

**“BUY A PC, OTHERWISE GET MARRIED!”: WHAT THE PHENOMENON OF  
LALA TEACHES US?**

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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## Abstract

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by

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Since 1978 when the “open door” policy was announced, China has gone through significant economic restructuring under global capitalism, shifting China to an information economy and to related social and cultural changes. This research explores a theoretically significant but under-explored phenomenon in China’s transition to a global information economy and its impact on society. This research focuses on the phenomenon of *lala*, a Chinese subculture based on same-sex desire, that has constituted itself through the use of Internet use. The phenomenon of *lala*, because of its formation of identity and resistance based on the use of Internet, is a case for the study of civil society under influence of the promotion of the information economy on one hand and mechanism of state control on the other. On the one hand, the Internet, as a new medium, challenges the institutional control traditionally exercised by the state, and at the same time creates a new public sphere in which people can express ideas and reach consensus. On the other hand, the state not only promotes the new information technology to profit from the “information economy,” but at the same time develops new kinds of

surveillance technology and political techniques to ensure that this emerging space of civil society remains under its control in the name of nation-building. While exploring the formation of the *lala* community, we will also explore the complex interrelationships among sexuality, civil society, technology, global capitalism, and nation building.

I want to argue that the same-sex desire of this subculture, because of its constitution through internet use, is distinct from what has been described as “lesbianism” or “gayness” but is closer to “queerness”. Therefore, to understand *lala* requires rethinking bodies, sexuality and technology along the lines of their reconfiguration in what is referred to as a tendency of a shift from discipline society to a control society along with discipline society.

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# **Introduction: the Formation of Lala through the Use of Internet in China**

Since 1978, when the “open door” policy was announced, China has gone through significant economic restructuring under global capitalism, shifting China to an information economy, with related social and cultural changes. My dissertation research explores a theoretically significant but under-explored phenomenon in China’s transition to a global information economy and its impact on society. My research focuses on the phenomenon of *lala*, a Chinese subculture based on female same-sex desire that has constituted itself through internet use. This research draws from my participant observation of websites, e-mailing lists, and among groups engaged in gay and lesbian activities both in China and the U.S.

The phenomenon of *lala*, because of its formation of identity and resistance based on the use of the Internet, is a case for the study of civil society in China under the influence of the promotion of the information economy on one hand and authoritarian state control on the other. On the one hand, the Internet, as a new medium, challenges the institutional control traditionally exercised by the state, and at the same time creates a new public sphere in which people can express ideas and reach consensus. On the other hand, the state not only promotes the new information technology to profit from the “information economy,” but at the same time develops new kinds of surveillance technology and political techniques to ensure that this emerging space of civil society remains under its control in the name of nation-building. While exploring the formation

of the *lala* community, we will also explore the complex interrelationships among sexuality, civil society, technology, the global information economy, nation-building, and state control.

### **Same-sex Desire in Transitional China**

I use the term same-sex desire in relationship to the sexual expression of *lala* against the recent history of the treatment of homosexuality in China. While homosexuality was depathologized in China in 2001, in the Maoist period, homosexuality was targeted as a deviant sex category. People who were labeled as homosexuals, often in the context of political struggles, were sent to re-education camps. After the open door economic reform of 1978, homosexuality became categorized as a mental illness and was treated through psychiatric procedures (Wu, 2000). Persons caught engaging in homosexual behaviors might be detained by the police under the Hooliganism Statute against public disturbance. Such persons were often harassed by the police who demanded payment to prevent public knowledge of their homosexual behaviors. Homosexuality, before it was depathologized, stood somewhere between crime and illness. However, after it was depathologized, homosexuality remained under state discipline and topics about homosexuality are still under state censorship.

Since the Chinese government continues to censor public discussion about homosexuality by, for example, restricting homosexual issues from traditional mass media, the most direct information about homosexuality now comes through internet use. From the first linking of China to the global internet in 1994, people, especially urban youth, have sought information from all over the world that has not been allowed or available in other media. Twenty-four hours a day, especially in the late evening after

work, people connect to Chinese-language sites, chat online, read and reply to articles on the Bulletin Board System, and read news about gay life in other countries. U.S. news reports suggest that there exist around 150 gay websites that have revolutionized gay life by offering an easy and anonymous way to find others of like mind. A nascent gay community is forming in cyberspace.<sup>1</sup>

Since 1998, the term *lala* has emerged from the Internet. It is used by Internet users who describe themselves as women who love women. Originally, *lala* was a term used by internet users in Taiwan. Identifying with female same-sex desire enacted by Taiwanese users, female users on the mainland also have come to link their sexual desires to Internet use, identifying as *lala*. As such, they passionately create their own personal websites in order to find like-minded people and create communities. Along with the strengthened internet infrastructure, and through the increasing number of personal websites, *lala* has become an emergent phenomenon in contemporary Chinese society. People who have access to the internet, especially urban youth, interact with the computer screen and thereby engage in an important socialization process for the forming of identity.

My dissertation research will link the phenomenon of *lala* to questions about information and democracy, surveillance and control. My research will show that the phenomenon of *lala* does not clearly support the proposition, suggested by self-interested technological discourse, that new information and telecommunication technologies are inherently democratic (Jones, 1995). Rather, *Lala* is more easily linked to the expansion of capitalist logic in China, rather than to the extension of democracy or the support of institutions of civil society and human rights. Technology is always produced and used in

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<sup>1</sup> "Out of closet, onto Internet", *Baltimore Sun*, February 27, 2000

a specific historical context. In China, technology is not only developed for economy and market profit but also as a mechanism of control by a one-party state (Walton, 2001).

Because lala's self-identity and community formation is constituted through use of the Internet, the dichotomy between real and virtual space is deconstructed. Many lala treat cyberspace as their spiritual home. Therefore, I would argue that the formation of lala identity, unlike the formation of gay and lesbian identity in Western countries, takes place not so much through interactions with people, but rather with a machine, that is, the computer. Therefore, the formation of lala is closer to "queerness" than to "lesbianism" or "gayness" because of its constitution of identity intimately linked to machine. As Eve Sedgwick reminds us, queer means no essence. Hence, it is the power from a queer critique that creatively transforms existing boundaries such as human, machine, sexuality, identity, etc. The social phenomenon is not only understood by analytical frameworks such as human, technology, race, sexuality, ethnicity, class, gender etc, but also by the reconfiguration of those categories which combine or deconstruct another (Harper, Maclintock, Munoz, and Rosen, 1997). The phenomenon of lala is a queer one because its practice no longer only refers to sexual orientation, to sexuality, to identity, but to a practice done by humans, by desire, and by the non-organic force from machines.

In addition to the formation of lala identity, the phenomenon of lala raises questions about information and democracy, surveillance and control, and nation building projects. The discourse that the development of Internet technology is destined to bring freedom of information exchange also presumes that Internet technology can surpass the states and nations. No matter what political system nation-states have, this discursive framework assumes that the use of Internet technology will naturally lead them to

western style civil society, or to the sometimes too politically loaded and abused phrase, “democratic” society. Hence, this discourse foreshadows the decline of the nation-state. However, statements like that seriously ignore the fact that technology has always been developed in specific historical and political contexts, and that often technology developed as a tool to preserve the power of the nation-state. Especially in non-western countries, science and technology has been used as a means to counter western imperialism and strengthen the local state. Technology, therefore, instead of naturally leading to the declining of nation-state, is used in strengthening the power of the building of nation-state.

For example, there has been a gradual cooperation between China and western technology companies to develop surveillance technology (Walton, 2001). Since 2000 China has been trying to pass an internet law and has started regulating website content. Besides monitoring chat rooms for politically sensitive or sexually explicit language, which also promotes self-censorship among managers of *lala* websites, some websites have been shut down on the grounds that they encourage “unhealthy” behaviors in society. Chinese government surveillances and controls Internet content under the name of “national security” or “social order.” Therefore, the Internet in the context of China is closer to the nationalist modernity project in promoting national wealth and nationalism than to the freedom of information change.

Nonetheless, activism against censorship also has arisen among *lala* participants both in China and the US. Such activism along with internet use partly constitutes the Chinese queer diaspora built on an intimate link between local and global communication

technologies and political strategies. Such activism reconfigures what can be done locally and globally, in virtual spaces and actual places. The bodies of activism, therefore, like lala bodies in internet use, demand rethinking subject identity and political activism in terms of control along with discipline. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri put it, “The society of control might thus be characterized by an intensification and generalization of the normalizing apparatuses of disciplinarity that internally animate our common and daily practices, but in contrast to discipline, this control extends well outside the structured sites of social institutions through flexible and fluctuating networks” (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p.23).

It is in this context of a conceptual shift to a control society that for lala, both in its constitution and activism through the use of the Internet, bodies are inseparable from technology and might best be thought of in terms of "machinic-assemblages" (Deleuze, 1987). The machinic-assemblage body, I would argue, is closer to the concept of “queerness” than what has been described as “lesbianism” or “gayness.” The concept of “lesbianism” or “gayness” is based on identity in the process of subjectivization within which the body is understood as an organismic enclosure where nature and culture are opposed to each other. On the other hand, the subjectivization process of lala is constituted with technology that is not so much about identity but queering. Therefore, to understand lala requires rethinking bodies, sexuality and technology along the lines of their reconfiguration in what is referred to as “globalization” (Aronowitz and Gautney, 2002).

By analyzing the phenomenon of *lala*, we must trace new and important shifts in conceptual frameworks concerning bodies and technologies that point to certain empirical tendencies often referred to as “globalization”: the shift from a discipline society to a control society, from an organism-closed subject to a machinic-assemblage body, from a Keynesian-Fordism economy to an affect economy and from a nation-state centric politics to a politics “beside” nation-state.<sup>2</sup> I will explore these conceptual frameworks in chapter 2. In addition to these conceptual frameworks, I will also explore a new methodology, the transcendental empiricism that Deleuze suggests, paralleling these shifts concerning bodies and technologies in the globalization age. My purpose in using this paradigm shift is not so much to analyze the situation now and predict the future, but to bring into the whole new thoughts. This paradigm shift is intriguing not only in terms of understanding the present but also the past, those countless events in history.

In chapter 1, I will exam two terms, *tongxinglian* and *lala*, in order to explore the configuration and reconfiguration of female same sex desire in modern China. *Tongxinglian*, the Chinese translation of *homosexuality*, emerged first in early twentieth-century China, within the context of “modernization”—a modern nation-state forming in an anti-western imperialist context. *Lala*, a simplified term referring to *lesbian* (formed from the articulation of the *le*), emerges through the use of the Internet in early twenty-first-century China. With this “globalization,” transnational capital and the cultural image circulate around the world. I will trace the history of these two terms, their

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<sup>2</sup> The first three shifts in thought are taken up in Patricia Clough's "Technoscience: Three Shifts in Critical Theory " delivered at the Humanities Center, University of California, Irvine, January 2002. See also *Autoaffection: unconscious thought in the age of teletechnology*, 2000.

translation, temporality, and spatiality, to understand how the subjective formation of desire embedded in the translation process in modern China under globalization.

In Chapter 3, I will explore how the idea that the Internet will bring freedom of information exchange is doomed to fail when faced with the implications raised by the phenomenon of lala. The discourse that the Internet will bring freedom of information exchange also presumes that developing information technology will naturally lead to “democracy.” The phenomenon of lala undermines this discourse and shows that not only is it itself contaminated by global capital but is also a form of neo-imperialism. I will demonstrate that technology in the case of lala phenomenon is instead closer to a nationalist modernity project, a nationalist modernity within which nation wealth, power, and security is needed to develop.

In Chapter 4, I will discuss the event—the Lesbian Cultural Festival—in exploring how a new form of nationalistic state discipline is emerging through the innovation of new technology. I will use the concept of discipline and control societies which I have articulated in Chapter 2 and suggest the shift of theoretical framework in exploring the phenomenon of lala in analyzing this event. Through analyzing the implications from the anonymous surveillance of the Internet and the later crackdown on the Lesbian Cultural Festival by the police, I will further demonstrate how the control society is first experimented with and emerges in the third world rather than in western societies. I will discuss how a control society is emerging in the third world through the nationalist modern subjectivation with a machinic assemblage character and how this nationalist modern subjectivation offers an environment different from western societies and better fertilizes the formation of the control society.

Although the Chinese government represses the development of lala civil society, a civil society with machinic sociality through the use of the Internet, lala activists also use this modern technology to resist state control and discipline. In Chapter 5, I will discuss lala activism against censorship and control which has arisen not only in China but also lala diaspora, especially in the U.S. Constituted by the Internet, such activism is at the same time an intimate network between local and global communication technologies and political strategies. This activism reconfigures what can be done locally and globally, in virtual spaces and actual spaces. Hence, the bodies of lala activism, like lala bodies in the use of the Internet, require us to rethink subject identity and political activism as machinic-assemblages beyond an organism-closed thinking. This machinic-assemblage activism, which has arisen from the intertwining relationship among civil society, technology, state power, and global capitalism, also requires us to use the concept of control society along with discipline society in order to understand the new form of resistance arising in globalization.

### **Methodology:**

The title of this thesis is “Buy a PC otherwise Get Married: What the Phenomenon of Lala Teaches us.” I use the word “buy” to imply the force of capital, “PC” the force of machine, and “married” the force of state and social discipline, and how these three forces combine, conflict, transform, or negotiate with one another in the phenomenon of lala. My methodological approach to the broader cultural, social and political issues raised by the lala phenomenon and its global activism is interdisciplinary. My method is based on participant observation. Observation not only mean observing

empirical data but also has to be accompanied by a shift in theoretical assumptions and logic. For example, the shifts I will be exploring in this dissertation move from discipline society to control society, from an organism closed subject to a machinic-assemblage body, from a Keynesian-Fordism economy to an affect economy and from a nation-state centric politics to a politics of supranational sovereignty. In this way, the observations are not only to describe a phenomenon but are also used to map the potential futures these shifts of thought might make probable and thereby to flush out the details of studies in thought. Situating my participant observation against and in these shifts of thought allows me to show not only what lala now means but what futures it might provoke for China locally and globally. Against and in this theoretical background, I study lala through participant observation, focusing on activist organizing at the local and global scale. I observed websites and participated in local activism, in geographically dispersed cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, New York and Chicago.

In the summer of 1999, I made a field trip to Beijing and Shanghai for preliminary field observations. And in summer of 2000, I made a field trip to Beijing for ethnographic study for one month. During both trips I was a participant observer and joined local activism. Since the fall of 1999, I have joined Lavender Phoenix, a U.S.-China based Chinese lesbian organization, as an organizer. The activism side of this organization is heavily dependent on the tool of the internet, since activists are dispersed in different cities of the U.S. and China. The main websites I have looked at and in which I will continue to participant and observe are Xiao Yu Yang Mei ([www.yifanbbs.com](http://www.yifanbbs.com)), Yu Bi Yuan ([yubi.yeah.net](http://yubi.yeah.net)), and Lala Ju Le Bu ([www.lalacub.net](http://www.lalacub.net)). These represent local and international websites with different politics and dynamics. I also analyzed and was a

participant observer in regards to two mailing lists, Chinatongzhi and Aizhiproject, in order to understand the new forms of resistance that are geographically dispersed and heavily dependent on information technology. The former is based on gay activism and the latter HIV prevention. Members of these two mailing lists are people around the world, selected by Wan Yan Hai, a well know gay and AIDS activist in China.<sup>3</sup>

I also do interviews among local key persons such as managers of websites and activists to explore with them their sense of identity formation, community perception, activist strategies, and formation of resistance. With the suggestions of these persons in mind, I continue to survey archive literatures about internet, its development and economy and the state regulation of it, such as infrastructure control, websites content control, and regulations on economies related to internet use such as the web café.

This research will demonstrate the phenomenon of lala, that is, the formation of queer identity in third world countries and queer activism which implies an understanding of the open system, of matter as dynamic, and of the nonlinear development of subject formation, as well as of political sovereignty, of affect economy, and of world capitalism in the late twentieth to early twenty first centuries. This interdisciplinary project contributes to queer theory, development theory, postcolonial theory, political economy theory, science studies, as well as adds understanding to sociological, anthropological and women studies concerning transformations of capitalism, state power, community organizing, and the study of body.

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<sup>3</sup> Wan Yan Hai was arrested and released by the Chinese government recently in terms of AIDS related issues. Please visit [www.wherewiswan.org](http://www.wherewiswan.org) for further reference and news reports.

## Chapter 1: From *Tongxinglian* to *Lala*: a question of translation across time and languages

*Tongxinglian*, the Chinese translation of *homosexuality* emerged first in early twentieth-century China, within the context of “modernization”—a modern nation-state forming in an anti-western imperialist context. *Lala*, a simplified term referring to *lesbian* (formed from the articulation of the *le*), emerges through the use of the Internet in early twenty-first-century China. With this “globalization,” transnational capital and the cultural image circulate around the world. In this chapter, I will trace the history of these two terms, their translation, temporality, and spatiality. Following Tze-lan D. Sang’s statements, the translation itself is never “just” the translation but embodies its own historicity (Sang, 2003). Terms such as *tongxinglian* and *lala* each have their limits and embody their own historical context. Nevertheless, it is that historical context which allows us to examine the question of time and space. The main task of historicizing lies in elucidating what is embedded in these terms: the different perceptions and cognitions of one’s self, the relational environment of subjectivity, and the actual bodily experience of these terms.

