11 Gay and lesbian communities in urban China

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the latest social scientific research on gay and lesbian culture in post-Mao urban China. Within the larger field of queer Asian studies, which is itself a rapidly evolving area of inquiry, the study of gay and lesbian communities in China often overlaps with the study of other gender and sexual minorities (for example, transgender individuals). In the interest of space, however, this chapter is delimited to a focus on the significance of urbanization for the social manifestations of same-sex eroticism that strategically brackets other types of queer experience. This chapter argues that Chinese cities have become an important site of gay and lesbian political mobilization since the late 1970s. My analysis will identify three interrelated types of political mobilization that have been examined in-depth across the literature on queer urban China: (1) the pursuit of civil rights, (2) the claiming of cultural citizenship and (3) the political manoeuvring of social space. The major cities that constitute the focus of my discussion include Beijing, Changsha, Chengdu, Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Shenyang and Taipei. With respect to spatial politics, the chapter also discusses the relationship of urban queerness to alternative social sites beyond the physical boundaries of geographical China, including overseas communities and cyberspace.

An important theoretical debate with which almost all secondary literature on queer Asia engages at length is concerned with the tension between global versus local forces in the uneven formation of modern sexual identities across geographically diffused contexts (see, for example, Chiang and Wong 2016). While earlier work in Chinese studies by Fran Martin (2003), Tze-lan Sang (2003) and Antonia Chao (2000 and 2001) had already provided fascinating ways out of that deadlock from different disciplinary angles, the publication of Lisa Rofel's *Desiring China* (2007) decisively reoriented the field in a new direction with an explicit attack on a model proposed by Dennis Altman (1997) called 'global gays'. In addressing 'the emergence of a western-style politicized homosexuality in Asia', Altman maintains a simple notion of globalization that is equated with the spread of Western models of homosexuality and thereby authenticates an eternal Western origin story (p. 417). The problem with Altman's model is that it continually defers Asian gay individuals to backward tradition (a 'lagging behindness') in a teleology towards the ultimate embrace of a Western-style homosexual identity. This can be seen in his assertion that 'claiming of lesbian/gay identities in Asia or Latin America is as much about being western as about sexuality' (p. 430).

In contrast, based on her fieldwork in Beijing, Rofel (2007) proposes an understanding of Chinese gayness in which 'the local and the global are both acts of positioning' (p. 93). Repudiating the idea that a singular global gay identity emerged in market reform China, Rofel instead views Chinese gay identities as 'a social process of transcultural practices'

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that 'resist interpretation in terms of either global impact or self-explanatory indigenous evolution' (p. 94). Working on different regions of the world, anthropologists such as Martin Manalansan (1995 and 2003) and Ara Wilson (2002 and 2012) have similarly critiqued the 'globalization of the gay movement' (Manalansan 1995, p. 437), while other scholars such as Peter Jackson (2009, p. 357) have added more nuance to the concept of 'global queering' to underscore the role of capitalism in maintaining 'local forms of cultural difference [that] exist alongside queering' (p. 359). As we review the latest research on gay and lesbian communities in urban China in this chapter, keeping this debate between 'global gays' and transcultural queer articulations in mind is useful because it has set the tone and tenor of most research on non-normative genders and sexualities in China. In fact, as we will see by the end of the chapter, many recent studies have begun to put this debate behind and imagine new paradigms of transnationalism that decentre not only the West, but even the concept of China itself.

CIVIL RIGHTS

Civil rights are a class of rights that protect an individual's freedom from infringement by the state and other members of society. In the context of gay and lesbian political struggle, this class of rights is concerned most directly with the elimination of discrimination and repression so that sexual minorities can enjoy the full civil and political participation within the state and society. While feminist and sexual minorities' rights movements have accomplished limited success in East Asia in the last two decades or so, homophobia and heterosexism continue to play a determining role in Chinese gay and lesbian life. This section focuses on two main areas in the pursuit of civil rights by the gay and lesbian population in urban China that have been brought to light by recent empirical literature: the negotiation of familial pressure and grass-roots activism. Although both arenas may not come off as directly aligned with the contours of the current gay rights movement in the West (typically epitomized by the pursuit of the legalization of same-sex marriage), they represent important ways in which gay men and lesbians in China manoeuvre for recognition, visibility and survival in a largely heteronormative society.

Following the lead of Rofel's study, many anthropological studies have diagnosed the pressure to get married and carry on the patrilineal family line as an important source of distress for queer people in China. Based on her participant observation at gay salons in Beijing in the 1990s, Rofel identifies a heated debate among gay men over coming out as a notable indication of the complexity behind the transcultural articulation of Chinese gayness. On the one side of the debate, some gay men vocalized the urgent need to come out to one's family in the interest of civil participation. As a young man bravely stated: 'if Chinese gays were more open with our parents in this way, then things would improve for gay people in China' (Rofel 2007, p. 98). Framed in this way, coming out represents an essential and ethical political strategy that takes sexual minorities one step closer to full civic recognition by the state.

