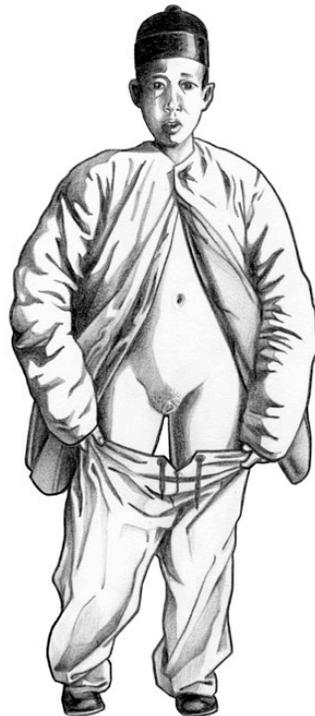


**WE  
WHO  
FEEL  
DIFFERENTLY**  
EPHEMERA

**“We Who Feel Differently”: LGBTQ Identity and Politics in China**

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With its widely-acknowledged origin in the Euro-American West, LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer) identity and politics seem to have gone global. Dennis Altman and other LGBTQ studies scholars and activists have observed the “globalization of sexualities”, that is, in Asia and other parts of the non-Western world, a Western (often read American) type of individualistic and self-knowing LGBTQ identity has emerged in bars, clubs, saunas, and other types of pink venues.<sup>1</sup> Concomitant with this, a Western type of LGBTQ politics, represented by the imperative to “come out” so as to discover an “authentic” self, together with an anti-state, anti-social, anti-establishment, anarchistic and oppositional political stance, has been embraced by an increasing number of LGBTQ individuals and rights groups. As many people have been “liberated” and empowered by such identification and experiences, many more also feel uncom

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Altman, *Global Sex* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Jon Binnie, *The Globalization of Sexuality*. (London: SAGE, 2004); Arnaldo Cruz and Martin F. Manalansan. *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism, Sexual Cultures*. (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

# WE WHO FEEL DIFFERENTLY EPHEMERA

fortable about the hegemonic representation of LGBTQ identity and politics: after all, these modes of identification and strategies of empowerment are historically, socially and culturally specific. They came from a Western context and were shaped by the particular history of social movements in America and Europe since the 1960s, as well as the political philosophy of the public sphere and civil society in opposition to the state, family and other forms of social institutions.<sup>2</sup> When they travel to non-Western countries and regions, they need careful revision and reworking in order to accommodate the specific historical and cultural traditions and the particular social contexts of these countries and regions. Furthermore, we must bear in mind that even the so-called “West” is not such a coherent entity: it is an “imagined community”, and its geographical and cultural heterogeneity cannot be subsumed by a singular type of LGBTQ identity and politics. When LGBTQ activists fight for social recognition and rights to sexual citizenship, and against marginalization and discrimination, they often fail to recognize the internal differences within the category of LGBTQ, as well as the complex articulation of sexuality, gender, class, race and ethnicity. In this sense, LGBTQ identity and politics create both inclusions and exclusions; they offer people opportunities but at the same time also create epistemic violence. In other words, both in and out of the West, there are people who feel differently about the hegemonic LGBTQ identity and politics advocated by transnational LGBTQ scholars and activists. Recognizing the incommensurable differences is central to LGBTQ movement as a transnational, cross-cultural and political project.

“We Who Feel Differently” is a multi-part art project designed by Carlos Motta, a New York-based Colombian artist. It is composed of a series of illustrations, posters, a video installation and an Internet archive. In July, 2010, part of the project travels to China, to the Other Gallery in Shanghai. It features a series of illustrations representing different but often marginalized queer identities and posters that spell a kind of poem about queer rights based on the language of global LGBTQ protests. These works engage with disparate gender and sexual histories and

representations in different parts of the world (Colombia, South Korea, Norway and the U.S). They critically interrogate the dominant representations of the LGBTQ identity and politics in the West by situating gender and sexuality in diverse locations and historical eras. Motta’s work celebrates the poetics of queerness: it takes an anti-normative political stance, yet it also recognizes the multiplicity and contingency of the socially constructed norms, as well as the specific and flexible strategies and tactics of resisting, appropriating and reworking these norms. In other words, it both queers the heterosexual social norms and the LGBTQ identity and politics itself. Through artistic representation of alternative expressions of gender and sexuality, the project opens up alternative imaginaries for multiple and cultural-specific forms of LGBTQ identities and politics.

