo gai kan de dou kanle*). **(28, Chengmai)**

For Mengxi, here, 'the scene' appears to be a social space in relation to which social-sexual experiences can be quantified. 'The scene' is suggested to have limited content; as such, it becomes possible to 'see everything there is to see'. In this sense, 'the scene' is also constructed as a temporal period, a limited period of life in which certain pleasures and experiences are possible and accessible. As Mengxi considered the likely prospect of marriage in the near future, he appeared to take comfort in the fact that he had experienced all that 'the scene' had to offer. As such, he prepared himself to move on to a different kind of life. Zheng (2015) has noted similar findings in her research with *tongzhi* in Dalian, a city in the northeast of the PRC. Zheng (ibid.: 143) comments that, faced with the apparent irrefutability of marriage and reproduction, 'young tongzhi … cope by imagining their present situation as transient, only a youthful fling, and that they will lead an ordinary life of conformity as they mature'.

As queer theorists of temporality have endeavoured to show, the notion of 'life' as a continuous and intractable motion towards the future can be seen as an effect of regulatory temporalisation (Edelman, 2004; Freeman, 2010; Halberstam, 2005; also Deleuze and Guattari, 1986). Finding themselves at odds with this hegemonic trajectory, as one leading singularly towards marriage and reproduction, some men in

this research articulated temporal imaginaries that rejected the urgency of the future. For example, Da Shu described a mode of living in a continuous present. Despite having 'come out' to his parents, Da Shu remained unsure about his plans for the future given his parents' continued desires for him to marry. He managed this uncertainty by avoiding 'worrying' about the future:

I want things to stay simple, so for now I just want to carry on as things are (*baochi xianzai*, literally: 'maintain the present'). Possibly… Who knows what will happen in the future. But for now, at the very least… I feel like if you worry too much about the future you will exhaust yourself (*ni kaolü taiduo weilai de shiqing ni hui hen lei*), it's better to resolve problems as they arise. This is my outlook on life at the moment (*dui shenghuo de yixie kanfa*). I'll solve my problems as they arise. **(32, Haikou)**

Ah Tao gave a similar account, though he appeared less certain about the possibility of avoiding marriage:

In the end I guess they [my parents] will want me to marry, but for now I… now I… now I, like… now I won't get married. But in the end… Well, there's a saying, what is it? 'Just take each step as it comes' (*zou yi bu kan yi bu*). That's all you can do, there's nothing else (*meiyou biede*). **(29, Qionghai)**

Da Shu and Ah Tao articulated modes of living that were oriented towards the present, ways of living 'for now' rather than for the future prospect of marriage, whether understood as a problem to be resolved or as an inevitable eventuality. Such present living emerges as a relation to the uncertainty of the future, which for Da Shu appeared unknowable, for Ah Tao, impossible; for him, there was 'nothing else' beyond the present. Such modes of present-oriented living have been celebrated by queer theorists as forms of 'queer time'. These are temporal frameworks that, as Halberstam (2005: 1-2) has put it:

develop   in   opposition   to   the   institutions   of   family,   heterosexuality,   and

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reproduction …creat[ing] new emphasis on the present, the here, the now, and while the threat of no future hovers overhead like a storm cloud, the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moment.

Such temporal practices may be effective forms of resistance to the 'exhaust[ing]' hegemonic futurism that Da Shu describes above. However, they were not embraced by men in this research with the same jubilant radical alterity that Halberstam (ibid.) reads in the temporalities of 'queer subcultures' in the USA, nor are they sustainable modes of living within a social context in which material existence remains dependent upon support and care provided by children. This is explored in more detail below and in the following section of this chapter.

Understandings of 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' as problematic relations to the future emerge in the context of a general lack of alternative life scripts to marriage and reproduction. However, these issues are not solely discursive but are also grounded in the material necessity of children as future carers in old age. At the time of our interview, Ah Ming was considering marrying the woman he was currently in a relationship with. For him, the prospect of aging without having had children was a source of intense fear:

I'm really afraid (*hen haipa*), do you know why I want to get married? One part of it is because of my parents, but it's also because I'm afraid; I'm afraid of getting old. What would I do when I get old? I feel that being homosexual is… People can only accept homosexuals, or think it's OK to be homosexual, because they think they are young and beautiful. What happens when you get old? I'm going to get old, if I don't get married now that's fine, but I'm going to get old, at 40 or 50, OK, but what about when I'm 60, or 70, even 80? I don't just mean not experiencing the happiness of having children and grandchildren (idiom: *ersun zhile*); I mean, who's going to look after me then? When you get old you have no strength, you can't care for yourself. Now I can do everything for myself, … But there is going to come a day when I can't look after myself anymore. I can't rely on the Chinese government to care for me in old age; the Chinese government is

useless (*chajin*). … So I think I would be better off just getting married. **(31, Haikou)**

Shengyuan echoed these fears. At the time of our interview, he was also in his early 30s and was struggling to decide whether to remain in Hainan or return to the mainland to care for his aging parents:

> The thing that I worry about with regards to the future is that in China there isn't an established system of care for the elderly (*yanglai tixi bu wanshan*). When you are old, there's no one to care for you, especially for *gays*. What are you going to do when you are old? Right? Sometimes I flick through profiles on the app [Blued] and see those 50 year old *gays* and think that they are so pitiful (*kelian*). I wonder if I will end up like that: 50 years old, without a partner, and waiting to die alone at home without anyone who cares (*zai jiali dengzhe si, meiren zaihu*). This is something that frightens me. **(33, Haikou, from Jilin, mainland PRC)**

These were common concerns expressed by participants and in wider everyday conversation I had in Hainan. Researchers have observed that in the PRC children continue to act, indeed are increasingly acting, as primary care-givers to their elderly parents (Hildebrandt, 2018; Evans, 2008). As such, the prospect of aging without having had children was a cause of concern and fear for many participants and could be seen to intensify the sense of impossibility that often characterised attempts to imagine alternative futures to marriage and reproduction. In addition to the discursive construction of 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' as futureless modes of existence, imagining materially sustainable life in old age appeared tied to marriage and reproduction.[109]

These material concerns also highlight the role that economic privilege may have

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[109] Only one participant discussed the possibility of adoption as a means of resolving the above discussed issues. He was, however, unsure of the legality of single-parent adoption in the PRC (as was I at the time). He also noted that his parents would be unable to 'accept' (*jieshou*) an adopted grandchild. Adoption laws in the PRC stipulate that a single man can adopt a male child provided that there is an age difference between parent and child of more than 30 years. When adopting a female child, this increases to 40 years. Adoption laws also stipulate that no more than 5% of annual adoptions can be to single parents (Shen, 2018).

played in engendering the ability of some participants to imagine alternative futures to marriage and reproduction. Ah Ben, a 36 year old factory owner who had benefited from recent economic growth in his hometown, identified surrogacy as a potential, though costly, alternative to marriage and reproduction:

> Later he [an ex-boyfriend] went to Thailand to have a surrogate child (*daiyun*). He asked his friend's wife to be the surrogate mother; he gave her 100,000 *yuan* (£11,000) and she had a child for him, because his friend's economic circumstances were not very good. … If things go well this year, then next year I plan to go to Thailand.[110] You know, I told you about that straight friend of mine (*zhinan pengyou*) there, his wife is tall and good looking, in every way she's pretty good. So I have spoken to him about this issue; I said, 'if thing are all well…' Because they have a difficult life too, their business isn't going well. … I have already given him some economic support, every Spring Festival I give him some money … So I have spoken to him about this before and he brought it up with his wife. I said to him: 'if I get the chance, I will talk to your wife about it myself'. I have bought clothes and bags and little presents for their daughters, because I know that their family is poor and those little kids want these things. They are under a lot of stress and I am in a position to help them out, so we can make a deal and help each other. So I'm still considering if I want kids or not.[111]
>
> **(Danzhou)**

Later in our interview, Ah Ben also noted annual insurance payments he was making to ensure 'a good life' in old age:

> There are things that I worry about too, like every year I have to pay for insurance,

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[110] Transnational surrogacy between China and Thailand may be an emergent trend amongst economically privileged *gay* men in the PRC. While on holiday in Thailand during a break from fieldwork in 2015, I met a number of affluent Chinese *gay* men awaiting the birth of their children to Thai surrogate mothers. The total cost of their surrogacy processes was quoted at ¥200,000 (£22,000) (also see Whittaker, 2016).

[111] It is important to note the series of inequalities that underpin Ah Ben's discussion of surrogacy above. While my focus above is on the way in which economic privilege opens up the possibility of surrogacy as an alternative future, it should also be noted that forms of economic and gendered privilege and inequality are also inherent in Ah Ben's discussion. His reference to his 'friends wife' as 'tall and good looking, in every way … pretty good' is also clearly objectifying and points to stark gender inequalities that characterise processes of transnational surrogacy (also see Twine, 2016).

it's about 10,000 *yuan* (£1,100). But if you haven't got a stable salary then this insurance won't cover you. Maybe in the future there will be protection in government policies, but if you want to have a… When you are old, if you want to have a good life (*ruguo yao guo de hao*) then you need to prepare a lot in advance.

As Ah Ben's accounts suggest, imagining 'a good life' in old age that is not dependent upon marriage and conventional modes of reproduction may be possible. However, this possibility may be the preserve of those with sufficient economic capacity to make alternative arrangements for care in later life.

For the many men in this research, alternative futures to marriage and reproduction appeared deeply uncertain. This temporal uncertainty could be understood as a definitional context within which participants' self-understandings as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' were constructed. The uncertainty of the future is not necessarily problematic in itself and it may engender novel modes of present-oriented living. However, pressure from parents to marry and have children, combined with the material issues of aging and the need for care in old age, render present-oriented living largely unsustainable and position the future as an urgent matter of concern. It is impossible to disentangle the material and discursive facets of this reproductive futurism. Notion of 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' were often constructed as modes of being confined to the present. This could be seen as the effect of mutually reinforcing mechanisms of power embodied in state censorship, family demands, limited welfare provision, and economic inequality. As participants struggled to imagine sustainable lives beyond marriage and reproduction, neither the ability to 'imagine' nor material 'sustainability' could be separated from one another. As such, reproductive futurism can be seen as a material-and-discursive condition of possibility. 'Life', as both a discursive-narrative concept and embodied practice, can be seen as bound by heteronormativity to marriage and reproduction such that to reject marriage and reproduction, for some participants, appeared to call into question 'life' itself. As Shengyuan noted earlier, his worries about the future

were rooted in an imagined trajectory of his life towards the future not as a mode of 'living' but as a matter of 'waiting to die'. These issues can be further unpacked by paying close attention to the specificities of 'life' (*shenghuo*) in relation to the Confucian logics of family and time described by men in this research. These issues can also be explored in relation themes of 'death' that were evident in some participants' narrative of the future.

Life and Death under Heteronormative Confucianism

Gu Hai and Bai Luoyin's story, with which the previous section opened, was cut short by government censorship. However, other popular stories of sex and love between men do play out in full. During our interview, Xiao Lei discussed his early online searches for the meanings of his emergent desires for men. He remembered an online fictional story he read that left a formative 'impression' upon his emergent self-understanding:

> At first I read novels and news about this sort of thing. I remember that the novel that left the deepest impression on me (*gei wo yinxiang zui shen*) was called *Blossom without Fruit* (*huakai wuguo*), or something like that. It was a story about two boys; when they were young, they were neighbours; later on they grew up. Let's call them A and B. A couldn't really be classed as a *gay* (*bu suan shi ge gay*), he was just moving back and forth between being *gay* and being a straight guy (*gay he zhinan zhege paihuai*), but B was a *gay*. They were good friends, and as they grew up B started to like A and eventually fell in love with him. One time, they were in B's bedroom doing what two people do (*liang ge ren zhijian de shi*) and they were almost caught by B's parents. They grew up and A got married, but B couldn't forget A and he never had another partner. In the end, A became a policeman and was killed at work. Afterwards, B looked after A's family. That was pretty much how the story went. **(27, Haikou)**

The title of this novel, *Blossom without Fruit*, echoes themes addressed in the

previous section; it suggest the start of something new, perhaps beautiful, but seemingly fleeting and without consequence.[112] The content of the story, as Xiao Lei recalled it, presents an alternative, and perhaps more plausible, ending to the 'happily ever after' that was imagined and denied for *Addicted*. Death was a recurrent theme in a number of often-heard stories consumed and retold 'in the scene' in Hainan, and perhaps in the PRC more broadly. Annual club nights at Tianchi and Yese memorialised the suicide of pop star and actor Leslie Cheng – Hong Kong *gay* icon and 'big brother' (*gege*) of *gay* men across Chinese-speaking regions. The lead protagonist of *Lan Yu*, Stanley Kwan's (2001) widely watched, though subsequently banned, story of love between men, is abruptly killed-off at the end of the film. The only two 'foreign gay films' to be referenced by men in this research, *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005) and *Prayers for Bobby* (Russel Mulcahy, 2009), further confirm this pattern, with both films killing-off their protagonists as narrative conclusions. Indeed, I heard versions of Xiao Lei's story of A and B recounted by other men in Hainan, once as something read on an online news portal, another time as the story of a friend-of-a-friend. Often, it appears that death was 'pretty much how the story went'. This was not only the case within a range public texts consumed 'in the scene' and referenced by men in this research. For some participants, death was figured as a possible future towards which they oriented their lives. Recalling his adolescence, Lu Ge remarked, 'when I was young, in high school, I already knew that I was *gay* (*yijing zhidao wo shi gay*)'.[113] He continued:

> Back then, I was thinking, well, obviously I wanted to go to university; everybody wants to go to university. I'd gone to high school, and the point of going to high school was to go to university. So I went to university and I felt lost, I didn't have any close friends, I always felt so lonely, just by myself. So, while I was at university I was thinking… I set myself a very funny life goal (*shenghuo*

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[112] As in English, the concept of 'fruit' (*guo*) in Mandarin Chinese carries connotations of 'consequence', 'result', and 'continuation'.

[113] In contrast to the majority of men in this research, who came to think of themselves in term of 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* only after online information searches (as discussed in Chapter Five), Lu Ge recalled reading about 'homosexuality/homosexuals' (*tongxinglian*) in a newspaper at a young age and understanding himself in this way, though he more often described himself as '*gay*'.

de mubiao) that after university… Well, first do well at university and then graduate, get a job, and then when I reach 30 years old, at 30 I would kill myself (*zisha*). I don't know why 30, why I decided on 30, I just set myself this funny goal. Of course, back then I was only 18, I'd already decided that at 30 I would kill myself, because I couldn't see any way to go on living after then (*yinwei ni kanbujian jinhou shenghuo de lu*). … I had never thought about getting married. If I had thought about getting married, why would I have planned to kill myself after university, right? **(45, Sanya, from Guizhou, Mainland PRC)**

For Lu Ge, at age 18, life appeared liveable only to the extent that identifiable orientational goals were perceptible as 'way[s] to go on living'. He narrated a life that 'everybody wants': to go to high school, then university, to 'do well', and to get a job. The next step in this hegemonic trajectory would be 'to get married'. For Lu Ge, marriage was not a viable mode of living and without alternative narrative framings, death appeared the only imaginable 'life goal' towards which he could orient himself. Clearly, Lu Ge did not kill himself at age 30 as he had planned. Later, this chapter will explore his account of negotiating an alternative life for himself. The construction of death as an alternative to marriage and reproduction was echoed by other participants. Of the 31 men interviewed for this research, 3 (including Lu Ge) had considered killing themselves as an alternative to marrying and having children. While this number is alarming, it is much less than the 26% of 'men who have sex with men', recorded in a recent survey of 2250 men across 9 cities in the PRC, who had considered killing themselves (Chen et al., 2015; also see Zheng, 2015: 188).[114] For several other participants, themes of death emerged as they recounted their parents' understandings of 'homosexuality/ being homosexual' as a threat to life, not only to the life of the individual but to the life of the extended 'family line'. Analysing these

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[114] There is a methodological point to make here. At no point in any of the interviews with men in this research did I ask direct questions relating to the contemplation of suicide. For the three men who discussed having contemplated suicide, these issues emerged while discussing how they envisaged their lives playing out in the future. If such direct questions had been asked, as in the above quoted survey, it is possible that more participants would have narrated considerations of suicide. It is also possible that men who had contemplated, or were contemplating, suicide would be less likely to come forward for a face-to-face interview and more likely to participate in survey-based research, such as the above cited study.

relationships between 'family lives/lines', 'homosexuality', and death suggests 'the symbiotic co-presence of life and death' (Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco, 2014). This requires paying attention to specific relations and temporalities that bind life to reproduction in the intertwining of the symbolic and the material.