On the other hand, many salon participants pushed back and used an essentialist rhetoric of Chinese culture to critique an untenable Western notion of the closet. For instance, Ah Zhuang, one of the 'elders' in the group, explained:

> My whole family knows I am a *gay*. But we have never discussed it. In my experience, dealing with so many Chinese *gays*, it is wrong to tell your parents. This is not part of Chinese culture. We Chinese must look after our parents and not bring them so much grief. What can be the result of telling your parents? Only grief for them. It is selfish to think only of yourself. Perhaps that kind of thing works elsewhere, but not here in China. (Rofel 2007, p. 98)

Yet there are others like Wan Yanhai who considered this position apolitical and motivated by cultural nationalism, viewing Chinese culture instead as an ideological phenomenon open to interpretation. Evidently, the range of opinions on whether to reveal one's sexual orientation to one's kin reflects the discrepant effects of the Western model of coming out and the intricate pulls of the family and the nation as a source of Chinese cultural belonging. This exemplifies Rofel's argument about a transcultural space in which Chinese gay identities are articulated, undercutting Altman's model of global gayness.

This transcultural articulation of Chinese gayness equally applies to lesbians, who experience no lesser degree of familial pressure than gay men do. Two landmark studies that have explored this theme based on fieldwork with lesbians in Shanghai and Beijing, respectively, are Lucetta Kam's *Shanghai Lalas* (2012) and Elisabeth L. Engebretsen's *Queer Women in Urban China* (2013). Kam and Engebretsen found that lesbian women in China face a common difficulty of adhering to traditional principles of *xiao* ('filiality'), in that they are expected to perform certain 'duties' in order to be regarded as respectable daughters and, more generally, 'decent' gendered adults in Chinese society. The most distinctive – and perhaps most challenging for lesbian women – elements of these duties are heterosexual marriage and childbearing. It is in the context of this clash between the heteronormative conventions of being a reproductive daughter, wife, and mother, on the one hand, and the queer logics of lesbian desire, on the other, that some women decide to enter what are known as 'cooperative marriages' (形式婚姻).

The notion of cooperative marriage refers more generally to a legal form of union between two consenting adults who agree to the relationship for reasons other than the typical motivations behind a 'normal' marriage. In other words, in principle, these kinds of marriage can be practised by people of all kinds of sexual orientation and with all sorts of intentions. In gay and lesbian circles, cooperative marriages typically refer to marriages performed by a lesbian and a gay man, both of whom are fully aware of the ritualized nature of their relationship. At a time when same-sex marriage is not yet legalized in China, the practice of cooperative marriages bears deep implications for the advancement of gay and lesbian political interest. As we will see, the scholarly debate on this subject exemplifies the slipperiness of testing or refuting the 'global gays' model, all the while necessitating a widening of the meaning of queer civil participatory politics. In both of the examples of gay salon debates and cooperative marriages, the context of urban cities is especially important, because it grants gay men and lesbians access to a dense social network of resources to come to terms with their sexuality outside their natal family.

Although the practice of cooperative marriage among queer adults can be found in most major Chinese cities including Beijing and Shanghai, Kam and Engebretsen each arrives at a different set of interpretations concerning the broader significance of how lesbians respond to family and marriage pressures. In Shanghai, cooperative marriage stands as one among the three main strategies that lesbians use to deal with family expectations and the marriage imperative. Whether they ultimately enter a heterosexual marriage or decide to survive the pressure to get married, lesbians cope with these pressures by either

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living a secret dual life (hiding their same-sex extramarital relationship from their husband and natal family) or by making her sexual preference open (initiating open or semi-open negotiation with husbands and family members). Entering a cooperative marriage presents itself as a third option, and, as Kam observes in her study, attitudes toward this form of arrangement vary considerably within the *tongzhi* ('comrades', a Chinese term for gay and lesbian) community. Many of Kam's informants view cooperative marriages in a sceptical light, considering it as 'a compromise rather than a politically sound strategy' (p. 100). Legal complexities – including conjugal financial arrangements, the legal obligation to take care of each other's extended family (as required by the Marriage Law) and spousal rights that prioritize legal marital partners over other forms of kinship in cases of emergency – constitute a central obstacle to the effectiveness of these kinds of arrangement, let alone the fact that all possible complications can never be exhausted before the marriage.

Nonetheless, Kam suggests that the decision among some lesbian women to participate in cooperative marriages can be seen as a kind of silent resistance. Cooperative marriages not only open up a new '*tongzhi* counter-space', in which alternative patterns of kinship unconnected by blood are conceivable, but they also enable a new framework of family and marriage that 'invites new insights into the institution of heterosexual marriage', contesting the assumed naturalized divisions of real and fake, primary and secondary, and significant and insignificant (p. 102). In contrast, Engebretsen maintains a much more critical view of cooperative marriages as practised by queer women in Beijing. Often dubbed as 'fake marriages' (假婚), cooperative marriages, according to Engebretsen, create two major problems for gay men and lesbians over time. First, this form of union tends to render same-sex intimacy and sociality invisible (and even impossible) in the long run, because participants are expected to conform to (and thereby reinforce) dominant norms of gender, marriage, and the family. Such conformity and reinforcement effectively marginalize those alternative kinds of gender and erotic expression for which cooperative marriages were initially intended to make room. Second, the documented examples of cooperative marriage in Beijing have gendered consequences that are particularly devastating for lesbians. Women's status as wives usually curtails their personal independence to a degree that their fake husbands do not experience. Together with the symbolic private same-sex weddings that she discusses in her book, Engebretsen considers cooperative marriages as a source of only 'short-term comfort' for Chinese queers (p. 103). This supports her broader argument that 'a desire for normativity remains a defining and powerful marker of lala [lesbian] selfhood', because it is only through the ways in which normative social status and sense of belong have been made available to lesbians on the register of the mundane can we begin to understand their (partial) aspiration for dominant cultural ideologies associated with socio-familial principles of filiality (p. 12). Here, Engebretsen joins the recent work of scholars such as Yau Ching (2010) to take normativity seriously as an intrinsic vector of queer quotidian politics.