The title “We Who Feel Differently” raises many interrelated questions when we situate the exhibition in China and in the context of the transnational LGBTQ movement: Who are “we”? How do “we” feel? About what? Who are we comparing with? What do “those people” feel? And why do “we” feel differently from “them”? Why is feeling, often ignored by political theorists, so important to today’s LGBTQ politics? How do we recognize incommensurable cultural differences while at the same time sharing some goals in common (as in the term *tongzhi*, literally “sharing the same goal”)? To untangle all these questions, we would, first of all, need to find out who we

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<sup>2</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992); Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books 2002).

# WE WHO FEEL DIFFERENTLY EPHEMERA

are, that is, what is Chinese LGBTQ identity and politics. I will do so by offering a brief historical account of same-sex desires in China and, in so doing, discuss the relationship between Chinese gay identity and transnational LGBTQ movement. At the end of the article, I shall query whether there is a culturally-specific Chinese gay identity and politics, and how it might problematize the “global queering” argument popularly held by people in both China and the West.

Common understandings with regard to homosexuality in China diverge: while some regard homosexuality as imported from the West, others attribute it to China’s own history and tradition.<sup>3</sup> In this article, through a brief overview of the history of homoeroticism in the People’s Republic of China, I suggest that LGBTQ identities in contemporary China are as much Chinese as they are transnational.<sup>4</sup> In fact, same-sex desire in China has been the result of the interplay of the local, the national, the regional and the global, and is subject to various political, economic and cultural discourses. It is, therefore, hardly possible to pin down whether or not it is “Chinese.” And exactly because of this, the question of whether there is a uniquely “Chinese” LGBTQ politics becomes complicated: contemporary Chinese LGBTQ politics do not follow the Euro-American model because of its cultural embeddedness; this is not to say that it is not influenced by, and therefore a part of, the transnational LGBTQ movement. Perhaps it is more useful to ask: what does homosexuality in China tell us about China’s historical and social change, and about LGBTQ identity and politics in a transnational context?

## The Pre-modern China: “Passions of the Cut Sleeve”

Homoerotic practices in pre-modern China can be traced back to the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.<sup>5</sup> Most of the literary representations featured same-sex intimacies among male elites at the imperial court or in the literati circle. Two characteristics can be summarised from these representations: first, most of these intimacies occurred along the social hierarchies of class, age and social status, such as between rulers and their favourites, between older and younger noblemen, and between theatre patrons and actors. These social hierarchies impacted on sexual hierarchies: the socially superior usually took the active role in sex and the socially inferior usually take the passive role. Their relationships were often characterized by strong emotional bonds and deep attachments that resemble Confucian filial piety.<sup>6</sup> Second, there was not an umbrella term to refer to such practices; instead, people often used literary tropes to refer to such practices: terms such as Longyang, “cut sleeve” (*duanxiu*) and “split peach” (*fentao*) come from his

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<sup>3</sup> Note on transliterations: I use the Hanyu Pinyin system of transliteration for Chinese words, names and phrases, except in cases where a different conventional or preferred spelling or pronunciation exists (e.g. Chou Wah-shan). The ordering of Chinese names follows their conventional forms, that is, surnames first, followed by first names.

<sup>4</sup> In this article, I use homoeroticism, same-sex eroticism, same-sex intimacy, homosexuality, gay, tongzhi, queer, LGBTQ to refer to same-sex desire for different reasons. Generally speaking, I use homoeroticism, same-sex eroticism, same-sex intimacy in pre-modern Chinese context and in a more general sense that does not indicate any fixed modern identity category. I use homosexuality, gay, tongzhi, queer, LGBTQ to refer to same-sex desire in a specific historical and social context, and I will demonstrate the necessity of using these different terms in this article through a historical approach.