For almost all participants, questions of the future invariably turned to relation to 'family' (*jiaren*) and especially 'parents' (*fumu*). These issues can be seen as shaped by diffuse, yet pervasive, Confucian cultural logics (*rujia sixiang*) that shaped the ways in which participants understood 'family' and the ways in which they discussed their families' understandings of 'homosexuality'. Midan had been 'out' to his parents for two years. In discussing their inability to 'accept this fact' (*jieshou zhege shishi*), he cited the centrality of reproduction within Confucian world views and notions of 'family':

> In China, the idea of bringing in the next generation to carry on the family line (*chuanzong jiedai*) is very strong, especially for men, for sons (*youqi shi dui nanxing, erzi*). The responsibility to keep the incense burning (*yanxu xianghuo*) is very big. There's a saying in China: 'there are three crimes against filial piety, of these, failing to ensure continuity is the most grave' (*buxiao you san, wu hou wei da*). So they think that if you're homosexual, marriage and having children are a big problem. They also worry that the news will spread that they have a homosexual child, that they won't marry a wife and have kids, it is a kind of disgrace (*chiru*) for this kind of lineal Chinese family (*Zhongguo de zhezhong zongzu shi de jiating*) **(24, Haikou)**

The previous section noted how reproduction ensures the material sustainability of the individual parent by procuring the child as a care-giver in later life. Within Confucian ideology and kinship systems reproduction is also understood to ensure the future of a broader notion of 'the family line' (Fei, 1992). As Midan notes, marriage and reproduction also concern the preservation of family 'honour', this will be further discussed later in this section. In this sense, the meaning of reproduction and its

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relations to the future are manifold. The three Confucian idioms that Midan cites above each construct the child as a temporal symbol and align reproduction with abstract notions of continuity. The logic of *chuanzong jiedai*, for which a more literal translation would read 'transfer lineage/essence, procure its repository', situates the child as a bridging of past, present, and future. Reproduction is figured as the means by which an ancestral 'essence' (*zong*) emanating from the past finds its place (*dai*) in the present and the possibility of its continuation into the future. Following on, to 'keep the incense burning' refers to the practice of continuously burning incense as a symbol of ancestral continuity.[115] As an idiomatic metaphor for reproduction, the concept of 'keeping the incense burning' figures the child as the burning ember that ensures the continued emittance of ancestral 'smoke'. Finally, the notion of a primary 'filial duty' (*xiao*) to reproduce not only ensures the continuation of 'the family line', but also the social and material reproduction of the parent-child relationship by demanding an unending cycle of children becoming parents, having children who become parents who have children… and so on. For 'this kind of lineal Chinese family', as Midan put it, reproduction is figured as a sacrosanct symbol of continuity and transcendence. It represents the nexus of individual lives and the life of 'the family line', and of situated, material embodiment and transhistorical, ancestral 'essence'. Filial piety, as Wang Qinxing (2011: 84-87) puts it in his account of Confucian temporalities and metaphysics:

> provides the transcendent connection between the Heavenly and the human realm … to be filial means that every male has the obligation preordained by his ancestral gods to ensure that the family bloodline continues to survive and thrive in the earthly world. … From the Confucian perspective, filial piety not only connects life in this earthly world to life in the other (numinous) world, it also serves as the foundation of all human virtues in this earthly world. … Ultimately, filial piety serves as the ontological foundation for self-transformation and the creation of the ideal ethical socio-political order in this earthly world.

Within this Confucian world view, the 'homosexual child', when conceived as the antithesis of reproduction for whom 'marriage and family are a big problem', appears

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[115] Silvio Bendini (1994) describes the symbolic and practical roles that the burning of incense has historically played in the construction and perception of time in China.

concomitantly situated as the antithesis of temporal duration. The 'homosexual child' is a threat to the continuity of 'the family line' and, thereby, a threat to the symbolic order and metaphysical logics of essence and materiality, the family and the individual, and temporal ontologies of past, present and future. The 'homosexual child', in this sense, can be understood to destabilise 'the ontological foundation … of the ideal ethical socio-political order' (Wang, 2011: 87) and therefore occupies, as Edelman (2004: 3) puts it (albeit speaking of a different cultural context), 'the place of the social order's death drive'.

The emphasis in both Midan's account of 'filial piety' and in related literatures (Fei, 1992: 80-87; Jenner, 1992: 108; Wang, 2011) on the specificities of male filial relations (fathers and sons) suggest the ways in which filial piety pertains to the construction and regulation of gendered, as well as sexual, identities and forms of relationality (this is also explored later in relation to the normative temporality of the 'sexed' body). Susan Greenhalgh (2013: 133) has suggested that marriage and reproduction remain 'essential to being "a real Chinese man"' (also Lin, 2014). In this respect, Rofel (1999: 460) has claimed that, compared to *gay* men, *lala* women 'seem to feel freer to assert that they will never marry'. Complicating this assertion, Engebretsen (2014: 60) suggests that 'lala women may indeed benefit from relative invisibility, compared with the focus put on men and their duties in a filial perspective'. However, this 'freedom' cannot be read as necessarily empowering. Rather, '[t]his dynamic of invisibility works quite differently for women because of prevailing gender inequalities ... [and] creates lifelong disadvantages for women's personal autonomy' (ibid.).

The sense of a problematic relationship between 'homosexuality/being homosexual' and notions of continuity, transcendent essence, and social order that is evident in Midan's above account of the Confucian lineal family could be seen to shape the ways in some participants oriented themselves towards the future. At 24 years old, Xiao Zhou was planning to marry a woman within the next 5 years. In recounting a conversation with his mother, he both critiqued and performed the exclusion of

'homosexuality' from narratives of the past and the future that depend upon a sense of transcendence and temporal duration:

> I said, 'mum, my boss likes me', she said, 'she likes you? That's not a problem', [I said,] 'but he's a man'. She said, 'stay away from him, don't get close to this kind of person, he'll kill you' (*bie kaojin zhezhong ren, hui haisi ni de*). I didn't want to talk about it anymore; I felt sad. I felt like, 'so, in your eyes I'm something dangerous like this'. I felt sad, so I didn't talk about it anymore. But sometimes I still try. Sometimes I'll watch a film with something *gay* in it (*limian you gay de dongxi*), two men together, and my mum will say, 'what sort of film is this!' I said, 'two men together', she said, 'a film like this can also be awarded a prize?' I said, 'yeah, they're in an emotional relationship too (*yiduan ganqing*), nothing different, just who they like is different.' She asked why and I said, 'because in this place of ours, since animals first progressed to become humans, this race (*dongwu shangsheng dao renlei zhege zhongzu*), it has been believed that males and females must be together for there to be future developments, only in this way can things go on' (*cixing he xiongxing zai yiqi cai neng you hou de fazhan*, *zheyang cai neng yanxu*). Like, if back then there were homosexuals and heterosexuals both existing at the same time (*tongshi you tongxinglian yixinglian cunzai*), then maybe there wouldn't be so much aversion (*paichi*) as there is now.
> **(Sanya, from Baisha)**

Here, in resisting his mother's construction of 'two men together' as something 'different' and 'dangerous', Xiao Zhou emphasises communality by noting that both 'homosexuals' and 'heterosexuals' engage in 'emotional relationships, nothing different'. In his effort to explain contemporary, common-place 'aversion' to 'homosexuals' he critiques the 'belie[f] that males and females must be together for there to be future developments'. However, in doing so, he also performs the exclusion of 'homosexuals' from a historical narrative of human evolution, citing a lack of 'homosexuals and heterosexual existing at the same time' as the cause of contemporary 'aversion'. The temporal and historical status of 'homosexuality',

therefore, appears questionable. Xiao Zhou saw 'homosexuals' as capable of engaging in an 'emotional relationship', on a par with 'heterosexuals', in the present, yet they appear incapable of having contributed to the historical trajectory of human evolution.[116] As Xiao Zhou continued, he articulated the ways in which he saw 'homosexuals' as also incapable of contributing to the future:

> It's, it… it doesn't have that kind of continuity (*yanxu*). Like, for heterosexuals, they have the next generation (*xiayidai*), but for us it's just a period of emotions (*zhishi yi duan ganqing*); in the end it's just *over*, *ending* (spoken in English), there's nothing that comes after (*meiyou shenme houmian de*). Like, for heterosexuals, when things are over for you, there's still your son, he'll remember you. There will be people who'll say, 'oh, that's so-and-so's son, his grandchildren'; people will ask, 'whose child is that?' and someone will say, 'oh it's so-and-so's, I know his father, and I knew his father's father'. It's more continuous (*bijiao yanxu*). But for two men together, there is only *ending*. Maybe, many years later, there may be some stories about you; that's the only way people can know you. But it's not the same as for heterosexuals who are known through their children (*tongguo ta de haizi zhidao de*).

It appears that for Xiao Zhou, here, the central distinction between 'heterosexuality' and 'homosexuality' was not gendered sexual desire ('who they like') but opposed temporalities of continuity and curtailment. Both 'homosexuals' and 'heterosexuals' are seen as capable of 'emotional relationships'. Yet for 'homosexuals' this represents a temporal limit, a terminus beyond which 'it's just *over*, *ending*'. 'Heterosexuals', on the other hand, are seen to enjoy a certain form of 'symbolic immortality' (Lifton and Olson, 2004) – a life that continues through practices of memory and knowing when 'there's still your son' and 'his grandchildren'. In this way, the identity 'father' opens up narrative space for imagining a future that extends beyond the bodily life of the individual. Again, this life of the 'father' beyond death has been noted as a central

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[116] The following section explores how some participants did construct a place for 'homosexuality' within historical narratives of 'development'.

tenet of Confucian world views, within which:

> [t]here is nothing more important than honouring the father … worshiping him on par with Heaven after his death …[;] to serve the dead as they were served while alive and to serve the departed as they were served while still with us … and making one's name remembered by the people of future generations in order to glorify the names of one's parents [are] the consummation of filial piety (Wang, 2011: 84-85).

This continuity of the 'father' transcends the temporal present and finite, material, bodily life. As an explicitly relational identity, 'the father' persists beyond death as a historical relation to the present 'son', as 'his father … his father's father' as Xiao Zhou put it. Above, Xiao Zhou acknowledges that 'homosexuals' may achieve future-historical existence within 'stories about you'. However, he was quick to add that 'it's not the same as for heterosexuals'. The future of 'homosexuals', as a historical narrative of a yet-to-come present, is at best precarious. Here, the 'homosexual' is constructed as a form of life with limited ability to transcend the finite body – that is, capable only of living a sort of present and finite 'bodily life' or 'bare life' (Agamben, 1998). 'The homosexual' is excluded from transcendent forms of life such as 'family life' and 'historical life'. At the risk of pushing the above excerpt too far, it could be argued that within this symbolic context, Xiao Zhou's mother's contention that 'this kind of person … [will] kill you' pertains to the alignment of 'reproductive heterosexuality' with notions of life, vitality, futurity, transcendence, essence, imperviousness, and continuity. This is in contrast to the alignment of 'non-reproductive homosexuality' with notions of death, mortality, the present, the body, materiality, precarity, and termination. It may be in this sense that 'homosexuality' appeared to Xiao Zhou's mother to be a 'dangerous' threat to the possibility of transcendent life.[117]

In the above account, the non-reproductive body of the 'homosexual' is figured as a symbol of the present, of imminence, perhaps even a symbol of imminent death as the

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[117] Matthew Sommer (2007) has discussed the ways in which 'bare branches' (*guang gun*), older, unmarried men without children, have historically been constructed as 'dangerous' and 'disruptive' to social order, represented in in early legal texts as 'murderers', 'hooligans', and 'rapists'. Somer (ibid.) also describes the ways in which the concept of the 'bare branch' was intertwined with the emergent notion of 'the homosexual' in Qing-era legal discourses.

inevitable orientation of the material, finite body. Yet this should not be taken to mean that the body is necessarily confined to, or is always a symbol of, the present. When figured in contrast to notions of transcendent lineage (the relationship between *zong* and *dai* as discussed earlier), or in contrast to relational identities figured by parenthood (son, father), the body appears material, individual, and finite – it is a body that dies, in contrast to relational identities and transcendent lineage that 'go on' (*yanxu*). It is this sense of the finite body as a symbol of secular discontinuity with which, for some participants, 'homosexuality' was associated. Yet the temporalities of bodies are multiple. The signification-materialisation of the body under the gendering terms of reproductive heteronormativity constructs bodies as essentially orientated towards reproduction (Butler, 1990, 1993). This can be seen to invest the gendered body with a form of biological futurism. As such, the non-reproductive body of the 'homosexual' and non-reproductive sex acts appear to contradict the body's own gendered material constitution. These issues could be seen to be at play in Ah Ming's reflections on his parents' 'hatred and loathing' of 'homosexuals'. Similar to Xiao Zhou above, during our interview, Ah Ming recalled discussions with his parents and sought to rationalise their 'aversion' to homosexuality'. In doing so, he articulated understandings of gendered bodies as oriented towards reproduction. 'Homosexuality' therefore appeared to be a 'waste' of this reproductive potential:

> You know, sometimes these things are on the TV, so I have tried to hint at it to them, saying things like, 'oh, that person is homosexual; homosexuals are men who like men'. But my parents hatred and loathing (*biyi he yanwu*) is obvious. They say things like 'I'd rather lay an egg, at least you could fry it up to eat; what use is a child like that?' (*buru sheng ge dan, hai neng jianzhe chi, sheng ge nayang de haizi you shenme yong*). Things like that. In their conversations too… Well, not like they know any homosexuals, anything like that, but in Hainanese there's a saying: 'a good cock stuck in an arse' (*ho deh sap gasui ha*). It means that something so wasteful (*hen langfei*), that kind of feeling, 'a good cock stuck in an arse', that kind of feeling. To put it another way, for my parents' generation,

even younger generations, their aversion (*paichi*) to homosexuality/homosexuals is beyond anything I could imagine. **(31, Haikou)**

For Ah Ming, 'aversion to homosexuality' appeared premised on an understanding of bodies as fundamentally intended for reproduction. In this account, the value of 'a good cock' is its reproductive function. The materiality of the body appears dependent upon a narrative of purpose that plots certain parts of the body as intended for certain uses and oriented towards certain results. The reproductive body, in this sense, is situated within and shaped by a temporal narrative of purpose, process, and result; it appears always already oriented towards the future-as-reproduction. Non-reproductive sex is recognised as contradicting this embodied purposefulness, contradicting a biological narrative written into the materiality of the gendered body. 'A good cock stuck in an arse' is what Mary Douglas (1966: 36) has referred to as 'matter out of place': 'a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order … the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements'.

