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Shanghai is a Fast Paced City:
An Exploration Into the Rapid Growth
of Queer and Trans Communities in
Shanghai, China

by

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Acknowledgements

I would like to take this space to thank the people that have led me on such an impactful journey, one that has not only lasted four years--but my entire life. In 2016, I traveled to Shanghai, China to expand my linguistic skills and grow my understanding of China and Chinese culture. As an openly queer person from rural America, I did not expect there to be much of an expansion of my queer identity on my trip. This notion was quickly dispelled after I engaged with the vibrant, expansive, and open minded community I found in Shanghai. It was there, thousands of miles away from my homeland, that I came out as nonbinary.

Nearly two years later in 2018, I returned to that city having grown as a person and wanting to contribute to those systems that so readily accepted me. I was overjoyed to see the community shifting and changing more rapidly than I ever expected, and rejoiced in the opportunity to help those who had so nobly given themselves to the advancement of the queer and trans community. This thesis was inspired directly by the work and actions of those advocates, and the ways in which they continue to work tirelessly in their cause to improve the lives of queer and trans peoples. I hope this body of work motivates you to new heights, as your work is so clearly valuable and meaningful.

From the bottom of my heart, 谢谢您们.

Introduction - Early Summer (初夏)

Throughout my undergraduate education, people have praised my interest in China, yet found themselves shocked when I came back from the country with something positive to say. In fact, many Westerners assumed I would return to the U.S. with a greater appreciation for the freedoms and liberties we possess. However, China was the first place to offer me a chance to engage thoughtfully within the *ku'er*[1] (queer 酷儿) and *kua'er*[2] (trans 跨儿) communities. My thesis is centered around the lives and experiences of gender and sexual minorities, such as queer and trans people, and how they go forward to create, maintain, and grow community spaces in Shanghai, China. While many of my close friends and colleagues in accademia would lean forward, excited for the chance to learn something new about an area that is constantly compared to a linear progression of Western experiences, many others outside of the postcolonial discourse community, would sit back--baffled by their existence. This reaction is hardly surprising. Western media coverage of China and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) both work in connection in the crafting the message that queer and trans people hardly exist in Chinese society.

Since the 1990s, discussions of gender and sexual minority groups have rapidly increased, but there remains a persistent urge to simplify their existence as an extension of Euro-American imperialist intervention. The development of *ku'er* and *kua'er* identities in China is noteworthy, as we in the West constantly utilize their victimization as a waypost to mitigate our own feelings of inadequacy for our lack of advancement in human rights. As queer and trans

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[1] See Appendix A, Table 1, row 8.
[2] See Appendix A, Table 1, row 7.

folx[3] strive to combat censorship and intolerance, their communities must also prioritize the

feelings and perceptions of the Western foreigner. These misconceptions and the discourse

centered around them would serve as the catalyst for my passion to create this work.

Within the narrative of gay groups in developing countries, there remains an insistence on

imposing Western ideas and politics. One of the aims of this thesis is to counter this imposition

on the development of said communities. As the implications for this centralization purports, the

incorrect assumption is that the Western model is normal, and therefore successful. It is easy to

perpetuate this qualification during an examination of these communities, and it only further

serves to marginalize their voices. For far too long, we have measured other societies'

developments against the trajectory of the West, assuming that our goals and struggles are

universal. In order to improve contemporary portraits of *ku'er* and *kua'er* peoples in China, I

attempt to paint a picture that is inherently founded in the complexity of "global gay formations

and local homosexualities" (King, 1992, p. 82; Altman, 1996, p. 87).

This paper is structured as an auto-ethnographic examination of the development and

systems surrounding the *ku'er* and *kua'er* community in Shanghai, China. Auto-ethnography is

defined by Ellis, Adams, and Bochner as,

> An approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze
>
> personal experience in order to understand cultural experience. This approach challenges
>
> canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a

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[3] See Appendix B, Table 1, row 1.

political, socially-just and socially-conscious act (Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., and Bochner,

A. P. 2011, p. 273).

Autoethnography is grounded in the creation of emotional depth. By crafting an evocative story

of intrigue, readers can take away a greater understanding of complex and unique experiences.

The idea for this paper was born out of many summer nights in 2016 wondering why someone

wasn't writing about the vibrant community of advocates and leaders for *ku'er* and *kua'er* people

in Shanghai, China. The knowledge and experiences that I convey through this thesis, is greatly

due to the work of Chinese advocates and their openness and willingness to welcome me into

their spaces. Any specific groups, spaces, or people mentioned in this work has had their names

and descriptions changed to protect their identities.

In 2016, after studying Mandarin Chinese for two years, I traveled to China for the first

time to participate in a three month intensive language program at a local Shanghainese

university. It was during that summer that I found and engaged with the local *ku'er* and *kua'er*

community. First, I was a passive participant, more focused on testing the depth and scope of the

community and seeking refuge in those spaces. While abroad, I found myself for the first time

feeling a sense of community and support amongst other *ku'er* and *kua'er* people. This

experience stayed with me, and motivated my return to the city in 2018. It was then that I began

to take a more active role in the community, supporting pre-existing structures and advocates

working to expand the visibility and tolerance of *ku'er* and *kua'er* people in China.

Initially I had hoped to make this study ethnographic in nature, as I believe it is vital for

researchers to place their subjects voices at the forefront of any dialogue seeking to express the

lived realities of their communities. However, due to concerns for safety and the privacy of those directly involved, I decided to instead frame the experiences I had with the community alongside pre-existing research. Unfortunately, conducting research while abroad proved to be unfeasible for me as an undergraduate student with no funding. I felt unable to properly store and protect the personal information of the advocates I wished to interview; therefore, to protect their privacy, I decided to utilize my own personal experiences while continuing to attempt to critique Western centralism. While that may sound paradoxical in theory, I hope that my experiences of using new media and information communication technology (ICT), will prove interesting and useful without derailing the focus from local advocates and community members. If given the chance, I would travel back to Shanghai, and spend up to a year or more collecting data and interviewing different community members as they work to grow *ku'er-* and *kua'er-* friendly spaces.

I will look at the rapid growth of k*u'er* and *kua'er* communities in Shanghai through the lens of four major international studies and queer theorists: Michel Foucault, Eve Sedgwick, Jürger Habermas, and Roland Barthes. To begin, I will explore the idea that Foucault evoked in the end of his first volume of *The History of Sexuality,* an "invocation of a different future 'economy of bodies and pleasures' not subject to the 'austere monarchy of sex' (1990, p. 159). Second, I will utilize the concept that Sedgwick investigated in *Epistemology of the Closet*, in which heterosexuality is taken as the presumed identity of a person, therefore causing non-heterosexuals to constantly "come out" as something contrary to the norm (1990, p. 68). Third, I look at the work of Habermas in his 1962 book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, and utilize his term of the "public sphere" to discuss the ways *ku'er* and *kua'er*

people have created their own spaces on the Internet or the "cyber sphere." In addition, I will

create a historical timeline of public tolerance and treatment of ku'er and kua'er people in China,

as it is vital to have an understanding of the unique struggles and difficulties that Chinese ku'er

and kua'er communities face. Finally, I will discuss the role of the state, the "signs" and

"signifiers" that Barthes discusses in his work, *Empire of Signs*, and the role these signs play in

indicating the treatment and tolerance of *ku'er* and *kua'er* people.