Historicizing *tongxinglian* and *lala* is not only to see the process of transformation of the concept of female same sex love in the transition of society in contemporary China, or to do discourse analysis of the power/knowledge from the state or modern science, or

to understand the material basis, such as the political economy of the market and the Internet in these changes. Historicizing *tonxinglian* and *lala* is also a question of translation across time and languages, of how they circulate and how they are “never fully translatable” in globalization (p. 30). The question of translation is already embedded in the context of globalization within which a term is not only a translation from English to Chinese but a manifestation of embodied experience. The “never fully translatable,” although a negative articulation, does not imply that there is an original text that “lacks” its true meaning in the translation process. Against the mourning of realism where a universal reality is assumed and therefore an essential meaning of origin is contagious in the process of translation, translation should be understood as productive. In this sense, the process of translation is closer to quantum mechanism within which the act of observation, in this case, the act of translation, has its own force to affect the observed. Hence, reality is never static, it can never be “objectively” observed. Reality is a dynamic phenomenon where different forces act or do not act, emerge or disappear, affect or are affected when they interact among each other.

Talking of the translation process as productive implies the limitation of perspective of postcolonialism or other cultural critical theories. On the other hand, seeing translation process as productive does not mean to celebrate the productivity of translation across space and languages in the globalization process without producing negative effects such as power hierarchies among different nation-states. But here I would like to presume that the readers have had enough, sometimes “too much enough,” critical perspective to see the problem of globalization. So, departing from this presumption, I would rather like to discuss the “too much enough” critical perspective

that causes its own limitation. Dichotomies such as first world/third world, postcolonial/post-colonies, hegemonic culture /peripheral culture, transnational/local, although critically aware of the power relationship in globalization, can be reductive and static. Also reductive is an analysis of the world as only divided into two paradigms, with one being stronger than the other.<sup>4</sup> These patterns in postcolonial and critical theories fall into what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in her book *Touching Feeling*, calls the “methodological centrality of suspicion,” that is, the “concept of paranoia” (Sedgwick, 2003).

Paranoia is, as Sedgwick wisely and creatively points out, “anticipatory,” “reflexive and mimetic”; it is “a strong theory,” one “of negative affects.” In addition, paranoia “plac[es] its faith in exposure.” Although Sedgwick uses paranoia practices in critical theories that focus on issue of “sexual difference,” they can be applied to the issue of political economy and culture in the globalization process as well. Paranoia is anticipatory, reflexive and mimetic, like setting up a thief in order to catch a thief. When you set up a person to be the one responsible for the loss of your wallet in your house, the ways that person behaves, the words that person says, the attitudes of that person all become suspicious. It is not surprising that he/she smiles at you purposely, mentions that he/she was out of town these days, and offers you a small gift that he/she bought on the trip in order to show he/she is not guilty.

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<sup>4</sup> A typical but rich transnational and postcolonial critique is Manalansan's "In the Shadows of Stonewall." He examines gay transnational politics and the diasporic dilemma, such as the problem of the notion of globalization of the gay movement, the assumption of universal gayness and homophobia. He also discusses the lack of critical examination of notions such as coming out, visibility, and the closet, as well as the simplistic description of social norms, attitudes, and a modern, Eurocentric and universal subjectivity.

Similarly, in views from postcolonialist, transnationalist or cosmopolitanist critical perspectives, no matter the westernization, oppression or contamination from western medical science, cultural industry, or traveling “gayness,” hierarchical and dual power relationships are more unforgivable for being unanticipated than unmentioned. Using terms such as “third world,” “postcolonialism,” “cosmopolitics,” or “transnational gayness” when looking at the translation of homosexuality or the formation of lesbian identity in non-western places such as China repeats paranoid critical analysis. What I refer to as a paranoid critical analysis is the eye which only sees the western terms such as *homosexuality* and *lesbian* traveling to other non-western places and used by people there as a “transnational” phenomenon within which westernization is implied. Examples of this would be understanding the discrimination against homosexuality in China as starting from the import of western medical science; seeing gay and lesbian identity formation in the 90s in China as a cosmopolitics phenomenon just as cosmopolitanism happened in the west; or viewing the gay and lesbian activism occurring in China recently as a phenomenon of transnational gayness that is injunctured with local context.

Paranoia is also a strong theory. In her reading of Silvan Tomkins, Sedgwick introduces his concept of “strong theory” and “weak theory.” Strong is not better than weak in this case, but each of these theories has its own characteristics, merits and limits. What differentiates between a strong and a weak theory is “the size and topology of the domain that it organizes.” A strong theory is like a formula. A good formula can reach a wide generality but at the same time risks being reductive, or “as little as possible is let to chance.” A weak theory, on the other hand, accounts only for “near phenomena”; it is “little better than a description of the phenomena which it purports to explain.” As

intellectuals, we all tend to wish that our point of view or analysis be a strong theory and that it has explanatory power to “a wide spectrum of phenomena.”

However, when an analysis falls into a paranoid pattern, then it is not only a strong theory but also “a theory of negative affects.” It is like the theory of humiliation, which is strong

“...to the extent to which it enables more and more experiences to be accounted for as instances of humiliating experiences on the one hand, or to the extent to which it enables more and more anticipation of such contingencies before they actually happen...As this account suggests, far from becoming stronger through obviating or alleviating humiliation, a humiliation theory becomes stronger exactly insofar as it fails to do so. “ (p. 134)

Therefore, we can see the terrible disaster of a strong theory when it links to negative affect. On the other hand, a weak theory, although its explanatory power is restricted, it can better protect individuals from falling into the amplification of negative affect because it remains weak.

The common patterns in critical theories, like paranoia, like to practice a form of exposure. Terms such as “reveal,” “unveil,” “denaturalize,” “expose,” “construct,” etc, are commonly used in critical analysis as it is telling “the truth.” As Sedgwick ironically points out:

“...while there is plenty of hidden violence that requires exposure there is also, and increasingly, an ethos where forms of violence that are hypervisible from the start may be offered as an exemplary spectacle rather than remain to be unveiled as a scandalous secret....That is, violence that was *from the beginning* exemplary and spectacular, pointedly addressed, meant to serve as a public

warning or terror to members of a particular community is combated by efforts to *displace and redirect*(as well as simply expand)its aperture of visibility.” (p. 140)

Therefore, it is not only that anticipatory, reflexive and mimetic characteristics amplify the feedback loops between ourselves and the environment but they also risk tautology, as well as practicing a form of exposure in the name of a certain calling, such as anti-essentialism or social constructionism, leading criticism to become paranoid theories and practices. However, a paranoia practice is not simply “bad” or its suspicions simply wrong. The problem is that for critics it becomes the only possible way of seeing things. Paranoia practice is also a good way to search for knowledge and interpret the world, however, the bad thing is that it becomes “the only way” and excludes other possible ways of seeing. Inspired by Sedgwick and also following Sang’s motivation, I will see the process of the translation of *homosexuality* and *lesbian* as a productive one, and the use of terms such as *tongxinglian* and *lala* in a non-Western culture as possibly resignifying and “complicat[ing] the meaning of homosexuality and lesbian in the Euro-American context”(Sang, p.30-31). Postcolonialism, transnational gayness and cosmopolitanism are only *particular* ways of understanding. My motivation to use different perspectives comes in reflecting back to see the importance of historical and geographical specificity in the use of *homosexuality* and *lesbian* in the west. This motivation has also developed from an interest in studying the positive affects, such as pleasure and joy, in the creative *and* productive use of *tongxinglian* and *lala* in a Chinese context.

Drawing from Tomkin's notion of weak theory and strong theory and moving away from paranoid theories and practices, I will discuss same-sex love in relationship to the nation-state building process in contemporary China. I use concepts such as "weak nation-state" and "strong nation-state" in order to describe the nation-state in contemporary Chinese history. The concept of a weak nation-state is not a negative notion but it functions differently than a strong nation-state. Like Tomkins's notion of a weak theory, a theory is a little bit more than a description. Therefore, a weak nation-state theory means a society's behaviors and functions, although they are influenced by the nation-state system, can not be generalized under its format. A strong nation-state, on the other hand, refers to a nation-state established within which economic, cultural and political spheres function according to a systematic and unified governmentality. I use the Republic Period (1912-1948) as a weak nation-state, the Maoist period in the People's Republic of China (1949-1978) as a strong nation-state, within which the Cultural Revolution period (1967-1976) as a weak nation-state, and the Economic Reform period (1979-present) as a strong nation-state to discuss the relationship of nation-state to same-sex love in contemporary China.

### **Translation from Homosexuality to *Tongxinglian***

Same-sex love in China before the formation of the modern subject, due to its entirely different social, political and economic conditions from the institutional form of modern nation-state, is always a space that motivates us to imagine a certain sexuality different from today. When we look back at sexuality in pre-modern patrimonial China, male same-sex love and eroticism is commonly described but female same-sex love is not.

The term “se” (eroticism) or “ai” (love) is used to describe not only male-female attraction, but also male-male and female-female attraction. Homosexuality from European sexology arrived in China in the context of modernizing and strengthening the nation-state, and the formation of nation-state. To see the relationship between *tongxinglian* and homosexuality is to see how the translation was embedded in the transformation from pre-modern society to the modern state in the nation-building process.

Tze-lan Sang’s book *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China* contributes a lot to an analysis of translating homosexuality in Republic China (1912-48). Drawing from rich historical and literary texts, Sang points out that *tonxinglian*, the Chinese translation of homosexuality, first occurred in the Republic period, and was a heterogeneous practice; it was used by intellectuals including medical scientists, sexologists, educated elite, and young students. “Whereas emotional and physical intimacy between women, as well as sex between men, was never the concern of physicians in the late-imperial era in china, in the early twentieth century it suddenly appeared in a variety of medical publications, ranging from sex-education manuals to translations of articles on homosexuality appearing in intellectual journals”(p. 99).

However, the fact that the term homosexuality was becoming highly visible in these intellectual journals does not mean its use was the same as its medicalization and normalization in European sexology and medical science. The heterogeneous practice and interpretation of homosexuality by Chinese intellectuals manifests itself in translation. Homosexuality is mostly translated to two terms, *tongxing lian* and *tongxing ai*. “Tong xing” means “same-sex,” “lian” means “desire,” and “ai” means “love.” Tong and xing

are hardly ever put together in tradition since “xing” mostly refers to “nature”—“the original state, truth, quality, disposition of something.” It also generally refers to both human and non-human attributes and doesn’t primarily relate to sex, gender or sexuality. Jin Wu (1999) contends that even the biological concept of male and female is used by Chinese physicians for indicating a certain fluidity of human behaviors and needs, not of the well-defined gender and social roles that different sexes play. According to Yin-Yang theory, in the context of both philosophical and Chinese medicine, although yin is associated with female and yang is associated with male, a person, like anything else, has both yin and yang within him or her. Tongxing, therefore, was already a term invented at that time. In addition, the term “se” is easily defined as eroticism, however, “lian,” “ai,” or “qing”(affection) more ambivalently describe human relationships such as love, affection, desire in friendship, mentorship, and kinship.

Therefore, not only homosexuality, but also the concept of “romantic love” is something foreign. In the book *Rural China*, written by the Chinese sociology father Fei Xiaotong in the early 40s, the author describes traditional Chinese society as sex-segregated. Women and men were separated not only in the economic division of labor but also in life processes where psychological interaction between men and women seldom took place. They followed the responsibility of paternal propagation and led a segregated economic social life. The principle of the segregation of men and women made the Chinese in traditional society inclined to seek emotional support from groups belonging to their own sex ( Fei, 1991). If “se” is a luxury that is mostly developed and practiced among the rich aristocracy and elite, then “romantic love” is still the affection and sexuality foreign to the kind of affection and desire that develops from socio-

economical conditions in traditional China (Sang, 2003). To intellectuals in the Republic period, distinguishing the boundaries and at the same time producing regimes, of what is friendship and romantic love, or what is the process of becoming friends and lovers, becomes a task of forming the modern subject embedded in the nation-state building process.

However, what is considered the form of modern subjectivity depends on different points of view. Intellectuals who follow European medical science see homosexuality as a psychological and sexually perverse phenomenon. They translate what they learn from western medical science to traditional practices in society, “as if there existed equivalencies instead of sheer incommensurability between the two”(Sang, p. 20). As Fei wrote:

“We are not sure how prevalent the perversity of homosexuality and narcissism were in the traditional Chinese society. However, close ties in those brotherhood or sisterhood fellowship organizations, which emphasize the responsibility of friendship such as ‘we cannot wish that we were born on the same day, but we wish that we can die in the same day’, shows to a certain extent that the phenomenon of the homosexual relationship is pervasive.”(p. 51)

As others shared similar points of view with Fei, intellectuals started to translate what they observed in society to the category of homosexuality. In this process, as Frank Dikotter (1995) states, instead of psychological and physical practice which focused on a particular type of person, phenomena suspected as homosexual or affirmed as heterosexual are condemned or encouraged. In patrimonial traditional China, “se” is itself a form of sexual pleasure not primarily associated with procreation. Acts such as sodomy,

originally a form of sexual pleasure among males, are then portrayed as condemned acts of social transgression. However, although trying to practically interpret the normal and abnormal sexuality informed by European sexology and medical science, the concept of “self” as an individual essence with a healthy or perverted entity still required a lot of reflection/practice for intellectuals at that time, since those sexual acts and affections among same-sex or opposite-sex couples are always understood as intersubjective rather than individual. “Self” as a traditional concept is not an identity but only exists in relationship. Heterosexuals in monomital marriages whose sexual acts were seen as improper were condemned by intellectuals in terms of “bad personal taste” instead of being seen as having deviant personalities. *Tongxinglian* is a “pi” (personal taste) instead of an essence different from heterosexuality. If this “pi” does not cause trouble to the harmony in human relationships and the responsibility toward family and society, it is innocent. If it does, people should be introspective about their “pi” and try to limit and change it.

In the case of female-female affection and eroticism, because the female subject position is comparably invisible in patriarchal, patrimonial Chinese society, people informed by European sexology and medical science then become sensitive to public female-female physical contacts. The gradual sensibility toward female-female affection and physical contact therefore becomes a feminist issue, as Sang argues. Sang states that, in the May Fourth decade (1915-27), a period of vivid and heterogeneous discourse and debate by intellectuals on modern subject building and the future of the nation-state, gender/sexuality politics were forming and being negotiated. Female same-sex love and intimacy also received unprecedented attention and definitions. It is these neologisms

about female same-sex love that “created a hypothetical symmetry between female and male homosexualities and, thus, filled in a gap left open by previous Chinese terms bestowing limited significance on female-female intimate relations...the new taxonomy of female same-sex love supplant existing concepts such as friendship or sisterhood...” and it also served to “enrich and increase the number of systems of meaning available” (p. 17).

The fact that the formation of the modern subject allows the female subject position to become visible is not only due to modern sciences but also socio-economical changes such as industrialization and women becoming free labor. From the late nineteenth century, gradually industrialized China has let women “free” from their traditional patrimonial households to become economically independent laborers. Historical records from the east coast of China where industrialization was first developed describe the customs of unmarried women and the subculture of female same-sex partnership.<sup>5</sup> Sang contends that the sensibility toward female same-sex love comes from “male anxiety over female sexuality, especially over female sexual pleasure dissociated from men and reproduction, in a modernizing society” (p. 108). Different modes of production, in my view, lead to different forms of desire and the expression of passion. Therefore, I do not tend to reemphasize the importance of female subject formation and the way that it implied more independence and agency as Sang argues. In

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<sup>5</sup> The most detailed document about the customs of unmarried and the subculture of female same-sex partnership occurs in “Golden Orchid Associations” (Jinglanhui). These associations were active in the Cantonese counties Shunte, Fanyu, and Sajiao of the Guangzhou area in southern China (Xiaomingxong, 1989). The membership of this association was exclusively female. Some members lived together as couples for their entire lives. Others married but continued their same-sex relationships after marriage, avoiding their husbands’ homes as much as possible. Some were forced to stay with their husbands and ultimately committed suicide. In a marriage ceremony, a female-female couple was designated as husband and wife. They exchanged gifts, and female companions who attended the feast served as witnesses.

my view, however, this anxiety that leads to regulate female sexuality also tries to discipline other sexualities as well, such as male same-sex desire. Male prostitution was banned first and *then* female prostitution. This is because the eroticism of female same-sex desire does not fit into the form of modern subjectivity that dictates eroticism should happen in the family with the only aim being procreation.<sup>6</sup> Hence, I emphasize the formation of modern subjectivity in a poststructuralist perspective rather than a gender perspective. In the formation process of modern subjectivity, the concepts of gender and sexuality are also formed at the same time, within which feminist issues start to be undertaken.

Nevertheless, the voice that does not follow the European medicalization of same-sex desire emerges in the process of translation. Intellectuals see female same-sex love, especially associated with affection and physical intimacy occurring in schools, as common to humanity. They celebrate and articulate same-sex love as a progressive mode of human affection, which moreover does not conflict with marriage.

Another view of intellectuals toward homosexuality issues is linked to the internalized racism of seeing the Chinese race as weak in the context of encroaching western imperialism and the semi-colonized situation in China at that time. As Frank Dikotter contends, after the fall of the Chinese empire in 1911, not only did the political structure change from empire to nation-state, but also the culture was transformed by the elite in the hope of strengthening the nation and achieving modernity. Learning western

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<sup>6</sup> The “way out” for a courtesan in China was usually to become one of her customer’s concubines or become the owner of a brothel. There were hierarchical prostitutes in empire China that represented different social status. The unification of prostitutes in the nation-state building process is another interesting phenomenon. See Gail Hershatter(1997): *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai*.

sciences and technology became the project of enlightenment. The understanding of sex became a path to national wealth and power. “To strengthen the country, one should first strengthen the race; to strengthen the race, one should first improve sex education.”<sup>7</sup> To radically modernize China in order to compete in the world, Chinese elites, from both Marxism and democratic liberalism, came to see same-sex affection and eroticism practiced in traditional society as regressive, backward forces that needed to be banned along with the practice of feet binding and male brothels. Racial anxiety manifests itself in a kind of self-loathing; the hatred of “the Chinese people’s signs of androgyny, gender reversal, sexual incompetence, and homosexuality” (Sang, p. 5). Eliminating same-sex affection and eroticism then becomes a project of modernizing the Chinese race.