<sup>5</sup> Adrian Carton, “Desire and Same-Sex Intimacies in Asia,” in *Gay Life and Culture: a World History*, ed. Robert Aldrich (New York: Universe, 2006), 303.

<sup>6</sup> Egalitarian same-sex intimacy between males was also found in pre-modern China. It mostly occurred in imperial court culture and among elite literati and took the form of male friendship or brotherhood. See Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: the Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 13.

# WE WHO FEEL DIFFERENTLY EPHEMERA

torical anecdotes and they describe not what one *is*, but what one *does* or *enjoys*.<sup>7</sup> In other words, homoerotic practices were not bound up with a person's identity in pre-modern China.<sup>8</sup>

Same-sex eroticism was generally tolerated, although not widely accepted, in pre-modern Chinese society, as long as it neither transgresses social hierarchies nor affects a man's fulfilment of his duty of getting married and carrying on the family lineage.<sup>9</sup> Major religions and beliefs in China, including Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism do not take issue with homoeroticism, both between men and between women.<sup>10</sup> In pre-modern China, people held a different view of gender and sexuality, which prioritised the different roles that people played in a Confucian family and society and which considered the interaction and balance of *yang* (the masculine and active force) and *yin* (the feminine and passive force) the purpose and rationale of all sexual intercourses.<sup>11</sup> Such a conception still impacts on the popular understanding of same-sex intimacy in contemporary China, although the medical, scientific and political types of homosexual and gay identities introduced from the West have taken the centre stage in modern China.<sup>12</sup>

Such a romantic construction of homoeroticism in pre-modern China should be read with some cautions, as this type of historical narrative was a product of the twentieth-century Sinology which tended to cast an orientalized gaze upon a "mystic" China with its distinctive history and tradition.<sup>13</sup> Such a narrative also neglects the facts that the pre-modern Chinese history was not a unitary and coherent narrative, and that there were multiple and sometimes contradictory discourses of sex and sexuality in pre-modern China, and indeed, at different times of the pre-modern Chinese history, and that globalization occurred far earlier in pre-modern China (bearing in mind that the Tang Dynasty Chang'an [today's Xi'an] and the Yuan Dynasty Dadu [today's Beijing] are renowned international metropolises), hence making a "pure" and "authentic" Chinese tradition virtually impossible. Modern Chinese LGBTQ identities may have little to do with

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<sup>7</sup> For an explanation of these historical anecdotes, see Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve*, 20-54; Zhang Zaizhou, *Aimei de licheng: zhongguo gudai tongxinglian shi* [An ambiguous intimacy: history of homoeroticism in pre-modern China] (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 2001), 10-11.

<sup>8</sup> The differentiation between "sexual act" and "sexual identity" in Chinese context was discussed by Song Hwee Lim in his *Celluloid Comrades: Representations of Male Homosexuality in Contemporary Chinese Cinemas* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 7-13. "The distinction between sexual acts and sexual identities is not so much that the former is 'what one does' and the later is 'what one is' (to borrow Hirsch's phrases), rather, the very concepts of act and identity must be seen as the effects of sexual discourses that not only distinguish one from the other, but also, by mobilizing this distinction, impose an arbitrary marker that separates the two concepts as mutually exclusive." (Lim, *Celluloid Comrades*, 9, original emphasis)

<sup>9</sup> For a critique of the tolerance of homoeroticism in pre-modern Chinese Society, see Liu Jen-peng and Ding Naifei, "Reticent Poetics, Queer Politics," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (2005): 30-55; Fran Martin, *Situating Sexualities: Queer Representations in Taiwanese Fiction, Film and Public Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 32-33; 201-203; 233-234; Zhang Zaizhou, *Aimei de licheng*.

<sup>10</sup> Historical records of same-sex eroticism between women were scant. See Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve*, 173-178; Tze-lan D. Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Sex-Sex Desire in Modern China* (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 2003), 37-95.