This is not only a matter of the construction certain bodily regions as essentially oriented towards reproduction. For Ah Ming's parents, the value of the life of a child would seem to be the child's capacity to reproduce. The 'homosexual child', understood as non-reproductive, therefore leaves them asking 'what use is a child like this?' In this sense, it is not only 'a good cock stuck in an arse' that is constructed as 'matter out of place' but also 'homosexual' existence itself. This existence of the 'homosexual child' is figured as a contravention of child-birth, where child-birth represents 'a set of ordered relations' that ensures the continuity of 'the family line'. Ah Ming emphasised this later in our interview when he commented that 'your parents gave birth to you and they want you to have children, this is what parents expect from you'. William Jenner (1992: 109) has noted that the ideal Confucian parent-child relationship functions as a system of 'debts and the absolute need to repay them'. This system concerns the parents' giving of life to the child and the child's responsibility to repay this gift by observing filial piety and continuing 'the

family line'. The life of the individual, in this sense, comes into being as a secondary by-product of the primary task of ensuring the continuity of 'the family line'. As such, 'life' is not an ontological certainty but a privilege that is conditional on a responsibility to carry on 'the family line' (Li, Holroyd, and Lau, 2010: 402). Reproduction can therefore be seen to 'qualif[y] a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility' (Butler, 1993: xii). As Ah Ming's parents suggest, the 'homosexual child', understood as non-reproductive, is constructed as undeserving of the privilege of life. Such a child appears comparable to, indeed of less value than, 'an egg' – an inert and lifeless symbol of the unfulfilled promise of fertility and futurity.

The devaluation of 'homosexual life' in Ah Ming's account of his parents 'hatred', and the apparent exclusion of 'homosexuals' from a life-affirming symbolic order centred on reproduction, can be seen to confer upon 'homosexuals' what Butler (1993: xiii) has called the 'status of abject beings':

> Those who are not yet "subjects," but who form the constitutive outside of the domain of the subject. The abject designates here precisely those "unliveable" and "uninhabitable" zones of life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the "unliveable" is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject.

This relegation to 'unliveable … zones of life' can be read as the context within which death becomes figured as a potential future towards which some men in this research oriented themselves. In this sense, Lu Ge's decision 'that at 30 [he] would kill [him]self, because [he] couldn't see any way to go on living after then', discussed earlier, could be understood not only in terms of the absence of alternative life scripts to marriage and reproduction but also in relation to the construction of 'homosexuality' as an '"unliveable" and "uninhabitable" zone of life' (ibid.). Later in our interview, Ah Ming engaged in a stark rationalisation of his own contemplation of suicide. He emphasised the value of his life as 'a good son', while his life as 'a homosexual' was devalued and appeared expendable:

> I've never caused any trouble for them, but if I was to really do this (*chule zheme*

da de yige louzi, literally: 'to make such a blunder'), if you go ahead with it, if you really do let your family know about this, … it… your p… your parents… How could your parents… How could they face up to their relatives? How could they face them? I used to think… I used to think, if I died, if I killed myself (*zishasi*), of course my parents would be upset, but they would only be hurt for a while (*zhi shi yizhenzi de shangxin*), and I wouldn't have to see their pain. But if they were to find out that I am a homosexual, they would be hurt, of course they would, and they would be hurt for a very long time, and they would have to face all of their relatives pointing at them and talking about them, their neighbours pointing and talking (*zhizhi diandian*). Can you imagine what it would be like for them to have a thousand fingers pointing at them (*qian fu suo zhi*) and talking about them? So in that case, would that be more painful for them or would it be more painful for them if I were to die? If I died, if I killed myself, at least people around my parents would take pity on them, 'oh, they raised such a good son and now he's gone, how sad'. But if it wasn't that I died, if it was that they found out that I am a homosexual, they'll say, 'look how their son turned out! They'd be better off having never had children, (*buru bu yang*) just look'. I wonder, if I were my parents, what would I choose? Sometimes I think it would be better if I just died and forgot it. **(31, Haikou)**

Here, Ah Ming compares the pain that would be caused to his parents by his death with the pain that would be caused if they were to 'find out that [he is] a homosexual'. Although developed in a vastly different context (the comparative analysis of slavery), Orland Patterson's (1982) concepts of 'natal alienation' and 'social death' are useful in unpacking Ah Ming's above account. Patterson (ibid.: 5-7) describes 'natal alienation' as 'the loss of ties of birth in both ascending and descending generations' and sees this as giving rise to forms of 'non-life', what he calls 'the socially dead person' (ibid.: 7). In the above account, Ah Ming presents himself with a choice between killing himself and 'let[ting his] family know' that he '[is] a homosexual'. However, both appear constructed as forms of death, given that the latter is seen as

engendering a form of life that would 'be better off having never [existed]' – a form of existence that is 'natally alienated' and 'socially dead' to borrow Patterson's (ibid.) terms. In Ah Ming's account, the distinction between suicide and 'being homosexual', when both are constructed as forms of death, is that the former represents material-bodily death while the latter represents social-symbolic death. The body of the 'good son' may die, but his historical existence continues as memory; the transcendent, relational identity 'son' does not appear to be negated by the fact of death, nor does his definition as 'good'. While this death may also constitute a termination of 'the family line', and suicide is certainly subject to social condemnation in the PRC (Lee and Kleinman, 2000), Ah Ming saw his parents as able to avoid culpability, noting that they could 'face up to their relatives' and find solace in the social confirmation that 'they raised such a good son'. As such, Ah Ming justified his imagined suicide as performing a minimal filial duty to preserve the honour of his parents. In contrast, allowing his family to 'find out that [he is] a homosexual' appears to constitute the symbolic death of the 'good son'. Continued material existence – the same body now occupied by 'a homosexual' – serves as a constant reminder that the 'good son' no longer exists and provokes 'a thousand fingers pointing'. The living body of the 'homosexual', in this sense, seems to act as a barrier to the consignment of the 'good son' to a comforting memory. As such, for Ah Ming, suicide appeared a death more sufferable than the 'symbolic death' as which 'homosexuality' was imagined. Six months after our interview, Ah Ming married the woman he had been in a relationship with at the time.

Themes of termination, discontinuity, and even death that emerged in some participants' accounts of the future can be understood in light of the binding of notions of continuity, indeed a continuous life, to reproduction within Confucian world views. This also concerns the construction of individual lives as corollary to the task of carrying on 'the family line'. This should also be linked back to the discussion in the previous section of the ways in which the continued necessity of children as care-providers in later life was seen by participants to render uncertain the

sustainability of non-reproductive lives. Within this symbolic-and-material context, to refuse reproduction can be seen to call into question the symbolic-and-material grounds upon which certain notions of what constitute as 'a life' are premised. In this sense, 'being homosexual', when figured as synonymous with the rejection of reproduction, becomes a threat to life, it becomes something dangerous, discontinuous, and futureless. The figuring of marriage and reproduction as prerequisites for survival within a number of Confucian-influenced East Asian contexts has been described as constituting a 'Confucian biopolitics' (Cho, 2017; Nguyen and Angelique, 2017). Based on the accounts of men in this research discussed in this section, the construction of 'homosexuality' as an orientation towards death could perhaps be seen as a form of Confucian necropolitics, where 'necropolitics', as defined by Achillie Mbembe (2003: 40, emphasis in original), refers to the ways in which certain symbolic and material arrangements produce 'forms of social existence in which vast populations are subject to conditions of life conferring upon them status of *living dead*'.

Essentialism as a Narrative of the Future

The previous sections explored how certain temporalities of 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' were constructed at the intersections of Confucian world views and contemporary state policy such that the future, for many participants, seemed almost unquestionably oriented towards marriage and reproduction. At the same time, this highlights the extent to which participants understood 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' as necessarily problematising future prospects of marriage and reproduction. As such, while narratives discussed in the previous sections suggested the negation of *gay*, *homosexual*, and *tongzhi* futures and futures 'in the scene', they can also be seen to suggest the extent to which 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' were constructed in term of the rejection of marriage and reproduction. Almost all participants understood 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi* and/or 'in the scene' as rendering marriage and reproduction

problematic.[118] For some, however, this was not seen to render futures uncertain or to call into question the temporal continuity of such modes of 'being'. Rather, the rejection of marriage and reproduction was framed as an affirmative practice of living a *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* 'life' as an orientation towards the future. This section explores the construction of such narratives, while also highlighting the essentialism and normativity upon which they appeared to be premised.

As discussed in the previous section, when time is seen to be rendered continuous by reproduction, as the time of family and ancestry, there appears no place in either the past or the future for non-reproductive, same-sex relationships and identities. This was exemplified in Xiao Zhou's narrative of 'human evolution' discussed earlier in this chapter. It was also evident in Gao Quan's response to my asking about his plans for the future:

> **James:** Thinking about the next 10 years, do you think there will be any changes in your life?
>
> **Gao Quan:** I'll marry a wife (*wo hui qu laopo*).
>
> **James:** A wife? Why will you make this decision?
>
> **Gao Quan:** Why? Because, at the very least, I have to do what I have to do. There are things in life (*renzheng*) that have to be done, so I will do them.
>
> **James:** You… You… Who… Why do you feel like you have to do this?
>
> **Gao Quan:** Because, from ancient times to today, that's the way it's always been (*cong gu zhi jin yizhi doushi zheyang*), it's always been like this. **(24, Sanya, from Ledong)**

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[118] This point could be further developed and explored in relation to the changing meanings of marriage in the PRC. This chapter highlights the complexity of the meaning of marriage, perceived, on the one hand, as a matter of filial duty and as necessary for the procurement of care in later life, and on the other hand, as something that 'should' be actively desired by those who entre a marriage. It is in relation to the former that many participants experienced pressures to marry; it is in relation to the latter that participants saw marriage as problematic for men who did not desire women. I do not have space here to further elaborate these points (for work on the changing meaning of marriage in the PRC see Evans, 1997; Ho et al., 2018; Rofel, 2007; 1999a; Wasserstorm and Brownel, 2002; Yan, 2003)

Such historical narratives evidence the regulatory effect that certain ways of retelling the past have upon imagining the future (Hirsch and Stewart, 2005). For Gao Quan, history seemed to weigh on the future, limiting the possibilities of future lives to the repetition of 'the way it's always been'. However, some participants did engage in the construction of historical narratives within which 'homosexuality/homosexuals' were given a place and figured as continuous and transcendent. Such historical narratives were, at times, marshalled as a means of legitimising 'homosexual' identities and relationships in the present and claiming their place in future. This was evident as Dingfeng argued that the legalisation of same-sex marriage (*tongxing hunyin*) in the PRC was inevitable. This was a unique opinion amongst men in this research:[119]

> **James:** Do you think that China will one day see the legalisation of same-sex marriage (*tongxing hunyin hefahua*)?

> **Dingfeng:** Definitely, this will definitely happen (*kending hui*). … There's no way to say how long it will take; I don't know how to judge it … maybe it will take 10 or 20 years, it's hard to say. This will depend on the levels of relaxation (*fangsong chengdu*) in the government and the media. Now, if you look at Chinese history, aside from the communist era through to the period of reform and opening, when homosexuality was criminalised, all other periods were more relaxed (*bijiao kuansong*). If you look back at history, you must know, there were even many Chinese emperors who were homosexual (*baokuo hen duo huangdi dou shi tongxinglian*). (**24, Sanya, from Guangdong, Mainland PRC**)

In a review of 'the Chinese sociology of homosexuality', Kong (2016: 502) notes that a number of Chinese (largely Hong Kong-based) historian-activist scholars have been engaged in the reconstruction of a 'history of homosexuality' in Ancient China as a means of rejecting perceptions of 'homosexuality' as both 'unnatural' and a 'Western

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[119] In those interviews where the potential legalisation of same-sex marriage in the PRC was discussed, most participants were doubtful that this was a possibility in the near future. Many noted that even if same-sex marriage were to be legalised, they would not marry men, fearing the repercussions this would have for their relationship with their parents. This was suggested to be a commonly held opinion. Similar finding have been noted by Zheng (2015: 187). In my everyday interactions 'in the scene', the legalisation of same sex marriage was rarely as topic of conversation.

import' (examples include Chou, 2000; Ruan and Tsai, 1987; Samshasha, 1984). Above, Dingfeng can be seen as engaged in a similar endeavour. In the previous section, where 'homosexuality' was narrated in relation to 'the family line', 'being homosexual' appeared to have no place in either the past or the future, both narratively dependent upon reproduction. By contrast, in Dingfeng's above account, 'homosexuality' is constructed as a transhistorical, essential category and is given a place within a national cultural and political history of 'China'. As such, rather than being a perversion and termination of the transhistorical 'family line', 'homosexuality' itself is seen to have a lineage, one that can be traced back to 'Chinese emperors' and one perverted by a hostile contemporary socio-political environment. In the above account, contemporary hostility toward 'homosexuality' is recognised as a temporary aberration of an otherwise 'relaxed' environment, to which it is assumed that China will inevitably return. However, Dingfeng noted that 'there's no way to say how long it will take'. A similar narrative strategy of historicisation was at work in a pamphlet distributed to attendees at the PFLAG event that took place in Haikou in 2016 (see Introduction, page 14). A 'Q and A' section that imagined questions asked by parents of 'homosexuals' featured the following dialogue:

Q: If everyone in the world was homosexual, would that not result in human extinction (*renlei bu jiu miezhong ma*)?

A: Homosexuality will not, and could not, result in human extinction. … Homosexuals have existed since ancient times and humans have not become extinct. … From ancient times to today, there have always been homosexuals, just as there have also been heterosexuals since ancient times (*conggu zhijin dou you tongxinglian, jiu xiang zigu yilai dou you yixinglian*).

The inclusion of such a question in the pamphlet suggests the extent to which its producers anticipated that, for parents, 'homosexuality' would be associated with themes of termination, even extinction, and constructed in relation to an understanding of time and continuity as fundamentally inseparable from reproduction.

In refuting this understanding of 'homosexuality', the pamphlet deploys an essentialised notion of transhistorical 'homosexuality' (and also 'heterosexuality') that has 'existed since ancient times'. The continuity of human existence is therefore no longer seen as threatened by 'homosexuality', but instead becomes proof that such fears of 'extinction' are irrational. In poignant contrast, the pamphlet uses the exact same temporal discourses that were was used earlier by Gao Quan as he explained the perceived necessity of marriage; both used the phrase 'from ancient times to today' (*conggu zhijin*). In both instances, and also for Dingfeng above, history is a powerful discourse that regulates both the present and the future. However, for both Dingfeng and the PFLAG pamphlet, as well as for a number of other men in this research, history is not only, or necessarily, a synonym for ancestry or lineage – that is, history is not necessarily narrated in terms of 'family time/the family line'. History may also be narrated in terms of 'national time' or abstract 'objective time'. Within these time frames, 'homosexuality' can be constructed as a transhistorical, essential category such that historical narratives can be marshalled in ways that open up futures in which 'homosexual' existence appears more certain.

The multiple temporalities of 'homosexuality' were evident in my interview with Midan. Earlier in this chapter, Midan described the ways in which, in relation to the 'Chinese lineal family', 'being homosexual' was constructed as synonymous with discontinuity. Elsewhere in our interview, however, he narrated a history of 'homosexuality in China' that had repercussions for what he saw as the orientation of 'homosexual' lives in the present and in the future:

> In ancient, feudal China (*gudai fengjian de Zhongguo*) there was this kind of taste for male pleasures (*hao nanfeng*), but most of them, in the end, would still find a wife and have kids. But now, in modern times (*zai xiandai*), there is a different notion of homosexuality (*tongxinglian shi bu yiyang de yige gainian*). Now, I think if you are homosexual you feel like you can only like men, you won't want to marry a woman and have kids. Of course, there are some who compromise (*tuoxie*). **(24, Haikou)**

Here, Midan constructs 'homosexuality' not only as a transhistorical, essential, and continuous category but also as one that has changed throughout the course of its history. As such, contemporary 'homosexuals' are seen as embodying a 'taste for male pleasures' that has existed since 'ancient, feudal China', while also living distinctly 'modern' lives. Midan distinguishes between these 'ancient' and 'modern' 'notion[s] of homosexuality' in terms of attitudes towards marriage and reproduction, noting that 'now … if you are homosexual you feel like you can only like men, you won't want to marry a woman and have kids'. It appears, then, that for Midan, the recognition of exclusive desires for men and the rejection of marriage and reproduction constitute a 'modern' 'homosexual role' (McIntosh, 1968) – a normative script that outlines the practice of a 'homosexual life'. This history of a continuous and changing 'homosexuality' can be seen to powerfully refigure the meaning of, and relations between, marriage, reproduction, time, and 'homosexuality'. Within the timeframe of heteronormative Confucianism 'homosexuality', as the problematisation of marriage and reproduction, was seen to mark the end of history-as-ancestry. In contrast, in Midan's above account, contemporary 'homosexuality', while still articulated in relation to the rejection of marriage and reproduction, appears to be the very instantiation of historical progress. It is in this sense that 'homosexual' men who do 'marry a woman and have kids' are seen by Midan as having 'compromised', suggesting that marriage and reproduction are seen as inappropriate practices for 'modern' 'homosexuals'. The association Midan constructs between 'being modern' and contemporary 'notion[s] of homosexuality' could be understood in relation to Rofel's (2007) account of the ways in which discursive and imaginative spaces have been opened up in the 'postsocialist' PRC for the construction and legitimation of lives and identities seemingly animated by 'desire' (discussed in more detail in the Literature Review, page 64).