In conclusion, we can see the heterogeneity and inventiveness of the translation from homosexuality to *tongxinglian* practiced by Chinese intellectuals in the Republic period *tongxinglian*. In this, we can understand how a fixed normal or abnormal human essence is invented in European medical science and sexology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Not only European encounters of Chinese intellectuals at that time but also Asian encounters of Chinese intellectuals today in relation to the issue of sexuality make us see how practice and meaning are always *becoming* in the feedback loop across time and languages.

### **Mao’s *Tongxinglian*: a wrong class mind**

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<sup>7</sup> Quote from Wang Chengpin, *Qingchun de xingjiaoyu* (Sex education for youth), Shanghai: Xiongdi chubanshe, 1939, p.1. in Dikotter’s book (1995).

The heterogeneous interpretations of European sexology by intellectuals on the issue of sexuality in the Republic period is, in fact, made possible by what I refer to as “weak nation-state.” In the Republic period, the nation was still in the building process, and state institutions were still developing. Even those heterogeneous understandings and practices manifested in translation by intellectuals and elites instantly and widely influenced society as a whole. The process of the formation of modern subjectivity in a weak nation-state theory produces diverse subjectivities instead of universality.

Without established nation-state systems and institutions, more freedom and space is allowed when Chinese society encounters the European concept of the medicalization of homosexuality. However, after the communist revolution in 1949, the People’s Republic of China can be described as having a strong nation-state theory because a nation-state is established within which economic, cultural and political spheres function according to the Chinese Communist Party central government. Publications and journals are no longer heterogeneous as previously but become homogeneous voices or even mouthpieces for central policy. Subjectivity, including sexuality, is unifiedly regularized in the context of a strong nation-state theory. Foucault’s notion of a discipline society can be applied well in this context; that is, subjectivity is produced and formed through different state institutions. The categorization of homosexuality is then homogenously practiced in this socialist discipline society, however in a quite distinct form from a capitalist discipline society; that is, homosexuality is no longer a category of a deviant psychophysical essence that is different from heterosexuality but a deviant class race different from proletarians. To Foucault, the bio-power inscribed in modern racism is exercised through the mechanism of the normalizing state in forms such as capitalism,

Nazism, Fascism, or socialism (Stoler, p. 72). The socialist state racism, different from the capitalist one that dichotomizes the procreative and the non-procreative, assures the hygiene of an ordered society not through western medical science but through class struggle. The abnormal, that is, the sick, the mad, and the deviant, are not punished or fixed through medical science and psychology but through class education and sentencing.

Western sciences, although serving a certain “enlightenment” purpose in order to modernize China in the intellectuals’ minds in the Republic period, becomes the “imperialist sciences” under Mao’s anti-colonial socialist nationalism. During this period, both western capitalist modes of production and cultural infiltration, including the knowledge of science, were considered imperialist and dangerous, and class struggle was reinforced by society. Psychology or psychiatry were under attack as bourgeois disciplines and were accused of being pseudo-sciences, of biologicalizing, abstracting, and “denying the class nature of the human being” (Wu, 1998, p. 16). By another form of scientific biologicalizing, human nature is understood by class characteristics; that is, people from different social classes have different laws for their mental activities, and there are no common psychological laws of the whole human race. Psychic problems are approached exclusively by the method of social class analysis.

Jin Wu’s research *Mental Health Care in Mainland China* (1998) states that psychology or psychiatry, the “scientific” knowledge about human mentality, became a measure for class essence that implied political antagonism in the socialist regime. For instance, the former Soviet Union used mental hospitalization to discredit political dissidents. In Mao’s period, on the other hand, what happened was that people who had serious psychic disorders were marked as “counter-revolutionary,” and because of their

lack of control over their behavior, they were often sentenced to imprisonment as regular political offenders. There were also people, the “real” counter-revolutionaries, who became mentally disturbed after having been violently criticized and denounced in public meetings and who were repeatedly imprisoned without any treatment. The convergence of political discontent and psychic disorder, or the prisons and mental hospitals, shows that in the method of class theory, they are not different things.

Mental hospitals, under the convergence of political and psychical spheres in the method of class analysis, became a space for containing people who might cause trouble to the socialist government. Under the public health policy of the People’s Republic of China, although experiencing a serious shortage of professional staff and technical facilities, these hospitals were meant for the homeless or other political/mental dissidents who might cause trouble to the community. These institutions were ruled and organized by the Ministries of Civil Administration, Public Security and Public Health. The cooperation among these three governmental departments indicates that mental illness was a disease that belonged to people who might disturb the government mentally and physically, in a social and political way.

Homosexuality, as well as heterosexual romantic love, under this methodology of class analysis, are characterized as “deviant” sexual behaviors and considered as capitalist or feudalism corruption in state propaganda. People caught in sexual encounters outside heterosexual marriage, which often happened in the context of the political movements from the early 50s to the middle 70s when class struggle was emphasized, were labeled and subject to prosecution, or labor reeducation camp in order to correct their false-consciousness and false-behavior.

As a strong nation-state theory of the People's Republic of China, the institutionalization of discourse on sex allows it to reach out to ordinary people, in contrast to the Republic period where controversial sexual discourses were only limited to urban or intellectual circles. Evans (1997) contends that, in the 1950s and 60s, following the dominant sexual discourses in the Republic period, the CCP embodied these discourses in didactic policies by highly selecting right and wrong behaviors. These policies aimed to regulate sexual practice in support of the project of social control and economic development. Under the project of national reconstruction, individual energies were to be channeled into working for the collective benefit. Expressions of individualistic interest in appearance or romance were blamed as bourgeois behavior (p. 212).

The convergence of political and psychical spheres, that is, political discontent and psychic disorder, or the prisons and mental hospitals, in the methodology of class analysis under Mao is just a different form of a Foucaultian notion of discipline society. In capitalist discipline society, science such as psychology and medical science is for producing good labor, a good customer, and a good reproducer in order to work in a capitalist nation-state as a "free" laborer, a buyer with "free choice," and a citizen who "represents" his/her interest. In socialist discipline society, the class theories of human nature, on the other hand, are for producing a disciplined citizen as part of collectivity in order to work in a collaboration system (hezuo she), labor in a plane economy, and be a part of class categories and a hierarchy (black and red five categories).

On the other hand, during the Cultural Revolution (1967-1976), the strong nation-state theory of the People's Republic of China is no longer strong since state institutions

such as schools, factories, print industries, party units etc. are destabilized in terms of reintroducing Mao's class struggle, within which cultural, economical, and political spheres are in turmoil. There are no efficient institutions reinforcing the didactic policy of the public discourses of sexuality. Hence, the issue of homosexuality falls into silence.

As a weak nation-state theory, the Cultural Revolution period makes contradictory and complex sexual practices happen. It is in this period that a large-scale migration of young people within the country first happens. This large-scale migration gave young people freedom from parental supervision and enabled them to explore sexual experiences, both same-sex and opposite sex, that ridiculed the moral and ideological values of the time. Vital sexual energies and shy affection in both homosexual and heterosexual love are described in contemporary novels that reflect sexual attitudes and practices at that time. Such ideas also come out in contemporary conversations with that generation (40-50 year olds).<sup>8</sup>

Limited research has been done on the Cultural Revolution period in general due to the Chinese government still censoring this topic, so it is hard to have a general picture of how ordinary people's everyday life looked like. We can only grasp some sense from reading films or novels about that time or talking to people who experienced that period. Sang contends that through reading the novel and film texts from that period, there is "a strong contrast between the possibilities of same-sex intimacy and a stringent taboo on premarital male-female contact (p. 165). The traditional sex-segregated phenomenon, therefore, is still common even in Mao's whole period and not limited only to the Cultural Revolution period.

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<sup>8</sup> From a discussion with Wan Yan Hai in December 2000, an AIDS and gay right activist in China.

The traditional value of female-female eroticism as not a subject position and less visible than male-male eroticism is still common in the method of class analysis. Male-male sex acts if discovered were punished by party-mobilized campaigns and given the label of *hui fenzi* (bad element) due to their “bad behavior” in the concept of gender transgression. Sodomy is understood in patriarchal traditional society as a situation where the one being penetrated is in the feminine role.<sup>9</sup> However, female to female eroticism is rarely recognized in general people’s understanding.<sup>10</sup>

Homosexuality, therefore, in Mao’s period, is understood as false class consciousness, and female-female eroticism again, under strong and weak nation-state institutions before and during the Cultural Revolution, is still less visible in this socialist discipline society. In post-Mao China, the open door policy announced in 1979 created the contestation of different discourses on homosexuality again. This contestation came in a more immanent form than in the Republic period due to strong nation-state institutions, stemming from psychiatrists, journalists, lawyers, sexologists and other

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<sup>9</sup> If homosexual acts are revealed, punishment ranges from receiving critics’ diatribes from the party and public to being abused to death. One extreme case happened in the Cultural Revolution, in one Beijing high school, after the homosexual relationship between a male teacher and a male student was disclosed, the teacher was sentenced to the death penalty (Li, p. 381). This extreme case should be understood in a radical/ridicule reinforcement class struggle context introduced by Mao during the Cultural Revolution period. Much of the punishing violence happened not because of how serious people’s mistakes were but for the sake of antagonism and therefore the variety of punishing acts depended on different locations.

<sup>10</sup> My Chinese lesbian friend’s mother has told her a story she saw in the period of the Cultural Revolution in order to warn against her daughter’s “bad behavior” such as claiming to be a homosexual. Her mother said that there was a female-female couple in her factory and people knew their intimate relationship but were not bothered. One day another antagonist group from their factory group tried to struggle with the latter, and they then went to catch the couple when they slept together. They then tried to organize a campaign to punish them. However, either “anti-revolutionary” or “bourgeois behavior” seemed weird to describe their relationship since it is difficult to recognize female-female eroticism in society. Therefore, the campaign failed.

intellectuals, in the print and electronic media of state or private enterprises in the context of capitalist globalization.

## **Homosexuality in the Economic Reform Period**

The economic reform after the open door policy changed society from the previous anti-imperialist sentiment to seeing the west as a modernized society from which Chinese elites were eager to learn in order to strengthen their nation. Similar to the Republic period in terms of influence by western medical sciences, however, China after the reform was quite different from the early twentieth century in several ways. First, the political system counts as a strong nation-state theory distinguished from a weak one when the nation-state was in a building process. Society under this reencounter of western medical sciences no longer has large spaces to imagine and invent meaning by different people, but more unifiedly interpreted through efficient collaboration by different state institutions. Sexual differences, the essentialization of the self, the medicalization of sexuality etc. become more embedded as practices in society.<sup>11</sup>

Homosexuality in the reintroducing of western medial science, although an updated concept, is only de-criminalized as false-consciousness and bad behavior in the method of class analysis under Mao to then become medicalized. The Chinese

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<sup>11</sup> I met a thirty-three year old woman who was forced to take medicine to “change” her sexuality when I participated in an observation in Beijing, 2000. Mrs. A is thirty three. She divorced her husband two years ago when she realized that she had fallen in love with another woman. She told her parents and was forced into a mental hospital to receive therapy for fourth months. After therapy, she became a different person. She cannot think and respond as quickly as before, and she is much less energetic due to depression. She is still living with her parents, and her personal mail and diary are monitored by them. She said that she hoped to save enough money to move out.

government revoked the negative labels of the previous class antagonism, and in the reform period those who had been persecuted due to their homosexual behavior tried to get rehabilitation because homosexuality was viewed as an “illness” instead of a crime.<sup>12</sup> However, people who participate in homosexual behavior are still often arrested for “hooliganism.”<sup>13</sup> Through the gradual development of male homosexual gathering places in public spaces such as parks, saunas, public toilets, and bars, etc., the police sometimes arrest people in those spaces in the name of enforcing public security. Punishment ranges from nothing to fifteen days in prison. Female homosexual behavior is also often seen as something between criminal and sick. In 1985, Ruan (1991) interviewed some young women incarcerated in the Shanghai Women Delinquents Correction Institution due to their homosexual behavior or who were sentenced for homosexual “sex crimes,” along with those accused of heterosexual promiscuity.

Police harassment is humiliating but less threatening than the disclosure of a person’s homosexuality. In China, the disclosure of homosexuality may result in punishment from a socialist state mechanism where promotion in the party, military, and work unit, as well as housing distribution are all in one system. The complex system of work units (Danwei), the party, and the socialist economic system in this gigantic state mechanism oppresses homosexuals in China not only psychologically but also economically and politically on a daily basis. Since no law or principle can be followed, administrative punishment for homosexuality may vary dramatically depending on the

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<sup>12</sup> A case shows the changing phenomenon of homosexuality being regarded as a crime during the Cultural Revolution period to being categorized as a mental disorder after 1980. Mr. X slept with men in the military before 1978 and was sentenced for sodomy. Afterward, he was punished by the administration (discounted salary) and party. He went to see a doctor and was examined as a homosexual. Then he appealed in 1980, and was pronounced not guilty and the prior sentence was reversed. Therefore he got back his salary and the loss because of the false sentence (Li 1998, p382).

<sup>13</sup> Article 106 states, “All hooliganism should be subjected to arrest and sentence.” (Ruan, 1991; Li, 1998)

work units. Some units give no response. Some units deduct the employee's salary, stop paying for several months, record a demerit, change departments, or even fire the employee. Other units dismiss the employee's qualification for the party or military and government services. Housing distribution also creates another form of economic oppression. In China, most houses are owned by the state and distributed to people according to their work unit. One of the principles of priority in housing distribution is based on family. In this context, homosexuals are considered as having single status and have much less of a chance than married people to receive a house. Indeed the danwei system is decreasing through rapid capitalization and privatization, but there is still a significant population who works in the official system and the state enterprise. Disclosure, therefore, may risk one's career and future, and also lead family members to suffer homophobia and discrimination from outside.<sup>14</sup> Policemen, or other people who know this secret can utilize homosexuals' fear of disclosure to abuse, extort, and harass them.

Li Yinhe, the pioneer gay and lesbian studies scholar and activist in China, criticizes the ambiguity of the law which causes uncertainty in the result and punishment of homosexual behavior. She also criticizes the passive attitude that homosexuals take when facing police brutality and other oppression (Li, 1998). The ambiguity of the law results in the state official's arbitrary execution of his/her power over homosexuals and other people exploiting homosexuals by taking advantage of the homosexuals' fear of

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<sup>14</sup> In a recent case of police harassment and brutality toward gay men, during the July 28<sup>th</sup> Event, the men begged their homosexuality would not be disclosed to their families and work units. On the night of July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2003, police harassed and intervened at a gay bar in Dalian, slamming, yelling, humiliating, and arresting people. From Chinatongzhi emailing list, May 2th, 2003. Also see Dalian Tongzhi Website <http://www.dltz.org/bar.htm>.

disclosure.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, I have encountered many gays and lesbians in China who oppose using means to challenge and criticize the government. Under the governance of the Chinese Communist Party, advocates that explicitly express challenge and criticism of existing party's control are considered risky. Therefore, those people choose to use other means such as commercial and educational forces to change social attitudes toward homosexuality. In chapter four, I will use the Lesbian Cultural Event as a case analysis to explore different views toward the gay rights movement in China.

Moreover, in society the consensus of marriage causes even deeper problems in Chinese gays' and lesbians' everyday life. In society, most children move out from the family only after they get married. When children are around marrying age, parents push their children to marry. If their children don't have proper girlfriends or boyfriends at that time, parents will set up dates and push very hard. Most people above thirty are married. Research shows that only 3% of the population above the age of thirty are single. ( Li, 1998)

Because of the emphasis on family values in Chinese culture, marriage becomes the primary source of pressure for Chinese gays and lesbians. Parents consider it their responsibility to choose a good partner for children, and children consider it their responsibility to get married.<sup>16</sup> Gay men, especially, feel pressured because of the internalized responsibility for propagation in Chinese patrimonial society. In China, many

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<sup>15</sup> However, the ambiguity of the law in the same-sex love issue also leads to other spectacular events. In 1990, one gay couple in the Fujian province applied for a marriage license and was granted one by the local court after reporting to the federal court of the Fujian province. In 1991, a lesbian couple in the Guanxi province applied for a marriage license and it was also granted to them by the same legal process. (Li, p. 378)

<sup>16</sup> Parents utilize a variety of ways to persuade their children into marriage. In one case where the gay son refused to marry, his mother said "if you do not marry, I will not die peacefully." (Li, p. 225)

gays and lesbians still choose marriage as a responsibility to family.<sup>17</sup> Li Yinhe (1998) also suggests that the emphasis on marriage and family values is stronger than Western society, since marriage and family is used by Chinese society as a index of the success of one's personal life. Marriage responsibility in China also leads people from the west to mistake most homosexual behavior for bisexual behavior.