In addition to addressing the challenges of negotiating family pressure, Chinese queers have pursued civil rights aggressively via grass-roots activism. In a different essay, 'Of Pride and Visibility' (2015), Engebretsen examines three episodes of public Pride events organized by queer activists in three different cities: Beijing, Shanghai and Changsha. The first event was a party that took place in June in 1996 to celebrate the anniversary of the Stonewall riot. As a co-organizer of the party, Xiaopei He, later recounted, this landmark event not only involved queer women, but also gave birth to the first gay bar in Beijing:

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> The first time we organized a politically related activity was in a small bar, to commemorate the American Stonewall homosexual movement anniversary. In 1996 in Beijing, there was still no *tongzhi* bar. This time, we learnt from past experience, and I told all the people we knew to go to a very quiet bar in a small lane, to take part in a 'birthday party.' We bought a birthday cake and little presents. Sixty people came, among them eight women. This was the first time this many women took part in a get-together. Wu Chunsheng [another activist] quietly told me that there were plainclothes police in the bar. We thought of a way to get around that.
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> First we sang 'Happy Birthday' and cut the cake. Then I said to everyone, 'Can you guess whose birthday it is today? Come and whisper it in my ear, and if you get it right, you will get a present' (which were condoms and sweets wrapped up). Everyone started to ask each other whose birthday it was. People who knew about Stonewall told those who did not, who then came and whispered to me. Everyone one by one came to me and said 'Today is the American homosexual movement commemoration day.' One body when he heard the story ran over to me and said 'I know! I know! Today is the birthday of all of us!' When I heard his words, I was very moved, and my heart skipped a beat. I whispered what he said . . . to other *tongzhi*. I thought, that's probably what the *tongzhi* movement means. We unite together, we have a common birthday.
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> From that day, this bar became the first homosexual bar in Beijing. This backstreet bar was always empty, so we decided to make it our hangout. The owners were never fully welcoming, but needed the clientele. It became almost 100 per cent *tongzhi* every night. (He 2001, p. 51)

According to Engebretsen, 'the simultaneous presence of international references (Stonewall) and foreign participants, alongside savvy locals who knew how to best manipulate the authorities' in this birthday party in the mid-1990s 'aptly demonstrates a specifically Chinese form of queer activism that cannot meaningfully be understood simply as emulating the West' (2015, p. 97).

Similarly, the public activist events in Shanghai in 2009 and Changsha in 2013 challenge a straightforward 'global queering' analysis. Based on her personal communication with the organizers of the 2009 Shanghai Pride Festival (the first of its kind in mainland China), Engebretsen received the following response from one of the organizers who underscored the definition of the Pride concept:

> [It] should be multi-dimensional, multi-day, it should cut across various spheres: celebration, education, arts/cultural, sports, etc, and most of all, it should be an opportunity for a *collective coming out* for the LGBT community as a whole. This coming out element is a key crucial element: if I and my friends waved rainbow flags in the privacy of our own homes, that would not be pride. If we organized a one-off hush-hush event at some back alley local bar preaching to the converted (as has been done many times before), that would not be pride. If we organized a pride event that is not out in the press, and not known to anyone else in the world but the local gay community, that would not be pride, too. (2015, p. 100)

If the words of this event organizer seem to contradict the debate over coming out that Rofel observed at gay salons and the aims of the Stonewall birthday party in 1990s Beijing, such tensions show the enabling effects of contingency, discrepancy and diversity in Chinese queer grass-roots activism. As Engebretsen observes, 'what we could usefully take away from these interpretive tensions is less the observation that different community groups articulate Pride politics in different ways, than the recognition of an expansive coexistence of diverse forms of queer activism, some of which align more closely with global flows of queer activist ideology and discourse than others' (2015, p. 102). On 17 May 2013, when more than 100 queers and allies gathered in Changsha for a public parade on the scenic riverside streets in Changsha's university area, rather than the public square downtown, this 'Mainland China (Changsha) Anti-Discrimination Summer Event',

again, demonstrates the sensitivity of the organizers to appropriate 'public space' in a way that did not lead to the shutting down of the Parade. Together, these public Pride events in Beijing, Shanghai and Changsha offer some guidance about how to understand queer political manoeuvring in the single-party, authoritarian Chinese state. This is something that tends to be overlooked in much of the global queering literature that often takes for granted the democratic nature of a civil society structure.