To fully grasp the ways in which queer and kua'er communities have been influenced in

their growth and creation, one must examine the role that globalization has played in connection

to community development. In this examination, it is necessary to state that the growth of queer

cultures is not merely a "symptomatic impression" of globalizing neoliberalism, as that would

further degrade the local histories of those communities, and imply they are merely later-formed

copies of the West (Liu, 2015, p. 5). Likewise, these *ku'er* and *kua'er* communities should not be

interpreted as belated runoffs of post-Stonewall social formations (Liu, 2015, p. 7). Rather, I will

be interpreting the geopolitical concepts surrounding the structural and systematic workings of

power affecting these marginalized communities. For example, China's pink economy[4] is

integral in considering the experiences that I saw in Shanghai,

> The metropolitan dreams of China's new queer bourgeoisie, like any dream- text, have
>
> manifest contents as well as deep structures. On the surface, many of these developments
>
> do suggest that a new era of liberal rights has dawned to bring about the hypervisibility of
>
> queer issues in the public domain (Liu, 2015, p. 10).

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[4] Appendix B, Table 1, row 6.

It is important to note that what I witnessed in Shanghai, was made possible by the city's high livability for ku'er and kua'er people. The *China Daily* declared the city as, "one of the most open and progressive Chinese cities'' (Bao, 2006, 98) and compared to the rest of the country Shanghai's resources for *ku'er* and *kua'er* folx was much greater. At one training event, I received a map that listed every known organization affiliated with providing aid or community resources for *ku'er* and *kua'er* people. Shanghai had the most to offer by far. The northeastern seaboard had the most substantial number of dots, indicating allied organizations and companies, the further west--the fewer dots there were. The next largest rival for resources was Beijing. While Shanghai is considered the economic powerhouse for China, Beijing is the nation's capital and key political authority. This proved more difficult for local *ku'er* and *kua'er* communities in Beijing because, during any period of political significance, police would be especially combative toward local community events and sightings. A Chinese saying goes that it's easier to get away with things in the far provinces, "where heaven is high and the emperor far away."

Those that wished to be a part of the *ku'er* and *kua'er* community would need to carefully toe the line between advocating for the community, and being viewed as anti-government. This delicate dance required community members to self-censor, for fear of retaliation. LGBTQA+[5] groups are heavily monitored and scrutinized by the police, which made gathering in public or event private events difficult,

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[5] Appendix B, Table 1, row 5.

In China, all types of gay and lesbian-related activities involve a process of continual

testing and expansion that continues until you cross a line you are not meant to

cross...Only by continually testing the limits imposed on our activities can we know

where those lines are (Interview with Wei Xiaogang, Beijing, 5 January 2011; Chase,

2012, p. 158).

For those events and topics viewed as "too controversial", event organizers would cover the

windows with paper, or draw heavy curtains, attempting to hide the questionable content from

the CCP's watchful eye. However, the advent of the Internet changed the way community

members connected. For Chinese advocates, the Internet has stood apart from traditional media

as a key element in their ability to normalize and discuss homosexuality, despite the CCP's

wishes.

Even though, it is commonly acknowledged that the Internet is heavily monitored and

censored in China, LGBTQA+ advocates utilize a range of strategies to sidestep government

monitors (Cao, 2016, p. 504). Xiao Qiang is an adjunct professor at the Graduate School of

Journalism of the University of California-Berkeley, and the founder and chief editor of *China

Digital Times*. In his article, *The Battle for the Chinese Internet*, Qiang explores the extensive

power of censorship in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and provides a more nuanced

understanding of the "cyber-politics" that have expanded through online discourse. The

expansion of online discourse on the Internet includes blogging, instant messaging, and social

networking services such as WeChat, QQ, and Sina-Weibo.

These forms of discourse provide Chinese netizens with an unprecedented capacity for communication (Qiang, 2011, p. 48). Qiang writes, "under the cover of anonymity or using coded euphemisms, participants can express particular views--and in far bolder language than would be permitted in the official media" (2011, p. 49). Three Mandarin Chinese characters that best express the dynamic between authorities and Chinese netizens would be: *feng*[6] (封), *shai*[7] (晒), and *huo*[8] (火) (Qiang, 2011, p. 49). While I was abroad, I noticed advocates utilizing a mix of coded euphemisms and English to evade words that were automatically banned by authorities.

For Chinese netizens, the Internet functions as a public sphere, where users can challenge the CCP's dominance through cleverly worded satire, jokes, poems, and code words (Qiang, 2011, p. 52) and for many, the Internet provides a space to advocate for political reform and social change.Authorities also understand that often, "the next step after public dialogue is collective mobilization and organization around issues of common concern" (Qiang, 2011, p. 57) and censorship is duly carried out under the official decree of "constructing a harmonious society." (Qiang, 2011, p. 52). In order to construct a "harmonious society", the CCP wipes away or "purifies" any content deemed a detriment to society, which inspires many netizens to use a homonym of the word "harmonize" *hexie*[9] (river crab 河蟹) as a politically charged icon against government censorship. The resistance jokingly refers to themselves as the *hexie shehui*[10] (the river crab society 河蟹社会). China has a long history of using coded communication for the purpose of political dissonance, but what was once whispered in private is now very publicly communicated on the Internet.

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[6] Appendix A, Table 1, row 2.
[7] Appendix A, Table 1, row 13.
[8] Appendix A, Table 1, row 3..
[9] Appendix A, Table 1, row 5.
[10] Appendix A, Table 1, row 4.

Often, there would be terms that advocates would create themselves as no official term existed, such as: *ku'er* (酷儿), *liuxing*[11] (流性), and *kua'er* (跨儿). The idea that there was no official term with which to describe oneself surprised me, and strongly affirmed to me the necessity for researchers to use local queer lexical terms. For instance, the use of the term *queer*,[12] used by the community and myself, to describe anyone to considers themselves a part of LGBTQA+, is a Western feature. This is discussed in the article *Queer Bodies, Queer Lives in China English Contact Literature*, in which the authors assert, "the idea of a uniquely Chinese queer identity position is... evident in the unique lexical tokens that are used in the Chinese queer community" (Paiz et al., 2018, p. 151). In my thesis, I will integrate unique lexical token into my works, providing two appendixes for readers to further expand upon their meanings and uses.

Since the late 1990s and into the early 2000s, a cyber *tongzhi*[13]society has taken shape in Chinese cyberspace (Kam, 2006, p. 53). The vast interconnected cyber-network that I experienced, had its humble beginnings with vaguely named message boards and chat rooms. Kam writes,

> Within a few years, the cyber community has risen from ground zero, and has been developing rapidly in a size and scope of influence that would take decades for an offline community to accomplish...This has given rise to a highly condensed process of community building, cultural formation and transformation (Kam, 2006, p. 53).

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[11] Appendix A, Table 1, row 10.
[12] Appendix B, Table 1, row 6.
[13] Appendix A, Table 1, row 15.

These cyber communities act as public spheres for communities to engage and share their voices on topics that relate to their lives. A popular examination of the public sphere can be found in the notable German sociologist and philosopher, Jürger Habermas's, and his work entitled, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962).

I posit that the "cyber sphere" facilitates a virtual public sphere, allowing for communities that are otherwise silenced, to be heard. This was otherwise, unimaginable before the opening and reform period. As this event dramatically changed the economic landscape of the nation and brought about the possibility for greater engagement with non CCP crafted messages,

> The newly acquired geographical mobility, economic freedom and information technology have created a material reality that enables the practice of alternative lifestyles and the formation of new sexual communities. For the first time, homosexuality can appear in the dominantly hetersoexual public space as an independent category of people…[queer and trans people] have even succeeded in creating a public space of their own on the Internet and late in the offline world (Kam, 2006, p. 40).

Before the opening of the country, Chinese advocates had few options to acquire visibility. The creation of this public sphere jumped the community forward decades in their dialogue with the public.

Habermas defines the public sphere as, "private citizens behaved as a public body, allowed to confer and assemble with the freedom to express and publish their opinions--about

general matters" (1962, pp. 136-142). To act as a public sphere, a space must be part of the private realm but separate from the state. Habermas defines this as the "civil society." These spaces are vital as they provide strong checks to the censorship and control that the CCP wields over traditional media. The "cyber sphere" is vital in the role of community growth and creation as it allows *ku'er* and *kua'er* folx to understand themselves as people, since they are banned from traditional media depictions,

> The cyber public provided a framework for Moon to understand and articulate herself and her same-sex relationship. It initiated a process of self discovery, and signalled a significant moment of self-empowerment and self-normalization. Moon has since then come to terms with her lesbian identity and has started to understand her same-sex relationship in a new way (Kam, 2006, p. 55).