As discussed earlier, at the age of 18 Lu Ge had planned to 'kill [him]self, because [he] couldn't see any way to go on living'. Aged 45 at the time of our interview, Lu Ge had become an ardent proponent of the affirmative rejection of marriage and reproduction.

He saw this as an essential practice of 'being' *gay*:

> **Lu Ge:** I often joke with them [other *gay* men], we're chatting online and they ask me if I'm married, I always respond with a saying of mine: 'be who you are' (*shi shenme ren zuo shenme shi*, literally: 'who you are, what you do'). What I mean is that if you're a *gay* then just be a *gay* (*ni shi ge gay ni jiu yao zuo ge gay*); you're a *gay* and you still go and get married? It's not right (*budui*). Just be who you are. If you're *gay* then you should behave like a *gay* (*yao you yidian gay de qizhi*), you're *gay* and you still have a fake marriage (*jia jiehun*)? You're just hurting people and you won't be happy, right?
>
> **James:** So, what do you think it means to 'behave like a *gay*'?
>
> **Lu Ge:** If you're *gay* just go and look for a man, haha! This is what you're supposed to do; this is your duty (*benfen de shi*), right? **(Sanya, from Guizhou, Mainland PRC)**

Lu Ge's description of what it means to 'be a *gay*' collapses the distinction between 'being' and 'doing' such that 'what you do' (*zuo shenmen shi*) and 'who you are' (*shi shenme ren*) are seemingly inseparable. In the above account, he figures the rejection of marriage as performative of 'being *gay*'. As such, the question 'are you married?' is received not as a question of practice, for which a simple response of 'no' would suffice, but as a question of identity that leads Lu Ge to suggest that 'being married' and 'being *gay*' are mutually exclusive. Echoing Midan above, Lu Ge notes that there are *gay* men who 'still go and get married'. However, he suggests that this constitutes an improper, 'not right', way of 'being *gay*' and such marriages are defined as 'fake'. This relationship between identity and practice can be seen as dialectical; rejecting marriage is established as a normative, performative practice of 'being *gay*' and, at the same time, 'being *gay*' is establish a normative life script centred on the rejection of marriage. For Lu Ge, to reject marriage and 'go and look for a man … is what you're

supposed to do', it is *gay* men's essential and undeniable 'duty'.[120] Constructed in this way, 'being *gay*' is established as the practice of a particular kind of life and as an orientation towards the future.

Later in our interview, recalling his break up with a boyfriend 20 years earlier, Lu Ge elaborated the orienting function he attributed to 'being *gay*' in his own and his ex-boyfriend's contrasting life courses. This was a rich and evocative account that requires quoting at length:

It was after many years of knowing him that I finally knew… We had had sex so many times, we were so close, and he still didn't know that I was *gay* (*ta hai bu zhidao wo shi gay*), he didn't think that I was *gay* (*ta bu juede wo shi gay*); he just thought that he liked me and I had sex with him, but he didn't think that I was *gay*. So we were talking about his life, he was saying he wanted to get married [to a woman]. I said to him that I wouldn't get married, not in this lifetime (*zhe beizi bu hui*) ... He started criticising me, saying that I was too immature, he thought I didn't understand, didn't know about this society. He said, 'you're too immature, if you don't get married what else are you going to do?' (*ni bu jiehun, hai neng zuo shenme*)? … I said to him, 'use bamboo canes as binoculars', it's a proverb; bamboo canes are always very long, right? It means that you should look far in to the future, not just at tomorrow or the day after. Look far into the future and then let's see who is right and who is wrong. I meant that I would be right in the long run. It's been so many years and I haven't had to get married. In the end, he forced himself to find a girlfriend and got married, but that ended in failure (*dao zuihou ye shibaile*). …

So, recognition (*rentong*) is a very; it's a very difficult process. I went through this too. I'm lucky that my self-recognition is pretty good (*ziwo renzhi bijiao hao*) and started pretty early. He was the first one I really met; I stayed in contact with

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[120] It is worth recalling that earlier in this chapter (page 239) Mengxi described marriage and the subsequent avoidance of social interactions men 'in the scene' as matters of 'duty' (*benfen*), using the same term used by Lu Ge here.

him for many years afterwards. Back then he thought… Well, first of all, the fundamental error was that he didn't think that I was *gay* (*zui genben de cuowu shi ta bu juede wo shi gay*) … It was after many years that he said, 'why didn't you ever tell me?' … I said, 'does this really need to be explained? We're exactly the same (*women shi yimou yiyang de*)'. He said, 'why didn't you tell me sooner? I wouldn't have thought about getting married, I wouldn't have thought about that kind of life, I could have lived with you'. It's so funny. So, self-recognition, look, just like for him, it's so hard to achieve self-recognition (*ziwo rentong hen nan zuodao*). They're just used to thinking about a normal life, getting married. They always think about these things, it's a deeply embedded habit. **(45, Sanya, from Guizhou, Mainland PRC)**

Lu Ge's narrative suggests the extent to which, for him, 'being *gay*' and being 'recognised as *gay*' constituted an orientating life script. For Lu Ge, the 'fundamental error' that led to his separation from his boyfriend, and to his boyfriend's subsequent marriage, was his boyfriend's failure to recognise that Lu Ge 'was *gay*'. Had such recognition occurred, Lu Ge suggests, both of their lives would have been rather different. 'Being *gay*' appears to dictate an alternative life course; it opens up the possibility of a future other than marriage and reproduction. As Lu Ge's boyfriend contended, had he only known that Lu Ge 'was *gay*', he 'wouldn't have thought about getting married … wouldn't have thought about that kind of life'. 'Being *gay*' is conceived, here, as an orientation away from particular 'kinds of life' and towards others (also see Ahmed, 2006). According to Lu Ge, 'self-recognition' (*ziwo rentong*) as *gay* offers a standpoint from which it is possible to 'look far into the future' and anticipate the unfolding of a life other than that dictated by 'this society'. This ability to anticipate the future is seen as dependent upon 'being *gay*' as a continuous and essential state, something that 'you are' and always will 'be'. Lu Ge contrasts this essentialised notion of 'being *gay*' with a temporary and contextual ability to 'accept having sex with [men]'.[121] Within this narrative, certain practices (sex between men,

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[121] Distinctions made by men in this research between assumed circumstantial sexual practices between men and

the rejection of marriage, living together) assume status as the practices of a particular 'kind of life' – a '*gay* life'. They therefore become perceptible and meaningful as potential futures in advance of their actualisation; it becomes possible, as Lu Ge put it, to 'use bamboo canes as binoculars,' to 'look far in to the future, not just at tomorrow or the day after, but look far into the future'. Adrienne Rich (1980, in Plummer, 1995: 83) has provocatively described the temporal implications of such narrative transitions from unnamed desire to named identity, as recounted in Lu Ge's narrative above. For Rich (ibid.), 'that passion, once named, flung a long, imperative beam of light into my future. I knew my life was decisively and forever different'.

Such essentialised notions of a '*gay* life' or 'modern' ways of 'being homosexual' can be seen to enable the imagination and legitimisation of alternative futures to marriage and reproduction. It should also be noted, however, that such narratives and discourses, seemingly premised on essentialising alignments of desire, practice, and identity, also have regulatory and exclusionary effects. These were apparent as Ah Run, in a similar fashion to Lu Ge above, discussed his ex-boyfriend's life:

> **Ah Run:** … He thought of himself as a bisexual (*shuangxinglian*). He said that he didn't go to the club every day. Now he goes often, goes to Tianchi, maybe you've seen him there? … He told me that he had kids … that he was married. He had kids but still came to the club every day! Actually, he is just completely *gay*, he isn't some bisexual; he's just completely *gay* (*ta bu shi shenme shuangxinglian; ta wanquan jiushi gay*) …

> **James:** How do you understand the difference between being bisexual and being *gay* (*shuangxinglian he gay de qubie*)? Why did he give you the impression that he is *gay*?

> **Ah Run:** Why do I think he is *gay*? I think it's because in people's hearts… Bisexuals also have feelings towards women, right? They like women too. But I

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practices seen as actively desired and pursued, and the ways in which concepts of identity and 'being' were articulated within such distinctions, were discussed Chapter Four (page 144-145)

think that for him, he didn't have any strong liking for women at all, and he really likes men. … So I don't think he's bisexual. He only married his wife because his family forced him to (*bei jiaren bi de*). … He told me about this before; he told me he was going to get married, that he would marry a woman. Back then, he didn't say that he was bisexual; he said he was a straight guy (*zhinan*), he had sex with me and then said he was a straight guy! I didn't even know how to reply. I just said 'you're a straight guy, oh, um… so straight!'… He was very conflicted and he lied a lot. …

James: So how do you define yourself (*dingyi ziji*)?

Ah Run: Me, I'm *gay*, I'm not bisexual. In the past, I didn't understand, but now I know more; I know that I am *gay*; I know I want to be with a man, that I only like men. **(23, Sanya, from Chengmai)**

Ah Run's account of his ex-boyfriend's life is constructed as a narrative of 'inauthenticity'; it is an account of a life he saw as characterised by 'conflict' and 'lies' in relation to which he articulates the 'truth' of his own 'being *gay*'. This 'inauthenticity' centres on apparent misalignments of desires, practices and identities. Ah Run positions the fact that his ex-boyfriend 'comes to the club everyday' as incongruous with the fact that 'he was married [and] had kids'. He also questions his ex-boyfriend's identification as 'bisexual', claiming that 'he only married his wife because his family required him to' and suggesting that 'he's just completely *gay*'. As such, Ah Run includes his ex-boyfriend within the category '*gay*', but appears to see his ex-boyfriend's performance of this identity as improper and 'conflicted'. As discussed earlier in this chapter and in Chapter Four, gendered sexual desires were perceived by some men in this research as fluid and changeable. However, in Ah Run's above account, the suggestion that 'a straight guy' could have sex with a man garners his speechless disbelief. Identification as '*gay*' or 'straight', here, appears fixed and each is seen as associated with certain practices and life courses. To 'be a straight guy', in Ah Run's account, is to be married, to have kids, to have sex only

with women, and to avoid socialising in *gay* bars. To 'be *gay*' is to 'know [you] want to be with a man, that [you] only like men'. Ah Run notes that 'being bisexual' entails the embodiment of desires for both men and women and, therefore, present the possible reconciliation of his ex-boyfriend's marriage to a woman and desires for, and engagement in, sex with men. However, he questions the 'authenticity' of his ex-boyfriend's identification as 'bisexual'. This was something echoed by other participants, where claims to 'being bisexual' were seen as 'fake'.

Two men in this research understood themselves in terms of 'being bisexual' (*shuangxinglian*). This was understood as referring to the experience of sexual desires for both men and women; it was also complexly intertwined with their anticipated or existing marriages to women. For Mingzai **(24, Wenchang)**, as seen earlier in this chapter (page 237), 'being bisexual' meant that he 'really ha[d] had feelings towards a girl, but [was] also attracted to men'; this left him unsure as to whether he 'really belong[ed] to bisexual or to *tongzhi*'. He anticipated 'fading out of the scene' as a means of shoring-up 'that kind of bisexual feeling' and preventing his desires for men from 'impact[ing] on [his] future marriage and reproduction'. Dajun Ge, the only man in this research to identify as 'bisexual' with a sense of certainty, gave a similar account, in which his understandings of 'being bisexual' was shaped by the disparate kinds of relationships he maintained with men and with women:

> I have never even really been in a relationship with a man (*meiyou zhengshi gen nande tanguo lianai*), never; it's only ever been someone I've met once or twice … but I have never been without a woman by my side. … I couldn't live without a woman (*bu neng queshao nüren*); even now it's the same. So, after thinking about it, I came to the conclusion that I must be bisexual (*wo yinggai shi shuangxingde*), I like both sides. … In the past, I only knew about homosexuality and heterosexuality (*tongxinglian he yixinglian*). Later, there suddenly appeared bisexuality, haha! … I had never imagined that there were so many different kinds (*mei xiangdao hai fen de zheme duo*) **(63, Haikou, from Shandong, Mainland PRC)**

For Dajun Ge, 'being bisexual' rendered intelligible his desires for both men and women, even as his relationships with men and women were temporally distinguished as, respectively, episodic and enduring. As he continued, he described the difficulties that men identifying as 'bisexual' often experience in asserting the legitimacy of 'being bisexual':

> I read that there are some people who don't like bisexuals, they are against bisexuals, because they think that you aren't pure (*ni bu chun*), you're not a homosexual, right? I learned that in this scene there are a large group of people who don't like bisexuals, because you still get with women (*ni hai gen nüren*), so they think that you're not a homosexual. In their hearts they think that you're a fake homosexual (*jia tongxinglian*).

The delegitimisation of bisexual identities has been noted in other socio-cultural contexts (Coleman-Fountian, 2014: 111) and Butler (1993: 74) has critiqued 'gay and lesbian identity positions which constitute themselves through the production and repudiation … of bisexuality as a kind of failure or lack of commitment'. Accusations that men who identify themselves as 'bisexual' were 'fake homosexuals' were evident in interviews with a small number of participants, where such practices of delegitimisation could be seen as intertwined with efforts to establish 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* as essential life scripts. This was evident in Ah Run's above critique of his ex-boyfriend's claim to 'being bisexual', in which 'being bisexual' was constructed as an inauthentic 'Other', shoring-up his own sense of 'being *gay*'. The 'Otherness' of 'bisexuality' was also apparent in Ah Ben's account of his interactions with men facing pressure from their families to marry:

> Most people that I've met haven't come out, or they have plans to have a fake marriage with the opposite sex (*gen yixing jiajiehun*). But I tell them all that they first need to be clear about these issues, if you are going to tell this lie… First you must know that you are a homosexual (*shouxian yao renshi dao ziji shi tongxinglian*), that you don't like women, you need to be clear about this. Once

you understand that you don't like women, you need to be clear that once you've told this lie, you will have to keep it up for the rest of your life and, in the future, you won't be able to have much sex with someone of the opposite sex. A lot of people say 'oh, I'm bisexual, I can have sex with a woman', things like that. I say to them, 'yeah, you can have sex with a woman and so can I; I can take a Viagra and go all night' right? Even without Viagra, I could do it. But the problem is that you're not interested in women, right? Your interests are still in men, so why should you lie to yourself like this for a lifetime (*weishenme yao qipie ziji yi beizi*)? I talk about these things with all of them. Most of the people I meet are facing problems of carrying on the family line, or their relatives have traditional views (*chuantong de ginian*) and can't accept it, it's all these problems. I have said to a lot of people, 'the most important thing is to be clear about what sort of person you want to be, what sort of life you want to live' (*yao xiang qingchu ni yao zuo shenme yang de ren, yao guo shenme yang de shenghuo*); this is the most important thing. **(Danzhou, 36)**

Ah Ben's assertion of covalence between 'what sort of person you want to be' and 'what sort of life you want to live' echoes Lu Ge's injunction to 'be who you are' and suggests the efficacy of essentialised notions of sexual identity as future oriented life scripts. Here, Ah Ben links resisting 'problems of carrying on the family line' and 'traditional views' to the recognition of 'being homosexual' as a life script premised on exclusive desires for men and the rejection of marriage. 'Bisexuality', as the possibility of fluid, shifting desires for men and women, appears to threaten the coherence of this resistance and is denied status, alongside 'homosexuality', a legitimate mode of existence. Rather, identification as 'bisexual' is figured as a 'lie', as an inauthentic, even 'unnatural', state, apparently comparable to 'tak[ing] a Viagra'. The claim to 'be bisexual' is seen by Ah Ben not as a claim to identity, but a failure 'to know that you are homosexual, that you don't like women'. This, as Butler (1993:75) has suggested, 'raises the political question of the cost of articulating a coherent identity-position if that coherence is produced through the production,

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exclusion and repudiation of abject spectres that threaten those very subject positions'.