To bolster queer visibility and advocate for gay rights, many grass-roots activist organizations work closely with the government and draw on its resources for HIV prevention. The founding of the Chengdu Gay Care Organization (CGCO) is a case in point. As Wei Wei (2015) has observed based on his 2004–2006 fieldwork in Chengdu, homosexual men in Chengdu gradually shifted their identity from *piao piao* ('wandering man'), a euphemism for gay men's image of being 'rootless' and never settled down, to 'comrades' (*tongzhi*), which became a positive indigenous queer identification after its first usage by Hong Kong gay activists in the late 1980s (Chou 2000). Meanwhile, under the influence of China's urban consumer revolution, many gay commercial venues such as bars, bathhouses, massage parlours and gyms started to emerge from the late 1990s. In this context of increasing urbanization, the most popular gay bar in town, Variation, dominated the gay scene in Chengdu for more than a decade. When the Chinese government finally conceded that the country was facing a serious AIDS crisis in August 2001, it began to work with the China–UK HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care Project (funded by the UK Department of International Development). It also approached the owners of Variation, Xiao Zeng and his boyfriend Hong Sheng, to tackle the problem of HIV infection among the urban gay population by founding CGCO.

Since its inception in 2002, the CGCO has repeatedly confronted debates within its community about the constraints that the government has put on the organization in terms of its focus and outreach. Specifically, some members (middle-class and professional gay men in particular) argue that a focus on HIV prevention could lead the organization to ignore the actual needs of the gay community that they were supposed to serve, while external experts, including experts from the China–UK project that provides the organization funding and resources, urge the CGCO to broaden its vision to help all people affected by HIV/AIDS and not limit itself to focusing on the gay population alone (and even less so on gay issues). This also reflects the government's aspiration for the CGCO. Xiao Zeng's response to this conundrum is indicative of the fine line that queer grass-roots activists walk in China today: 'I am aware of disagreements within the organization. [. . .] However, no matter whatever people do and whatever they say, we mustn't challenge the bottom line of the government and compress the current surviving space for CGCO. Strategies are very important if we want to get anything done in China. Otherwise, nothing will be accomplished' (Wei 2015, p. 214)

CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP

Besides the tactical pursuit of civil rights, Chinese queers have turned to cities as an important site for political mobilization by claiming a novel type of cultural citizenship since the onset of economic reform. Rofel (2007) defines the relationship between cultural citizenship and what she calls the 'transcultural nature of gay life in China' in the following way:

> In postsocialist China cultural belonging, as connected to practices of desire, has replaced political struggles over class identity as the site on which citizenship is meaningfully defined, sought, and conferred or denied. [. . .] By cultural citizenship, I mean to highlight how citizenship, or belonging, is not merely a political attribute but also a process in which culture becomes a relevant category of affinity. It is a process of self-making and being made, of active modes of affinity as well as techniques of normalization. Cultural citizenship is a rubric or trope I use to convey novel processes of subjectification and new modes of inclusion and exclusion. Struggles over cultural citizenship are contests over new schemes of hierarchical difference, over who represents the cultural competence to carry China into the future and to create wealth and power for the nation under neoliberal capitalism. (pp. 94–5)

This concomitant desire for strengthening China under neoliberalism and redrawing hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion to normalize self-making situates queer cultural belonging at the liminal juncture of economic liberalization and political authoritarianism.

In the existing literature on urban queer communities in China, perhaps no other subject has epitomized this new sense of queer cultural belonging and garnered as much scholarly attention than the discourse of *suzhi* ('quality') and the cognate phenomenon of money boys. Money boys refer to male prostitutes – gay or straight – who have come to cities to engage in monetary transactions by selling sex to men. Drawing on her fieldwork in Beijing, Rofel observes that 'gay men who have legal residency in Beijing assume that money boys come from the countryside and that they pollute city life with their transgressions of the social divisions between masculine wealth and masculine love, between urban propriety and rural excess, and between proper and improper expressions of gay identity' (2007, p. 104; see also 2010). By denigrating money boys and scaling them down to a lower gradation of *suzhi*, the emergent bourgeois subjectivity among gay men in urban China reinforces the dark politics of cosmopolitanism in cities such as Beijing. Imbricating desires for proper cultural belonging, yearning for class subjectivity, and rejection of the rural, '*suzhi* divides gay men even as it is used to exclude them from proper Chinese cultural citizenship' (p. 104).

Another important study by Loretta Wing Wah Ho, *Gay and Lesbian Subculture in Urban China* (2010), similarly examines the impact of China's socioeconomic globalization on the formation of homoerotic identities and cultures. Based on interviews with five hundred informants about homosexuality in Beijing, Ho's work insists on 'opening up' as the metaphor that dominates the Chinese discourse of globalization and plays a determining role in the production of gay and lesbian cultural citizenship in late reform-era Beijing. Ho argues that 'a host of interlocking factors' helped to shape the articulation of same-sex identity in urban China, including 'local gay activism, an increasingly globalised gay culture, the same-sex movements in the diasporic Chinese communities [or what she also refers to as 'a hybridized transnational/Chinese identity'], and the emergence of a gay space in Chinese cyberspace' (pp. 10, 137). Responding to the global queering debate, Ho considers Chinese gay and lesbian subjects as having situated themselves within spaces of intercultural articulation that defy the mutual exclusiveness of global uniformity and local heterogenization. Ho's study joins the work of Rofel on the discourse of *suzhi* as it relates to the articulation of same-sex subjectivity and brings to light a wide range of conflicting attitudes toward money boys in Beijing. As a manifestation of how sexuality and class intersect, the practice of normalizing a certain notion of gayness based on the degree of *suzhi* exemplifies how nonsexualized social hierarchies are reinforced and reproduced