Public discourses are necessary as they are responsible for the regulation of the visible (and invisible) limits, in which one can "project possible forms of life and where one locates oneself in the changing contours of social acceptability" (Kam, 2006, p. 40).

Coming Out - Filial Piety Over Religion (孝反而宗教)

Eve Sedgwick, attributed as one of the founder of queer studies, provides an in depth examination of the role of "the closet" within gay culture and identity in her book, *Epistemology of the Closet*. Sedgwick argued that homosexuality is closely related to, "several binary oppositions in Western popular culture, including secrecy and disclosure, as well as the public and the private" (Kam, 2006, p. 109). It is a constant question and state of being that a queer or

trans person must answer to at any time, to determine if they are "closeted" or "out". The process

of "coming out" is highly anticipated and encouraged in Western gay identity politics, as it

indicates a sense of "authenticity" and "truth" (Kam, 2006, p. 109).

As a queer person, one is asked by society to reintroduce themselves as a "gay" person at

every instance of everyday life by challenging the supposed norm of heterosexuality. Sedgwick

muses on the ever present fixture of the closet, seeing it as a fundamental element to the

experience of living life as a queer person,

> The gay closet is not a feature only of the lives of gay people. But for many gay people it
>
> is still the fundamental feature of social life; and there can be few gay people, however
>
> courageous and forthright by habit, however fortunate in the support of their immediate
>
> communities, in whose lives the closet is not still a shaping presence (Sedgwick, 1990,
>
> p.68).

However, throughout *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick centralizes the discussion of

sexuality and the role of the closet in Western identity politics. By allowing the focus to remain

on the West as a centralized figure, Sedgwick demotes all other societies and cultures.

This centralization is first noted in her introductory argument and is used to justify her

theory. Later queer theorists such as Petrus Liu, an Associate Professor of Humanities at

Yale-NUS College, would critic this assumption,

In order to show that sexuality is central to every node of knowledge, however, Sedgwick

has to qualify her argument with the phrase "in Western culture." The West then becomes

a totalizable entity, while the non-West is definitionally excluded from this theory of

sexuality (Liu, 2015, p. 25).

Sedgwick is not the only noteworthy theorist to make this mistake. The trend of Western

centralization is popular among many authors and is even examined in Michel Foucault and his

book, *History of Sexuality Vol 1,* in which he posits that the East does not experience "sexuality

and sensuality" in the same ways as the West (1990, p. 54).

However, the concept of the closet is displayed differently in the East. In China, this

concept of in/out is seen in *yin/xian*[14], which points to the act of being "visible" or "invisible" as

a gender or sexual minority,

This is similar to Martin's account which points to the complexities and nuances of the

closet and coming out politics in the Chinese context, in which dichotomies such as

out/in, visibility/invisibility, and authenticity/ inauthenticity becomes blurred and

contested. The only exception in the Chinese context is that concealment and disclosure

do not point to the authenticity of one's identity (Kam, 2006, p. 109).

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[14] See Appendix A, Table 1, row 16 and 17.

To decide to be "in" or "out" would depend on the historical and social setting. For many queer and trans folx in China, it depends on the particular social surrounds and on the person, and who that person is with.

The features of the closet and its effect on the social lives of of ku'er and *kua'er* communities can be observed in the expansive and intensive research provided by Dr. Lucceta Lo Yip Kam, in *Shanghai Lalas*, one of the most accurate and in depth studies known on the topic of Shanghainese *ku'er* and *kua'er* women in the past two decades. In the book, Kam details the six years she spent researching and interviewing 25 self-identified *lala's* (lesbians) and how their homosexuality is constantly measured up to male centered politics, the appropriation of the word *tongzhi* (comrade) by queer folx, and the groundbreaking possibilities that the "cyber public" offers *ku'er* and *kua'er* communities. Her work, measured alongside Sedgwick--paints a picture of how *chuqu*[15] (coming out) can look different across culture.

Shanghai Lalas offers a unique perspective on how the Chinese landscape has changed. Her study, completed in 2012, paints a portrait of a bustling growing community. Since then, I have observed a continuation of Kam's expectations for the increased ability of the cyber public to bleed into real life changes for *ku'er* and *kua'er* lala's. The book provides readers with a nuanced understanding of what future possibilities lie ahead for a fully realized cyber lala community, as many members could not have previously imagined a future where they could openly have a same-sex partner.

By the 1990s, Chinese media gave rise to an increase in public visibility of *tongzhi* subjects (Kam, 2006, p. 56). For the first time, there were a small number of lesbians and gay

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[15] See Appendix A, Table 1, row 1.

men appearing and being interviewed on "television talk shows, newspapers, and in the collective 'coming out' of lesbians and gay men in the cyberspace" (Kam, 2006, p. 56). Most Chinese *ku'er* or *kua'er* people are still unable to come out, this experience is familiar across cultures as Sedgwick writes,

> To say, as I will be saying here, that the epistemology of the closet has given an overarching consistency to gay culture and identity throughout this century is not to deny that crucial possibilities around and outside the closet have been subject to most consequential change, for gay people (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 68).

These were important moments for ku'er and *kua'er* people across the nation, as they presented as some of the only "models" for what a homosexual was. As is often the case, those that were able to come out online and in other popular media were those who could "afford to appear in the public eye" (Kam, 2006, p. 56). Indeed, these "models" for homosexuals, were able to appear on television despite their subversive sexual identity by conforming to every other societal expectation through a performance of homonormativity.[16]

In 2016, I traveled to China for the first time. In preparation for my trip, I used the internet to search for any traces or mentions of the ku'er community in Shanghai. Through a preliminary search, I was able to see there were a number of queer bars, mostly centered around males and masculine people, and shockingly one lesbian bar. This was quite the surprise, as spaces that are centered around females and femmine people are rare to find even in the West.

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[16] See Appendix B, Table 1, row 8.

The first night that I entered the lesbian bar, I found myself in the middle of a birthday

celebration. Transfixed, I watched as several people around the room recorded the festivities,

sharing the twists and turns of the celebration on a live stream. I later found out this live stream

feed was broadcasted across Mainland China for the benefit of anyone who was unable to access

or come out to their local ku'er community.

The bar was packed, mostly filled with Chinese nationals. When I turned to the patron

beside me she explained that she was not gay herself but liked to come here for the atmosphere.

A little disappointed, as I was attempting to find people who self-identified as queer, I started to

make my way out of the bar. On the way out, I was introduced to a patron who was from

Portland, OR, where I was living in the United States. She and I discussed the difficulties and

challenges of living as an out queer person in China and discussed how I found the bar. It was

then that she revealed to me that there was a very active WeChat group used by queer identified

people and allies in the city. Suddenly it clicked, while I had easily been able to find locations

and names for bars that clearly designated themselves as spaces for queer people (mostly gay

men), a precursory dive into the Internet hadn't surfaced many results for other signs of the

community. The function of a closed WeChat group required any current members to physically

add the interested in party by sharing the QR code of the chat group to join.

Once I was in the group, I was able to experience some of the pre-existing structure that

community members had developed, a comprehensive network that stretched throughout

Mainland China. Not only did this group chat service the entire city of Shanghai, but there were

companion WeChat groups that were run in different parts of the country. If someone were to

travel to Beijing, they could ask the Shanghai group to send them the information for a Beijing

moderator. That moderator would then personally add the other person, and they would be able to see all of the relevant information for life and events in both cities. The cap for these group chats was 500 people, but I would later find out the demand for their virtual town square would require the creation of multiple of each focused WeChat group.