In common with the previous sections, this section has explored narratives in which 'being' *gay*, *homosexual, tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' was constructed in relation to the problematisation of marriage and reproduction. However, in contrast to the previous sections, it has been shown that for some participants, rather than rendering the future uncertain, rejecting marriage and reproduction and pursuing same-sex relationships were seen as affirmative, performative practices of 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi* and/or 'in the scene'. Such modes of 'being' could therefore be conceived as ways of 'living' that were oriented towards certain futures. This section has also shown that the construction of sexual identities as essential, future-oriented life scripts at times entailed the denial of 'bisexuality' as an 'authentic' mode of sexual 'being'. Another problematic aspect of these discursive practices of imagining and legitimising alternative lives oriented around the rejection of marriage is that they are, indeed, primarily discursive. As such, they do not provide forms of resistance to the material necessity of children as care-providers in later life, something that was cited by several participants as rendering marriage a necessity. It is perhaps symptomatic of these issues that Lu Ge and Ah Ben, the most vocal proponents of sexual identity as a future-oriented life script amongst men in this research, were also two of the most economically privileged. Without material-structural supports for the living out of alternative life course to marriage and reproduction, essentialist discourses of sexual identity premised on the rejection of marriage and the pursuit of same-sex relationships may, for some, offer little more than imaginable impossibilities.

Accommodating Marriage

The previous sections have outlined complex relationships between temporality, identity, embodiment, materiality, and life/liveability. The previous sections are not intended to represent disparate categories into which participants can be placed in

relation to their narratives of the future. Rather, the sections of this chapter illuminate complex processes that intertwine in the construction of selves and others as oriented (or not) towards the future within a socio-culturally and materially specific context of pervasive heteronormativity. This said, at the time of our interviews, participants could be loosely categorised in relation to the ways in which they considered issues of marriage and reproduction. These categories do loosely correspond to the issues discussed in the previous sections. These categories are: 1) men who expressed deep uncertainty about what the future would hold, seeing marriage and reproduction as likely, though perhaps not entirely certain (yet) (approximately 8 men); 2) men who saw marriage and reproduction as inevitable (approximately 8 men); 3) and men who steadfastly rejected the future prospect of marriage (approximately 5 men).[122] These categories do not account for all participants; four men were already married and two discussed the possibility of having contract marriages (*xinghun*) to *lala* women in the future.[123] This final section explores accounts of these practices of accommodating and negotiating marriage.

As discussed in the Literature Review, several scholars have explored practices of contract marriages between *gay* men and *lala* women in the PRC (Choi and Luo, 2016; Engebretsen 2014; He, 2009; Kam, 2013). Given the extent to which such marriages have been documented in existing research, it is somewhat surprising that only two men in this research had considered contract marriage as a means of satisfying their parents' demands that they marry while allowing for the maintenance of social, sexual, and romantic relationships with men. One of these men was Midan, who, as seen in the previous section, recognised that 'now… if you are homosexual you feel like you can only like men, you won't want to marry a woman and have kids'. Midan had 'come out' to his parents one year prior to our interview after his mother had found

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[122] I use 'approximately' in each case in acknowledgement of the fact that many participants would, at certain points in our interviews, express different attitudes toward marriage. This was particularly the case for men who, above, are placed in the category of 'men who expressed deep uncertainty about what the future would hold'. Though these men were largely ambivalent about the prospect of marriage, some would, at times, also suggest the perceived inevitability of their future marriages.

[123] These figures amount to 29 men. Two interviews that took place with AIDS prevention workers are not included in the above categories as the personal views of these men in relation to either their current marital status or the future prospect of marriage and reproduction were not discussed.

him in bed in the embrace of his then boyfriend who was visiting their home during the Spring Festival break under the pretence of being 'a friend from university'.[124] However, Midan's parents refused to acknowledge his 'coming out' and continued to demand that he married a woman, even introducing him to their friends' daughters (an experience also shared by Da Shu after 'coming out' to his parents). Midan saw contract marriage as a possible solution to these issues:

> I don't think their views will change, but I have told them clearly that I won't get married, there is no way I will marry a woman (*bukeneng gen nüxing jiehun*). Of course, we might be able to come to some agreement (*da ge xieyi*). … If they're worried that people around them will find out that I am this kind of person (*zhe zhong ren*), then, OK, I can bring a *lala* back home and have a marriage ceremony. You could call it carrying out a formality (*zou ge xingshi*). Like in the future, if they want to have grandchildren, I could always use a surrogate, this isn't a problem; this issue can be resolved too. **(24, Haikou)**

For Midan, 'bring[ing] a *lala* back home and having a marriage ceremony' was seen as a means of protecting his parents from condemnation as a result of being found to have raised a child 'like this'; such condemnation was discussed earlier in relation to Ah Ming's account of the 'homosexual son'. At the same time, this would allow him to refuse normative marriage, a refusal he saw, as discussed in the previous section, to be a central tenet of 'being homosexual' 'in modern times'. Manyu gave a similar account, though he expressed greater resistance to the prospect of a contract marriage. After Manyu had discussed the difficulties of 'coming out' to 'Chinese parents' (*Zhongguo de jiazhang*), I asked if he had ever considered doing so himself. He replied:

> **Manyu:** I have thought about it, but I don't dare. I think it is hard, you know, if you tell them, it's very hard for parents to accept, they might argue with you and, for parents who aren't in full health (*shenti zhuangkuan bu hao*), it can be too

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[124] At the time, Midan had been studying at university on the mainland.

much for them. So I'll do my best to hide it (*jinliang ba ta yincang qilai*). If, in the end, there's nothing I can do, I might find a *lala* and have a contract marriage, something like that.

James: Do you have many *lala* friends?

Manyu: I just know one; there was one who asked me if, when the time comes (*dao shihou*), I would like to have a contract marriage with her. I think she doesn't dare to come out either, so she wanted to have a contract marriage. I said, 'if, when the time comes, I've no other options, let's think about it then'. **(22, Danzhou)**

Manyu's claim that, 'for parents who aren't in full health, [coming out] can be too much for them' could be seen to reiterate associations between 'homosexuality' and death as discussed earlier in this chapter. Two other participants similarly suggested that 'telling your parents' would not only cause them pain (*shangxing*) and garner criticism (*qianze/piping*) from their friends and relatives but could in fact lead to their death. While Manyu was clearly resistant to the prospect of a contract marriage, seeing this as something he would do only if he had 'no other options', in common with Midan, he also recognised the value of such an arrangement in protecting his parents while allowing him to refuse normative marriage. The possibility of a contract marriage, for Manyu, was one way in which an alternative future to normative marriage became thinkable; as he put it, 'when the time comes … let's think about it then'.

For both Midan and Manyu, contract marriages with *lala* women presented the possibility of futures other than the normative marriages towards which they were pressured by their parents. Such marriages, however, were not seen to resolve the pressures they were also under to 'carry on the family line'. Neither of these men saw reproduction and shared child rearing as something they could, or wish to, ask of their imagined *lala* contract marriage partners. For Midan, as he noted above, surrogacy

was one way in which 'this issue can be resolved', seemingly seeing himself as capable of making the significant financial investments that surrogacy would require, as noted earlier in this chapter (page 244). Manyu envisioned an alternative and creative solution to his parents' demands for grandchildren:

> When my mum and dad start pressuring me to have kids, I'll find a friend who works in a hospital and ask them to forge a certificate to say that I'm infertile (*buyun buyu*). That will solve the problem. **(22, Danzhou)**

For other men in this research with whom contract marriages were discussed as a potential alternative to the normative marriages they anticipated in the future, the problematic issue of child-rearing within such arrangements was seen to make contract marriages untenable. After Mengxi had spoken of an ex-boyfriend in Haikou who had entered a contract marriage with a *lala* woman, I asked if this was something he would consider. He replied:

> **Mengxi:** No. My feelings are like this, if you do go into a contract marriage, do you want to have a kid? If you want to have a kid, how will you explain it to them in the future? Because if in the future you have a child together, but you don't live together, it's pretty weird (*you dian neige*), your kid will be… I don't know what they would make of it.

> **James:** Have you considered that, if you did have a child, you could just tell them that you are *gay*, like, explain the situation?

> **Mengxi:** I would do my best not to let them know. If one day I found out that they were too (*ta ye shi*), then I would tell them. But if there weren't any problems and life just went smoothly then, well, just let things be. I wouldn't let them know. What good would it do to them to know? (*rang ta zhidao you shenme haochu ne*) Anyway, I'm not planning to have a contract marriage. **(28, Chengmai)**

As seen in the first section of this chapter (page 239), at the time of our interview, Mengxi anticipated 'leaving the scene' and getting married in the near future. For him, as for other participants with whom contact marriages were discussed, the question of 'having kids' was seen to render such marriage untenable. For Mengxi, contract marriage was seen as a 'weird' situation within which to raise a child and he appeared concerned about negative impact he perceived this would have on his future child. Zhang Liang also questioned the appropriateness of raising a child in a contract marriage; as he put it:

> If you do have a contract marriage, in the future there will still be lots of problems. One is that, no matter what, it is still fake (*buguan zenyang haishi jiade*); it will break down in the end. You will also have lots of problems in your own life, like, when you have a child, what sort of living arrangement will you have? (*nimen yao zenme zhu*) … Think about it, if two normal people (*zhengchang ren*) get married it is already easy for them to run into problems, let alone this kind of situation, this kind of non-normal marriage (*bu zhengchang de hunyin*). **(28, Haikou, from Fujian, mainland PRC)**

For both Mengxi and Zhang Liang, the 'non-normal' nature of contract marriages did not present itself as a valid alternative to the 'normal' marriages they both anticipated. Rather, viewing contract marriages as 'weird' and 'fake', they perceived these as inappropriate arrangements within which to raise children and as likely to be the cause of 'lots of problems in your own life'. For Zhang Liang, despite identifying himself as *gay* and noting on several occasions during our interview 'I don't like women (*wo bu xihuan nüxing*)', marrying a heterosexual woman and maintaining (the pretence of) a normative marriage appeared more 'real' and less troublesome than a 'fake' contract marriage. Such persistent heteronormativity was also evident in Mengxi's scepticism of contract marriage. He suggested that if he were to raise a child in such an arrangement, he would 'do [his] best not to let them know' the nature of the marriage or his own sexual identity, not unless it turned out that the child 'was [*gay*] too'. In addition to these concerns, Zhang Liang noted that a contract marriage

would not be possible as he did not know any *lala* women; as he put it, 'I have never met one, not ever'. In her research with *lala* women in Beijing, Engebretsen (2014: 106) describes a range of social and activist organisations that 'organised events and discussions on how to select an appropriate partner for *xinghun* arrangements … This was because many gays and lalas did not socialise at mixed-gender leisure events … and therefore found it difficult to meet a prospective partner'. Similarly, in Hainan, as discussed in the Methodology (page 103), *gay* men and *lala* women rarely socialise in mixed-gender spaces. However, at the time of my field work, there were no social and activist organisation in Hainan organising events such as those Engebretsen describes in Beijing (Kam, 2013, notes similar events in Shanghai). This may account for the limited extent to which contract marriage was seen as viable option, or was discussed at all, by men in this research.

The first section of this chapter discussed the ways in which some participants anticipated distancing themselves from, or 'fading out' of, 'the scene'. This was narrated as the reverse of processes of 'coming into the scene', discussed in Chapter Four. While multifaceted, processes of 'coming in' largely entailed the emergence of forms of self-understanding in terms of sexual 'being' and 'living' – 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' and 'living' a *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* lives, lives 'in the scene'. 'Leaving the scene', therefore, was often narrated as a departure from this 'kind of life' in favour of a life oriented toward/around marriage and reproduction. This did not mean no longer desiring and having sex with men (though some participants did imagine distance from 'the scene' in this way). Rather, this was largely understood as a matter of curtailing social interaction with other men 'in the scene'. Four men in this research were, however, married and had children and still considered themselves to be 'in the scene', recognising their status as such in a range of ways. These were also amongst the oldest men in this research. Each of these men could be seen to have remained 'in the scene', while also getting married and having children, by virtue of particular spatial arrangements. Three of the four married men in this research were from the mainland PRC, where their wives and

children lived. This spatial separation allowed for the maintenance of clear and largely stable boundaries between their 'married lives' and their 'lives in the scene'. This also offered ample time for social activities with other men 'in the scene' that may have otherwise been taken up by their roles as fathers and husbands. Ah Zheng, who, as seen in Chapter Four (page 158), regularly visited 'places in the scene' and had many friends 'in the scene', was also married and had children. His wife and children were also in Hainan, though he too made use of spatial separation to maintain a 'life in the scene':

James: So where would be your ideal place to live?

Ah Zheng: It's better to live outside, not with your family; if you live with your family and they find out then that's not good, this is how I feel. My parents and my wife don't know that I am this kind of person, my brothers and sisters, none of them know. … I don't want to live too close to my family. If I lived too close to them, I worry they'll find out. After a while you have to move out; if you stay there and they find out that's not good. That's what I think. In the city there are more people, so it's less likely they'll find out. My parents live in the countryside (*nongcun*), far away from me. If I live by myself, I'm more free. If you live with your wife… I've not lived with her for over a year now, the kids live there with her, and I live by myself. I live with a friend now, he's also *gay*, we live together.
(54, Sanya)

For Ah Zheng, distance from his wife, children, and parents was equated with being 'free'. This spatial separation was also recognised in terms of an urban/rural distinction, as Ah Zheng saw his residence 'in the city' to mean 'it's less likely they'll find out'. He therefore articulated associations between urban anonymity and increased sexual autonomy that have been recognised by many scholars (Annes and Redlin, 2012; Castells, 1983; D'Emilio, 1983; Weston, 1995). The fact that all of the married men in this research continued to consider themselves 'in the scene' should not be seen to refute the accounts of participants, discussed earlier in this chapter, who

saw futures oriented towards marriage and reproduction as also oriented away from 'the scene'. This is perhaps a methodological issue. It is unlikely that older, married men who understood themselves to have 'left the scene' would be willing or available to be interviewed for this research. The difficulties experienced in recruiting men over the age of 30 would suggest this to be the case. At the same time, the accounts of these older married men suggest that marriage and reproduction and 'being in the scene' may be less mutually exclusive orientations than was suggested by a number of younger men in this research. As such, while at the time of our interviews many younger men in this research saw no future for themselves 'in the scene', it is possible that if/when marriage and reproduction become present realities, rather than anticipated futures, these men may in fact find themselves living lives both inside and outside of 'the scene', with this boundary maintained through particular spatial arrangements.