### **Translating Lesbian to *Lala***

Since the economic reform, China has gone through significant economic restructuring under global capitalism, shifting China to a capitalized economy and to related social and cultural changes. Western sexual identity politics, parallel with the western encounter of medical science and sexology in the Republic period by intellectuals, is “translated” by lesbians and gays in China in this reopening to a global economy and culture after Mao. From a transnational critical perspective, Lisa Rofel (1999) contends that gay identity formation in the economic reform in big cities is a transnational gay identity which was initiated in the late 80s by resident foreign gays and lesbians in Beijing. In her transnational critical point of view, as well as many others, she sees that the formation of gay identity in non-western countries such as China is itself a seeking of cultural belonging, that is, a belonging of a modern/western/developed subjectivity. However, I would like to use the “translation” process to understand the formation of gay identity in China, which is distinguished from transnational criticism since its paranoid reading easily traps itself in the modern/backward, first world/third

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<sup>17</sup> However, if people get married and then get divorced, society will not push them to marry again, because they are considered to be suffering from psychological trauma. Therefore, it is common for Chinese gays and lesbians to collaborate with each other, getting married and then divorced so they won't be bothered by family and society.

world hierarchical dichotomy it aims to criticize. Indeed the formation of gay identity in China arises with the growth of a capitalized society, within which western culture travels to China along with the transnational capital flow. However, neither accepting the notion of transnational gayness nor rejecting it by insisting on the existence of an authentic Chinese sexuality, the formation of gay identity in China, I argue, is a translation process, an inventive interpretation that has its own historicity.

Since the Chinese government still censors homosexuality issues, organizing grass roots groups is restrained.<sup>18</sup> But since the popularization of the use of the Internet in 1998, which serves as the most open media to spread news that doesn't depend on or isn't constrained by communist bureaucracy, a virtual gay and lesbian civil society has formed in cyberspace. Especially for lesbians, whose socializing space is less in public spheres as gay men in terms of bars, disco pubs, saunas, or more publicly exposed places such as public toilets, and parks etc., cyberspace plays an important role in the formation of identity and the socialization process. Cyberspace becomes a safe haven for urban and well-educated lesbians to identify themselves, make friends, share information, and plan social events. *Lala*, a term translated from *lesbian* for Chinese lesbians to identify themselves, is an emerging identity in China now.

Originally, *lala* is a term that was used by Internet users in Taiwan. Identifying with female same-sex desire enacted by Taiwan users, female users on the mainland also

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<sup>18</sup> Based on my participant observation in June 1999 in Beijing, underground lesbian activism started to develop since 1998. Several lesbians voluntarily formed the first lesbian organization in China, the Beijing Sisters, and held the First China Lesbian Conference in Beijing in October 1998. Participants in this conference, about fifty women, came from different provinces. This organization got funds from a Dutch non-profit organization. I stayed in their new workshop office since the previous office was suspected by the state resident community team which kept close watch on the workshop. It changed location occasionally due to the sensitive political atmosphere.

have come to link their sexual desires to Internet use, identifying it as *lala*.<sup>19</sup> As such, they passionately create their own personal websites in order to find like-minded persons and create communities. Along with the strengthened Internet infrastructure, and through the increasing number of personal websites, *lala* has become an emergent phenomenon in contemporary Chinese society. People who have access to the Internet, especially urban youth, interact with the computer screen and thereby engage in an important socialization process for the forming of identity.

“Internet teaches a child to become an adult,” a 23-year old female *lala* said to me. The Internet helps people to rewrite their past same-sex experience. The process of becoming *lala* has some common patterns. Usually, before self-identifying as *lala*, people are more or less aware that their sexuality differs from that of the mainstream. They often have intimate relationships with other people of the same sex, often defined simply as “good friends.” But as they get older, perhaps after their mid-20s, social pressure to get married puts a strain on this intimate friendship.

In most cases, these intimate relationships work when people are still young, but during or after college, when pressure to date or get married increases, these intimate relationships become harder to sustain, and one member of the couple leaves the other. The ones left behind, often the ones who have a harder time conforming to mainstream social norms, start to question who they are and search for information about their sexuality. The mainstream media, however, not only avoids homosexual topics but

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<sup>19</sup> From my participant observation in Shanghai in 1999, the lesbians that I contacted are much younger, around age twenty. Although they have not formed an organization, they have built a cyberspace network, and the cyberspace is shared with lesbian friends from other provinces. Through the Internet, they are able to keep themselves informed about the gay rights movement in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the international arena. Even the influence of the lesbian subculture of Taiwan and Hong Kong is accomplished in cyberspace. The girls told me that they learned the terms T(butch) and P(femme) from Taiwan and Hong Kong, and they were eager to learn about the lesbian community in Taiwan and make sure that it is like what they saw on the Internet.

sometimes even stigmatizes it. Eventually, they start surfing the Internet, and through gay and lesbian web sites find like-minded people. Through the Internet they make friends, start dating, meet each other, learn about the gay and lesbian subculture, give meaning to introspective behaviors, and thereby begin to form a *lala* identity.

Therefore, *lala*, in contrast to those of other social groups who can meet each other easily face to face, has a stronger commitment to the Internet. The term *wangchong*, which literally means “cyber worm,” is used by Internet users to describe those who spend excessive time on the Internet. Since their love lives and self-identity are all subsumed by the Internet, *wangchong* is a typical phenomenon in the *lala* community. They engage in social communication by chatting, reading news, posting and responding to bulletin boards, and using ICQ for hours every day.

The process of dating and making friends among *lala* has certain patterns: first they meet someone in a chat room who is interesting, or are impressed by someone’s articles. They become friends through further chatting or email and eventually exchange telephone numbers and photos. Some people may want to have face to face meetings yet to others it is not an urgent need. Because the geographical reach of the Internet is so broad, long-distance relationships are very common among *lala*, sometimes just between cities in China, and other times between countries. These commitments of love and friendship are not necessarily sustained through physical interaction but through interaction via telecommunications technology, the Internet, the telephone, etc. And quite often a relationship is not defined by how much time two people physically spend together but how many hours two people communicate through telecommunications. If

these relationships become stable, they can lead to migrations from city to city or country to country as these long distance couples seek to be together.

Cyberspace, therefore, provides a new space for the gay rights movement in China. Previous researchers only focused on legal, social and cultural aspects of the condition of homosexuality and ignored the Internet, invisible but critical to the condition. A well-informed and well-educated gay population can form a community in cyberspace and share experiences, strategy and support with each other. The synchronization of time and space, achieved through the Internet, facilitates information exchange and consolidates forces that struggle with societal homophobia, state surveillance, and family pressure.<sup>20</sup> Different generations represent different experiences of the process of identity. The generation under twenty is born after economic reform, under the one-child policy, and enjoys better economic conditions and an abundance of information, which helps them identify their sexual orientation. Contrarily, older people have less information and resources to identify their sexual orientation and most of them have marriage experience, whether they are still married or divorced. Younger generations do not abide by the traditional norm of marriage so much as the older ones. They have better resources and strategies to counter pressures from family and society. Some of them even come out to both their families and society.

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<sup>20</sup> A paranoid critical practice also extends to the study of cyberspace. Zillah Eisenstein (1998) states that imaginaries of the globe and cyberspace attempt to displace and reconfigure the excessive greed and wealth of transnational capital. The visual images mediated through the Internet displace and remove the relations of power and naturalize what we see, making it appear ordinary and inevitable. The modes of information and mentality produced alongside are already imprecated in the relations of capital. Her postcolonial perspective and transnational criticism, if applied in the case of the formation of *lala* identity in China, might risk only seeing *lala* as a postcolonial product based on asymmetrical relationships between first world and Third world countries, a product of cultural hegemony possible by the capital flow.

Therefore, *lala*'s body, because of its constitution and activism through the use of the Internet, I would argue is under a different governmentality, that is, the mechanism of control from the mechanism of discipline. I will explain the governmentality from the mechanism of control in chapters 3 and 4. In this chapter, I use the concept "translation" to replace the existing postcolonial and transnational criticism in order to "mov[e] from the rather fixated question: Is a particular piece of knowledge true and how can we know? To the further questions: what does knowledge *do*—the pursuit of it, the receiving again of knowledge of what one already knows? *How*, in short, is knowledge performative, and how best does one move among its cause and effects?"(p. 123). Drawing from Tomkins' notion of strong and weak theory and my empirical finding, I suggest that we should see homosexuality as a translation across time and languages. By looking at same-sex love this way, I offer other knowledges that may "affect" differently than knowledge drawing from postcolonial, cosmopolitics, or globalization critical analysis/paranoid reading. I want to make the original European sexology—the medicalization of same-sex affection, as well as the essentialized idea of opposite-sex affection—"remain weak" in its circulating around the globe, in China as well as its initiated western places.

## Chapter 2: Tendencies: body, affect economy, and control society

The formation of lala, because its socialization process, intimate relationships and self-identity are closely dependent on the use of the Internet, requires us to adopt new theoretical approaches to understand the relationship between bodies and technologies. There have been significant discussions on the body drawing from feminism, queer theory, cultural studies, and many other theoretical paradigms. The tendency of these lines of thought is anti-essentialist: they reject biological determinism, and they define the body as nothing more than a social construction. The body in this anti-essentialist project is often treated as a more or less fixed matter instead of being dynamic. In this chapter, I would like to discuss the importance of thinking of the body as a dynamic matter instead of a fixed one, especially in a postindustrial society where technology has directly engaged itself in forming matter. The direct technological investment in matter, such as genetic and computer engineering etc., requires us to rethink matter not as a fixed essence but as “mattering.”<sup>21</sup>

*Lala* is a phenomenon that requires us to inquire how computer technology is “sexing” the body, in the context of China’s transition to a global information economy and the related social and cultural changes. The sexed body through Internet technology requires us to think of the body as dynamic on an ontological level beyond an epistemological one. *Lala* is an identity distinguished from “lesbian.” “Lesbian” is an

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<sup>21</sup> By “mattering” I refer to matter in flux, never a static essence but always indeterminable.

identity in the process of subjectivization within which the body is understood as an organismic enclosure where nature and culture are opposed to each other. On the other hand, because of its constitution through Internet use, *lala* is not an organismic-enclosed body but a “machinic-assemblage”—a concept drawn from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari—whose process of subjectivization is constituted by both organic life and non-organic machine. This machinic-assemblage deconstructs the organism-centered identity by queering. What I mean by queering here is not the same as most people’s use of it, which is in the context of human-centered sexuality that often only touches the questions of epistemology. Queering here means the assemblage of human and non-organic machine, from which human sexuality then becomes possible. And it is queering in this sense that requires us to think of subjectivization in terms of a control society along with a discipline society.

In addition, the phenomenon of *lala*, because of its formation of identity and resistance based on the use of the Internet, is a case for the study of civil society in China under the influence of the promotion of the information economy on one hand and authoritarian state control on the other. On the one hand, the Internet, as a new medium, challenges state control on traditional media such as TV, radio etc. through state institutions. The Internet creates a new public sphere in which people can express ideas and reach consensus. On the other hand, the state not only promotes the new information technology in order to profit from the “information economy,” but at the same time develops new kinds of surveillance technology and political techniques to ensure that this emerging space of civil society remains under its control in the name of nation-building.

While exploring the phenomenon of *lala*, we will also explore the complex interrelationships among sexuality, technology, nation-building, the global information economy, civil society, and state control. And it is the reconfiguration of bodies and technologies under the transformation of global capitalism from Keynesian-Fordism to post-Keynesian-Fordism which leads me to draw on Gilles Deleuze's concept of a "control society" and his concept of "transcendental empiricism." In a control society, the process of subjectivization is no longer limited to the institution such as in a discipline society, but is both in and out of institutions. New social phenomena emerges in a control society, within which mattering is sped-up through industries such as biological and computer engineering, requiring us to seek new objects of inquiry, such as *lala*, in order to understand the complex reconfiguration of bodies in globalization. Transcendental empiricism, distinguished from traditional empiricism which easily sees matter as fixed, defines matter as dynamic. Therefore, the sped-up mattering under the post-Keynesian-Fordist global capitalist mode of production requires us to adopt a new methodology that treats matter, the object of inquiry, in a state of ontological becoming.

Therefore, by analyzing the phenomenon of *lala*, we should trace the important tendencies in concerning bodies and technologies: the tendency from discipline society to control society, from an organism-closed subject to a machinic-assemblage body, from Keynesian-Fordism economy to affect economy and from a nation-state centric politics to a politics "beside" nation-state. The concept of "beside," drawing from Eve Sedgwick's reading of Gilles Deleuze, is a concept of non-duality. "Beside" is a spacious relationship which linear logics and dualistic thinking becomes non-sense.

"A number of elements lie alongside one another, though not an infinity of them....*Beside* comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating,

rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations ( Sedgwick, 2003, p. 8).”

The tendency of these shifts in thought does not suggest a dualistic thinking of a discipline society versus a control society, an organism-closed subject versus a machinic-assemblage body, a Keynesian-Fordism economy versus affect economy. Discipline and control societies, organism-closed subjects and machinic-assemblage bodies, Keynesian-Fordism economies and affect economies, and nation-state sovereignty, are not “things” but always in becoming. It is also the concept of *beside* that makes these shifts not linear ones but spaces that allow us to imagine, to rethink the past, present and the future *in flow*. Moreover, I will discuss how these shifts in thought link to transcendental empiricism, to me, a methodology of the *beside*, in exploring the phenomenon of lala.

## **Unfolding Organismic-enclosed Bodies**

Although there has been a substantial re-theorizing of the body in recent critical theories of race, gender and sexuality, the concept of the body has remained caught in an anthropologic realm; that is, the body is understood as an organism and conceptualized as a closed system, where nature and culture are opposed to each other (Butler, 1993; Grosz, 1994). For instance, theories of social constructionism, using feminism as an example, treats sex as given, as an unintelligent life form belonging to the realm of nature, in opposition to gender as a cultural, intelligent construction. Judith Butler, in challenging social constructionism, sees the matter itself as “not yet” a body with a form. She uses

concepts such as “melancholy incorporation” in explaining gender formation. Gender formation is a process where the human psyche melancholically “incorporates” the lost object, a masculine or feminine image which he/she loves. Within this formation, “gendering” and “mattering” are at the same time being processed as a “gendered body.” Moreover, bodily integrity is not once and for all but needs to sustain itself through the repetition of this melancholy incorporation of the same social/historical form/meaning, that is, the masculine and feminine image.

Elizabeth Grosz, on the other hand, challenges Butler’s privilege of this social/historical form and her treatment of bodily force as passive. Bodily force in Butler’s articulation is something with a passive agency, led by social/historical form/meaning. To Grosz, bodily force is positive. Sensation and perception as dynamic forces of the body are not only one-dimensionally influenced by social/historical meaning/form but are also two-dimensionally influencing the latter and influenced by it. However, for theorists following anti-essentialist projects such as those of Butler and Grosz, although they go beyond social constructionism and see matter as dynamic, theories of bodily matter are still caught in an anthropological realm. The bodily mattering in Butler not only stays in the dichotomy between image and matter/body, but prefers a sociohistorical form after which a body is then possible. Grosz, although not privileging forces that constitute the body as only social/linguistic but also taking into account the body as a material/organic force, cannot see forces of mattering beside human organismic and also social/linguistic forces (Cheah, 1996). Anthropological thinking of the body does not yet unfold the organism, a problem often shown in social scientist and humanist thinking.

On the other hand, as Clough suggests, there is a break in Haraway with these critical theories, as Haraway focuses on what she calls “material-semiotic entities” such as the fetus, the computer chip, the genome. Therefore, the body is opened up, its organism centralism deconstructed, and there is a call for the thought of agencies other than human (Clough, 2000). Moreover, cybernetics is a line of thought which imagines the body beyond an organism-enclosed entity, as mattering with organic and non-organic forces. Cybernetics is a study of communication between human and human, human and machine, and machine and machine. The worldview of cybernetics is based on a quantum mechanics probabilistic world, which is distinguished from the static worldview of Newton’s deterministic world and Einstein’s theory of relativity. In a static worldview, matter is fixed and movement of matter follows Newton’s law of generality, or follows Einstein’s law of relativity. Relationships among matter under these laws follow a linear causality; that is, given the same cause, the same result is produced.

In cybernetics, in contrast, relationships among matter are non-linear. In a non-linear relationship, causes and effects function as feedback loops. Cause produces effect, and then effect in turn influences the next cause. Causes and effects in non-linear causality are a feedback circulating. Communication among matter in cybernetics, both organic and non-organic, functions as feedback loops. Communication either functions as positive feedback, that causes amplifying, or negative feedback, that reduces in order to reach equilibrium. Matter in a probabilistic world, such as in cybernetics, is no longer enlivened through pre-existing forms which remain the same for all time, but rather its dynamism is understood as immanent to matter (Clough, 2000; Delanda, 2002). This new line of thought requires us to think beyond the anthropologic enclosure, where

only culture is the bearer of dynamism, to the thought of machinic actualization, which not only includes cybernetic devices but also machinic-assemblages such as the cyborg.

The concept of the organism-centered subject, like that of nature and culture, are products of concrete historical processes. Yet, the degree of homogeneity is high enough to make it possible to imagine the existence of a single and eternal “culture” or “nature.” But this seeming homogeneity of matter is rather a matter of slow heterogeneity. For instance, a spoon in our human eyes seems homogeneously existent. Yet in the eye of an eight-hundred year old tree, a spoon is a heterogeneous mattering, from a product created by humans and then dissipated by natural or organic forces, or by other historical/man-made incidences. Therefore, heterogeneity of matter, or non-equilibrium mattering, calls for the thought of “productive causes.” Causes as productive function as positive feedback, that is, feedback circuiting far from equilibrium. Productive causes are therefore not for producing a homogeneous status of an equilibrium system, but complexity/heterogeneity evolving more or less through time. In this framework, we live in wildly opened fields and this requires rethinking matter and the body as a human and non-human assemblage or composition, a machinic assemblage, made possible by the dynamism of matter. In this sense, relationships between organic and non-organic life no longer simply dichotomize as organism and environment such as a subject-object split. Relationships between organic and non-organic life in a machinic-assemblage are a co-evolution of “organism” and “environment” beyond organism-closed evolution such as genetic determinism and reductionism ( Pearson, 1999).