The first focused WeChat group I joined was called "Queers & Allies #1". This group served as a general forum, where other community members could see postings for upcoming events from different groups, opportunities to get together and workout, group outings to local restaurants. While I would go on to join multiple WeChat groups. I would come to realize, not all were created equal. Some group chats were carefully moderated by more active members of the community, directing the flow of conversation, setting group boundaries, and delegating tasks to other members. These groups would serve many different functions, but mostly led to in-person meetings to allow for further discussion of sensitive topics.

In 2018, I returned to Shanghai with a greater understanding of the social landscape and a desire to become a more active participant in the ku'er community. The city I returned to was at once familiar and yet very different. I began to more actively monitor the largest Queer&Allies group chat, looking for ways to be more active in my engagement with the community. I participated in a kick off event for the year, where several groups that advocated for *ku'er* and *kua'er* folx and companies that supported them, came together to demonstrate support. At that event, I was able to meet new community leaders--who had carved out niche safe spaces for community discussion, education, and debate. I would later go on to attend and help facilitators in their multifaceted roles as leaders, as their task was difficult: how do we craft a space that is inclusive for everyone? As every young queer and trans person goes on to learn,

The romantic myth of homosexual identity cutting across class, race, and so on doesn't work in practice any more than it does in the West. The experience of sexuality in everyday life is shaped by such variables as the gap between city and country; ethnic and religious differences; and hierarchies of wealth, education, and age (Altman, 1996, p. 89).

At times, it can be difficult to find welcoming spaces in the queer and trans community. There are many different types of spaces, some more dominated by Western foreigners than by politics surround the local communities. Foreigners must be hyper conscious of their roles in these communities, as the long standing history of Western imposition provides them bountiful advantages.

The question of a global gay identity is explored by Dennis Altman, an australian academic and pioneering gay rights activist. In his work *Rupture or Continuity: The Internationalization of Gay Identity* he interviewed local queer advocates within SE Asia. Altman examined their ideals and experiences in relation to a global context of sexual citizenship,

My experiences led me to working with advocates who really cared. In my own conversations with homosexuals in Asia there is an ongoing ambivalence about the extent to which they are constituting themselves a part of a global identity. As Eduardo Nierras puts it, "When we say to straight people, or, more rarely, to Western gay people, 'We are like you' we must remember to add, 'only different'" (Alman, 1996, p. 90).

It is for this reason that Altman and I posit that discussions surrounding sex/gender structures must not be independent of larger socio-political ones. As the body of works on queer and gender studies grow we must remember the West's journey towards community and identity development.

It is easy to observe one's own culture and confidently assert that it did not display a linear progression towards "Western-style queerness" but rather, an amassment of peaks and valleys, shifting and changing the way people navigate numerous models of their identity in everyday life. This same recognition of the complexity between the cultural tensions and socio-political factors must be bestowed upon China, and any other society. Altman writes, "we may well need a political economy of homosexuality, one which recognizes the interrelationships of political, economic, and cultural structures (1996, p. 91).

Achieving this, will be vital in any future discussions based around the complex compound of tradition and modernity that is found at the foundation of any queer or trans community abroad. New identity, gay identities, will develop in ways that are drastically different from the blatant political rhetoric of the West. This can be seen in the lower prioritization of same-sex marriage relative to other socio-political rights sought by LGBTQA+ communities. And while these new gay identities emerge, often times in ways unpredictable to their Western counterparts, we must remember that our differences "are not as great as sometimes claimed" (Altman, 1996, p. 91).

A Brief Historic Narrative of China - Queer China (同志中国)

Power is essentially what dictates its law to sex. Which means first of all that sex is placed by

power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden (Foucault, 1990, p. 83).

In this section, I attempt to paint a brief yet thorough historical account of Chinese

society's tolerance and treatment of *ku'er* and *kua'er* folx. As history marches forwards, it is vital

for the stories and lives of *tongzhi* and *kua'er* peoples to be told. In my research, I was heavily

influenced by the work of Chin-fu Hung, an Associate Professor at the Department of Political

Science and Graduate Institute of Political Economy, National Cheng Kung University (NCKU),

Taiwan. Hung's research focuses on the impact of the information and communication

technologies (ICT) upon the political development and democratization, and the socio political

development in East and Southeast Asia (Hung, 2011, p. 383).

Hung's article, *The Politics of Electronic Social Capital and Public Sphere in Chinese*

Lala Community: Implications for Civil Society, provides historical context for the treatment of

Lala and ku'er communities. As one of the oldest civilizations in the world, China has

transformed itself many times over, and been led by many different guiding principles. When it

comes to the topic of *tongzhilian zai zhongguo* (homosexuality in China), there lies a key

difference in the way that the East and the West considered homosexuality.

It has been suggested that *tongxinglian* (homosexuality) was popular in China's Song

(宋, 960-1279), Ming (明, 1368-1644), and Qing (清 1644-1911) dynasties (Hung, 2011, p. 374).

Even throughout the Middle Ages, historians argue that Chinese homosexuals did not receive

high levels of persecution as compared to their Western counterparts (Calhoun, 2000, p. 83-84;

Hung, p. 374). In fact, in ancient China there were "certain degrees of cultural tolerance of

homosexuals" (van Gulik, 1961; Hung, p. 375). However, one would be remiss to romanticize the absence of persecution or tolerance of same-sex eroism, as it was tolerated with,

> "A vital qualifier--it occured only when the social hierarchy was not challenged. Ironically, the most distinctive features of the Chinese history of homosexuality are neither homophobia nor homoeroticism but rather classism, sexism, and ageism, which permeate and construct both homosexual relationships and mainstream culture" (Wah-Shan, 2001, p. 30).

With the romanization of ancient China, many great theorists further "other" the East by falsely claiming that their history is uniquely lacking in similar qualities to our own. This false narrative can be found in Foucault's *History of Sexuality,* in which he maintains that, "sexuality is not a timeless, immutable given because sexuality as we know it is absent in the East" (Foucault, 1990, p. 57; Liu, 2015, p. 27).

He further asserts that the invention of homosexuality can be traced back to an exact date, specifically in 1870 in the West (1990, p. 43). In this claim about the construction of homosexuality, Foucault argues that same-sex eroticism must have two narratives one Western and one Eastern, " This racist claim of two separate histories, utilizes China as its primary example,

> The first history, which began somewhere in Greece and migrated to France to produce "the homosexual" as a species in 1870, is called scientia sexualis. Foucault's definition of

scientia sexualis does not include modern Greece, but draws a line of continuity between modern French culture and ancient Greek culture. The second history, of which Foucault cites China as a primary example, encompasses all non- Western societies without distinguishing their ancient and modern forms...While the cultural differences between ancient Greece and France of the 1870s are construed as a historical advance, the distinction between ancient China and modern China does not bother Foucault much (Foucault, 1990, p. 57; Liu, 2015, p. 27).

Indeed, he would fall in line with other Western academia to dangerously romanticize the past treatment of *ku'er* or *kua'er* people in ancient China. While *tongxinglian* were not treated as intrinsically sinful or hailed as evil, there remained a system of family-kinship that put pressure on both men and women to marry, and produce heirs for their family lines, thus exhibiting a "limiting boundary to and pressure on same-sex erotic practices" (Wah-Shan, 2001, p. 30). Confucian ideas were strongly rooted in the notion that practicing *tongxinglian* would prohibit an individual from achieving the ideal personality.