This section has explored the ways in which several men in this research anticipated accommodating, or were already accommodating marriage while continuing to maintain social, sexual, and romantic relationships with men and living 'lives in the scene'. For two men in this research, it was anticipated that contract marriages with *lala* women would provide a means of satisfying their parents' demands that they marry while allowing them to maintain degrees of sexual agency in living outside of the confines of normative marriage. However, these arrangements were not seen to resolve pressures to 'carry on the family line'. Some men saw contract marriages as untenable given the perceived problematic nature of raising children outside of 'normal' marriage. Four participants were, in fact, already in such 'normal' marriages – married to, and some having children with, women (assumed to be) unaware of their desires for men and the time they spent 'in the scene'. These men saw spatial distance as the deciding factor in their ability to maintain clear boundaries between 'married life' and their 'lives in the scene'.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the ways in which participants' self-understandings were dis/oriented in time, focusing on questions of the future and the ways in which participants experienced, narrated, and responded to pervasive pressures that they marry and have children. This chapter therefore contributes to the existing literature on relationships between non-heterosexual lives and identities and issues of family (especially the importance of filial piety) in the PRC (Chou, 2008; 2000; Engebretsen, 2017; 2014). This contribution has been made by offering a complex and nuanced account of the ways in which dynamics of family, relationality, subjectivity, life, and identity were intertwined within participants' narratives of the future. In exploring these issues, this chapter has drawn upon queer work on the power of normative time (Edelman, 2004; Freeman, 2010; Halberstam, 2005). These insights have been transposed from the Euro-American sociocultural contexts within which they were developed and explored in relation to the specificities of time, life and reproduction under heteronormative Confucianism as recounted by men in this research.

Chapters Four and Five described certain ways in which participants understood themselves as socially-sexually and spatially oriented in relation to other men understood as 'the same', with this 'sameness' articulated in notions of 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' as collective sexual categories. In contrast, this chapter has shown that within narratives of future, many participants' self-understandings were articulated in relation to a range of others 'outside of the scene' – parents, family, children, and wives. As such, when 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' were understood as problematising future prospects of marriage and reproduction, they were also understood as ways of being disoriented in time, and entailed experiences of futurelessness. These issues can be understood as the effect of intertwined contexts of state censorship of the media, the necessity of children as care-givers in later life, and Confucian notions of filial piety and the importance of continuing 'the family line'. These can be seen to operate as mutually

reinforcing material-and-discursive conditions of possibility that render certain ways of living more imaginable and more sustainable than others. In exploring relations between family, life, and time within the Confucian world views that many participants ascribed to their parents, this chapter unpacked relationships between participants' understandings of themselves and their lives and the construction of 'homosexuality' as synonymous with termination, futurelessness, and even death within the discourses of their parents. These issues could be seen to shape the ways in which some participants saw marriage and reproduction as unavoidable.

These issues point to the extent to which 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' were understood as ways of 'being' that rendered normative marriage and reproduction problematic. For some, this called into question to possibility of 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' as ways of 'being towards the future'. For others, the anticipated rejection of marriage was itself figured a as a performative practice of these modes of sexual 'being' such that they became ways of 'being towards the future'. For older unmarried men, their rejection of marriage appeared fundamental to their understandings of themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' and they vehemently encouraged other men to resist pressures to marry, seeing this as a matter of 'being who you are'. These essentialised understandings of sexual 'being' were, at times, articulated in relation to the construction of 'bisexuality/being bisexual' as 'inauthentic', where this presented the possibility that desiring and having sex with men and marrying a woman and having children were not necessarily oppositional practices. As the final section of this chapter showed, the extent to which most participants saw marriage and 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' as oppositional does not mean that there are not married men who understand themselves in these ways. Finally, without wishing to fall into a simplistic economic determinism, it has been suggested that the extent to which some participants felt able to reject marriage, and articulated this as central to their understandings of themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene', may relate to their positions of relative economic privilege.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This thesis has explored contexts and concepts in relation to which participants understood themselves as particular 'kinds' of sexual people and as living (or not) particular 'kinds' of lives. Such modes of self-understandings have been explored as not only narrative constructions but also practices of everyday life. As such, it has been shown that for men in this research 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' concerned embodied interactions and forms of relationality variously oriented in space and time. In this concluding chapter, I highlight connections between the three data chapters, link these to existing literatures, and outline the key contributions made by this thesis. I also reflect, throughout, on the limitations of this research and make suggestions for further studies.

The Value of an Exploratory Approach

In her introduction to *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed (2006: 6) writes that '[i]t is by understanding how we become oriented in moments of disorientation that we might learn what it means to be oriented in the first place'. Methodologically, this thesis was shaped by such a 'moment of disorientation' – a realisation that my own intentions for what this research was about did not necessarily reflect the everyday concerns of men that I spent time with and interviewed in Hainan. As I re-oriented myself towards these concerns, the focus of the research itself became a range of concepts and contexts around which participants could be seen to orient certain understandings of themselves. Taking this open-ended and exploratory approach brought into view a range of issues that were central to participants' self-understandings and everyday lives, none of which were anticipated at the outset of the research. These were also issues that have not been widely explored in previous studies of non-heterosexual lives and identities in the PRC. Each of the data chapters therefore makes its own significant contributions to existing literatures; these are summarised later in this chapter. First, however, I outline some of the insights gained by taking an open-end,

exploratory approach in this research.

Across this thesis, it has been shown that participants' self-understandings and everyday lives could not be straightforwardly interpreted in relation to narratives of social change at the regional scale of Hainan (Feng, 1999; Feng and Goodman, 1998). Neither were themes of nationalism, globalisation, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism pervasive or dominant concerns for participants. This is in contrast to much of the current literature on non-heterosexual lives and identities in the PRC (Bao. 2018; Ho, 2010; Kong, 2011; Rofel, 2007). This means that the geographic and social-historical context in which this thesis is situated is somewhat uncertain: is this thesis about the lives of '*gay* men in Hainan' (as its title suggests)? In the PRC? In East Asia? In the world? It can perhaps be seen to be about all of these in relation to the various issues that have been addressed. For example, in Chapter Six issues of family, marriage, and reproduction were most often discussed by participants in relation to 'China' (*Zhongguo*), as both a cultural and political entity. In Chapters Four and Five, 'the scene' and the uses and usefulness of internet technologies were discussed at scales ranging from the global, the national, the regional, the city, the town, the rural, and the immediate spatiality of the body. In Chapter Five it was also suggested that internet technologies could be seen as implicated in the production of these scales. This in itself is an important finding. It suggests the extent to which the social-historical-spatial contexts in relation to which participants understood themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' were multiple and uncertain. It suggests that 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' could mean different things depending upon the social-spatial-historical contexts within such 'being' was understood as taking place at a particular moment or within a particular story. It is in relation to this multiplicity and uncertainty that this thesis adopted the notion of 'the everyday', not as a synonym for 'the local' but as a metaphor for lived experiences of sexual 'being' at multiple social-historical-spatial scales.

Exploring this multiplicity, complexity, and uncertainty became a key aim of this

thesis. For example, Chapter Four questioned an interpretation of 'the scene' as a synonym for the seemingly familiar concept of 'community' (as per Chapman et al., 2009: 694). Instead, multiple, complex, and uncertain meanings of 'the scene' were explored as articulated in participants' stories of 'coming in'. In doing so, it became clear that 'the scene' was an important way in which participants constructed and experienced a sense of collective belonging. However, the boundaries of such belonging often remained unclear; they were seen as potentially and multiply concerning same-sex desires and practices, social intimacies and interactions, and/or shared forms of knowledge. This is not to suggest that there is any fundamental difference between 'the scene' and concepts of 'community'. It is to say that maintaining a productive methodological uncertainty as to the meanings of a certain concept can facilitate the exploration of empirical contexts of uncertainty and multiplicity. This can garner appreciation of a range of specific and unexpected meanings. Similarly, Chapter Five engaged in an open-ended inquiry into the perceived uses and usefulness of internet technologies. This revealed the multiple and contradictory meanings these had, and roles these played, in participants' lives. Here, it was seen that internet technologies were conceived as spaces of 'clarity' and 'enlightenment' within which selves and others became knowable and visible on the basis of assumed shared sexual categories. Simultaneously, however, these online spaces and interactions gave rise to fears of 'exposure', were seen as 'less real' than offline contexts, and were suggested to foment 'messed-up' sexual practices.

Acknowledging uncertainty and multiplicity, both methodological and empirical, can foster an appreciation of complex modes of self-understanding as they are lived in everyday life. At the same time, this is not an argument for the indiscriminate celebration of uncertainty proffered by certain strands of poststructural and queer theory (see McLaughlin, 2006; Nussbaum, 1999; Seidman, 1993 for critique). Chapter Six discussed the uncertain possibilities of alternative futures to marriage and reproduction, a source of fear and pain for many participants. Here too, however, recognising the difficulties some participants experienced in articulating alternative

futures drew attention to the ways in which their self-understandings not only involved the construction of coherent narratives of past, present, and future (Lawler, 2010; Ochs and Capps, 2009; Plummer, 1995) but were also shaped by contexts of incoherency. This was recognised as the effect of certain discursive-and-material arrangements that made some lives more thinkable and liveable than others. It was in this way that 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and 'in the scene' were not only ways in which participants 'made sense' of themselves but also entailed experiences of 'nonsense' – experiences of 'being out of line' (Ahmed, 2006) with narratives and temporalities of family, marriage, and reproduction. For some, this was to be out of line with the time of liveable life.

On the basis of these insights into everyday contexts of uncertainty, it can be suggested that researchers seeking to explore dynamics of gender and sexuality, especially cross-culturally and/or in under-researched contexts such as 'marginal' regions, may benefit from adopting ethnographic, open-ended, and exploratory approaches. This may entail maintaining degrees of distance from the analytical categories 'gender' and 'sexuality' themselves. Grand narratives of social change, modernity, neoliberalism globalisation, and transnationalism, around which much recent anthropological work on sexualities has been oriented (Boellstorff, 2005; Epprecht, 2012; Grewal and Kaplan, 2001; Martin, 2003; Phillips, Watt, and Shuttleton, 2000; Puar, Rushbrook, and Schein, 2003), should be called into question. Their relevance to the everyday lives of research participants is not a foregone conclusion. By this same token, however, conducting research in an ostensibly 'marginal' region does not necessarily mean that geopolitical marginality will be perceived by participants as shaping their everyday lives. As such, I echo Boellstorff's (2007: 19) call for a 'critical empiricism': 'an approach that although not fetishizing "data" nevertheless demands that theorisations remain accountable to their subjects of study … this critical empiricism asks after relations of adequation between any theorization and the discursive realities it claims to interpret'. Taking such an approach in this thesis led to the analysis of relatively unexplored concepts and

contexts as well as the innovative use and reworking of existing theoretical perspectives; these are discussed in more detail shortly.

Limitations of an Exploratory Approach

There are also serious limitations to research that involves uncertainty in relation both to the theoretical paradigm through which it is conducted and the empirical focus of its enquiry. A critical approach to historical context can reveal a multiplicity of histories; this can also result in the loss of a sense of historical situatedness. Such a critique could be made of the accounts of participants' self-understandings and everyday lives given in this thesis, where much attention has been paid to relational, micro-scale processes of meaning making and practices of everyday life. These could be seen as somewhat abstracted from broader-scale processes of social change. As noted above, an important finding of this research is that there were many processes of social change, as well as contexts of continuity, that shaped participants' self-understandings and everyday lives. This suggests the need to complicate metanarratives such as Rofel's (2007) account of 'desiring China'. However, more could have been done to give a 'thicker' sense of these multiple histories and social contexts. This, however, would perhaps require a more focused approach. A stronger sense of historical context could have been achieved by taking just one of the themes explored in this thesis and offering a more expansive and historically situated account.

Further, the lack of a clearly defined conceptual approach, and my desire to explore concepts and context that emerged as salient for participants themselves, could be seen to have led to the omission of certain important fields of inquiry, namely a sustained discussion of gender (*xingbie*) and sexual desire (*xingyu*). All participants understood themselves as 'men' (*nanxing*/*nanren*). Their understandings of themselves as men were not problematised in the ways that their understandings of themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' were – they did not narrate complex social processes and interactions through which they arrived at understanding of themselves as men. This highlights the extent to which gender is a

'naturalised' category of 'being' and a 'fundamental social division' (Jackson, 2006b: 107). Yet participants' accounts of themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and 'in the scene' were matters of both gendered *and* sexual self-understanding. This was evident in Chapter Six, which showed that notions of 'homosexuality/being homosexual' were often articulated in relation to the problematisation of marriage and reproduction, which were central to participants' gendered self-understandings and relational social roles as sons. These issues also related to dominant understandings of gendered bodies defined in terms of their assumed innate reproductive capacities. The gendering of 'different worlds' to which *gay* men and *lala* women were seen to belong was highlighted in the Methodology, as was the potential for such divisions to be complicated by the concept of 'homosexual/homosexuality' as a non-gender-specific category. Still, more could have been done to analyse gendered aspects of participants' understandings of themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' and how these modes of 'being' were practiced in everyday life.

Similarly, while, as seen in Chapters Four and Six, some participants did see gendered sexual desires as changeable and were concerned with how such changes may occur, most understood gendered sexual desires as 'natural' (*ziran*) and 'fixed' (*guding de*). As such, most participants were more concerned with ways of 'being' a particular 'kind' of person and living a particular 'kind' of life, of which gendered sexual desires were a central facet, than with questions of the 'source' or 'origin' of sexual desires. From the constructionist position adopted in this thesis, this is a matter of the *construction* of gendered sexual desires as 'natural' – desire is not the 'essential core' of a constructed sexual identity or mode of self-understanding, though it may be figured as such (Foucault, 1978; Gagnon and Simon, 1973; here, 'construction' may mean something different from a Foucauldian and interactionist perspective). The social construction of sexual desire (*xingyu/yuwang*) as distinct from social interaction and intimacy (*shejiao/youqing*) and romantic relationships and intimacies (*ganqing/aiqing*) was highlighted in this thesis. However, the concept of sexual desire has remained somewhat under-theorised.

One potential way in which both gender and gendered sexual desires could be more substantively critiqued and incorporated into the analysis of participants' understandings of themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' would be to adopt a more clearly defined interactionist framework within which gender and sexuality are seen as intertwined, but analytically separable, categories of analysis (Coleman-Fountain, 2014; Gagnon and Simon, 1973; Jackson and Scott, 2010a). The meanings of 'gender' and 'sexuality' could be duly complicated and contextualised, while both terms could be used to pursue a form of analysis with greater explanatory potential than the ad-hoc, thematic, and context-directed analysis carried out in this thesis. Alternatively, following the line of thinking proposed by ontological anthropologists, the concept and experience of *xing* (the 'sex' of 'sexual desire' (*xingyu*), 'sex difference/gender' (*xingbie*), and 'sexual intercourse' (*xingjiao*)) could be adopted as an analytical category, not as a 'combination' of 'gender' and 'sexuality', but as a concept in its own right (Holbraad and Pedersen, 2017). This would require further reading of genealogical and philosophical literatures concerning *xing* (Pan and Huang, 2007; Sang, 1999: 278-281; Wang, 2016). Finally, a diverse participant sample in terms of gender, one including *lala* women and 'cross dressing' performers (who often refer to themselves as *CD* and *weiniang* (literally: 'fake women')), would allow for comparative analysis of the ways in which various terms of self-description and modes of 'being' were both gendered *and* sexualised.

Chapter-Specific Contributions and Limitations

Chapter Four explored the meanings of 'the scene' and how participants understood themselves to have 'come in'. The notion of 'the scene' is not specific to Hainan and several researchers working elsewhere the PRC have noted the concept (Chapman et al., 2009; Sun, Farrer and Choi, 2006). Here, it was argued that 'the scene' was a key framework through which participants negotiated understandings of themselves as belonging to a 'sexual minority' *vis-à-vis* a 'sexual majority' understood as 'outside of the scene'. A key finding was self-categorisation as *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or

tongzhi was often seen to become socially meaningful as a form of collectivity and sameness through interactional and relational processes of 'coming into the scene'. While participants narrated 'coming into the scene' in a range of ways, each involved processes whereby 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* became more than ways of categorising selves and others, they became the basis for ways of 'being together' and 'living together' in a shared social world. This highlights the importance of everyday interactional contexts within which sexual self-understandings are negotiated. As such, understanding 'the ways in which individuals come to categorise themselves as certain kinds of sexual … beings' (Plummer, 1981: 92) requires attention to everyday interactional dynamics and forms of relationality within which sexual meanings are negotiated and lived.