Moreover, the anthropologic thinking of body matter is often caught in body/mind dualism, which leads to the virtual/real dualism in the studies of teletechnology. In this virtual/real dualism, virtual is understood only as a disembodiment of materiality and a dematerialization of the body (Hayles, 1999; Jones, 1995; Morse, 1998; Shields, 1996). The virtual/real dualism, on the other hand, parallels the digital and analog debate on the relationship between human and machine. As Sedgwick and Frank contend, the trend of binary thinking—human: analog:: machine: digital—in cultural criticism reduces the complicated digital/analog assemblage to humanistic thinking in the age of the cybernetic fold ( Sedgwick and Frank, 1995). Humanistic thinking has already assumed that the human body as an organism is a closed system opposed to its environment/machine/technology. Affect, on the other hand, drawing from Silvan Tomkins, results from an analog->digital->analog> digital process within which the human body is seen as a digital/analog assemblage. Therefore, the organism-centered human is deconstructed. Drawing from cybernetics theories, communication is no longer a human: machine:: analog: digital dualism but an affective feedback loop; its communicative subject is a machinic assemblage ( Wilden, 1972).

## **Affective Body**

Drawing from Deleuze's philosophy, Brian Massumi uses terms such as form/content and intensity/affect to explain the problem of body/mind dualism in the sped-up mattering of the age of post-Keynesian-Fordist global capitalism. He sees form as a pattern that emerged from non-conscious psychophysical intensity—affect—that produces conventional meanings corresponding to the historical process of

intersubjective interaction. The connectivity of form that emerges from affect and affect itself functions as a non-linear feedback loop. Affect is different than emotion. The former is understood as the capacity of the body of affecting and being affected, and on the other hand the latter is the intensity serving in the process of subjectivization (Massumi, 2002). Extending Massumi's argument on affect, representation, meaning, interpretation and signification are no longer understood as how a subject decodes the message from an object, that is, representation functioning by a subject/object split. Representation, meaning, and signification are themselves sociolinguistic forms, or patterns, emerging from the affective body. Matter understood as dynamic is no longer understood as a pre-existing entity which remains the same for all time and needs to be represented, interpreted, or signified by a cultured/human mind, that is, as an origin needing to be loyally described. Rather, bodies are dynamic processes based on the notion that difference is positive and productive instead of negative. Dynamism as positive also argues against the psychoanalytic idea of difference as lack, an idea borrowed by the feminist tradition. Dynamics of matter as positive opens up modern Man, the humanistic subject that is an organism-closed, signification closed-circuit based on lack (Terrinova, 2001)

Body/mind dualism has been a long debate in western philosophy. For Descartes, the expression of things and their existence is the expression and nature of God. "Rational intuition" from the human mind is itself a manifestation of God's existence and serves to discover knowledge of the world. In contrast, as Deleuze suggests, to Spinoza, God is no more than human itself, including its "rational intuition," and the existence of things is also nothing more than existence itself, i.e. not transcendental or even

metaphysical (Deleuze, 1990). The idea, to Descartes, is the production of the mind which is capable of perceiving and reflecting upon all objects. In contrast, as Deleuze contends, Hume uses the term impression, replacing the term idea (Deleuze, 2001). Idea is a term belonging to subjectivity, but impression is a term belonging to bodily intensity. In Hume's world, matter is dynamic; there is no fixed matter/nature that the mind needs to reflect upon. Ideas are only impressions which are "nothing more than bodily senses (sights, tastes, sounds, smells, etc.), bodily states like hunger and thirst, and more generally pleasures and pains," that is, an expression of intensity of an affective body.<sup>22</sup> Or put in Spinoza's terms, the idea is an expression of the body as a degree of power, and the idea itself shows the body's capacity of affecting and being affected. The human mind is an expression of its dynamic body which is affecting and being affected at a given time. Spinoza uses two triads, one is ontological and another ethical, to explain the body and its mode:

the expressive triad corresponding to finite modes comprises an essence as a degree of power; a characteristic relation in which it expresses itself; and the extensive parts subsumed in this relation, which compose the mode's existence. But we find in the *Ethics* a strict system of equivalences that leads us to a second modal triad: the essence as a degree of power; a certain capacity to be affected in which it expresses itself; and the affections that, each moment, exercise that capacity. (Deleuze, 1990, p. 217)

Therefore, the body in the sped-up mattering under the age of post-Keynesian-Fordist global capitalism, that is, in the open system, should be seen itself as an expression of its mode, instead of an inert nature or representation. Moreover, the sped-up mattering under the age of post-Keynesian-Fordist global capitalism requires us to

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<sup>22</sup> The discussion of Descartes and Hume is partially taken from Greg Caruso's unpublished lecture notes.

conceptualize the body's essence as a degree of power, its characteristic relations as a mechanic-assemblage, and its extensive parts subsumed in this relation include non-organic life such as chips, genomes, etc. The ethical questions we need to address in the sped-up mattering under the age of post-Keynesian-Fordist global capitalism are not about how much power humans have to control technology instead of being controlled by it, but rather are about what capacity the machinic assemblage body has, that is, the capacity of affecting and being affected, and how the machinic assemblage body encounters external bodies and things which agree with its nature, whose relations combine with its own and increase its own power of action.

Therefore, we need a new language to describe questions of representation, signification, and subjectivization in the open system where the body is beyond a closed organism system and which will also give agency to non-organic bodies. There is no inert entity which the mind represents, but rather matter is dynamic and representation becomes a non-linear feedback which itself is an expression. Signification is no longer the chain of signifying with a lack of resemblance to the origin, but is itself a productive force, an affective connectivity functioning as a non-linear feedback loop. And subjectivization is not a process in which the organism-closed body is later being anthropologically, socially constructed, but is itself a folding from outside. The folding itself is an expression of its degree of power, and at the same time an expression of its capacity of affecting and being affected (Deleuze, 1988). Or as Sedgwick and Frank suggest, subjectivization is understood as affect in a cybernetic fold in the sped-up mattering under the age of post-Keynesian-Fordist global capitalism (Sedgwick and Frank, 1995).

Extending Massumi's notion of form emerging from intensity to Deleuze's notion of actual and virtual and Spinoza's affective body, I would like to argue that affect is the actualization of the virtual, and itself is not so much about representation of the law of generality but an event from actualizing the virtual. Deleuze distinguishes actual/virtual from real/possible (Deleuze, 1993). Actual/virtual is a concept where matter is dynamic and therefore existence is itself an actualization of the virtuality in an open system. Contrarily, real/possible is a concept where matter is a fixed entity functioning according to the law of generality; that is, matter and its movement is determined by linear causality. Therefore, affect is itself an event in an actualization process of virtuality. Bodies understood as affective machinic assemblages are dynamic, productive and capable of affecting and being affected but they are so in and against the modulations of capital. The move to the thought of the open system results, I would argue, from significant economic restructuring under global capitalism, a shift to an information economy, which links capitalist investment to technoscientific productivity.

## **Discipline and Control Society/Post Keynesianism and Global Capital**

The tendency of the shift in thinking of bodies as machinic assemblages, linked as it is to global capital, can also be understood in terms of the tendency of the shift from a discipline society to a control society. The shift from a discipline society to a control society, important to analyzing the emergence of *lala* identity in China and its relationship to Internet use, is embedded in the economic transformation from Keynesian-

Fordism to post-Keynesian-Fordism. In the early 70s this shift not only happened in the West but is closely linked to economic transformation in postcolonial or third world countries, such as China. However, the time line of the economic transformation from Keynesian-Fordism to post-Keynesian-Fordism is different in non-Western places such as China. Generally speaking, China started capitalist production from the announcement of the “open door” policy in 1979 and the so called post-Keynesian-Fordism model economy such as the information economy and the biotechnology economy started in the early 90s. On the other hand, because of the historical contingency different from the West, the Keynesian-Fordism model of economy is still significant in China in the age of transnational capitalism where the Keynesian-Fordism model of economy and its exploitation is still important in China, Eastern Europe, and some other third world places.

The Keynesian-Fordism model of economy is productive of a discipline society, that is, the formation of the body is a process of subjectivization through apparatuses of the state (Foucault, 1978). The body is disciplined as an organism or closed system and its organization is required to respond to a centralized movement toward equilibrium, socially analogous to normalization, or status quo. The body in the discipline society functions in terms of the thermodynamics of the nineteenth century, that is, the energy of the body is the main energy resource for work. Entropy in the gigantic machine of capitalism is treated as unavailable energy for work, socially analogous to the resistance in the factory, and later the resistance of the identity politics of women, black, youth, etc.

who challenge the established labor model that equals wage labor to only white male workers (Caffentzis, 1992).

In response to the limit of profits and the increasing entropy in the 60s, capitalists invested in technological development. Investing in technology is a shift from exploiting absolute surplus value to exploiting relative surplus value. Human labor used to produce material goods is displaced by machine power. At the top of global economy, this displacement is for the production of different forms of energy, such as the commodity of services, knowledge, information and communication through biotechnology and computer engineering. When capitalism invests in technology so intensely as to absorb all levels of life to the machine of capitalist accumulation, it can be said that production, reproduction, and consumption become as one circulation (Negri, 1999; Hardt and Negri, 2000). The phenomenon of *lala* is related to this subsumption of life to capital. *Lala* are bodies and identities which consume, produce and reproduce energy made by information technology. *Lala* is being produced by, in, and for an affect economy. Therefore, what capitalism produces, consumes and reproduces is not only at a molar level but at a molecular level; that is, there is affective labor that engages sub-individual expenditures of time in the consumption of communication, mood, knowledge, and attention. Capitalist mechanics shift from a thermodynamic model to a turbulence model more appropriate to an open system. This shift led by capital where an open system offers more possibilities for its innovation, as well as exploitation, nonetheless also offers, as Parisi and Terranova argue, possibilities for politics, the kind that I believe *lala* demonstrates (Parisi and Terranova, 2000).

To return then to the tendency of the shift from a discipline society to a control society, I would argue that in a discipline society, socialization is the mechanism of inclusion and exclusion through disciplinary institutions, such as the nuclear family, the factory, the prison and the clinic. In the control society, these institutions open up and the mechanisms of control become more immanent to the social field and are distributed through bodies. I will argue that if homosexual refers to bodies in a discipline society, *lala* are machinic-assemblages in a control society along with a discipline society. *Lala* are not only disciplined by or through institutions, moreover, through the deployment of digital technology networks going through and outside institutions. Bio-power in a control society is exercised through opening up the human organism to a technological environment and giving agency to non-organic bodies, which produce a new subject, *lala*, corresponding to intensified surveillance and control. In China, for example, there is a project, Golden Shield, established and still in process for the development of surveillance technology which aims to integrate a gigantic online database that can encompass different kinds of surveillance networks, such as speech recognition, monitors, and also Internet surveillance technology in order “to see, to hear, to think” of citizens without presence (Walton, 2001).

Finally, I would also like to extend the argument to the tendency of a shift from a discipline society to a control society as not only a tendency of shift from a closed system to an open system, with subjectivization based on the socialization of subject/organism to the increasing agency of non-organic bodies, but also there is a tendency of a shift from nation-state centric politics to politics beside nation-state. If homosexuality belongs to the nation-state centric politics, *lala* belongs to a new politics beside nation-state, expressed

in terms of its formation of identity, its resistance, and the control and discipline exercised over it through the collaboration between nation-state and transnational capitalism along with nation-centric politics. The shift of a discipline society to a control society therefore needs to be further adjusted, in relationship to non-Western places; that is, its relationship to postcolonialism must be drawn out in order to understand phenomena such as lesbian identity formation in China.

The phenomenon of the displacement of nation-states and the acceleration of the collaboration between transnational capitalism and nation-states arising in globalization demands us to reexamine the relationship between the regulatory function of the nation-state and global capitalism. Hardt and Negri claim that a new form of supranational sovereignty, the Empire, has arisen. The concept of *beside* nation-state, different from the supranational sovereignty, does not lean on an integrated political entity within which conflict does not exist. The phenomenon of the displacement of nation-states and the acceleration of the collaboration between transnational capitalism and nation-states arising in globalization does not necessarily mean that there is an integrated Empire exercising its force. *Beside* nation-state refers to the changing role and function of nation-state, and the “not yet” integrated forces arisen from the displacement of nation-states and the acceleration of global capital flow along with nation-state centric politics. It is in this space of beside nation-state where new forms of governmentality, of civil society, of resistance arise.

After all, it already has been argued that a discipline society was practiced first in the colonies and then brought back to Europe, which dynamically gave rise to the bourgeois self and class, and nation-state in the dynamism of colonialism (Mies, 1986;

Stolar, 1995). I want to argue that paralleling the revisionary perspective of the practice of discipline first in the colonies, is a perspective that suggests the practice of a control society happening first in postcolonial, or “third world” countries. And sovereignty power is no longer from western colonial powers but a power *beside* nation-state, a power that is not merely first world, either imperialist power or transnational capitalism, but also “third world” nation-state sovereignty and its collaboration with the former.

The absorption of the “outside” is always the concern of capitalism. The flexible accumulation under transnational capitalism after 1973 no longer functions as only discipline but also control, and it is no longer merely for the individual subject but is also for the sub-individual or non-organic bodies. The nimble fingers of women laborers, or migrating labor power, or the circulation of organs, plasma, genes of forests etc., all become commodities for exchange and profit. Capitalism in the global information technology economy, supported by the collaboration between transnational capitalism and local nation-states, becomes more interested in the brain function and body parts, the molecular level of its citizens and their subjectivities. Capitalism now wants a molecular form of energy, corresponding to its surplus of energy from technology. The control from the collaboration between transnational capitalism and local nation-states is to control those profitable bodies, by investing in advanced technology, and to let die those unprofitable and disposable bodies and subjectivities. From a discipline society to a control society there is a withering of civil society, the collapse of the separation of public and private space, and a weakening of nation-state boundaries (Hardt, 1995). On the other hand, I would argue that identity politics, labor unions, civil society and the separation of private and public space of a discipline society is not quite the same in

postcolonial societies (Lowe and Lloyd, 1997; Cheah, 1995). In postcolonial societies, or so called “Third World countries,” the effects of disciplining were not as institutionalized so “completely” as in the West (in the sense of western capitalist discipline society). The control society becomes exercised first on those third world bodies without much resistance residue from a discipline society. In the case of China, where the governmentality of its discipline society is a socialist one, the mechanism of control is easier excised without much resistance from “representational politics,” a form of civil society in a western capitalist discipline society. I will explain this point further in Chapter 4. Nevertheless, at the same time a new form of resistance is arising different from the civil society in a discipline society, by the collaboration between transnational capitalism and local nation-states, which I will explain further in chapter 5.

### **Transcendental empiricism: an open-system methodology**

Needless to say, to understand the broader cultural, social and political issues raised by the *lala* phenomenon and its global activism requires us to take a new methodological approach, corresponding to a shift in the theoretical assumptions and logic, such as the tendency of shifts I explore in this paper, from a discipline society to a control society, from an organism-closed subject to a machinic-assemblage body, from a Keynesian-Fordism economy to an affect economy and from a nation-state centric politics to a politics of *beside* nation-state. Therefore, my method is partly participant observation and partly experimentation, which Deleuze describes in terms of a transcendental empiricism. Transcendental empiricism is the methodology of an open system which is beyond the subject-object distinction held in traditional empiricism, but

which describes causal connection as not a linear causality but a non-linear interconnectedness (Deleuze, 2001). By this he means that observation is used not so much to describe a phenomenon, rather it is used to map the potential futures these shifts of thought might make probable and thereby to flush out the details of shifts in thought already provoked. Studying *lala* through participant observation, focusing on activist organizing on the local and global scale, observing website texts and participating in local activism in geographically dispersed cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, New York and Chicago, I situate these empirical tendencies against and in these shifts of thought which allow me to show not only what *lala* now means but what futures it might provoke for China locally and globally.

In the humanities and social sciences, methodology is based on empiricism followed by classical physics which holds the ontological assumption that matter has its own entity and cannot emerge spontaneously. The subject is the epistemological position which represents, interprets, and gives meaning to those entities. Methodology, therefore, belongs to epistemological questions, that is, using the kind of method that can represent truth better. On the other hand, as Manuel Delanda and other theorists in science studies contest, the law of generality in classical physics assumes general truths in which everything functions mechanically according to the law. However, the assumption made in the law of generality itself rejects the productive causes in the process of doing experiments for testing those general theories, such as creating complicated instruments, the laboratory culture and its empirical methodology, which shows what Haraway called “science-in-making,” a making of the law of generality along with philosophical policing (Clough, 2000; Delanda, 2002). Methodological assumption in humanities and social

sciences does not examine the productive causes in the making of the law of generality in classical physics. Methodology in humanities and social sciences shares assumptions made in classical physics, manifesting in realism or relativism as a worldview. Body in this methodological assumption as inert matter follows the law of generality. Mind, on the other hand, anthropologically represents, interprets, and gives meaning to inert nature, a realm of knowledge where humanities and social science can contribute.

In transcendental empiricism, by contrast, causal connections are not according to an a priori form of the law of generality. To Hume, causal relationships cannot be attained through immediate experience. The immediate experience we have toward causal connections is not so much about the connections between cause and effect but itself the effect of habit or custom.<sup>23</sup> In Hume's philosophy, the world is open and matter is dynamic. Causal connections are no longer linear causality but non-linear feedback loops, and the latter often function as effects of custom and habits, that is, repetition patterns of affective bodily intensities as a subject/object split within which linear causality exists.