In the 1920s and 1930s, attitudes towards *tongxinglian* began to shift as sexual fluidity or same-sex attraction began to be treated as "colonial importation of modern Western sexology, Christian homophobia, and the medicalisation of homosexuality" (Chou, 2000, pg. 42; Hung, p. 375). *Tongxinglian* began to be targeted by Chinese intellectuals who used the pathologization of homosexuality to advance their own socio political-agenda. It was the Chinese political elites and the intellectuals who had been "enlightened" by Western scientific discourse who begun to demonstrate intolerance and aversion towards *tongxinglian*. They labeled homosexuals as an

afflicted "diseased state" (*bingtai* 病态) or "metamorphosis" (*biantai* 变态), inferring that

tongxinglian were an "aberration and a mental disease" (Hung, p. 375). The persecution of

homosexuality persisted, and when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power in 1949,

the government gave greater emphasis on social and moral orders. This lead to the oppression,

imprisonment, and murder of homosexuals from the 1950s onwards.

  With the rise of China's great leader, Mao Zedong 毛泽东, came refurbishment of the

intolerant attitudes towards *tongxinglian*. Hung found that "Mao considered homosexuals to be

the products of a 'mouldering lifestyle of capitalism" (Contreras, 2007; Hung, p. 375).

Homosexual acts become criminalised and punishable under the status of "hooliganism"

(*liumangzui*) (Hung, 2011). Criminalization and punishment worsened during the Cultural

Revolution (*wenhua dageming* 文化大革命). Between 1966 and 1976, *ku'er* and *kua'er* people

were penalized by forced re-education in labour campus (*laodongjiaoyu* 劳动教育; *laojiao*劳

教), where they would face public humiliation and torture, or rural exile (*xiafang* 下放) (Hung,

p. 375). In an unknown number of cases, they were secretly executed (Laurent, 2005: 179-180;

Hung, p. 375).

  Once a connotation between homosexual behavior and capitalism was developed,

tongxinglian were viewed as counterrevolutionaries, displaying a deadly political fault in their

identity. Suddenly, individual sexual preferences were twisted into an attack on lofty

revolutionary ideals. Through the criminalisation, re-education, imprisonment, torture, and

murder of *ku'er* and *kua'er* peoples, sex had been modified into a "political tool for social

control" (Hung, p. 375). The CCP called for its citizens to identify any perceived

counterrevolutionaries, turning neighbors into would be executioners. As one author who lived

through the Cultural Revolution described it, by 1975 "people [who were] suffering from sour

grapes transmuted their craving for illicit sex into a desire to catch others in the act" (Hua, 2011,

p. 51). This gave rise to what Foucault discussed in *The History of Sexuality*, how sex had been

weaponized as a political tool to further the *wenhua dageming* (Cultural Revolution),

> Sex as a political issue...was tied to the distribution of forces, the adjustment and
>
> economy of energies...it was applied to the regulation of populations, through all the
>
> far-reaching effects of its activity...giving rise to infinitesimal surveillances, permanent
>
> controls, extremely meticulous orderings of space, indeterminate medical or
>
> psychological examinations, to an entire micro-power concerned with the body (Foucault,
>
> 1990, p. 145-146).

The use of sex as a political tool is no mystery to modern day readers, but the reasoning behind

the persecution and ill treatment of same-sex eroticism differs from their Western counterparts.

The repressive ideological atmosphere of the 1950s into the early 1970s highlighted a key

division in the criminal prosecution of homosexuality between the East and the West.

Specifically, the division lay in the prosecution of homosexuality not as a crime against

god/nature (i.e. sodomy) like in the West, but under hooliganism (*liumangzui*) (i.e. a crime

against the social order), which encapsulated other crimes such as "over consumption of alcohol,

causing a public disturbance, and gambling" (Li 2007, Liu 2015; Paiz et al., 2018, p. 151). The

distinction is noteworthy, as it indicates the Chinese State's methodology toward regulation and

remediation.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault defined the role of regulation as a means for legislative methods to exert control over the lives (and sex lives) of a populace (1990, p. 84-85). It was due to this regulation and remediation that clinicalization occurred of "so called deviant sexual behaviors as diseased states to be cured through medical intervention" (Paiz et al., 2018, p. 153). The medical confirmation of homosexuality as an illness served as an effective form of social control, and in China medical professionals played an influential role in defining sexual identities as a sexual crisis entrenched in Chinese society. Foucault described the reasoning behind this as an attack on individuality through the vehicle of sex, writing that,

> Sex was a means of access both to the life of the body and the life of the species...This is why in the nineteenth century sexuality was sought out in the smallest details of individual existence; it was tracked down in behavior, pursued in dreams...it became the stamp of individuality (Foucault, 1990, p. 146).

The role of sex and sexual desires as a political issue has historically been used as a successful means of population and social control. Another example of this control can be seen in the CCP's introduction of the 1979 one-child-policy.

With the end of the cultural revolution in 1978, China ushered in a decade of intense transformation both economic and sexual. While the economic transformation brought about by *gaige kaifang* (改革开放) has benefited some greatly, others were left behind. The economic landscape in China transitioned from "socialist planning" to "market socialism" and was accompanied by the introduction of the CCP's ill fated one-child-policy (Hung, 2011, p. 375).

This policy acted as a means to control population and was deeply intertwined with the twin

pillars of Chinese society,

> The 1980s mark the end of the Cultural Revolution, and it was a time where the country
>
> was seeking rapid economic growth. However, post-Cultural Revolution China was still
>
> deeply influenced by communist and socialist ideologies. It was around the twin pillars of
>
> communism and socialism that social norm-enforcing values were created. These values
>
> placed individual responsibility to the group and the family over the maintenance of
>
> individual freedom and expression (Paiz et al., 2018, p. 151).

The one-child-policy only plagued the country with their current predicament: overpopulation of

the elderly. This is displayed in the "4-2-1 problem" in which one child is responsible for the

care and well being of both their parents, and their parent's parents. In China, the traditional

condemnation of *tongxinglian* is combined with a deeply ingrained social pressure to marry and

procreate, further placing an enormous constraint on *ku'er* and *kua'er* folx. Additionally, the lack

of legal protections for queer and trans rights in Chinese law allowed *tongxinglian* to be

penalized "arbitrarily on the basis of the Chinese system of administrative and Party disciplinary

Sanctions" (Li, 2007; Jeffreys, 2007, p. 10).

The end of the still 1980s saw a similar position of the criminalization of homosexuality.

By 1987, legal authorities considered *tongxinglian* to cause a diversion in social morality, citing

same-sex eroticism as a disturbance to the public. Authorities further posited that *tongxinglian*

remained a threat to the countries future as it provided a, "harmful influence on the psychological

and physical health of the youth" (Zhang, 1994, p. 633; Kam, 2006, p. 48). However, this

narrative would be challenged during the broadening of the education system. The cultural

revolution, had brought about a new class of Chinese citizens to be the first in their families to

attend college. This opening of higher Education impacted the nation's ongoing sexual liberation

and revolution, and "by 2009, China's college enrolment rate has roared to 62% compared to

6.1% in 1979." (Li, 2007; Jeffreys, 2007, p. 377)

    In the 1990s the CCP made the fateful decision to allow newspapers, magazines,

television, and radio stations to compete in the marketplace instead of being financed exclusively

by the Party and Government. This meant that newspapers, magazines, and Web-based news

sites could navigate the cross-currents between the open marketplace and the CCP censors. In

short, globalization and increased economic wealth had set China on the pathway towards an

expansive online media landscape that it has today, "the internet is now impacting China's socio

political environment, creating a pluralistic society where diversity public interests may coexist"

(2011, p. 376). These economic and technological changes would shape the ways in which

communities could communicate and advocate for improved social and legal positions. By the

1997 same-sex eroticism had been decriminalized, and by 2001, *tongxinglian* had been

declassified as a mental illenss (Hung, 2011, p. 374).