<sup>11</sup> Carton, "Desire and Same-Sex Intimacies in Asia", 309-311. Also see Charlotte Furth, *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China's Medical History* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1998); Robert Hans van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974).

<sup>12</sup> For the argument of the disruption of Chinese homoerotic traditions by the West, see Xiaomingxiong [Samshasha], *Zhongguo tongxing'ai shilu* [History of Chinese homosexuality] (Hong Kong: Fenhong sanjiao chubanshe, 1984); Chou Wah-shan, *Tongzhi: Politics of Same-Sex Eroticism in Chinese Societies* (New York: the Haworth Press, 2000), 42-55. For a critique of the argument, see Liu Jen-peng and Ding Naifei, "Reticent Poetics, Queer Politics," 30-55; Fran Martin, *Situating Sexualities*.

<sup>13</sup> In mainland China during the post-Mao period, the scholarly reconstruction of pre-modern sex and sexualities as *ars erotica* was closely linked to a rising nationalism and a conscious departure from the Maoist past. See Judith Farquhar, *Appetites: Food and Sex in Post-Socialist China* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2002), 243-284.

# WE WHO FEEL DIFFERENTLY EPHEMERA

the pre-modern forms of eroticism and intimacy, but the strong call to go back to the pre-modern past bespeaks the collective desire within China's LGBTQ community for the legitimation of alternative expressions of genders and sexualities that are not dictated by the influence from the West. Indeed, it must be noted that sexualities and identities are historically and socially constructed. A previous form does not necessarily lead to a later form. The desire to construct a coherent historical narrative for a singular sexuality speaks more about what has not happened in the present than about what has happened the past. A history of same-sex desire in China should, therefore, be read with a critical attitude and with some contemporary concerns.

## The Republican Era (1911-1949): Translating Sexuality

The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century saw China's door being opened to the invading Western colonial powers, the end of the imperial dynastic tradition, and the founding of a new republican state and the building of a modern nation. The historical period also witnessed the introduction of Western scientific sexology and social Darwinism by China's elite intellectuals. In the 1910s and 20s, apart from the introduction of such notions as gender, sex and sexuality, the term *tongxing'ai* (same-sex love; homosexuality) entered the Chinese language from the European sexology (particularly from writings by the German Richard von Krafft-Ebing and the Englishmen Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter), often through Japanese sources (exemplified by the term *doseiai*, meaning "same-sex love". The Chinese character *tongxing'ai* shares the same written form with the Japanese kanji *doseiai*).<sup>14</sup> *Scientia sexualis* took the place of *ars erotica* and began to map sexual desires and identities in Chinese society in new ways.<sup>15</sup>

In translating Western sexology, psychology and psychoanalysis, China's May Fourth intellectuals and translators did not consider homosexuality a biologically-determined identity. *Tongxing ai* (or *tongxinglian*; or *tongxing lian'ai*) was often considered relational and situational, and was often conceived of as a modality of love or an intersubjective rapport rather than as a category of personhood.<sup>16</sup> It was at the same time a type of true love, a temporary aberrance which occurred in particular social contexts and modes of sociality, or a habit that can be acquired under certain circumstances and thus can also be curbed. The *pi* (obsession) considered personal in pre-modern China became a social problem.<sup>17</sup> Bodies began to be linked to implicit claims of psychiatric reasoning and nationalistic significance in the new episteme.<sup>18</sup> Concomitant with the heated public debate on homosexuality in middle-class periodicals, representations of same-sex love, especially short stories and pictures regarding female homoeroticism, abounded in glossy magazines in urban China during the era.

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<sup>14</sup> Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian*, 23.

<sup>15</sup> *Scientia sexualis* (xing kexue) and *ars erotica* (xing yishu) are terms that Michael Foucault uses to designate different ways of understanding sexuality. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1. (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 51-73.

<sup>16</sup> Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian*, 99-126.

<sup>17</sup> Wenqing Kang, *Obsession: Male Same-Sex Relations in China, 1900-1950*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Howard Chiang, "Epistemic modernity and the emergence of homosexuality in China," *Gender and History*, 22, no. 3. (2010).