Transcendental empiricism, therefore, is the methodology of an open system beyond the subject-object distinction held in traditional empiricism. In traditional empiricism, the ontology of an entity is a closed one and experience becomes the realm of epistemological questions as representations of the entity. In contrast, transcendental empiricism breaks up the traditional notion of ontology and epistemology and sees matter as an actualization of virtual multiplicity. Matter in transcendental empiricism is dynamic and capable of affecting and being affected. As Delanda suggests, matter is "capable of

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<sup>23</sup> The discussion of Hume is partially drawn from Greg Caruso's unpublished lecture notes.

spontaneously giving rise to form drawing on its inherent tendencies (defined as singularities) as well as its complex capacity to affect and be affected” ( Delanda, 2002. p. 141).

The challenge made to traditional notions of ontology and epistemology by transcendental empiricism directly impinges on the anthropologicist model of the body/mind split. Methodology in the humanities and social sciences still holds this model and relates methodological issues only to the epistemological realm. The body is seen as inert matter and the mind as the representation apparatus of it. Methodology then becomes the realistic narrative, generally or relatively. In contrast, transcendental empiricism is the problem of thought tied not to essences but to the evaluation of what is important and what is not, and to the distribution of the singular and regular points. As Delanda contests:

The role of the thinker is not so much to utter truths or establish facts, but to distinguish among the large population of true facts those that are important and relevant from those that are not. Importance and relevance, not truth, are the key concepts in Deleuze’s epistemology, the task of realism being to ground these concepts preventing them from being reduced to subjective evaluation or social convention...Deleuze stresses the role of correctly posed problems, rather than their true solutions, a problem being well posed if it captures an objective distribution of the important and the unimportant, or mathematically, of the singular and the ordinary. (Delanda, 2002, p. 5)

Transcendental empiricism, therefore, is beyond the binary model of the materialist and discursive construction of those methodologies in a closed system in the humanities and social sciences. In contrast, in an open system, a problem is defined precisely by a distribution of the singular and the ordinary, the relevant and the irrelevant.

By thinking these ways, the law of generality in classical physics is not so much about discovering general truths about the universe, but posing a relevant problem defined by the simple distribution of singularities, that is, an important description of the actualizing process of virtual multiplicity.

The open system as the nonlinear dynamics we are living in wildly reopens a field considered closed and requires us to conceive new methodologies in order to rethink the dualism between the anthropologic habitual boundaries of human and machine, body and technology, organism and environment. The phenomenon of *lala* is an actualization of virtuality drawing from a history of the development of science and technology, especially the development of cybernetics, and its relationship to the transformation of global capitalism. The bodies and activism of *lala*, understood as a machinic assemblage, is an actualization of cybernetic virtuality that requires us to experiment with a new thinking beyond the framework of the nature/culture dualism or the subject as an organism-centered closed system. A study of the phenomenon of *lala*, that is, the formation of queer identity in third world countries and queer activism, implies an understanding of the open system, of matter as dynamic, and of the nonlinear development of subject formation, as well as of political sovereignty, affect economy, and world capitalism in the late 20<sup>th</sup>/early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

## **Chapter 3: Contaminated Internet: Market Profit, Nation- building, and Information Technology**

The Internet in China has become a hot topic for researchers, especially its relationship to the development of civil society. On the one hand, the Internet, as a new medium, challenges the institutional control traditionally exercised by the state, and at the same time creates a new public sphere in which people can express ideas and reach consensus. On the other hand, the state not only promotes the new information technology to profit from the "information economy," but at the same time develops new kinds of surveillance technology and political techniques to ensure that this emerging space of civil society remains under its control.

The emerging phenomenon of lala is the product of the dynamics of market profits, technology, and political control. The formation of a lala community through the use of the Internet is an interesting case for the study of a civil society under the influence of the promotion of the information economy on one hand and the mechanism of state control on the other. While exploring the formation of the lala community, we will also explore the complex interrelationships among sexuality, civil society, technology, global capitalism, and state control. In this chapter, I will discuss the mechanism of state censorship and regulation of the Internet that the lala community faces, and I will discuss in chapter 5 how at the same time lala activists negotiate that censorship and regulation, also through Internet use, in developing a civil society.

The formation of a lala community through the use of the Internet not only touches the questions about information and civil society, but also surveillance and control. Through my participation and observation of websites, Chinese gay and lesbian activist email lists, and groups engaged in Chinese gay and lesbian activism, both in China and the U.S., I will show that the formation of a lala community does not clearly support the proposition, suggested by much of the discourse on new technologies, that new information and telecommunications technologies are inherently democratic (Jones, 1995).<sup>24</sup> In this discursive framework, the development of new technologies, such as the Internet, will bring freedom of information exchange. However, it does not examine the fact that the complex production of this discourse has always been embedded in a broader capitalist interest.

The discourse that the development of Internet technology will bring freedom of information exchange also presumes that Internet technology can surpass states and nations. Not taking into account the diverse political systems that different nation-states have, this discursive framework assumes that the use of Internet technology will naturally lead them to a western style civil society, and most of the time they equate western civil society to a “democratic” society. Hence, this discourse foreshadows the decline of the nation-state. However, statements like that seriously ignore the fact that technology has always been developed in specific historical and political contexts, and that often technology develops as a tool to preserve the power of the nation-state. In the context of non-western countries, science and technology has been used as a means to counter

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<sup>24</sup> Steven G. Jones states that people often assume two essential characters of computers—that they cut across boundaries and break down hierarchies—and presume old social problems can be resolved by using a new technology. However, computers can easily create boundaries and hierarchies and be used for control information as well (p. 29).

western imperialism and strengthen the local state. Technology, therefore, instead of naturally leading to the declining of the nation-state, is used in strengthening the power of the building of nation-states.

The discourse that information technology will bring freedom of information change, therefore, makes the opposition of western style/ “democratic” civil society and non-western/“authoritarian” society. Western style society is assumed to have freedom of information exchange not only within nation-state boundary but also with other nation-states. On the other hand, a non-western authoritarian society is assumed to be without freedom of information exchange within its nation-state and also with other countries.<sup>25</sup> This kind of discourse is not so different from the discourse of neo-liberalism, within which capital will “free” not only economic underdevelopment but also the authoritarian political systems of non-western third world countries. Although the formation of lala identity and community is facilitated by the impact of a global information economy in China, the development of information technology along with the development of an information economy in China also increases government surveillance and control over its people, including the surveillance and control of gay and lesbian websites in China. Therefore, I will use lala as an example to deconstruct the equation between information economy and freedom of information exchange. By deconstructing it, I will show that lala, indeed its formation of identity and community, benefits from the information economy in China, and is also constrained because of the development of surveillance technology along with the development of information economy. Technology is always

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<sup>25</sup> The terms such as west and non-west are not arbitrary categories. I am aware of the limitation and reductionism of the dichotomy use of west vs. non-west. But in order to emphasize and delineate the power relationships embedded in world colonial history, I still use this dichotomy in a general way.

produced and used in a specific historical context. In China, technology is not only developed for profit and economic development, but also as a mechanism of state control.

## **Contaminated Internet**

The discourse that the Internet will bring freedom of information exchange often presumes a dichotomy between western society, democracy, and free information on the one hand, and non-western, authoritarianism, and control of information on the other. This discursive framework is not only often used by transnational technological corporations but is also embedded in the political ideology of many researches in the field of social sciences which study the development of the Internet in non-western societies. For instance, recently there has been research emerging on the study of the relationship of the Internet to political regimes in East Asia. This research shows how the Internet develops under the restrictions of “authoritarian” political systems, which confronts the discourse that the Internet will bring freedom of information exchange (Kalathil 2002; Hachigian, 2002). The application of the Internet in these authoritarian regimes is more likely to serve as a mouthpiece of state ideology than a tool of democracy.

Although deconstructing the equation between the Internet and the freedom of information exchange, this research holds to the dichotomy of west/democratic vs. non-west/authoritarian which derives from the bias of ethnocentrism. In the framework of ethnocentrism, the west—the subject—is the “democratic,” representational political regime and the non-west—the other—is viewed as either authoritarian such as in East Asia or Latin American or chaotic such as in Africa. Under ethnocentrism, the

deconstruction of the equation between the Internet and the freedom of information exchange only happens in the non-western political regimes, where the Internet cannot bring the freedom of information exchange either because of its underdeveloped economy or patriarchal state control. This ethnocentric thinking about the Internet ignores the fact that in western society there still exists digital divides by class and political surveillance on information. For example, the damage of civil liberties with the Patriot Act after September 11<sup>th</sup> and the war against Iraq shows that information is under surveillance and censored, proving that telecommunication technology is indeed a means for surveillance or “a mouthpiece of state ideology [rather] than a tool of democracy”(surveillance and the control of information in the context of the Patriot Act and the war against Iraq are no longer “authoritarian” but in the name of security for protecting “democracy”).<sup>26</sup>

While still trapped in the ethnocentric notion in terms of discussing different political systems, this research pays attention to the Internet, the technology itself, and how it affects civil society in different political regimes in East Asia. As Shanthi Kalathil states, to understand the complex ways in which Internet technology affects civil society one must not only measure government restrictions on its development but also understand the different characteristics of the activities of civil society that emerge under different mechanisms of state control (p. 21). The evolution of society under the encouragement of self-censorship through the state’s threat of punitive action, such as in China, leads to the result that the majority of Internet users are not seeking out politically

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<sup>26</sup> The Internet under the Patriot Act is no longer a technology for information exchange but a “military technology” in the name of national security. “A Snooper’s Dream”, *New York Times*, November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2002.

sensitive websites banned by the government. For instance, research shows that Internet users in China believe in the necessity of regulation of online information even more than non-users (Liang and Wei, 2002).

Furthermore, this research challenges the discourse that equals the Internet to the freedom of information exchange. This discourse itself is a self-interested discourse made by capitalism, and information technology does not naturally lead to the free flow of information. As Kalathil points out, political regimes such as in China and in Singapore successfully limit and shape online content through censorship, regulation, and surveillance, while at the same time promoting the information economy. As its western counterpart, such as the so-called “sacrifice of freedom for the benefit of security of all people,” surveillance and the control of information exchange is used in the name of national security. At the same time, the information economy still needs to be developed, states a consensus made between politicians and corporations. According to Kalanthil, the knowledge economy in these East Asian regimes no longer refer to the free production of information but the production of a “tech-savvy, educated, and satisfied population”(p. 31). Indeed, capitalism makes a profit from information, no matter the reifying form, “knowledge,” “education,” or “entertainment.” However, it seems that Kalanthil is also trapped in this ethnocentric thinking; that is, the satisfied population fed by the information constituted by commercial forces are not only living in those East Asian countries but also in the western world. In this ethnocentric thinking, the western subject is assumed as “autonomous” instead of “satisfied” or “tech-savvy.”

In his astonishing article “Posit(ion)ing Human Rights in the Current Global Conjunction,” Pheng Cheah states that the problem of the concept of human rights is rooted in its normativity and universality. In UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights, human rights constitute three parts: civil and political rights; social, economic and cultural rights; and the rights to development. The claim of civil and political rights is the first generation of human rights, rooted in the west, and aimed at protecting individuals from state arbitrariness. The claim of social, economic and cultural rights are the second generation of human rights and the rights to development are the third generation (Cheah, 1997). The second and third generations of human rights arise from anti-colonial history in non-western countries. Both of them are used by those countries to fight for cultural relativism and colonialism. The problem of those claims of human rights, according to Pheng Cheah, is the normativity and universality that has been contaminated by transnational capitalism. The notion of the first generation of human rights ignores the fact that it is often used by the collaboration between western states and transnational capitalism as a form of neo-colonialism, for example, to claim “free trade” as a human right. The problematic notion of “free trade” has its imperialist history in world colonial history. On the other hand, in the context of anti-colonialism, non-western countries develop the second and third generation of human rights, such as Asian governments, who often use “the right to develop,” “anti-western imperialism,” and “the right to fight colonialism,” as tools to develop its patriarchal nationalism.

When we look back at information technology such as the Internet, we find out that it is not only a tool for commercial profit but also a mean to develop nationalism, both in west and non-west countries, under the name of the normativity and universality

of governments' claims of human rights. Therefore, the discourse which equates the Internet to the freedom of information is a self-contaminated discourse made by colonialism and global capitalism.

Christopher R. Hughes perhaps best articulates this theme that technology has always been developed as part of patriarchal nationalism, especially in military use (Hughes, 2002). Through his research on the history of the development of the Internet in the U.S., he states that before the Internet became a commodity and a means of public communication in 1991, it was always used for nation building. And even after the Internet became commercialized and a part of global economy, the state has never stopped to ensure this technology as capable of enhancing national security. While we link the Internet to nation-building projects, it is then not surprising to see how capitalism and neo-colonialism cooperate together in the name of promoting "world democracy." As Hughes quotes Al Gore:

To promote. . . to protect . . . to preserve freedom and democracy, we must make telecommunications development an integral part of every nation's development. Each link we create strengthens the bonds of liberty and democracy around the world. By opening markets to stimulate the development of the global information infrastructure, we open line of communication.(p. 206)

This ethnocentric, self-contaminated discourse of human rights and democracy by global capitalism is itself a form of neo-colonialism. Under this neo-colonialism, the impact of information technology on political systems and the regulation of the Internet becomes "homeland security"—this homey, essential, necessary act—but regulation of

the Internet in other countries then becomes “surveillance and control” against the principle of human rights.

One the other hand, using modern technology in order to fight against colonialism is also not new in many non-western countries. For instance, in China the use of science and technology as a tool for modernization has been employed since the nineteenth century to preserve state power in the face of western imperialism. Therefore, science and technology have always been intimately linked to the project of modernization as well as in other western or non-western countries in terms of developing imperialism or anti-imperialism in history, or in recent times, linked to preserving state power in the globalization age. As Hughes states:

At first sight it might seem like something of an irony that the scientific and technological progress commonly assumed to be one of the driving forces of globalization has also been seen as one of the keys to successful nation-building in Chinese political thought since the nineteenth century. However, as theories of globalization have moved beyond the belief in the decline of the state that is central to what has been called the ‘hyperglobalist thesis,’ they have begun to develop an understanding of how states survive through the successful mediation of international transactions in ways that can actually enhance their power.(p. 202)

The development of national power and wealth through the development of science and technology also did not change from the Maoist period to the reform period, although the form of economic production changed from socialist to capitalist. The preservation of the nation-state has at the same time included the preservation of a “nation essence” on a cultural level, a form of nationalism also developed through the process of nation-building.

While the open door policy which followed the death of Mao changed the nature of Maoist anti-imperialist nationalism, it does not imply that the nationalist project ended due to the introduction of foreign capital and investment. The Chinese government created the discourse of “socialist spiritual civilization” in order to face the growing cultural ideology of consumerism in the reform period. The buying of foreign brand name products as a way to show one’s social and economic status has become a side-effect of the rapid development of capitalism in socialist China (Sklair, 2002). Chinese politicians on the one hand want to promote a capitalist economy in order to strengthen national wealth, while on the other hand try to control the possible de-legitimization of their power in the face of westernization which foreign capital might bring. The “polluting influence of western values” became a slogan used to preserve the Chinese “essence,” which is less about a fixed Chinese essence which needed to be saved but more about the development of nationalism in order to preserve the power of nation-state and the legitimacy of existing state control.

In the context of this “preservation of Chinese essence,” government officials often describe homosexuality as a form of “western pollution.” Homosexuality is therefore excluded from mainstream discourse in this nation-building project. Hence, in the case of homosexuality in China, the self-contaminated normality and universality of human rights is undermined. As Sklair argues, in the environment of transnational capital flow, after the Tiananmen Square Massacre, Deng Xiaoping’s first statements insured capitalists that China would continue to provide a safe environment for foreign investment (p.267). Colonialism and imperialism are no longer only referring to hegemony from the outside but also to the state apparatus in relation to its own people.

Hence science and technology, especially telecommunication technology in modern times, is often seen as a tool to reach the “global village,” leading to the decline of nation-state, but it is actually used to enhance state power in a different format. In the context of Internet technology, cyberspace does not lead to a global space without national boundaries but an additional space for the project of nation-building. Therefore, in exploring the formation of lala identity and their resistance to state discipline and surveillance, we need to connect this identity, discipline, and resistance to the nation-building project, which includes both the development of capitalism and nationalism through the development of Internet technology.

## **Lala and Internet Surveillance**

There are 56 million Internet users in China and growing. Since the beginning of the development of the Internet in the mid 90's, China has been aware of the political consequences and economic benefits that the Internet and modern technology may bring. The development of the Internet in China has always been embedded in the political leadership's project to modernize Chinese society in terms of a strong economy, efficient bureaucracy, and a strong nation-state. National leaders have promoted the Internet as a modern, efficient means of communication that young Chinese should learn how to use. Some researchers are interested in how the modernization process through Internet technology may imply the potential loss of political control and the realization of freedom of information exchange. For example, in promoting e-commerce, the

government has to pass laws and institutionalize other structures within which information will become more transparent. The growing influence of market forces, reinforced by membership in the WTO will result in greater openness of the media and information, which implies more democracy (Woesler, 2002).<sup>27</sup> Or some researchers say that as information technology increases citizens' access to government, this will flatten institutional structures replacing more hierarchical ones (Tan, p178). These discourses of modernization again show the encounter between nation and technology, though now in the early twenty first century instead of the nineteenth century.