    The early 2000s saw a steep increase in interaction between *ku'er* and *kua'er*

communities. Finally able to take a step out of the darkness, communities sought refuge in

corners of the internet. In his work, *The Politics of Electronic Social Capital and Public Sphere

in Chinese Lala Community: Implications for Civil Society+,* Hung explores the greater

implications for cyber social bonds in the Chinese *lala* community (2011, p. 369). These

intensely political landscapes of cyber-networks were made more accessible and interactive

through the advent of WeChat. Hung found that the creation of these cyber social bonds began in

the 1990s. Hung goes one to write,

> By 2011, china is experiencing a dynamic upsurge in semi-public community building
>
> that is diversifying into not only a greater variety of bars buta also semi-public and
>
> Lala-identified organizations, conferences, research projects, free zones, and mainstream
>
> media exposure. (pg. 380)

He further asserts that the Internet has helped liberate the Chinese *lala* community through the

development of what I call, the "cyber sphere", or the use of cyberspace to generate community

spaces virtually and "facilitate the emergence, formation, and development of electronic social

capital and the public sphere" (Hung, p. 369).

In the article, *Problems of Publicity: Online Activism and Same-Sex Sexuality in China

and South Korea*, the author, Thomas Chase, a lecturer within the Translation and Interpreting

Studies Program at Monash University, analyzes the issues surrounding online activism by gay

and lesbian groups and their supporters in South Korea and Mainland China. He focuses not only

on the challenges they have faced, both in their ability to raise public support and for legislative

reform, but also on their ability to promote more accurate, positive, and visible portraits of ku'er

and trans people to the Korean and Chinese publics. Chase found that exclusive online methods

of activism require acceptance by the publicity power of traditional media sources.

One of the key issues that Chase categorized, is the tendency within traditional media to "exclude, trivialise or condemn particular social groups due to their gender, ethnicity, or sexuality." He describes this phenomena by utilizing a term coined by communications scholars as "symbolic annihilation" (2012), p. 160),

> The under-representation and or/negative portrayal of a particular social group in the media that characterises this phenomenon is seen as important because the frequency and manner of media representation is believe to send influential messages that help inform social attitudes and individual behaviour (Becker, 2006; Klein and Shiffman, 2009, p.57).

The effects of symbolic annihilation are a key element in the CCP allowing the continued mistreatment and intolerant/indifferent social climates surrounding *ku'er* and *kua'er* people. While *tongzhi* (同志) virtual communities are vitally important to building community spaces, the restrictions and censorship instilled by the CCP stifle advocates' ability to normalize *tongzhi* and *kua'er* (跨儿) folx. The CCP works actively to perpetuate this annihilation, even going so far as to ban all portrayals of homosexuality in the entertainment industry, issued in their annual "Citizen Guide to Moral Living" (Gao, 2017, p. 1). While this ban is actively enforced through more traditional media, popular micro-bloggers who started their careers with the help of traditional media have been able to attract public attention and support for LGBTQA+ rights.

One example of a popular figure who owes their notoriety to traditional media is Wu Youjian, often referred to as "Mama Wu" or "China's first mother to publicly support same-sex marriage" (Chase, 2012, p. 159). Wu has been a popular media figure since she first appeared

with her son, Zheng Yuantao, in a 2005 television interview in which Zheng publicly "came out". Since then "Mama Wu" has utilized their popular personal blog to support same-sex marriage, issuing public statements that help attract media attention and further discussion by a number of Chinese bloggers. In 2011, during a push for the legislation of same-sex marriage, Wu argued "If gay and lesbian rights aren't acknowledged by the state and national law, then in fact their human rights cannot be protected and this is unreasonable" (Wu, 2011; Chase, 2012, p. 159).

In Korea, a popular drama promoting tolerance of LGBTQA+ folx called, *Life is Beautiful,* has instigated public reflection on ku'er issues (Chase, p. 164). This type of traditional media depiction has been prevented in China, due to strict content controls of films and television. In order to work around these limitations, social advocates have attempted to reach wider audiences by voluntarily self-censoring content. One example of this is *Queer Comrades* (*tongzhi yi fanren)*, a production group that has created three season of video reports and short films that are frequently "uploaded to popular Chinese video sharing sites such as *56.com*, *6.cn*, *Tudou* and *Sina*" (Chase, p. 165). Considering the sensitive nature of their existence, *Queer Comrades* has had to test the lines of controversy through their self-censorship.

At times, their videos would be blocked from being uploaded, or pulled down for exploring too sensitive of topics. While it is important that their videos can stay on popular Chinese sharing sites even for short periods of time, the success that *Life is Beautiful* cultivated is infinitely more influential. The online debate that sprung from the depictions of openly queer people led one activist to proclaim that the effects of this program were "...greater than almost 20 years of activism by gay rights activists" (Interview with Na Yeong-jeong, Seoul, 19 February

2011; Chase, p.167). Chase argues that it is a necessity for Chinese advocates to obtain

traditional media coverage as it is essential for focusing collective public attention, "simply put,

new media diversifies, while traditional media amplifies" (Jenkins, 2006, p.257; Chase, p.167).

In *Empire of Signs*, Roland Barthes, the notable French philosopher, linguist, and gay

man, discussed the conceptualization of Japan as a metaphor for the ways in which Western

thought is centered around a system of signs (1970, p. 3). While Barthes had visited the actual

physical country of Japan, he instead upon using his position as a "foreigner" in every sense of

the word to dissect the two linguist elements of a "sign", i.e. the "signifier" and the "signified"

(1970, p. 9). In raising this issue of"semiology" or the study of signs, Barthes furthered the ideas

of Ferdinand de Saussure, by extending the search of signs to non linguistic areas.

The beginnings of semiology can be traced back to a piece called *The Essay Concerning

Human Understanding* by John Locke (1690), who anticipated the need for philosophers to

"understand the interconnection between representation and knowledge" (Danesi and Perron,

1999, p. 44-45). However, Locke's prompt of discovering the properties of signs went largely

unnoticed until the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the American philosopher Charles

S. Pierce "took it upon themselves to provide a scientific framework that made it possible to

envision even more than what Locke had hoped for--namely, an autonomous field centered on

the sign" (Danesi and Perron, p. 45). By the late 20th century, semiology had grown in

popularity in part due to *Empire of Signs* and to the publication of the 1984 best selling medieval

detective novel, *The Name of the Rose*, written by Umberto Eco (Danesi and Perron, p. 45).

Eco defined semiotics as "the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie," because if "something cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot be used to tell the truth; in fact, be used to tell at all." This is, despite its apparent facetiousness, a rather useful characterization of semiotics, since it implies we have the capacity to represent the world in any way we desire through signs, even in misleading and deceitful ways (Eco, 1975, p. 7; Danesi and Perron, p. 45).

 A sign, simply put, can be defined as anything, it can be as small as a word, a gesture, etc. I posit that through the process of semiology, the "signs" of *ku'er* and *kua'er* folx act as a "signifier" crafted by the CCP to be seen as detriments to society, thus carrying out the government's wish to create the "signified" reality in which *ku'er* and *kua'er* folx are excluded from societal engagement. To carry out a homosexual lifestyle would be to act as a "bad" citizen (Gao, 2017, p. 1).

As the CCP indicates through their "good citizen guides", censorship, and restrictive monetization, they believe that *ku'er* and *kua'er* people are less desirable as citizens. Instead, I posit the reason for the success currently being achieved by the queer and trans community can be traced to a social change in attitudes and widespread acceptance of said communities.

Recently, there have been landmark victories for the *ku'er* and *kua'er* communities. The most notable being the high profile case of Sina Weibo and their reversal of their "anti gay content ban (Al Jazeera English, 2018). This ban was self-implemented by Sina Weibo, a site that is heralded as the "Chinese twitter", in coordination with a recent call to arms from President Xi JinPing to "purify the internet." President Xi did not out right name gay content as insidious

or impure. However, the popular microblogging site most likely decided to self-censor anything "gay" due to the CCP's 2016 ban of television content that "exaggerates dark sides of society" including any depictions of queer and trans people.