# WE WHO FEEL DIFFERENTLY EPHEMERA

## The Maoist Era (1949-1979): “Comrade” the Political Subject

Considered as “feudal remnants”, homosexuality, together with other non-marital and non-heteronormative sexual practices such as polygamy and prostitution, was “eradicated” from China’s public discourse in the early 1950s. Records of homosexuality during the Maoist era were scant, fragmentary and contradictory: while some reminisced same-sex intimacy and camaraderie with homoerotic sentiments, others accused the Maoist regime of persecuting people who engaged in same-sex practices on the charge of *jijian* (sodomy) and *liumang* (hooliganism; hoodlum).<sup>19</sup> *Liumang*, literally “the flowing common people”, reveals the tension between the desired stability of the socialist subjectivity from the revolutionary hegemony and the impossibility of such stability.

The Maoist state places high priority on family as a basic social unit and on gender and sexual norms as essential to the formation of the socialist subject. *Tongzhi* (“comrade”) was the legitimate subject in the Maoist era: it was a politicized subject, in that the production of bodies was inextricably related to the nation-state and the revolutionary hegemony. The socialist *tongzhi* should not be seen as asexual or anti-sexual. In fact, even in the most ascetic years during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), there was some freedom among young people to talk about sex and to engage in it.<sup>20</sup> More importantly, the socialist *tongzhi* subject broke away from the “bourgeois” type of individual, hierarchical and consumerism-oriented subjectivity. It experimented on mapping bodies that did not take the individual and its sexuality as its core and imagining a utopia of social egalitarianism. In a way, the socialist *tongzhi* was intrinsically queer.<sup>21</sup>

The Maoist era has long been gone, and many people look back on the bygone era with ambivalent feelings. However, its modes of subject formation, including collectivism, mass mobilization, voluntarism, social activism, camaraderie, association of the individual identity with the state, as well as a longing for social equality and justice still have their legacies felt in LGBTQ identities and politics in China today.

## The Reform Era (1979 to present): “Comrade” the Sexual Subject

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, China began to depart from the Maoist politics of “class struggle” to the emphasis on developmentalism, rationality and pragmatism in the Deng Xiaoping era. The state policy of “reform and open-up” (*gaige kaifang*) opened China to the global economy as well as to liberal and neoliberal discourses. Along with the emergence of the individual subject, discourses on gender and sexuality began to surface in Chinese society in the 1980s. Scienticism, anti-radicalism and the scholastic turn in the 1990s produced increasing scholarship on homosexuality studies, among which were Li Yinhe, Liu Dalin and Pan Suiming’s sociological research, Zhang Beichuan and Lu longguang’s medical research, and Fang Gang’s

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<sup>19</sup> Please note that *jinjian* was a term borrowed from the legal codes in pre-modern China. It did not have a Biblical reference. See Guo Xiaofei, *Zhongguofa shiye xiade tongxinglian* [Homosexuality under the gaze of Chinese law] (Beijing: Zhishi chancuan chubanshe, 2007), 15-20. For a detailed explanation of *liumang*, see Michael Dutton, *Streetlife China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 62-75.

<sup>20</sup> Emily Honig, “Socialist Sex: The Cultural Revolution Revisited,” *Modern China* 29, no. 2 (2003): 143-175.

<sup>21</sup> As Eve Sedgwick argues, queer denotes “the open mess of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excess of meaning [that occur] when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, or anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically.” Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 9.