The chapter focused on how participants defined themselves as 'in the scene' and articulated notions of 'sexual sameness'. The findings of this chapter could be developed through deeper exploration of how participants defined others as 'outside of the scene' (*quanwai*) and articulated notions of 'sexual difference'. This was touched upon in the discussion of *anchang*, understood as men who desire men but do not 'come into the scene' (pages 161, 194, and 223). However, further attention could be paid to a range of 'Others' who mark the boundaries of 'the scene'. This could include how the categories 'heterosexual' (*yixinglian*) and/or 'straight' (*zhi*) (especially the often used term 'straight guys' (*zhinan*)) were constructed. Chapter Six did suggest the ways in which 'being in the scene' was constructed in opposition marriage and reproduction; this could be more fully unpacked to achieve a more thorough understanding of the various meanings invested in 'the scene'. As discussed earlier, there also remain important questions regarding the gendering of 'the scene' and the extent to which *lala* women and 'cross dressing' performers were seen as belonging, or not, to 'the same scene' (*tong yige quanzi*).

Chapter Four's emphasis on situated contexts of social interaction was echoed in Chapter Five, which noted that stories of 'finding selves' and 'finding others' online also often entailed processes of 'coming into the scene'. Here, many participants saw

'the scene' as a 'hidden world' in which other *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* men are present, visible, and accessible. It was not only participants' encounters with discursive sexual categories online that engendered their self-understandings as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' but also their subsequent interactions with other men understood in these ways, interactions that were recognised as largely facilitated by internet technologies. In this sense, there is a need to appreciate the functions of internet technologies as sites of interaction, rather than solely repositories of information. In his research on 'gay life in Japan', Mark McLelland (2002: 288) has similarly suggested that 'the internet, far from being a simple conduit for information, was a social space with its own rules and structures'. This emphasis on social interaction and spatiality is largely missing from the current PRC-specific literature on relationships between internet technologies and non-heterosexual identities (Deklerck and Wei, 2015; Ho, 2010; Shaw and Zhang, 2017). As shown in Chapter Five, such an approach is all the more necessary given the popularisation of locative media technologies through which 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' become ways of seeing and being seen within offline spaces at a range of scales.

Chapter Five conceptualised internet technologies in terms of 'space'. This was to the exclusion of other important spaces, such as parks and *gay* bars, frequented by some men in this research. In common with certain online spaces, these were understood as spaces within which presence could be equated with 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene'. While these spaces were frequented by only a few participants, they are nonetheless important in understanding the spatiality of modes of sexual 'being', especially given the ways in which, for some participants, such offline 'places in the scene' were understood as 'more real' than the online spaces within which they found and interacted with other *gay*, *homosexual*, and *tongzhi* men (page 222). There also remains scope for further discussion of what could be termed 'heterosexual spaces' or the 'heterosexualisation of everyday space' (Bell et al., 1994; Brown, 2007). This would mean exploring spaces that participants occupied as sons,

brothers, fathers, and co-workers, amongst other identities and social roles that were seen as demanding the performance of heterosexuality. There is much still to be said here concerning the ways in which such nexuses of presence and identity involved dynamics of seeing and being seen. These issues are especially relevant to the lives of men in smaller towns and villages.

With their focus on narratives of the past and modes of 'being' in the present, Chapters Four and Five laid the ground for Chapter Six, which explored narratives of the future and the ways in which these were oriented by culturally and materially specific dynamics of heteronormativity. Relationships between the Confucian concept of filial piety and non-heterosexual lives and identities in the PRC and other Chinese contexts have been discussed at length in the current literature (Chou, 2000, 2008; Liu and Ding, 2006; Engebretsen, 2014; Kong, 2011). Chapter Six contributed to these discussions by exploring the discursive-and-material conditions of possibility that enable and curtail the imagination and practice of lives beyond marriage and reproduction. Such conditions of possibility were shown to shape the temporality of participants' self-understandings as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene'. Here, 'temporality' refers to the extent to which modes of sexual 'being' and 'living' were imagined as temporary and confined to the present or as continuous and extending into the future. In this sense, to 'ask about the ways in which individuals come to categories themselves as certain kinds of sexual … beings, … and how such definitions are used in fashioning subsequent lifestyles' (Plummer, 1981: 92) requires consideration of the discursive-and-material recourses for imagining and practicing 'a life' that can be oriented in time.

Missing from Chapter Six is a more detailed discussion of participants' aspirations for male-male relationships. These were highlighted in the section on essentialism as a future oriented narrative, where it was shown that for some participants 'being with a man' (*gen nanren zai yiqi*) and the imagination of same-sex relationships in the future were seen as performative of 'being' *gay*. This suggests the extent to the pursuit of same-sex relationships could constitute a future oriented narrative. However, there is

more to be said on the imagined possibilities for male-male relationships; this could also be discussed in relation to the valorisation of 'romantic' relationships and the denigration of 'excessive' casual sex discussed in Chapter Five. Importantly, it should also be noted that male-male relationships were seen by many participants as imaginable but impossible. For example, Ah Tao poignantly commented:

> Oh why must I be *gay* (*wo weishenme yaoshi gay*). What a sad life! And now my family force me to get married. What can I do? Bring a man home? As if! **(29, Qionghai)**

Future research can explore how ways of 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' are constructed in relation to different kinds of same-sex relationships. Attention should also be paid to the varying extents to which such relationships are seen as im/possible.

Beyond the Individual and the Human

A theme across all three data chapters was a pervasive emphasis on relationality and contexts of interdependence in participants' accounts of themselves and their everyday lives. This was evident in the ways in which 'coming into the scene' was registered in various forms of interaction in which 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* were became the basis for sexual, social, and epistemological interactions and relations with others. In this sense, 'the scene' could be seen as a collective 'life world' in which 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* were oriented as way of 'living' together with others. Chapter Five explored how 'being' *gay, homosexual*, and/or *tongzhi* were not only matters of self-labelling but also concerned being visible to others within shared spaces. This can be seen as a dynamic relationship between space, visibility, presence, and sexual categorisation. This is also an intersubjective relationship between selves and others seeing and being seen by one another and constituting one another through those practices of visible co-presence. In Chapter Six, it became clear that while 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene'

could constitute ways of 'being in the world(/a world)', the degree to which such 'being' was seen to extend indefinitely into the future was often uncertain. For many participants, this temporal durability was threatened by both a lack of 'infrastructural and environmental conditions [that sustain] living and acting' (Butler, 2015: 65), and by heteronormative understandings of temporal continuity as inseparable from reproduction and 'the family line'. These were not separate concerns; they can be seen as intertwined and mutually sustaining. In this way, 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene', as ways of being dis/oriented in time, concerned relations to others, particularly to anticipated children as future care providers, but also to parents and to historical narratives of 'the family line'.

Together, these issues suggest two important points regarding participants' self-understandings and everyday lives. Firstly, they highlight the need to think beyond the individual in appreciating what it meant for participants to 'be' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene'. This has long been central to symbolic interactionist understandings of the self, where emphasis is placed not only on how individuals understand themselves but on how they are perceived by others and how the perception of others is integrated into the self (Blummer, 1969; Mead, 1934). In addition to these dynamics of relationality between selves and others, the issues explored in this thesis highlight the role of entities and contexts that operate as enabling conditions, discursive-and-material, for the coming together of selves and others. 'The scene', technological spaces of co-presence, and 'the family line' could be seen as examples of such entities and contexts. These could understood as 'thirdspaces' (Soja, 1996), belonging neither to the self nor the other, but operating as frameworks within which selves and others come together and are produced in particular ways, even as such 'thirdspaces' are themselves produced in that process of coming together (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986; May, 1996: 301).

This leads to the second point: understanding what it meant to 'be' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' for men in this research required thinking beyond narrative and discursive construction of sexual categories. For men in this research,

'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' were ways of being in spaces and times. In this sense, such 'being' may be better appreciated as an assemblage of human-and-non-human relationships. 'Being' a particular 'kind' of sexual person was dependent upon certain relations between people and spaces, as seen in Chapter Five, and on relations between people and material requisites for living a sustainable life, as seen in Chapter Six. Without wishing to fold the issues explored in this thesis into a single metanarrative, it can be seen that together the findings of the three data chapters point to what Edward Soja (1996: 3) has described as 'the simultaneity and interwoven complexity of the social, the historical[/temporal], and the spatial, their inseparability and interdependence'.

These observations are provocations for further research, rather than fully formulated conceptual conclusions. The main point I seek to make is that the findings of this research suggest the need for ethnographically grounded, complexly and multiply theorised, interdisciplinary approaches to sexualities research. Such approaches can enable the exploration of everyday modes of sexual 'being', which have been shown to entail practices of living (and dying) in space and time together with others. Conceptual tools for appreciating the lived complexity of sexual 'being' can be drawn from phenomenological (Ahmed, 2006; De Certeau, 1985; Simonsen, 2005; Ingold, 2011) and queer work (Butler, 1993; Edelman, 2004; Halberstam, 2005). They can also be found in literatures outside of the 'epistemological north' (Bhambra and Santos, 2017). For example, in future research the above suggestion that for men in this research 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' involved complex entanglements of sociality, spatiality, and temporality could be further developed by drawing upon Chinese philosophical literatures and ontological standpoints (Lai, 2016; Pan and Huang, 2007; Shepherd; 2007; Wang, 2011). In discussing the concept of 'a person' as linguistically constituted in Mandarin Chinese, Huang (1982: 87) has claimed that:

If Chinese is taken as a guide to an account of the nature of things, the concept of a person seems to point to a gradient ontology with the entities posited to exist, or the

(ultimate) subjects of predication forming a continuum in which the properties attributed to these entities overlap with each other.

Such a 'gradient ontology' could provide a productive starting point for think about sexual 'being' beyond the individual and the human as a matter of interwoven dynamics of sociality, spatiality, and temporality. Future research could draw upon such literatures and integrate their insights at the levels of ontology, epistemology, and methodology. This said, in doing so, care should be taken to avoid forms of cultural essentialism and orientalism could be seen to characterise the embrace of supposed 'non-Western' conceptual frameworks. These should always be historically and ethnographically contextualised and problematised.

'The Everyday' as/and Regional Specificity

As discussed in the Literature Review, scholars have observed that non-heterosexual lives in the PRC are lived 'within the tension between the enduring importance of family and marriage and the growing tide of individualism' (Choi and Luo, 2016: 263; also Kong, 2011; Rofel, 2007). The findings of this research tell a slightly different story. On the one hand, participants' self-understandings were, indeed, often negotiated in opposition to, or in dialogue with, 'the enduring importance of family and marriage'. However, the alternative to this was not necessarily 'individualism'. Rather, in imagining alternative forms of social belonging and practices of life to family, marriage and reproduction, participants articulated situated, specific, and embodied interactional dynamics that emphasised the importance of collectivity, relationality, and the material grounds (spatial and temporal) for imagining and living alternative lives. It is in this sense that 'being in the scene' was articulated in opposition to a life oriented around family and marriage, but this remained a fundamentally collective and shared way of 'being'. As noted earlier, this may have less to do with the specific importance attributed to 'the scene' by men in this research than with the extent to which 'the scene' may have been overlooked by other researchers as a key framework of self-understanding and everyday life for *gay*,

homosexual, and/or *tongzhi* men elsewhere in the PRC.

Relatedly, the findings of this thesis complicate a dominant narrative concerning the contemporary construction of *gay*, *homosexual*, and *tongzhi* identities in the PRC. Others have emphasised the construction of non-heterosexual identities within contexts of globalisation and cultural hybridity (Bao, 2018; Ho, 2010; Kong, 2011). Within such accounts, claims to 'being' *gay* and/or *tongzhi* have been seen as claims to belonging within an imagined 'cosmopolitan globalized world' (Rofel, 2007: 1). On the other hand, invocations of the importance of family have been seen as claims to 'belonging, not simply to the nation-state but to Chinese culture writ large' (ibid.: 103). In contrast, this thesis has recognised the importance participants placed on immediate interactional and spatial contexts within which 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' were seen to become possible and to be practiced in everyday life. This is not to say that transnational flows of knowledge and capital are *necessarily* irrelevant to the lives of men in this research, or that the 'everyday' is not also a *potentially* transnational space. Indeed, as discussed in the Literature Review, contemporary discourses of 'being homosexual/homosexuality' (*tongxinglian*) can be seen as the product of historical, transnational transfers of knowledge. Moreover, some participants did discuss concepts such as 'Western sexual liberalism' (*xifang xing kaifang*) and referenced 'Western' films such as *Brokeback Mountain* and *Prayers for Bobby* (page 247). However, within participants' accounts of their self-understandings and everyday lives issues that could be conceptualised in terms of globalisation and transnationalism were not pervasive concerns. This suggests the need to question assumption of the pervasive relevance of globalisation and the transnational. Further, while discussions of family were often framed in terms of 'Chinese culture' (*Zhongguo wenhua*) and 'tradition' (*chuantong*), these were not necessarily problematised in contrast to assumed global, cosmopolitan, or 'Western' sexual cultures and lifestyles or articulated as claims to national belonging. Rather, the concerned the immediate and material sustainability of lives beyond those oriented towards marriage and reproduction.

To what extent might these issues relate to the regional context within which this research was conducted? This is a difficult question to address on the basis of this research given that 'regional specificity' was not a pervasive of concern for participants and, as such, was not taken up as a concern of this research. However, as discussed in the Introduction, this thesis may be the first sociological study of non-heterosexual lives conducted in what has been termed a 'marginal' region of the PRC (Feng, 1999; Feng and Goodman, 1998). Regional context, therefore, is a pertinent question at the point of conclusion. Unlike Wei's (2012) study, conducted in Chengdu, which described the disappearance of 'local' *piaopiao*, or 'wandering men', identities and practices, no such 'locally' or 'regionally' specific identity labels and associated practices were discussed by men I spent time with and interviewed in Hainan. On this point, however, it is worth pointing out that this research was limited by being conducted in Mandarin Chinese. It is possible that regionally or 'ethnolocally' (Boellstorff, 2002) specific terminology and practices would have been evident had the fieldwork been conducted in Hainanese or Hlai.

At the same time, the extent to which participants emphasised immediate social, spatial, and temporal contexts of everyday life as they related understandings of themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' may, in itself, suggest regionally specific modes of sexual 'being'. This would be in contrast with major urban centres where, as argued in much existing research, such modes of sexual 'being' are largely constructed and experienced at intersecting scales of the national and the global. There are at least two reasons why this may be the case. Firstly, compared to major urban centres, there is a relative paucity of formal activist organisations and activities, such as AIDS-prevention and community-based organisations, in Hainan. Such organisation have elsewhere been described as vectors for the construction of 'global gay' identities and notion of cosmopolitan belonging (Altman, 1996; Altman and Symons, 2016). Secondly, while participants did not make clear or consistent links between Hainan's 'marginal' status and their understandings of themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene', many suggested that

Hainan was a poor choice of field site if my intentions were to understand the lives of *gay* men in the PRC. I was told repeatedly: 'you should have gone to Beijing or Shanghai'. This suggests the extent to which, for many participants and others I spent time with in Hainan, major urban centres were seen as representative of 'China' writ large.[125] This does not mean that they saw themselves as representative of *gay* lives in 'Hainan' *per se*. However, this may explain the extent to which their understandings of themselves as *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi,* and/or 'in the scene' were articulated in relation everyday social, spatial, and temporal contexts, more than the narratives of national progress and global belonging described in studies conducted in major urban centres. If either or both of these issues can be seen as explanations for the emphasis participants placed on immediate and everyday social, spatial, and temporal contexts, then it is likely these findings are not unique to Hainan, and similar understandings and experiences of 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' can be expected elsewhere in the PRC, outside of major urban centres.