Sina Weibo sought to take down content that depicted queer and trans people, alongside posts promoting violence, porngraphy, and other illegal subjects. However, days after this decision public backlash promoted the site to reverse their ban on publishing homosexual content. Chinese netizens had flocked to the site using hashtags such as, *wo shi gay* (I am gay) and *wo shi illegal* (I am illegal), to protest the social media platform's ban (Chappell, 2018, p.1). Some of the most popular posts came from the advocacy group, Voice of the gays, which had been reposted tens of thousands of times in a few days (Chappell, 2018, p. 1) While Sina Weibo had attempted to follow the lead of the CCP to "symbolically annihilate" depictions of *ku'er* and *kua'er*, their attempt at self censorship was halted by public outcry.

Intersections of Identity - (交叉身份)

The intersections of a person's identity heavily impact the ways in which they are treated, and the pathways that they are afforded. Of course a person's identity is more than just a collection of intersections such as race, nationality, gender, sexuality, or class. However, these lenses allow researchers to frame the narrative of who is considered socially desirable or valued. Furthermore, these intersections denote the privilege that a person wields. My role as a participant-observer in these communities has been directly dependent upon my privilege as a white, able bodied, middle class, educated American. As a foreigner, I was treated different. In this section, I will discuss the ways in which intersections of identity impact visibility, safety, desirability, engagement, and influence.

One issue that is rarely addressed, is the intersection of race and ethnicity. The connotation between color and power is still upheld in *ku'er* and *kua'er* communities. Many *tongzhi* have experienced decades long depictions of gay media exclusively eroticizing Caucasian ideals (Chou, 2000, p. 115). Over saturation of strictly white Western depictions of queer and trans people, without representation for a Chinese narrative, has also aided in the creation of the ideal LGBTQA+ person. This is a form of colonisation that has carried over through Western imperialism and its effects are widespread,

> "Modern colonialism operates as institutionalized hierarchies of specific knowledge and power relations between the colonizers and the colonized through the social construction of desire and subjectivity, which permeates everyday practices" (Chou, 2000, p. 117).

Western media representations of asian males is grossly negligent in carrying a historical narrative of emasculation. This narrative teaches asian people to devalue their own features, leading to a vicious cycle of self-hatred (Chou. 2000, p. 116). The desired queer body is modeled upon the ideal mainstream Western body, and casts aside most other body types. This racial hierarchy is further perpetuated through *suzhi*.[17]

In Shanghai's cosmopolitan and urban life, there are a set of "hierarchies experienced as internal to gay culture" (Bao, 2012, p. 107). For example, the ability to communicate in English, hangout with international friends, and attend regular meetups at bars and restaurants all indicates

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[17] Appendix A, Table 1, row 14.

a type of queer person who is of high economic class and education and therefore high *suzhi*. Bao writes,

> *Suzhi* (素质 quality), is a popular rhetoric in post-Mao China. It effectively distinguishes people by location, class, and education. This is a rhetoric that has been widely and effectively utilised by the Chinese government to legitimise social inequalities and to consolidate its governance. People with high *suzhi* enjoy more rights and privileges than people who have low *suzhi*. This naturalises class and gender differences as wella s an urban/rural divide...the state-initiated discourse of *suzhi*...serves as an effective means to consolidate and reinforce social hierarchies (Donald et al., 2009; Jacobs, 2009; Sigley, 2009; Tomba, 2009; Woronov, 2009; Hongwei Bao, 2012, p. 111).

Someone facing economic barriers is considered to have low *suzhi*, and thus is seen as less worthy of respect within the community. This discourse of *suzhi* was carried over from CCP sponsored campaigns to "improve" citizens *suzhi*, and to craft a more legitimate citizen, thereby facilitating their governance (Bao, 2012, p. 111). This is a prime example of homonormativity working against the the proposed ideals of the LGBTQA+ of inclusion for all.

In an examination of the intersection of gender, Kam found a centralization of male sexuality and a legal invisibility for *tongzhi* communities,

> Legal action against homosexual conduct is always directed to male homosexuals, female homosexuality is rarely talked about in public discussions. This has reinforced the existing

ignorance about female homosexuality in society...it is argued that the decriminalization of

male homosexual conduct actually leads to a legal denial of homosexuality. (Jia, 2005, p.

12; Kam, 2006, p. 50).

Culturally female centered sexuality is viewed as less threatening to public security and social

morality. However, silence and invisibility does not signal tolerance or social acceptance of female

homosexuality. Kam writes, "occasional media reports about female homosexuals usually tell of

murders and suicides" (Kam, 2006, p. 50). Secondly, this legal invisibility, while seemingly better

than the previous ambiguous persecution under "hooliganism", has been interpreted by *tongzhi*

communities as an indication of continued deprivation of legal protection.

While the topic of female homosexuality has gained ground since the early 2000s, *kua'er*

communities face a unique intensive uphill battle for visibility and tolerance. Access to quality

medical care and hormone treatment has been difficult since the CCP's tightening of gender

reassignment surgery regulations in 2009 (Chow, 2017, p. 1). In order for *kua'er* to change their

gender identity on their government issued ID, an individual must endeavor on a long convoluted

legal process that leaves many in a state of limbo (Chow, 2017, p. 1). Those who are successful in

changing their ID face additional obstacles. Education and Employment records show a mismatch

in gender identity, often leading employers to reject job application due to an inability to confirm

past qualification. While there remains a great historical and cultural narrative of the Chinese

kua'er community,

A recent opinion survey revealed that a large portion of the Chinese population do not fully understand transgender issues and harbor negative sentiments. Forty-three percent of those surveyed in China believe that being trans is a form of mental illness, and 42 percent do not support bathroom access (Chow, 2017, p. 1).

Despite institutional discrimination and widespread intolerance, there has been some recent positive movement for the *kua'er* community. In 2017, a day after President Trump tweeted his approval for a ban of transgender military personal, Chinese LGBTAQ+ advocates celebrated the landmark victory of a Chinese court ruling in favor of a trans man in the nation's first trans discrimination lawsuit (Maizland, 2017, p. 1). Discussions on gender identity have grown since this historic victory, allowing for greater visibility of the *kua'er* community.

In this thesis, I sought to explore the growth and expansion of *ku'er* and *kua'er* in Shanghai, China. In our quest to research these dynamic growing sexual and gender minority groups, we as academics and researchers must strive for three things. First, the decentralization of Western narratives and harmful imposition of a linear Western progression for global gay identity groups. Our pathway towards liberation was not successful, the West does not hold the answers towards achieving equalization between the intersection of identity. It is necessary for discourse communities to hold space for the ideas, goals, and challenges faced by local communities. This centralization was noticeable in the discourse I read, and even found in the works I hold in great regard, "while we are indebted to the works of Foucault, Sedgwick, and Halperin, we cannot afford to keep assuming that queerness or homosexuality has a single origin in Greece or France" (Liu, 2015, p. 30).

Second, this Western construction and romanization of ancient Eastern histories only serves to further "other" Eastern narratives. Constructions of false narratives such as these simplify the issues, struggles, and persecution that queer and trans people have faced. Often, their pain and mistreatment are watered down and sweetened, allowing for a more palatable Western construction. Last, these communities are abundant with rich local histories that have impacted the local lexicon, discourse, and ideals far greater than the impressions made through neoliberal globalization. To contextualize the successes in the East as a direct result of Western intervention, only perpetuates a history of Western imperialism and colonialism.