# WE WHO FEEL DIFFERENTLY EPHEMERA

journalistic writing.<sup>22</sup> The rise of mass media and popular culture, the discovery of HIV/AIDS, the emergence of a middle class, youth culture and urban culture in the 1990s all contribute to the construction of the contemporary LGBTQ identity.<sup>23</sup>

In 1997, *liumangzui* (hooliganism) was deleted from China's Criminal Law; in 2001, *tongxinglian* (homosexuality) was deleted from the third edition of *Chinese Classification of Mental Disorder* (CCMD-3). The two symbolic events were considered decriminalization and depathologization of homosexuality in mainland China.<sup>24</sup> With the slow relaxation of the state control, there have been increasing social movements and identity politics championed by LGBTQ individuals and groups. Some queer public events have been held, including queer film festivals held in Beijing since 2001, queer art exhibition held in Beijing in 2009, and Shanghai pride parades held in Shanghai in 2009. Increasing LGBTQ venues have appeared in Chinese cities, including bars, clubs, saunas, and community centres. Meanwhile, the Internet and other forms of digital technology have provided alternative queer spaces for LGBTQ people to articulate their identities and to build their communities.<sup>25</sup>

With the booming LGBTQ public culture in China today, more and more people have subscribed to the identity category of *tongxinglian* (same-sex love).<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, the term *tongzhi* (comrade) began to gain popularity in mainland China since the late 1990s. Originally a socialist identity category and first appropriated by a Hong Kong queer activist in 1989, *tongzhi* has been one of the most popular terms to refer to LGBTQ people in the Chinese-speaking world.<sup>27</sup> According to Hong Kong queer scholar Chou Wah-shan, *tongzhi* is characterised by *qing* (deep

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<sup>22</sup> Li Yinhe and Wang Xiaobo, *Tamen de shijie: zhongguo nan tongxinglian qunluo toudi* [Their world: a perspective on Chinese gay community] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1992; Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1993); Liu Dalin, *Zhongguo dangdai xingwenhua: zhongguo liangwenli xingwenming diaocha* [Sex culture in China today: report on 20,000 cases of "sexual civilization"] (Shanghai: Sanlian shudian, 1992); Zhang Beichuan, *Tongxing'ai* [Homosexuality] (Ji'nan: Shandong kexue jishu chubanshe, 1994); Fang Gang, *Tongxinglian zai zhongguo* [Homosexuality in China] (Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe, 1995). For information of Pan Suiming's and Lu Longguang's research on homosexuality in the 1980s and 90s, see Liu and Lu, *Zhongguo tongxinglian yanjiu* [Study of homosexuality in China] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui chubanshe, 2006), 38-39.

<sup>23</sup> I have mainly focused on gay male sexual identity in this article. For information about lesbians in the Chinese-speaking world, see Elisabeth Lund Engebretsen, "Lesbian Identity and Community Projects in Beijing: Notes from the Field on Studying and Theorising Same-Sex Cultures in the Age of Globalisation," *Permanent Archive of Sexualities, Genders, and Rights in Asia*: 1st International Conference of Asian Queer Studies (2005), <http://bangkok2005.anu.edu.au/papers/Engbretsen.pdf>. (accessed June 1, 2010); Helen Hok-Sze Leung, *Undercurrents: Queer Culture and Postcolonial Hong Kong* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008); and Fran Martin, *Backward Glances: Contemporary Chinese Cultures and the Female Homoerotic Imaginary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> The 1997 Chinese Criminal Law deleted *liumangzui*, which was considered by the Chinese LGBT community to be the "decriminalization" (*feizuihua*) of homosexuality. Legal studies scholar Guo Xiaofei points out that the so-called "decriminalization" of homosexuality was an unexpected outcome resulted from the deletion of *liumangzui*, although the issue of decriminalizing homosexuality might not have been the intention of the legislators. He further points out that homosexuality had never been criminalized in legal texts in the People's Republic of China, although the law in action might have been different. For more discussions about homosexuality in Chinese law, see Guo Xiaofei, *Zhongguo fa shiye xiade tongxinglian* [Homosexuality in the gaze of Chinese law] (Beijing: zhishi changquan shubanshe, 2007); Zhou Dan, *Aiyue yu guixun: zhongguo xiandaixing zhong tongxing yuwang de falv xiangxiang* [Love and discipline: juridical imaginations of same-sex desires in Chinese modernity] (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2009). Regarding the 'depathologization' of homosexuality, CCMD-3 stipulates that only those who are not 'self-harmonious' (*ziwo hexie*) with their sexual identities need seeking psychological and medical treatment. For an example of medical treatment of homosexuality with aversion therapy, see Liu Dalin and Lu Longguang, *Zhongguo tongxinglian yanjiu* [Studies on Chinese Homosexuality] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui chubanshe, 2005), 231-328.