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through the discursive categorizations of sexuality. In other words, the postsocialist desire for gay or lesbian identity, as it is underpinned by the discourse of *suzhi*, emerges from and adheres to a distinctively urban, middle-class genealogy of cultural participation. Responding to the global-local debate, then, Ho concludes that 'same-sex attracted individuals in urban China selectively (re)appropriate patterns of gayness through a Western model of modernity, while still continuing to defend an 'authentic' Chinese same-sex identity and sense of belonging' (p. 119).

Travis Kong's *Chinese Male Homosexualities* (2011) features a distinct effort to move the money boy debates forward by drawing on his fieldwork in Hong Kong, London, Guangzhou, Beijing and Shanghai between 1997 and 2008. In the context of the PRC, Kong unearths an important archive documenting the layered fracturing of Chinese queer identities and how they changed over time (pp. 12–13). For instance, the emergence of gay identity among men who self-identify as *tongzhi* in reform-era Chinese cities features a complex set of generational differences. Gay men who came of age in the Maoist era tend to be more cautious about disclosure, warier of the regulatory mechanism of the work unit (*danwei*), and more sensitive to the obligation of familial morality, whether in terms of owning up to the filial duties of being a son or saving the family's 'face' (*lian* or *mianzi*). In contrast, the younger generation of gay men, born in the late 1970s and 1980s, feel more empowered by the Internet, the possibility of migration (especially from rural to urban areas), and a growing sense of individuality and sexual subjectivity, which were repressed in the Maoist period.

Adding to the dialogue on queer urban cultural citizenship, Kong shows that many of the themes central to the transnational constructions of Chinese gay male identities converge asymptotically on the figure of the money boy. As gay identity became increasingly associated with consumption and material privileges in the PRC since the 1980s, money boys (again, not all of whom identify as gay) walk a fine line in separating sex from work and from love. Some of them, for example, regard condom usage (or non-usage) as a meaningful act to make that distinction tenable. The emphasis on cultural citizenship therefore channels the self-identification of Hong Kong *memba* (to which we will return shortly) and the self-understanding of mainland money boys through consumer desire. Meanwhile, the money boy in Beijing and Shanghai distinguishes himself from the feminized 'golden boy' in London (which will also be discussed below), because the axis of their psychological and social constitution diverges with respect to their object of negation (the Chinese nonsex worker versus the white Western man). Kong's ethnographic study makes it evident that even the term *tongzhi* operates as a highly uneven (sometimes even unsuccessful) rubric for capturing the lived experiences of sexual minorities across these horizontal sites of 'transnational traffic'. By throwing light on how different modes of capitalism in London, Hong Kong and mainland China construct different routes to, for the lack of a better word, 'global' gayness, Kong shows that the co-constituted aspects of global-gay-capitalism are invariably articulated heterogeneously through and against one another.

In mapping a polyvalent matrix in which transnational flows of capital, bodies, ideas, images, and commodities condition the mutually generative relationship between queer and Chinese identities across the lateral sites of (post-)socialist, postcolonial, and diasporic Chinas, Kong's work advances our understanding of queer cultural citizenship in two distinctive ways. First, Kong's work does not take China for granted as a static theoretical and geographic entity. Rather, Kong is concerned with the inherently

fraught relation between '(male) homosexuality' and 'Chineseness' as reciprocal cultural constructs that can be illumined from the inside out (for example, Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong), outside in (for example, London), and liminal/transient (for example, Hong Kong) angles. This multidirectional approach enables Kong to enter the scholarly dialogues and debates on essentialism versus social constructionism, queer theory versus sociology, and Western-centric gay studies versus postcolonial queer globalization studies, among others. Second, relatedly, Kong's study sheds light on the construction of queer cultural citizenship in Hong Kong, a region that bears a politically contested and historically embedded relationship to the PRC. In Hong Kong, because of the city's colonial history and transformation into a Special Administrative Region of China circa 1997, residents have been deprived of full access to civil, social and political rights. Because the development of Hong Kong citizenship has been circumscribed by economic ideologies, which contributed to Hong Kong's reputation as an 'apolitical' society, Kong argues that in order to understand the development of sexual citizenship in this particular region, 'we have to shift from institutional political spheres to other spheres, such as the market economy, the civil society, the media, popular culture, and the private realm of family and marriage, which are also involved in "politics"' (p. 44).