This said, the above inferences cannot be confirmed for at least two reasons. Firstly, most studies that have emphasised the centrality of 'national' and 'global' forms of belonging have not addressed questions of their geographic locations in major urban centres (one exception here is Bao, 2018). It is not possible to conclude, therefore, that the importance attributed to such discourses is specific to these geographic contexts. Secondly, and importantly, the contrast between the emphasis placed on everyday and immediate social, spatial, and temporal contexts in this research and emphasises placed on national and global discourses and scales of belonging in studies conducted in major urban centres may be the result of disparate methodological and conceptual orientations, as discussed in the first section of this chapter. While others have sought to explore issues of modernity, neoliberalism, nationalism, transnationalism, and globalisation (Ho, 2010; Kong, 2011; Rofel, 2007), this thesis has been less oriented by a specific set of concerns. This may account for the emphasis placed, as much by participants as by myself (and by myself as

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[125] Scholars have also discussed the ways in which media representations of Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou construct these cities as representing the 'modern nation' writ large (Chen, 2012; Xu, 2006).

participant in the dynamics explored in this thesis), on everyday social, spatial, and temporal contexts. Indeed, in her richly ethnographic and deeply participatory study of the lives of *lala* women in Beijing, Engebretsen (2014: 35) concludes that 'lala's own presentations of their lives in the past, present, and future' speak of both transnational imaginaries and affiliations and everyday social and material conditions of possibility. She concludes, therefore, that for these women, 'categorical sexuality – or at least sexual subjectivity – emerges as endlessly fraught, precariously situated, and certainly relationally produced' (ibid.), something that could also be said of the everyday lives and self-understandings of men in this research.

More important than questions of whether or not the findings of this research are specific to Hainan, or to 'marginal' regions of the PRC more broadly, are the ways in which the research finding may contribute to struggles to expand the condition of possibility for living diverse sexual lives. The conclusion that, for participants in this research, 'being' *gay*, *homosexual*, *tongzhi*, and/or 'in the scene' were matters of intersubjective and co-dependent relations between people, spaces, and times could have significant implications for activist practices in Hainan, which have recently re-emerged with the establishment of a PFLAG group in the region. My continued connections to PFLAG, as well as my friendships with a number of men in this research, may provide opportunities for the collaborative refashioning of this thesis into an accessible and useful document that can be disseminated in Hainan.

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Theme: The scene and positions within/outside

1) Imagine had just arrived in [place name] and knew nothing about the scene here, based on your own experiences how would you introduce the scene to me?

- What things do you think I should know about the scene?
- Can you tell me about any particular experiences that have given you this impression?
- What does this word 'scene' mean to you?
- What sort places and people make up the scene here?

2) Do you feel that the scene is important in your life?

- Important in what ways?/Why do you feel that it is not important?
- Do you feel a sense of belonging to the scene here? How did you come to feel this way?/Why do you feel you don't belong to the scene?
- What do you think your life would be like if you hadn't come into the scene? (Assuming they have)

3) Could you tell me about your experience of coming into the scene?/Do you consider yourself as having come into the scene?

- What does 'coming in to the scene' mean to you?

Theme: Understandings of self and others

1) I have heard many different words that people used to describe themselves and other people in the scene, are there any particular words you use to describe yourself?

- Why do you prefer to use this/these word?
- Do you feel that this/these word is important to how you see your life?
- At other times or in different places do you use any other words to talk about yourself?

2) What other words do you use to describe people in the scene?

- What do these words mean to you?

- Do you see yourself as different from these people? Are there any ways in which you feel the same?

3) How would you like to be seen by other people in the scene?

- Is this something you care about?
- How do you ensure that people see you in this way?

4) What kinds of men/women do you find most attractive?

- What things are important to you when you are looking for a partner?
- What is it about this kind of person that attracts you?
- Is it easy to find this kind of person here in [place name]? What about in other places you have lived in? Where do you think it would be easier to find someone like this?

5) Do you feel different from heterosexual people?

- Different in what ways?
- Are there ways in which you feel the same?

Theme: Self and others in places and practices

1) Where do you usually go to socialise with friends in the scene? Can you describe this place/these places.

- Could you tell me what a typical night there is like for you?
- What sort of people are there and what activities are there?
- What do you think about while you are in this place?

2) Why do you choose to go to these places?

- Are these places a big part of your everyday life?
- What would your life be like if these places did not exist?
- Do you feel comfortable in these places?
- Is there anything that you worry about while you are in these places?
- Is there anything you would like to change about these places?

3) What other places are there that people in the scene go to?

- Have you ever been to these places?
- Who do you think goes to those places?
- Why don't you go to those places?

4) Do you often socialise with straight friends? Where do you go and what do you do with your straight friends?

- Do you feel different when you socialise with straight friends?
- Are there any things you worry about when you are with straight friends?
- Are there things that are the same regardless of whether you are with straight friends or friends in the scene?

Theme: Wider geographic scales and concepts

1) Do you feel that [place name] suits your life?

- Are there any things that you particularly like about [place name]?
- Are there any things that you particularly dislike about [place name]?
- Is there anything that you would like to see change in the future?
- Do you plan to stay in [place name] in the future?

2) Are you familiar with scenes in other parts of Hainan? How do you think they compare to here?

- Do you think there are any differences with the scene here in [place name]?
- Why do you think that it is different here/there?
- Are there things that are the same?

3) As someone in the scene, do you think that where you live has an impact on your life?

- What sort of an impact?
- Where would be your ideal place to live?
- What is it about this place that attracts you?

With participant who have moved from smaller towns and rural areas

4) Do you feel that this part of your life has changed since you moved to [place name]?

- Do you think that there is anything different about your life here in [place name] and your life in your hometown?
- Are there things that have stayed the same?
- Do you have friends in the scene back in your hometown? How do you think their lives compare to yours? Could you describe the life of a friend you have back in your hometown.

Ending the interview

Is there anything you think I should know that we haven't talked about?

Is there anything you expected me to ask that I didn't?

Is there anything you would like to know about me?

Do you have any advice about things that might be important to consider as I continue my research?

Appendix B: Blued Profile Used During Fieldwork
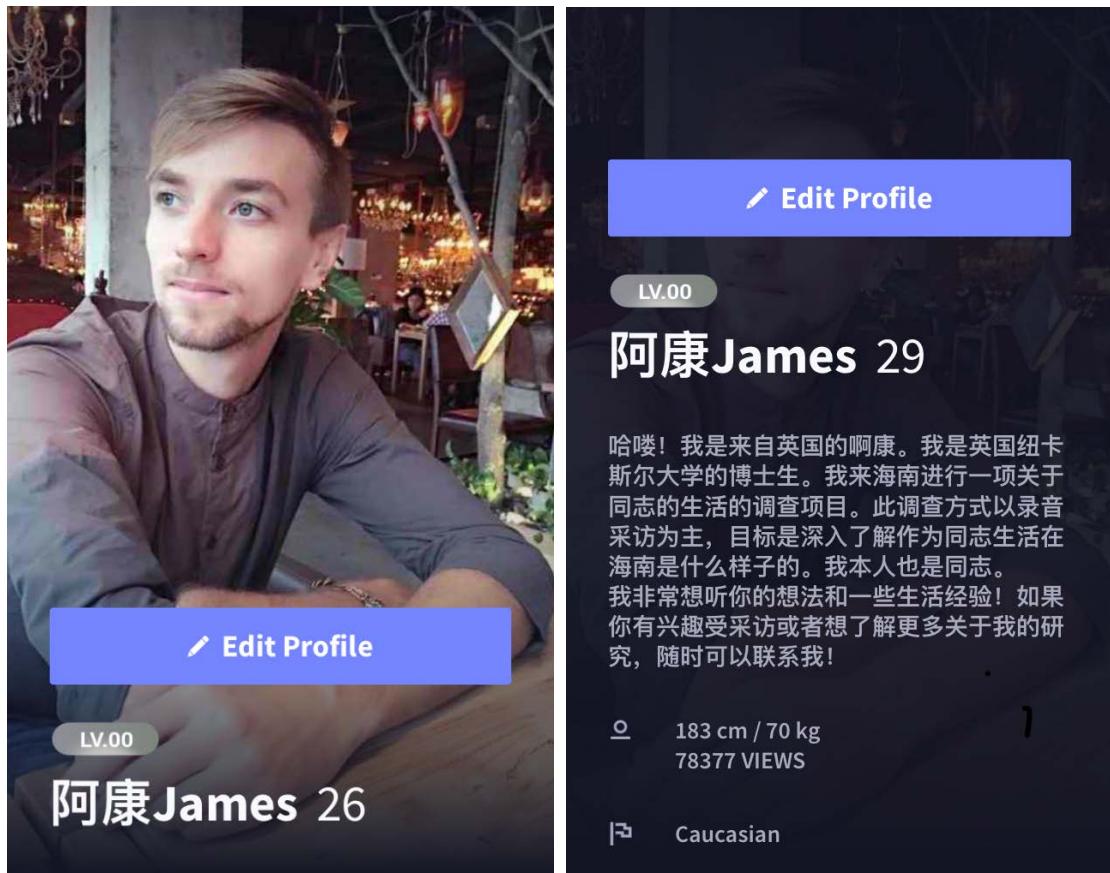
Text Translation

Hi! I'm Ah Kang from the UK. I'm a PhD student from Newcastle University in the UK. I am in Hainan to carry out a research project about the lives of tongzhi. The main way in which this research will be carried out is through recorded interviews. The purpose of the research is to gain a deep understanding of what it is like for tongzhi to live in Hainan. I am also tongzhi myself.

I would really like to hear your thoughts and some of your life experiences. If you are interested in being interviewed or would like to know more the research, feel free to contact me anytime!

Appendix C: Participant Information

Name	Age	Major Urban/Smaller Town	Location	Occupation	Recruitment Method
Ah Ben	36	ST	Danzhou	Industy	online
Ah Gang	29	ST	Wuzhishan	Government	online
Ah Ming	31	MU	Haikou	Education	online
Ah Run	23	MU	Sanya	Retail	bar
Ah Tao	29	ST	Haikou	Agriculture	online/bar
Ah Zheng	54	MU	Sanya	Agriculture/ Retail	park
Chen Chen	28	ST	Baoting	Tourism	online
Dajun Ge	63	MU	Haikou	Government	bar
Da Shu	32	MU	Haikou	Government	snowballing
Dingfeng	24	MU	Sanya	Tourism	online
Gao Quan	24	MU	Sanya	Property	park
Jiang Quan	31	MU	Sanya	Health	snowballing
Lailai	18	ST	Baoting	Student	online
Liang Zongwei	26	MU	Haikou	Unemployed	snowballing
Lu Ge	45	MU	Sanya	Property	bar
Manyu	22	ST	Danzhou	Student	online
Mengxi	28	ST	Chengmai	Informal	online
Midan	24	MU	Haikou	Unemployed	online
Ming Zai	26	ST	Qionghai	Informal	snowballing/online /park
Shasha	21	ST	Qionghai	Food	online
Shengyuan	33	MU	Haikou	Food	online
Xiao Lei	27	MU	Haikou	Retail	online
Xiao Mai	18	MU	Sanya	Tourism	bar
Xiao Pang	26	ST	Wuzhishan	IT	snowballing
Xiao Qiao	18	ST	Chengmai	Student	online
Xiaoyu	33	MU	Haikou	IT	park
Xiao Zhou	24	MU	Sanya	Tourism	snowballing
Xi Peng	39	MU	Haikou	Banking	online
Yan Nan	28	MU	Sanya	Tourism	snowballing
Ye Feng	42	MU	Haikou	Health	snowballing
Zhang Liang	28	MU	Haikou	Property	online

Appendix D: Information Sheet

The Lives of Tongzhi in Hainan

James Cummings, Newcastle University

What's the research about?   I am a PhD researcher from Newcastle University in the United Kingdom researching the lives tongzhi Hainan, their understandings of social change, and to what extend this has impacted upon their lives. The research will involve interviewing tongzhi about their lives. I am interested in understanding what life is like for tongzhi in Hainan, whether you feel this has changed in recent years, and if so why.

Why is this important? By exploring stories like yours, the research will contribute to increasing our understandings of the lives tongzhi and the ways in which they may be affected by processes of social change, both in different parts of China and across the globe.

Most research about tongzhi has been conducted in big cities like Beijing, Shanghai or Guangzhou, but it is important that we understand the lives tongzhi outside of these cities and that people in other places have the chance to tell their stories.

How do I get involved? If you are interested in this research and would like to tell me about your life, or if you would just like more information, you can contact me using the details provided overleaf.

What does the research involve? It involves a single interview with me, where we will discuss the research topic. If you decide that you would like to be interviewed for this research we can arrange to do the interview somewhere private that is safe and convenient for you. The interview will take between 1 and 2 hours and questions will explore whether or not you feel that Hainan has changed in recent years, if you feel that your life has been affected by these changes and whether these changes have affected the way you feel yourself and your life. There are no right or wrong answers; I am just interested in what you have to say.

With your permission, I would like to audio-record our interview so that I can fully appreciate what you tell me. During our interview you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to and you can ask for the recorder to be switched off or decide to stop the interview at any point.   If after the interview you change your

mind and no longer wish to be involved, you will have a two week period during which you may contact me and ask to have your information removed and deleted. After the interview I will transcribe the information and translate it into English.

How will my information be protected? The research will be conducted entirely by me and no one else will be told that you have participated in the research. No one but me will ever hear the recording of our interview. The interview transcript will not use your real name and any information that may identify you will be deleted. The transcript and a recording of our interview will be stored in a password-protected file space on a UK-based server, to which only I have access. When the project is complete the digital recording of our interview will be deleted.

The project is supervised by Prof Diane Richardson, Prof Janice McLaughlin and Dr Joanne Smith Finley at Newcastle University. They may read our interview transcript once is has been anonymised.

It is important that you understand that during our interview if you tell me something that indicates that either you or someone else may be at risk of harm we would have to stop the interview to discuss the issue further. If you continue to discuss the issue I may have to pass on this information to someone who can help you or whoever is at risk of harm. We can discuss these issues in more detail before the interview.

How will my information be used? The information from our interview will be used in my PhD thesis on the lives of tongzhi in Hainan. It may also be used to write shorter articles that will be published in academic journals and for presentation papers. My thesis will be written in English; in the future it is possible that I will use some of the information to write articles in Chinese. This study has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, a UK funding body.

Interested? I will be in [place name] from [data] to [data]. If you would like to take part in this research or would like to know more about the project, please contact me (Ah Kang) at:

Email: j.r.cummings@ncl.ac.uk

Wechat: akang_james

Mobile: 18608094477

If you have any concerns regarding this research and your involvement in it that you do not wish to discuss with me, you can contact my supervisor Dr Joanne Smith Finley, who is able to speak Chinese:

Email: j.smithfinley@ncl.ac.uk

Phone: 00441912087485

Appendix E: Consent Form

The Lives of Tongzhi in Hainan

James Cummings, Newcastle University

Please select as appropriate

Have you read the information sheet for this research project? .... Yes / No

Do you feel that you understand what this research is about? .... Yes / No

Do you understand how the information you provide will be used?...……….. Yes / No

Do you understand that your name or other identifiable information

will **not** appear in any work using the information you provide in this

interview? ....……………………………………….…………………... Yes / No

Do you know that taking part in the research is completely voluntary? .... Yes / No

Do you know that you can ask to stop the interview at any time? .... Yes / No

Are you willing to be interviewed for this research? .... Yes / No

Are you willing for the interview to be audio-recorded and transcribed? …..... Yes / No

Do you understand for two weeks following the interview you may

reconsider your involvement and ask to have your information deleted? …… Yes / No

Please feel free to ask any questions you have before we start the interview

Signed (you do not have to use your real name):

Signature of Researcher:

Date:

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