<sup>25</sup> For more discussions about LGBTQ community issues in contemporary China, see Bao Hongwei, "LGBT Issues in China," in *The Greenwood Encyclopaedia of LGBT Issues Worldwide*, ed. Chuck Steward (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC CLIO, 2010): 355-73.

<sup>26</sup> Apart from gay, *tongxinglian* and *tongzhi*, there are also other types of same-sex subjects in contemporary China. See, for example, Wei Wei's study on *piaopiao*, a type of indigenous same-sex subject in Chengdu in Southwest China. Wei Wei, "'Wandering Men' No Longer Wander Around: The Production and Transformation of Local Homosexual Identities in Contemporary Chengdu, China," in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 8, no. 4 (2007): 572-588.

<sup>27</sup> For the origin of the term *tongzhi* in the LGBTQ context, see Song Hwee Lim, *Celluloid Comrades*, 11-12.

# WE WHO FEEL DIFFERENTLY EPHEMERA

sentiment or passion) instead of *xing* (sex). Instead of “coming out”, *tongzhi* should adopt a “coming home” strategy, that is, to incorporate same-sex relationship in the framework of family and kinship.<sup>28</sup> Gao Yanning points out that *tongzhi*, rather than “gays and lesbians,” are the major same-sex subjects in China, and that *tongzhi* is characterised by ‘getting into heterosexual marriages’ (*chengjia*) and ‘staying closeted’ (*bu chugui*).<sup>29</sup>

While Chou’s theorization of *tongzhi* may sound overly romantic, and Gao’s may sound reductionist, the term *tongzhi* should inspire us to rethink LGBTQ identity and politics that are both influenced by, and at the same time can pose a challenge to, transnational LGBTQ movement and neoliberal mode of subjectivity. For one thing, *tongzhi* the sexual subject is not anti-social. The Western type of identity politics, represented by the imperative to “come out” and the Stonewall type of confrontational politics, may not be reproduced in China as a result of China’s specific social and cultural context.<sup>30</sup> For another, instead of adopting an antagonistic attitude towards family, marriage and kinship, LGBTQ people in China have been inventing multiple and creative forms of family, kinship and intimacy that do not fall into heterosexual norms. Addressing each other in familial terms such as *gege* (older brother), *didi* (younger brother), *jiejie* (older sister) and *meimei* (younger sisters) registers intimate modes of sociality and relationship. Marriages of convenience between gays and lesbians help to redefine heterosexual marriages and families. *Tongzhi* does not designate an “authentic” identity that needs to be discovered and outed; rather, it points to identities and sexualities as performative and situational. *Tongzhi* is not anti-social; instead, it works within the heterosexual institutions of family, marriage and kinship by queering the heterosexual norms.<sup>31</sup>

## “Global Queering”

Dennis Altman observes the dissemination of a Euro-American type of gay identity all around the world. He addresses the globalization of sexual identities and calls for global sexual politics.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, LGBTQ politics has been an important component of international relations and transnational politics, as in the case of the “Gay International.”<sup>33</sup> In today’s China, LGBTQ

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<sup>28</sup> Chou, *Tongzhi*, 1-9.

<sup>29</sup> Gao Yanning, “Zhongguo you gay ma? tongzhi yu gay/ lesbian de kuawenhua bijiao” [Are There Gay People in China? A Cross-cultural Comparison between Tongzhi and Gay/Lesbian], in Conference Proceedings of the National Conference on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Treatment among Men Who Have Sex with Men / the Tenth Anniversary Celebration of Friends Project/ Barry & Martin Prize-Giving Ceremony, ed. Friends Project (Qingdao: Pengyou xiangmuzu, 2009), 197.

<sup>30</sup> For a discussion of the politics of the mask and *xianshen* (to reveal oneself; to come out) in Taiwanese society, see Martin, *Situating Sexualities*, 187-235.