Henceforth, Kong proposes three prisms through which queer citizenship in Hong Kong can be understood: the *tongzhi* movement, queer consumer culture, and the subversion of heteronormative family biopolitics. Although the decriminalization of homosexuality in Hong Kong took place as early as 1991, the mushrooming of local *tongzhi* groups tended to embrace an assimilationist, non-confrontational, and normalizing strategy throughout the 1990s. It was not until more recently, with the launch of the International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO) in 2005, that a more radical but also more coalitional politics of sexuality has gradually taken shape. However, many Hong Kong gay men claim a considerable lack of interest in institutional politics. In turn, the cultural politics shaping a distinct *memba* identity (*memba* is a local parlance that reflects the way Hong Kong self-identified gay men pronounce the English word 'member' – implying a sense of exclusiveness – with a Cantonese accent) reflect the passion of Hong Kong gay men for economic consumption and cultural representation. As cultural space – for example, media and popular and consumer culture – becomes the major space for the production of texts and practices that disrupt the hegemony of heteronormativity, this new form of queer cultural citizenship subsequently loosened homosexuality from its pathological, deviant, and criminalized social status and brought it closer to a cosmopolitan archetype of cultural respectability and decency. However, the new queer consumer culture galvanized by the neoliberal economy is not without its limitations. As Kong reminds us, precisely because the commercial queer scene in Hong Kong is 'largely male-dominated, highly class-specific, youth-oriented, camp-phobic and fashion conscious, and has always been coloured by a substantial Western input', Hong Kong *memba* 'are caught within the disciplinary hegemonic cult of gay masculinity and the practice of conspicuous pink consumption' (pp. 83, 92). With respect to intimate citizenship, although Hong Kong gay men have not yet fought vociferously for the legalization of same-sex marriage or other kinds of legal recognition, the private lives of *memba* are filled with nuanced and subtle quotidian strategies of negotiation – ranging from coming out to secret closeting, from leaving home to getting married and forming families – that seek to create alternative scripts of kinship and intimacy within the parameters of family biopolitics.

SPATIAL POLITICS

Along with the pursuit of civil rights and the claiming of cultural citizenship, cities give Chinese queers the added opportunity to manoeuvre social spaces carefully for political purposes. In this way, Denise Tang's work on lesbian life in Hong Kong places a distinct emphasis on spatial politics that enriches the kind of cultural citizenship approach underpinning Kong's study of the same region (2011). For queer women, marriage and reproductive pressure is no less ubiquitous in Hong Kong than it is in Beijing or Shanghai (as we have seen earlier in the diverging takes on cooperative marriages by Kam and Engebretsen), but Tang proposes a slightly different theoretical angle for understanding how local lesbian and transgender women grapple with such heteronormative scripts. Building on the insights of Henri Lefebvre (1991), Judith Halberstam (2005), among others, Tang argues that a *conditional* – and not just physical – conceptualization of (queer) space is central for a robust reading of both the limits and possibilities of the materialization of lesbian desires. The family exemplifies a concrete location where physical and social dwellings converge in quotidian terms. As it is well known, dense population and limited living spaces are conspicuous problems in Hong Kong. When living together with the family generates challenges for lesbians attempting to conceal their sexuality, they often turn to coping strategies for cohabiting with family members at home, such as by situating themselves temporarily outside its physical confinement and within urban consumption spaces. From the well-known lesbian bars such as H2O and Red in Tung Lo Wan (Causeway Bay) to other cafes and specialty stores in Mong Kok and Tsim Sha Tsui, lesbian consumption enclaves in Hong Kong resemble sites of everyday resistance in which lesbians negotiate with capitalist ideologies as entrepreneurs or customers.

In regulatory spaces such as religious institutions, schools, and workplaces, queer women experience elaborate forms of discrimination that extend from the normative expectations of the family and the heterosexual marriage imperative. Since the 1990s, the Hong Kong Special Administration Region has been repeatedly criticized for settling on short-term solutions to long-term crises, and these problems have manifested themselves most tellingly in depictions of Hong Kong as a region lacking cultural heritage and a city where the gaps of socioeconomic inequality have widened. Local *tongzhi* activists have seized the opportunities in this highly charged political climate and strategically developed coalition-oriented political spaces in which not only LGBTQ visibility, but also discourses of sexual rights and anti-discrimination, are furthered. Indeed, the queer meaning of *tongzhi*, which has an original, literal meaning of 'comrade' in socialist China, was popularized around this time, drawing on the title of the First Hong Kong *Tongzhi* Film Festival in 1989. This ongoing annual event has in turn served as a cultural space where the politics of consumption and queer cultural representation intersect, with independent media carrying the greatest potential of creativity and representativeness. The queering of the *tongzhi* concept in a place like urban Hong Kong precisely works off against the impossibility of this usage in socialist China (cf. Bao 2011).

Scholars have adopted a similar consideration of space and social sites to examine the history of gay culture in other parts of urban China. An important study comes from Xiaoxing Fu's ethnography that traces the social transformation of gay community practices in Shenyang from 1980 to 2010 (2015). Going back as far as the 1930s, several teahouses, bathhouses, and public toilets in the Mukden No. 1 Flourishing Area, the

North Market (developed by the warlord Zhang Zuolin in 1921), and the junction of the Mukden-Peking Railway and the South Manchuria Railways were well-known places for seeking same-sex companions prior to the 1980s (pp. 221–2). When dance parties and dance halls began to re-emerge in the 1980s as a central component of leisure life, a geographical area known as 'Men's Street' (男人的一條街) constituted the main social site for gay community activities during that decade. One source of information recollects:

> When the Men's Street was in grand occasion, there were several hundred people every night, at Huanlu station across the way, sporting goods store yard in the south of the stadium. Every night there were 300–400 people which affected the whole stadium. In the street, there was a group of people every three to five steps away; people all knew each other; those who were not acquainted would get to know each other in a few days. At that time, music, modelling and dance, four people danced four cygnets, they danced 'The Red Detachment of Women' and the crowd watched. We also rehearsed 'The Top Ten Beauty in Shenyang.' Those who were not chosen got angry and they offered help as assistants. At that time, outlanders came in groups and there was communication between cities. People from Dandong would arrive, and locals welcomed them and provided dining. There were people from Dalian and Fushun, and from other provincial cities such a Xi'an, Hegang and Tangshan. (Fu 2015, pp. 228–9)

Another gay man in his fifties recalls that people began to appear at the Men's Street from eight in the morning and that 'there were people there almost twenty-four hours per day. We all miss that time' (p. 229).

The 1990s catalysed the maturation of socialist market economy and led to the development of a commercialized recreational and entertainment industry (for example, bars and KTVs), in which gay communities carved out an enclave of its own. Fu discovered that after the decline of Men's Street, Shenyang's gay community gradually moved to Zhongshan square (just north of Men's Street) and, in particular, the disco pub China Jump in the 1990s. The gay community normally selected and occupied one corner in an entertainment space. Across the board, gay social sites began to feature a new characteristic that treats consumption as its foundation, departing from the cost-free structures of former sites. The emphasis on consumption expanded into the twenty-first century, during which exclusively gay spaces began to emerge, including bars, bathhouses and home-based brothels. By 2012, there were at least six gay bathhouses and 22 *tongzhi* bars in Shenyang (Fu 2015, p. 236). One important consequence of the consumer revolution is the rise of male-male sex work, where the overlap between queer spatial politics and cultural citizenship cannot be overlooked (as evident in the previously discussed example of money boys). Responding to the global-local debate, Fu concludes that 'from sharing free urban public space, to occupying and charging for the participation in commercial space, then to establishing consumerist exclusive space, the gay community of Shenyang has experienced and imagined a sense of deferred identity endowed to them by broader forces of modernization, while being in the process of persistently constructing their own exclusive space in the city' (p. 243).

Giving space a central theoretical consideration has also led scholars to move beyond the geographical confines of China proper to talk about queer politics. Ho's study (2010), for example, taps into the cultural terrain of gay cyberspace in China. One of Ho's remarkable findings is that the space in which Chinese netizens, Chinese-language websites, Chinese website operators and mainland-based online censors interact is anything but a straightforward open platform of sexual and cultural experimentation. Rather,

Chinese cyberspace is a cultural milieu full of contradictions, one that both represents and misrepresents same-sex identity as much as it is circumscribed by self-censorship and growing commercialization. Ho's attention to how gay and lesbian communities have moved from physical locations to cyberspace is especially insightful, as the period in Chinese history under consideration intersects post-Mao socioeconomic reforms with the amalgamation of socialist and global capitalist political economies. The opportunity that the World Wide Web offers Chinese Internet users to reach beyond the geophysical confinements of the PRC via electronic technology typifies the trend of global integration around the turn of the twenty-first century. As Ho notes, 'Gay netizens in China are constantly borrowing language and images from global flows of information and people, while adapting themselves locally' (p. 108). Of course, it would be a mistake to view this globalizing cultural process merely in terms of homogeneous calibration. The blossoming of the new online literary genre known as *tongzhi wenxue* ('comrade literature') in Chinese cyberspace is an example of centrifugal hybridization, because, as Ho points out, 'Comrade Literature is a local genre that has its antecedents in other forms of Chinese literature' (p. 112). In sum, by allowing Chinese gay netizens to be connected virtually and globally, Chinese cyberspace breaks down the boundaries and transcends the borders that have long played a determinant role in the construction of sexual identities. Meanwhile, the hegemonic ideas about aspects of international gay and lesbian practices and lifestyles circulating in Chinese cyberspace are often fragmentary and sometimes even distorted because of the rapid annexation of online commercialism.

Perhaps one of the most interesting developments in the field of queer Chinese studies has been the investigation of queer Chinese overseas communities (for example, Chiang and Heinrich 2014). Here, it is worth revisiting Kong's study (2011) to unpack such kind of queering of 'space' and 'spatial politics' that defies the confines of the nation-state as the basic unit of analysis. Despite the fact that Hong Kong was a British colony between 1842 and 1997, or precisely because of it (the British government limited the quota of incoming Hong Kong population in response to the political anxiety of the 1997 handover), Chinese migrants to Britain (and Europe in general) are far fewer in number, making up only 0.4 per cent of the total population according to the 2001 census, in comparison with the case in North America and Australia. Based on his fieldwork in London in 2007 and 2008, Kong noticed that the most popular image of Chinese gay men in the UK is the *jintong* ('golden boy'), which, in traditional Chinese literature, denotes a young virgin boy who is innocent, pure, and feminized (even androgynous). Interestingly, the white man – golden boy pairing remains the most generic type of ethnic-crossing gay relationship in cosmopolitan London, reflecting a certain degree of social acceptance (even by Chinese British gay men themselves) of the masculine whiteness and the soft oriental dichotomy that reverberates through the broader cultural imaginary of Asianness in the Western world (Eng 2001). Whether Chinese gay subjects came to the UK as overseas 'brides' of white British gay men (many of whom benefited from the 2004 Civil Partnership Act), with family (usually of middle or upper-middle class), or as independent migrants (mainly through strategies of individual enhancement such as education or training), the image of the golden boy has occupied a central ideological place within the British queer community – from which certain Chinese diasporic gay men radically depart and with which others closely identify. The subversion and hegemony of the golden boy figure therefore presents one powerful example through which it is possible to conceptualize 'Chinese' and

'gay' identities in the perpetual process of mutual denaturalization outside geopolitical China proper or on the margin of Chineseness.