However, these discourses of modernization always imply a teleological, linear development; that is, a better society will unavoidably come through this modernization process. These teleological discourses of modernization expect the innovation of science and technology or capitalism as essential for us to reach a better world. In contrast to those teleological discourses of modernization, other research shows that cooperation between Chinese and Western companies to develop new surveillance technologies has been growing. For instance, the Golden Shield project, one of the thirteen Golden Projects of technological innovation planned by the Chinese government in order to modernize the nation-state, is the project enacted by the cooperation between western companies and research institutions in China for developing surveillance technologies

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<sup>27</sup> Martin Woesler's use of one advertisement from a Microsoft package which links Microsoft Office to massive social change and democracy as his argument about the link between human rights and the Internet in China is ironic (p.266). It is another example of discourse that the Internet will bring freedom of information exchange and democracy which is actually contaminated by global capitalism and neo-colonialism. It seems that "democracy," "human rights," and "justice" are terms not only used by corporations such as Microsoft for advertisement but also political agendas believed by people through cooperation with corporations, that is, buying Microsoft products will bring democracy, human rights, and justice.

such as digital cameras, speech recognition, Internet filter content technology, and database analysis artificial Intelligence, for surveillance and control.<sup>28</sup> Internet technology indeed creates a problem for the government as to how to control unwanted information. However, they are seeking to solve this problem through investment in yet more technology. Western companies who build the new surveillance technologies profit from this investment. Therefore, information technology can serve the interests of both state surveillance and capitalist interest.

In and against those discourses of modernization, moreover, the Chinese government uses regulations as part of this modernization process in the name of nation-state building and security. From January 2000, the Chinese government has enacted legislation, such as “Measures on Regulating the Internet Information Service,” “Interim Regulations on Websites’ Engagement in Carrying News Information and Regulations on Internet BBS Service Management,” and “Resolution on Safeguarding Internet Security,” to prohibit on-line transmission of information that may threaten current political hegemony. These laws prohibited content which “subverts state power,” “disturbs the social order,” “preaches the teachings of evil cults,” “distributes pornography, slanders others, or harms the ‘honor’ of China,” “reveals state secret” etc, which even cause further fear projections and lead to even wider interpretations of these laws by Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and Internet Content Providers (ICPs) (Hachigian, p 49).

This governmental legislation and regulation not only censors sensitive on-line content directly but also promotes self-censorship by ISPs and ICPs, which is even more

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<sup>28</sup> China’s Golden Shield Project has a lot of similarities with the “Total Information Awareness,” a project of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency developed under the Patriot Act, a surveillance system that includes electronic transaction data “from credit card information to veterinary records.” See “A Snooper’s Dream”, *The New York Times*, November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2002 and “Agency Weighed, but Discarded, Plan Reconfiguring the Internet”, *The New York Times*, November 22<sup>th</sup>, 2002.

efficient since it directly influences the profit of both Chinese and transnational companies. ISPs and ICPs carefully follow these rules, employing monitors to delete and censor problematic content in chat rooms and forums for fear of punishment by the state. There have been dozens of prosecutions of Internet content violations which human rights groups are strongly opposing. I will discuss how these regulations, self-censorships, and state surveillance influence gay websites and the development of the *lala* community in this chapter and give some empirical examples about how Chinese government censors and monitors gay websites. I will also illustrate how recent governmental regulation of the Internet promotes self-censorship by ISP's. And I will discuss the intervention in the assembly of *lala* through the Internet in Chapter 4.

The law on the regulation of the Internet passed in 2000 inhibits the development of gay websites in the name of morality. The categories described in the law that fall under "Disturb[ing] the social order" and "distribut[ing] pornography, slander[ing] others, or harm[ing] the 'honor' of China" imply that certain behaviors will endanger public morality. The law does not explicitly mention homosexuality. However, it is sufficiently vague that some local governments and private ISP's often interpret it to include a prohibition of the discussion of homosexuality. Under this law, homosexuality becomes "unhealthy" or even gets linked to crimes such as "pornography." The police often shut down gay websites, and sometimes even arrest site webmasters, or fine them and confiscate their equipment, as occurred in the Guizhou province in 2002. A gay

webmaster was prosecuted for transmitting pornography. His computer was defined as a “crime tool” and confiscated, and he was fined 1000 RMB and detained for five days.<sup>29</sup>

However, often direct state intervention is not necessary. The mere fear of government sanctions will lead private ISP’s to censor or shut down websites on their own. Due to state regulation of the Internet, many *tongzhi* websites have faced harassment and are shut down by the police or ISP’s, and they have to learn to censor themselves in order to prevent further punishment and harassment. They avoid any sexually suggestive phrases such as “419” (which literally means “for one night,” one night stay), money boy (male prostitute), and anything that might be taken for pornography, and emphasize a “healthy” environment.

Internet surveillance has led to the formation of a limited *tongzhi* community. A survey conducted in 2001 by the Beijing Aizhi Action Project (“Aizhi,” meant to sound like “AIDS,” also means “love of knowledge”) in collaboration with the Aiching Baipishu website on the development of Chinese gay websites showed that most websites aimed to provide space for socializing and emotional support, rather than for more “serious” purposes such as education or community building. Problems that these sites face included lack of funding, and lack of labor or technical knowledge. Since these were volunteer projects, technical problems such as unstable servers, no legal protection, hostile Internet companies, and attacks by hackers arose.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Resource from personal email messages from Chinatongzhi emailing list, a list based on discussing gay and lesbian issues in China, from June to July, 2002. Wang, Ching-ning. [ning33@hotmail.com](mailto:ning33@hotmail.com).

<sup>30</sup> Cited from “The Report of the *Tongzhi* Internet and Health Conference”, Beijing Aizhi Action Project, 2001.

## **Technology in Desire**

As I mentioned before, many people may expect the gradual opening of the Chinese market, especially since China joined WTO. The development of an information economy in China will gradually integrate it with the global economy which brings an unavoidable information flow and a global exchange. By exploring the formation of lala through the use of the Internet in China, I argue that this argument that the Internet will bring freedom of information exchange is itself contaminated by global capitalism and functions as a new form of neo-colonialism. The information economy under current global capitalism does not necessarily bring freedom of information exchange. The development of an information economy, on the other hand, is closer to the nation building project where the economy needs to be promoted at the same time state power and control need to be asserted.

In addition, recent news shows that transnational ISP companies such as yahoo and others have compromised the enforcement of self-censorship contracts from the Chinese government. The profit-oriented cooperation already suggests that to expect capitalism to bring information freedom is itself questionable. The development of the Internet in China is closer to a nation building project with capitalist logic, instead of the natural result of the development of a civil society and the freedom of information exchange.

Therefore, my conclusion is that to explore the development of lala community and movement in China we need to understand the intertwining relationship of sexuality, civil society, technology, global information economy, nation building, and state control. Internet technology is always already produced and used in a historical specific context.

It is produced for economy profit, state power and control, and also civil society development. On the other hand, Internet technology also reconfigures how profit can be accumulated, how the state mechanism of control can be exercised, how the nation-building project is developed, and how civil society can form, reform, and deform. Technology is never itself neutral and fixed but a dynamic matter in process and constituted by nation-state, different capitalist interests, and resistance from transnational civil societies. Technology is endlessly dancing with human will for control, for material needs, and for desire.

## **Chapter 4: The Lesbian Cultural Festival: Control in Emerging**

I have explained in chapter 2 that in order to understand the phenomenon of tongzhi, its body and identity, we need to trace the important tendency of the shift from a discipline society to a control society. I have also argued that the control society, paralleled with the first practice of the governmentality of a discipline society in colonies, is experimented with first in postcolonial, or “third world” places such as China. I will analyze the event, the Lesbian Cultural Festival, to support these arguments. My point here is not so much to suggest the phenomenon of lala as the phenomenon of a withering of civil society, the collapse of the separation of public and private space, and the weakening of nation-state boundaries in the tendency of the shift from a discipline society to a control society as happened in the west. As I argued in chapter 2, societies in these postcolonial or third world places are not so much discipline societies where governmentality is institutionalized as the triangle of state, civil society, and people as in the west. Therefore, the governmentality of the mechanism of control becomes exercised first on those third world bodies without much resistance residue from a western capitalist discipline society where civil society is based on a representational model.

I will also extend the argument that the governmentality of control paralleled with that of a discipline society was practiced first in the colonies and then brought back

to Europe, which dynamically gave rise to the bourgeois self and class, and the nation-state in the dynamism of colonialism. I will show how the new governmentality, the mechanism of control, emerges first in those postcolonial or third world places and will potentially influence the government in other places, including the west, such as the politics of homeland security after September 11<sup>th</sup> as I explained in Chapter 3. Further, the sovereign power is no longer from western colonial power but from the notion of *beside* nation-state within which the nation state cooperates with transnational capitalism and through this intimate cooperation they reconfigure each other. Moreover, I will show how the control and profit from this *beside* nation-state through the cooperation between nation state and transnational capitalism in advanced technology goes to a molecular level beyond a molar level, that is, control of and profit from emotion, perception, feeling, even being, that is beyond just buying clothes and foods for basic needs.

I will later discuss the ways that the body of lala activism is a machinic-assemblage produced through biopower from the governmentality of control, and in my final chapter I will argue that it is also a machinic-assemblage activism. This body of activism depends heavily on Internet technology within which a transnational civil society is emerging. In a discipline society, the logic of discipline is subjectivization. Subjectivization is the process by which the separation of the public/private sphere is formed, identity is configured, and citizenship is defined according to a bourgeois class (Hardt, 1995). The alternative groups from the bourgeois class in a discipline society, such as women, blacks, homosexuals, etc also configure their identity as counterpolitical in order to be incorporated into society (Martin, 2000). In a control society, on the other hand, subjectivization no longer has the characteristics of the separation of the

public/private sphere, and politics are no longer identity politics, and what the body means no longer refers to an organism but instead the identity/body itself becomes a machinic-assemblage, in which citizenship no longer refers to identity but to the identity/body as a machinic-assemblage.

Foucault elaborated on the governmentality of a discipline society by the notion of “panopticon.” A person with the plague in a discipline society was fixed in a contained house. “And if he moves, he does so at the risk of his life, or of contagion or punishment (Deleuze, 1992, p. 357). Indeed information technology such as the Internet gives rise to the lala identity and community in China. On the other hand, this information technology is also used by the state to facilitate its discipline, surveillance and control over its people. The surveillance and discipline of a person with the plague in a discipline society is by the panopticon architectural form. Besides the surveillance and discipline from a discipline society, lala faces yet more surveillance and control from a control society; that is, the panopticon does not depend on a physical or institutional form but crosses over space. Accompanied with the Internet, email, TV, music and phones, the body of lala no longer needs a panopticon, an architectural, physical containment to discipline her body. The panopticon itself is abstracted and becomes a force that constitutes lala’s body. Her body no longer needs a panopticonic institution/architecture to modify/supervise her behavior but a panopticonic force that constitutes and is embedded in her body, modulates her emotions, her perception, and her being.

In this chapter, I would like to explore an event, the Lesbian Cultural Festival, in order to see how the tendencies of the characteristics of a control society have emerged. I

would like to explore in what context it benefits the emergence of a control society, what are its characteristics, and how it is different from a discipline society.

## **The Lesbian Cultural Festival**

In the spring 2000, Beijing Sister, the first lesbian grassroots organization in China, established in 1998, was planning to hold the Lesbian Cultural Festival (LCF), the second National Lesbian Conference, in Beijing, May 2-5, 2000. The first National Lesbian Conference was held in 1998, and around thirty lesbians came from nation wide and had a wonderful gathering in Beijing. This time Beijing Sister, mainly the organizer M, planned to have 500 hundred lesbians join LCF, which was aimed not only at the inner gathering of the lesbian community but also tried to bridge the gap between the community and mainstream society. LCF was planned to include cultural events such as community discussion, film, theater performance, and collective marriage ceremonies (which was cancelled later because it was too provocative). And in terms of speaking to the mainstream, LCF invited scholars and gay-friendly media to report the event.

This news had been announced since early April and discussed in Xiao Yu Yan Mei (Xiaoyu), the main overseas lala Bulletin Board System (BBS) and hooked to the Yifan website (yifanbbs.com) for overseas lesbians from China in the U.S. Xiaoyu was established in 2000. Yifan is famous for its electronic books reservoir. Its web users are mainly highly educated students and intellectuals overseas and from China. The Yifan website was blocked by the Chinese government in 2002 due to the provocative

discussions on its Bulletin Board System Forum. Because the users of the Yifan website are mainly highly educated students and overseas elites, the users of Xiaoyu have similar characteristics. Information about LCF was also announced on Yu Bi Yuan (Yubi), one of the oldest and main lesbian forums in China.

Organizers of LCF posted their ideas, plans, activity designs, strategies and detailed work processes, in order to propagate and attract the lala audience to participate. It is easier on the Yubi website, compared to Xiaoyu, for users to post articles since it does not need an ID registration as does Xiaoyu. On the other hand, the structure of the Xiaoyu website can identify web users easier because it not only needs registration but also distinguishes according to the amount of articles people post as senior, junior or freshman members. In the later part of this article, we will see how the different locations of the two websites, corresponding with different ways of identification, demonstrate different structures of society, that is, the discipline and control society.

My resource for data about LCF is both from the text of discussions on Yu Bi Yuan and Xiao Yu Yan Mei websites, accessed from April to June, 2001, and from informal discussions with LCF organizers and participants who attended this event in Beijing. I will mainly use the text of discussions from websites, accompanied with my observations in so called "physical" space. In terms of analyzing the web text, I prefer to use "information" rather than "discourse" for those texts since we can see how using the concept of discourse makes it harder and harder to analyze the event since this concept presumes the "person" who speaks tries to produce certain "meanings." In the context of cyberspace, not only "person" but also "meaning" are problematic since they do not refer

to a person's identity, the molar level of the body, but more to a molecular level, referring to one's affect in temporality. In order to identify a person, we cannot depend on identification but on the distinction of specific affects that may belong to one person's characteristics. One organism body can have unlimited identifications corresponding to what she/he feels and needs in that temporality. To tell if an article is written by someone or not is not by identification but by the affect the text produces and whether or not it corresponds with that person's style. To a machinic-assemblage body like lala, more information flows and affects than one person could speak. It is countless identifications and countless speakers which are not necessary itself, and are not confined in the human organism's mind and identity.

Moreover, meaning-embedded discourse has faced its limit in analyzing what happens in cyberspace in terms of the "noise" that flows in it. In the case of LCF, not only different kinds of information emerged before, present and after the event—information from organizers, from a suspicious audience, and from a supportive audience about this event—but also the "noise." Noise is that information not so much related to the LCF itself but which functions to distract and disturb the audiences' attention from the discussion about LCF. Later we will see how this noise efficiently affected the lesbian activism itself, that is, drawing it away from activism in a discipline society sense, and contributing to the mechanism of control.

### **Before The Lesbian Culture Festival**

When organizers from Beijing Sisters posted their motivation and anticipation of LCF on Yubi in early April, not only supportive voices but also suspicious voices arose. Besides those different voices, significant amounts of noise posting also arose, which made the total amount of Yubi forum discussion articles reach a surprising apex. Among those suspicious voices, some people/identifications expressed their suspicion in a very structural and organized way. They asked specific questions about organization, financial resources, legal status, and information about the members of Beijing Sisters. They also questioned organizers about selling tickets for specific culture events in LCF and were suspicious that organizers not only got funding from the foreign NGO organization for holding this event but also made profits for themselves.

These powerful suspicious voices indeed produced more suspicious affect toward LCF within the lala community and pushed organizers to explain further. Organizers then wrote several formal articles in reply to those questions. They reported the history of the development of Beijing Sisters, when it was established, who was in the organization presently, who had joined before, and the functions of Beijing Sisters. Organizers also explained what kind of funds they received from abroad and through whom, and what established scholars in what institutions were their supporters etc.

Besides questions about the organization of Beijing Sisters, suspicious voices also debated their own ideal of the lesbian movement in China against BS's strategies in terms of holding the LCF. They claimed that the LCF should assert itself to promote a cultural image instead of advocating for political rights. They demonstrated that by the law of the People's Republic of China, any democratic party has to be indicated to and informed by

the Chinese Communist Party. Although identifications which raised these suspicious questions claimed themselves as lala, they disagreed with this event because they felt it was too political. Although organizers claimed LCF as a cultural event, these suspicious identifications thought LCF had too much of a political implication because it was not only a form of collective assembly but it also promoted homosexual legal rights implicitly.

This de-political claim from suspicious voices also suggested that the gay and lesbian movement should use established individual gays and lesbians to influence society rather than developing an organization. "If we need to establish an organization, it should be a loose one, not aimed at promoting political rights," "not to be active for the purpose of being active."<sup>31</sup> In terms of funding from foreign NGO, suspicious voices stated with a nationalist tone that grassroots activism should be done by the Chinese themselves instead of using foreigner's money and cooperating with foreign forces only to gain international media effect.

Besides those suspicious voices, there were also other significant amounts of "noise" emerging. I use the term "noise" to describe those voices because it functions not so much as forms of agreeing, disagreeing, or discussing LCF but interrupting, distracting attention from, or entertaining by it. For example, noise arose in the discussion of LCF events in order to distort other peoples' expression and purposely disrupt the discussion on the BBS. Or, noise assaulted other people who were in discussion, sometimes with masculine and discriminating attitudes toward lesbians. Or, noise assaulted and criticized organizers and other supportive people on the LCF event.