<sup>31</sup> My discussion of the *tongzhi* identity and politics are inspired by two sources of literature: first, writings, mainly on non-Western sexualities, including Chris Berry, “Sexual Disorientations: Homosexual Rights, East Asian Cinemas, and Postmodern Postnationalism,” in *Pursuit of Contemporary East Asian Culture*, ed. Xiaobing Tang and Stephen Snyer (oulder, CL: Westview Press, 1996); 157-82; Chou Wah-shan, *Tongzhi*; Elisabeth Lund Engebretsen, “Queer Ethnography in Theory and Practice: Reflections on Studying Sexual Globalisation and Women’s Queer Activism in Beijing,” *Graduate Journal of Social Science* 5, no. 2 (2008): 88-116; Loretta Wing Wah Ho, *Gay and Lesbian Subculture in Urban China* (London: Routledge, 2010); Travis Kong, *Chinese Male Homosexualities: Memba, Tongzhi, and Golden Boy*. (London: Routledge, 2010); and Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). Second, writings on gender performativity, queer sociality, kinship and intimacy in the field of queer studies, including Lauren Berlant, *Intimacy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Elizabeth Freeman, *The Wedding Complex: Forms of Belonging in Modern American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>32</sup> Dennis Altman, *Global Sex* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 160-190.

# WE WHO FEEL DIFFERENTLY EPHEMERA

identity and politics are subject to various transnational forces, from media to popular culture, from transnational LGBTQ movements to international travels, from global medical governmentality on HIV/AIDS to transnational pink economy. Indeed, same-sex desires in China are global.

But the LGBTQ identity in China is also distinctively Chinese. It has a specific history and is embedded in its particular social and cultural context. The contemporary Chinese LGBTQ identity is influenced by ideologies and practices of sex and sexuality from pre-modern China, the Republican era, the Maoist era and the Reform era. Each historical period has left its imprints on today's LGBTQ identities and desires.

We should caution against the “global queering” thesis and the “Chinese” gay identity thesis. In fact, Chinese gay identity is both global and local, both transnational and national. It is an assemblage of different images and imaginaries from different times and locations, and from different sources, including media, popular culture, human rights discourse, medical discourses, and the state law and regulation.

Suffice it to say here that the same-sex desire is deeply intertwined with Chinese modernity. The emergence of “same-sex love” symbolised the disruption of knowledge and cosmology that had existed in pre-modern China for thousands of years by the modern scientific knowledge introduced from the West via transnational cultural flows in Asia. The May Fourth intellectuals' enthusiasm for translating and discussing homosexuality expressed their imagination of, and desire for, a modern nation. Mao opened up an imaginary of the socialist modernity through revolutionary hegemony. Subject formation in the Maoist era was closely intertwined with a particular construction of gender and sexuality. In the Reform era, the emergence of the LGBTQ identity has become a trope for a more open and liberal China, with its entry into the global economy. In a sense, gay identity in the post-Mao China marks a departure from the Maoist subjectivity that celebrates China's coming to terms with transnational capitalism and neoliberalism.

However, there are serious discontents with this “global gay” identity. The spectres of “cut sleeve”, “same-sex love”, and “comrade” still haunt the seemingly seamless and utopian dream of the “global gay” identity. Today's LGBTQ culture in China is predominantly urban, middle-class and cosmopolitan. It excludes people from the countryside and from undeveloped regions, people who are open in sex and relationship, people with different expressions of gender, and people who engage in commercial sex. The rhetoric of *suzhi* (quality) in LGBTQ community serves state governmentality and reinforces social hierarchy.<sup>34</sup> Chinese gay identity is as exclusive as it is inclusive. It bears witness to a society that is penetrated by global capitalism and that undergoes rapid social changes, and to the volatile bodies, desires and identities that live through China's unfolding history.

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<sup>34</sup> For a discussion of *suzhi* (quality) in Chinese gay community, see Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China*, 85-110; and Loretta Ho, *Gay and Lesbian Subculture in China*, 89-97.