During the last month of my trip in Shanghai, I attended a queer movie night showing of the 2002 film, *Shanghai Panic,* which depicted young *ku'er* and *tongzhi* youths as they attempted to survive in their rapidly "revitalized" surroundings. This film showing provided a chance to hear more from the often underrepresented parts of our community, dealing with the topic of economic barriers, depression, suicidal thoughts, self harm, drug abuse, and the issues surrounding the contraction of AIDs (Cheng, 2002). This film felt intimate and enthralling, it intermixed Mandarin Chinese with the local Shanghainese dialect. The characters were intensely attractive in their normalcy, and sympathetic in their moments of struggle. The scenes of day to day life appeared real. I later learned that one of the main characters, Mian Mian, was the author of the banned book this film was inspired by. When the moderator explained his reasoning for wanting to share this movie he discussed the youths that he interacts with daily as a teacher. He explaining that to first describe Shanghai, they would typically use the same description, "Shanghai is a fast paced city, you have to work hard to get by." *Shanghai Panic* depicted many instances where revitalization

had left behind Chinese queer youths, making it more difficult for them to live. Discussion of this lived reality are rare, and seldom published.

It is necessary for there to be a change in the way that academia and the media depict Chinese *lala*, *tongzhi*, *liuxing, ku'er*, and *kua'er* communities as, "experts come to take on the role of public spokesperson for the silent population of lesbians and gays in China" (Kam, 2006, p. 52). In the creation of false narrative, one that surrounds Western ideals and histories, we only seek to destroy the lives and stories of real queer and trans people.

Appendices

Appendix A

Glossary of terms (*Mandarin Chinese*)

Pinyin	Character	Definition	Double Meaning
Chūqù	出去	To come out	To leave the family in order to gain sexual freedom.
Fēng	封	To block	n/a
Huǒ	火	To set on fire	Describing the rapid spread of information through news reports, comments, photos, or videos that spread through the Internet like wildfire.[18]
Héxiè shèhuì	河蟹社会	River crab Society	Chinese netizens who oppose being "harmonized" or censored.[19]
Héxié	河蟹	Harmonious	To censor, homonym of the word "river crab."
Kāifàng	开放	Opening up	A dual meaning: one positive of opening up, and one negative of modern, westernised, and morally loose.[20]
Kuà'ér	跨儿	A trans or transgender person	A more inclusive, and less clinical way to describe someone who identifies as trans.[21]
Kū'ér	酷儿	Queer	A term coined by advocates, mimicking the sound of "queer" in English.

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[18] See Qiang (2013), especially his section on the "digital resistance" (pp. 52-54).

[19] In folk language, *crab* can additionally be used to describe a bully who uses their power over others through acts of violence. Thus the image of a hairy river crab is utilized by Chinese netizens as a new satirical, politically charged icon for those who are against government censorship. These netizens call themselves the River Crab Society.

[20] See Qiang (2013), "In modern Mandarin Chinese, kaifang has been used to indicate opening up or being open-minded. Currently, kaifang has been used to indicate a sense of being modern, Westernised, and morally loose. It generally refers to a state of openness and acceptance to the outside world; it is as much about the acceptance of an identity as about the acceptance of an ideology."

[21] From Trans Student Educational Resources (2018), "Trans/Transgender are umbrella terms for people whose gender identity differ from the sex they were assigned at birth. The term transgender is not indicative of gender expression, sexual orientation, hormonal makeup, physical anatomy, or how one is perceived in daily life. Note that kua'ergender does not have an "ed" at the end" (p.1).

Liúmángzuì	流氓罪	Hooliganism	A law used to signify
Liúxìng	流性	Flowing sex (gender)	An umbrella term created for and by transgender peoples, describing a fluidity of gender identity.
Lālā	拉拉	Lesbian	Originates from the English word for lesbian.[22]
Pūlù	铺路	To pave (a road)	Describes the "two-set model" pathway to coming out.[23]
Shài	晒	To shine upon (of the sun)	To reveal unspoken information, often about the elite.
Sùzhì	素质	Quality	Used to describe a queer person's economic status as being of dī or gāo (low or high) status.[24]
Tóngzhì	同志	Same will, comrade	A play on the clinical term of homosexuality, tóngxìngliàn (同性恋) and an appropriation by gay activists of the common Communist party greeting of "comrade."[25]
Xian	县	disclosure	To reveal oneself as a gender or sexual minority.
Xiào	孝	Filial piety	A traditional Chinese confucian concept that outlines and moderates interactions between different genders and social hierarchy.
Yin	隐	The state of concealment	Used to describe when others do not the sexual identity of someone.

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[22] See Hung (2011), the term *Lala* (拉拉) first appeared "in Taiwan in 1998 and was subsequently introduced to mainland China through "feminist" and LGBTQ networking. *Lala* is intimately attached to the lesbian community to denote women's same-sex love and collective identification" (p. 374).

[23] See Huang and Brouwer (2018), in their work Huang and Brouwer discuss the issues presented for queer peoples who are attempting to "come out" (p. 100-103).

[24] See Huang and Brouwer (2018), "those who do not or cannot afford to be good consumers are sometimes condemned as lacking "culture" or described as *di suzhi (*low quality), and thus not qualified to be a "good homosexual" (See Rofel, 2007, pp. 103-106)" (p. 102).

[25] See Chou (2005), "A general address term in Communist China, the Chinese word *tongzhi* (同志) was appropriated by gay rights activists in Hong Kong to refer to members of sexual minorities. It has positive connotations of respect, equality, and resistance" (p. 1).

Appendix B

Glossary of terms (*English*)

Terms	Definition
Folx	"Folx," is defined as an umbrella term for people with a non-normative sexual orientation or identity, "x" is used as a gender neutral particle to denote the unknown entity of someone's sexual or gender identity.
Heteronormativity	A belief or assumption that all peoples are heterosexual.[26]
LGBTQA+	The acronym for "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Asexual, & Allies."
Nonbinary	A term used to describe the fluidity of one's gender identity, indicating they are "outside" of the gender binary of female or male.[27]
Pink Economy	A term used to describe the queer and trans communities' acquired purchasing power that has led to the development of a market focused on LGBTQA+ folx.
Queer	"Pertaining to identities, identifications, and actions of individuals that are counter to the norm and what typically may have deemed as acceptable in a given socio-cultural context; this often includes some connections to sex, gender, or sexuality."[28]
Sex	The anatomy of an individual's reproductive system, and secondary sex characteristics that determine what a person is categorized as at birth.
Homonormativity	"A politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the

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[26] See Russo (2014), "The term heteronormativity traces its origins to the early 1990s, when it was popularized by Queer Theory expert Michael Warner in "Fear of a Queer Planet." It is a portmanteau of "hetero-" meaning opposite, as in heterosexual, and "normativity," meaning a system of normative assumptions" (p. 1).

[27] See Russo (2014), "Gender identity is one that does not fall within standard categorizations of male/female or man/woman. A nonbinary person not self-identify as a man or a woman-- or identifies sometimes as a man and sometimes as a woman-- thereby falling completely outside the typical gender binary" (p. 1).

[28] See Paiz, J.M., Comeau, A., Zhu, J., Zhang, J., & Santiano, A. (2018), to actively define what constitutes a queer identity can be somewhat problematic, as this can lead to a reinforcement of hegemonic discourse (p. 150-151). Gruyter writes, "Sedgwick (2008 [1990]) suggested that defining queer based on the object of one's sexual desire is allowing heteronormative world-views to remain dominant as opposed to challenging them in any meaningful and critical way (see also, Motschenbacher & Stegu 2013, Sullivan 2003). This has led some LGBTQ+ studies scholars/queer theorists to argue that we should not define the term queer, as to pin down a meaning would necessarily unqueer it (Jagose 1996, Sullivan 2003)" (p. 151).

	possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption."[29]
Gender	A social construct used to imbed characteristics of women and men, their roles in society, norms, relationships of and between genders. Gender is not binary and doesn't only exist between "men" and "women."

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[29] See Duggan (2013), section entitled "what is homonormativity?", "Homonormativity is not the same as heteronormativity in the sense that it does not assume that every person is gay; rather, it assumes that queer people want to be just like heteronormative people."

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