Finally, the burgeoning literature on queer Taiwanese culture has also sought to complicate the reciprocal production of Chineseness and queerness, because, like Hong Kong, Taiwan maintains a politically contested and historically embedded relation to continental China (for example, Chiang and Wang 2017). Yu-Ying Hu's work (2017) provides a major intervention in this regard by showing how the gender positionings of female homoeroticism have been recast around the uneven stumbles of the global and regional currents of transnational sexual identity politics. It revisits a well-known social identitarian grid within the Taiwanese lesbian community – the T/Po dichotomy – and anchors a deep ethnographic analysis on its discrepant transformations within the nascent matrix of cultural 'glocalization' around the turn of the twenty-first century. Building on the work of Antonia Chao (2000 and 2001), Hu notes that the masculine T and feminine Po binary formation of female same-sex gendered eroticism emerged in Taipei's urban bar culture under the safeguard of 'American GI culture' (美軍文化) in the 1960s. However, with the influx of Western lesbian feminist politics in the 1990s, lesbian-identified activists and students began to challenge the perceived primacy of the T/Po conceptual framework on the ground that it replicated (and therefore perpetuated) the problematic heteronormative gender binaries characteristic of the long-standing butch–femme dichotomy. As a result, new gender neutral identity categories such as *bufen* ('undifferentiated'), *lazi* (Chinese transliteration of les) and *nutongzhi* ('female comrade') emerged as fashionable badges carrying progressive and modern connotations, relegating the T–Po gendered eroticism to the background loaded with unambiguously local, backward, and outdated signification. Social geography mattered, too. 'Taipei,' as Jens Damm has observed, 'is the only city – probably not only in Taiwan but the whole of East Asia – where a huge open space, the Red House district, has been successfully developed into an area where gays and lesbians have openly created their own urban infrastructure, with bars, restaurants, shops and information exchange opportunities' (2011, 172).

Despite the growing dominance of Western feminist politics since the 1990s, one of Hu's most surprising findings is that the T–Po sexual dynamic has not disappeared altogether, but retains a lingering appeal in shaping the identitarian framework of lesbian communities in contemporary Taipei. One consequence of this was, quoting Hu,

> a recent transformation of *T–Po* from identity labels that signify a coherently gendered lesbian subjectivity to descriptive languages that expresses contingent gender behaviors, a discursive change possibly influenced by the conceptual mediation between modern feminist politics and the locally developed *T–Po* gendered sociality. (2017, p. 96)

As lesbians came to embrace the complexity and multiplicity of gendered sexual positionings with greater intensity (and thereby becoming more suspicious of the reducibility of female homoeroticism to gender binary), the increasing popular usage of hybridized identity labels such as *bufen pian T* ('undifferentiated, inclined toward T') or *bufen pian Po*:

> points to the ways in which the idea of lesbian genders is reconceptualized from masculine–feminine binary to become a spectrum-like linear formation, in which *bufen* is deployed as a third category to articulate different degrees of deviations from *T* masculinity and *Po* femininity. (p. 98)

In her work, Hu documents ample evidence for the ways in which different women consigned to this transnational cultural politics of lesbian identity formation to varying degrees based on their diverging social backgrounds, cultural immersions and community experiences.

CONCLUSION

From a historical perspective, the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1997 and the depathologization of homosexuality in 2001 constitute two important turning points for the development of Chinese queer communities and cultures (Kang 2012). However, this chapter has highlighted a different index of historical layering beyond the legal and medical paradigms to explain the growing visibility of gay men and lesbians in China: the urbanization of Chinese cities. First, the social density of cities provides sexual minorities an unusual level of resources to offer support, socialize, engage in debates, share information, organize activism, and manoeuvre the pressure of social norms with one another outside their natal family. Although some of these activities do not always align with a conventional understanding of the pursuit of civil rights, they share the political agenda of eliminating discrimination and repression so that sexual minorities can enjoy the full civil and political participation within the state and society. Secondly, the economic logic of market reform that has transformed the tempos and characteristics of Chinese society allow gay men and lesbian to work out a new notion of cultural citizenship governed by the intersections of gender, sexual orientation, class, and the working of state apparatuses in major metropolises. Finally, Chinese cities have become an important – prototypical rather than typical – site of gay and lesbian political mobilization since the late 1970s by redefining their sexual subjectivities and positionalities alongside new metrics of spatial distribution. This last sense of spatial politics also complicates our understanding of the mutually productive relationship between queerness and Chineseness when examples beyond the geographical borders of the Chinese nation-state – for example, in the Chinese diaspora or on the World Wide Web – are brought to the fore.

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