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.cinews.net/bbs/yubi/10401.html>. Access date April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

## **Living in the Flow of Information**

Owing to these huge debates on the web among organizers, suspicious voices, supportive voices, and noise, LCF drew significant attention in the lala community. Yet, on the day before LCF, police came to crackdown the event, confined organizers and participants in the hotels where they resided, and investigated individuals separately for hours. Although no one was arrested, the action of registering names in police files touched on the most serious taboo for homosexuals—coming out. The crackdown of the LCF then resulted in some volunteers of LCF bitterly criticizing organizers, and it also resulted in organizers criticizing each other. Volunteers and organizers who had Internet access then posted their opinions about LCF, using first-person and realistic narration and wrote down what they did for preparing the event, in dealing with police intervention during LCF, and in responding to criticism from other organizers and volunteers. Moreover, it wasn't until the police crackdown that it became clear that many suspicious voices and noises before LCF on the web came from the cyber police.<sup>32</sup>

The cyber police successfully intervened in LCF by pretending they were lala and asking suspicious questions in order to push organizers to offer more information so they could more easily intervene in the event. It successfully exhausted the energy of the organizers so they couldn't focus on activism only, and it produced the affect of

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<sup>32</sup> The questions posted before the event from suspicious voices about Beijing Sister's legal status, funding resources, members and functions, etc. were exactly the same as the questions asked when police investigated organizers when they were confined in their hotels.

suspicion in the community, destroying the solidarity of the lala community. Cyber police also used strategies such as making noise to distort, distract, and disrupt discussion on activism, and conspicuously made the lala community mistrust the ability of organizers and the LCF event. Web cops were hired by the state to surf the web to find suspicious discussions that they identified as possibly challenging state power and then they intervened. They were hired to put noise information out, twenty four hours a day, to compete with information from activism. We understand that the web itself is an open space with a free flow of information, so what the cyber police did was to add more information to distract people's attention from the information by organizers and other lala. The intervention from the cyber police successfully made ambivalent which were the voices from lala and which were the enemy's since it had produced the suspicious affect which was so effective. However, even though some of the suspicious voices on the web before LCF were identified after the crackdown to be from the cyber police, it is still hard to conclude where other suspicious voices and noise came from—whether they were from web cops, or some crazy guys, or just suspicious or homophobic affects within the lala community. What we can see is only the affective information, the effect those suspicious voices and noise produced, which flows on the screen without necessarily a person carrying it out.

The affective information produced on the web did not stop after the police crackdown of LCF. It changed from the information produced mainly by organizers, suspicious voices, and noise before the event to even more affective and sensational information full of novelty produced by LCF volunteers, organizers, and participants. When the police crackdown happened in Beijing, the news was almost simultaneously

transmitted through the Internet and was known globally by web users. People who were confined and interviewed by the police narrated the dangerous and stressful situation and used first-person and realistic narration to describe what happened during the time of the police crackdown in terms of the different time and space where they were located.<sup>33</sup> The audience was affected by watching the different angles of “reality” about how the police harassed organizers, how they followed participants after they separated because of the canceled event and traveled only in Beijing City, how they intervened in any potential gathering for discussion in bars or other public spaces by different reporters on computer screens.

Besides this realistic narration on the crackdown event, later on volunteers and organizers started to post articles on BBS, both Yubi and Xiaoyu, to argue with each other about the failure of LCF. In proving the legitimacy of what they had done, they posted articles in memorial, reportive, or even confessional styles to describe and analyze what they were doing before, during and after LCF in terms of complicated communications, personality weaknesses, and financial problems. The sensational and affective information can be highlighted by a piece written by one of the volunteers. In the article “May Cultural Festival in My Eyes,” she wrote:

In order to report correctly and make sure of events’ completeness and details, this article has to be written in a trivial and redundant way.... We wish every audience reads it as patiently as the authors who spent time on writing it. Thanks.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> For example, one of the most sensational narrations was posted by the main organizer of LCF, M, “‘M.. you are such a figure! Falung Kong keeps me awake for three nights, but you keep me awake for two nights,’ the person said to me. He said he represents only himself as an individual, not as part of the government.” From <http://www.yifanbbs.com/ubb/Forum48/HTML/001365.html>, May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

<sup>34</sup> From personal email: .ning33@hotmail.com, May 23th, 2001.

The narrative language that was also used in the fights between organizers had a sensational and novel tone: such as “the situation is complicated, the event development is dramatic” and “about the story of the financial report, there is another sort of amazing one that I will describe in another article. What I can say here now is, Z (another organizer) controlled all the use of money from the beginning, and even now.”<sup>35</sup> And another example: “The organizer M who showed her mystical characteristic on the first day I met her...For a 20 year old girl like me, it’s impossible to think too much for just participating as a volunteer.”<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, the volunteers, organizers, and participants who had access to the Internet after the crackdown became the main narrators of what happened at LCF. People expressed their own realistic narrative to describe this event, what they did for preparing, where they were when the police came and confined people, what kind of questions the police asked them, what work they were doing now for unfinished tasks, and what were their interpretations about the failure of LCF. Everyone had her own historicity and narrative to describe this event. LCF was the *realities* represented in the flow of information, corresponding with the eagerness from the audience who claimed that, whether the activity was successful or not, organizers who had participated in the event should give a report to lala on the web. Activism itself, therefore, is not so much in a fixed, centered time and space with people participating in it, but it is informationalized and flowing everywhere computers exist. Doing activism for those machinic-assemblage

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<sup>35</sup> <http://www.cinews.net/bbs/yubi/11145.html> and <http://www.cinews.net/bbs/yubi/11149.html>. May 8, 2001

<sup>36</sup> From personal email: ning33@hotmail.com, May 23th, 2001.

bodies means being located in front of a computer screen, reading, writing, and responding to articles. The information is transmitted through the electronic medium, and the realm of its affect is modulated and modulating, consciousness is formed and forming, a revolutionary zeal is expressing and expressed.

Through affective information on the web before and after the LCF, what we can see is that what happened at LCF at that time and in that space is not important anymore but is constituted by the flow of information on the web: the narration at the beginning (the purpose of the LCF, the strategy, the reflection of the gay and lesbian movement), the disappearance of narration (when organizers did not have access to the internet during the crackdown period), and later the narration of how those four-days happened (different people from different angles, different time and spaces to "constitute" the event), and the interpretation (the failure, the analysis of personality). The LCF is no longer an event which involves people in a fixed time and space, nor do the concepts of success and failure matter here, but it is an event of information, flowing in space and time, attracting and affecting web users who are more than a collection of people physically in China. The audience is no longer the participants in Beijing, but the audience of the web. The whole event is more real in cyberspace than in so-called "reality" as some "objective" phenomenon that happened to people and things in a physical space. The event itself, therefore, happened in cyberspace, where there are people talking, people fighting, people raising questions and people interpreting. Activism itself now becomes a process of informationalization, its historicity is deconstructed, within which revolution and counter-revolution affect is informationalized and transmitted electronically and is affecting other bodies.

So, what is activism now? How do we understand the new phenomenon of activism with the lala machinic-assemblage body that has developed with Internet use in China? What is the new form of activism given the new restraints arising in the context of China which on one hand promotes an information economy, and on the other hand continues to grasp its political power in a controlling society? What is the new body of activism produced under this context? In exploring these questions, I would like to compare M, the main LCF organizer, and her view of the gay and lesbian movement with the view of the young lala generation raised through Internet use in China, including 20 year old volunteers. Additionally, I will compare lala in China with lala overseas, their response to the failure of LCF and the different ways their activism is expressed. Through their differences in responding to the failure of LCF and their ideas about the gay and lesbian movement, it is suggested that the failure of LCF comes from the decline of a discipline society and the emergence of a control society.

### **Discipline and control societies**

M, an intellectual influenced by western political philosophy, from the beginning of planning LCF, posted her view about the gay and lesbian movement in China. Her version of gay and lesbian movement in China had been inspired and influenced by Western representational models, identity politics, and a confrontational model of activism. In the article “About Self culture and Community Establishment” before the LCF, she wrote:

In a democratic society, the collective force and community is very important. However, even in the most democratic countries, no government can cover and care about specific individual's concerns. Any individuals who want to fight for their rights have to coordinate with other people in order to form collective force. A democratic society is created through this peaceful and equal negotiation among different groups so different groups' interests can be redistributed. This is why different groups have their own organization in order to lobby in congress. Therefore, under the condition of China, if we want to do something for ourselves and the next generation of lala, we need to follow the rule of the game, *forming interest groups to fight for rights*"( my emphasis).<sup>37</sup>

To M, under the harsh homosexual situation in China, "before we become mute," LCF is not only an activity to speak out from the lesbian community, but is itself a history created by the lesbian community. In M's concept of the gay and lesbian movement, it is through individuals forming interest groups and organizations to fight for their rights, like the political negotiation logic in a western representational politics society. Besides her anticipation of integrating the gay and lesbian movement in China to the global gay and lesbian movement, she also actively attended international LGBT conferences and applied international funds to the lesbian movement in China. Nevertheless, in facing the emergence of the gay and lesbian web community, she saw the use of the Internet as a threat to the gay and lesbian movement and worried that the web may distract most of the lala energy since almost all the BBS and chat rooms are only "loving with pleasure, whining with pain," not seriously raising important discussion and getting involved in activism to change the difficult social situation in China.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.cinews.net/bbs/yubi/11494.html>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.cinews.net/bbs/yubi/11536.html>

In contrast to M's view, volunteers posted their views on the best way the lala community might benefit after the police crackdown, against Beijing Sister's strategy about how to do the gay and lesbian movement in China. These young volunteers started to post articles on the web criticizing organizers. They expressed their opposing and hostile sentiments on those over-political politics that the People's Republic of China has gone through since Mao, characterized by "no horrible political motivation, complicated economic profits, sophisticated and evil personal relationships." To them:

No matter if it is a cultural festival, conference, or entertainment,... they are all for creating a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere in order to let everyone show their deep heart voice... This is the goal that makes us come to volunteer for this event. That is, the most simple and pure goal. However, in the process of LCF, we see how the whole event development gradually went away from us.<sup>39</sup>

Besides criticizing the political consequence of LCF, the young volunteers also started to question the necessity of organization in the lala community. They criticized the Beijing Sisters for being institutionalized and for not being flexible enough to adjust to social change, that is, to the fast development of the lala web community, in order to develop strategies that are useful for doing activism in China.

Beijing Sister should have its own law...the mission, structure, decision making process, etc. If Beijing Sister wants to develop in the long term, it should do it step by step, establishing a strong base and should not expect success immediately. Who doesn't know that the lala movement is still like an infant and just beginning in China? And compared to years ago when Beijing Sister started, society has changed a lot. For example, the web as a new form of prevailing media, it has enabled millions of lala to face who they are and make other friends... Shouldn't Beijing Sister adjust to social

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<sup>39</sup> From personal email: ning33@hotmail.com, May 23th, 2001.

change in order to follow the trend? I think changing Beijing Sister is more important and realistic and urgent than discussing other issues.<sup>40</sup>

To those young volunteers who “grew up” and found their identity through the web, the establishment of organizations and the forming of interest groups is both dangerous and not efficient for the situation in China. One volunteer said:

I can give up holidays, free time, energy, passion for LCF. But if my parents, relatives, lover, friends are hurt because I joined this event, then I won't allow it. Any organizations or persons that cause hurt I will treat as an enemy.<sup>41</sup>

This seemingly apolitical announcement actually shows its political implication. On one hand, under the state control of assembly and media, it is difficult to form organizations without the CCP's leadership, on the other hand gays and lesbians are still fearful of being identified; cyberspace is the only space that is convenient and safe for gays and lesbians concealing sexuality and forming a community in terms of its anonymity and the way that it corresponds to the state promotion of information economy. These volunteers even cited and posted assembly and demonstration laws, and social organization management laws of the People's Republic of China, in order to show how Beijing Sister itself is illegitimate and LCF is determined to fail due to its illegal status.

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<sup>40</sup> From personal email:ning33@hotmail.com, May 23th, 2001.

<sup>41</sup> From personal email:ning33@hotmail.com, May 23th, 2001.

They claimed organizers “should reflect upon themselves instead of criticizing the general state situation in China.”<sup>42</sup>

The web development vs. the forming of an organization as a strategy for gay and lesbian activism then becomes the main debate in reflecting on the failure of LCF. I would argue that activism through forming organizations, interest groups, assemblies, and demonstrations in order to fight for political rights is a form of activism in a discipline society, and this kind of activism is not influencing those new generations of lala who formed their identity through the use of the internet and whose sexual body has already been a machinic-assemblage body from the beginning. They are the new generation created by the new state biopower. I would argue it is the mechanism of a control society, which on one hand destroys any possible institutional power to challenge its politics, and on the other hand promotes an information economy to make profit. The biopower under the mechanism of control reifies the lala, who are those machinic-assemblage bodies sick of organizations, institutions, and discipline style politics. One volunteer wrote:

Before the LCF, when I asked M whether the event was legal or not, M answered that the legal status of LCF is tricky. Indeed, any public gathering should get permission from the local government and we do not have it. Yet if LCF was defined as illegal by the government, that means homosexuals gathering in China was illegal, and it is very bad for the international reputation of China....Her answer made me pretty scared....Why did M suddenly link LCF to political issues such as international influence? It is too exaggerated and serious. ....It seems that M admires freedom, democracy, and the legal system, and is used to the Western way of looking at things. The way she judges things good or

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<sup>42</sup> From personal email:.ning33@hotmail.com, May 23th, 2001.

bad, white or black is dependent on western values and juridical systems.<sup>43</sup>

The new form of activism in the control society has been mentioned in one audience article, “Who should bear the responsibility of helping development of gay and lesbian community,” which echoes the views of the volunteers:

I want to say that what she (M) has done for lala ...Is it true that the lesbian space is still infertile and bare as M claimed? On the opposite side, I would like to mention the lala web community. From 1998 I have joined websites such as Lala Shenghuo Guangchang and later Lala Ju Le Bu. Those webmasters spend their own limited money and countless time and energy to build up the virtual space for the gay and lesbian community. They let each sad and lonely lala find herself and love in this space. If those people’s work and passion did not exist, how could it be possible for China to have such a huge gay and lesbian community right now? Therefore, I would like to argue that the real effort for opening a lala space in China is not through one or several “representative” lala activists but through those anonymous people who contribute their energy nationally and internationally.<sup>44</sup>

In her view, Internet technology has brought the possibility of forming the gay and lesbian community in China, which depended on the effort of many webmasters who spent their personal money and time to build up gay and lesbian websites that benefited gays and lesbians in China on such a significant level that a grassroots organization such as Beijing Sister can’t compare. They are people who have done activism anonymously and do not think of themselves as “representative” of the lala movement in China.

Against the new form of activism made possible by Internet technology, within which name and identity are no longer significant but the affect modulates and transmits in the flow of information, M wrote of her concern for cyberspace and argued it was not the

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<sup>43</sup> From personal email:.ning33@hotmail.com, May 23th, 2001.

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.cinews.net/bbs/yubi/11467.html>

right way for the gay and lesbian movement in China. Although she submitted that to challenge the existing media controlled by the state is still difficult, she still thought investing activism in cyberspace and depending on its virtuality is dangerous.

I have spent almost five months interviewing people in order to write a book about the Chinese lala. It would be the first published book about the lala community in China. But until this summer, only because of paperwork from the Central Propaganda Bureau, many publishing houses which have shown interest in publishing my book do not dare to challenge the order from the State. Indeed, people are celebrating how the web brings us a lot of convenient and new space. On the other hand, I have seen the two-sided sword. We don't have to spend more time in explaining the exclusivity of the web, that is, only certain people who have cultural, educational and economical abilities can have access to the Internet. The most important point is that the web makes lala indulge in it. The web indeed offers us a lot of possibility. It can help us to identify ourselves, make friends, express opinions and sentiment, etc. But this comfortable, secure, and convenient virtual space also makes countless lala indulge in it and then forget we are actually living in a real and realistic world and society, which we have to face, bear and change. In cyberspace, we can relieve ourselves unrestrainedly and let go of all the repression, pain, distortion, etc. However, once we face the real world, again we immediately face the painful, repressive, double standard...this is why, on the web, except lala outside China, we seldom see lala in China write encouraging, relaxing and happy words. Almost more than 80% of the words expressed are about the pain from breaking up relations or finding girlfriends etc. There is almost no serious discussion.<sup>45</sup>

Through these debate on how to do lala activism in China, we see how M is different from those generations who formed through Internet use. In M's words, cyberspace is a virtual space contesting with the real space that people physically live in. On the other hand, the machinic-assemblage body of lala that formed through Internet use deconstructs the dualism of virtual and real. They criticize M's ignorance about the Internet as a powerful technology, how it significantly improves gays' and lesbians' lives in China, and her stubborn view of what activism should be; that is, organizing lesbians

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.cinews.net/bbs/yubi/11493.html>

to form interest groups for fighting for political rights, instead of following the social trend, that is, to understand what is allowed and can be done in society and what is not. In M's eyes, what the Internet brings to lesbians is only the "comfortable," "secure," and "convenient" virtual place that makes people "indulge" in their personal life instead of fighting the realistic world. To stand against M's discipline style of society activism and her criticism of web users who ignore real life problems, one person wrote:

Is it like M said that lala indulges in the web so they don't face the society? No it is because the reality is full of obstacles. The obstacles come first from our family and living environment and then society as a whole. When lala hasn't been brave enough to face their own personal living environment, you want them to fight society. It is like pushing an infant not-yet able to walk to run fast and it will only destroy her.<sup>46</sup>

Through analyzing the difference between M and the generation formed through the use of the Internet, we can see that not only are their views on what Internet technology brings to the lesbian movement in China different, their concept on "what is politics" is also different. This question plays a role in the different meanings that the terms "political" and "cultural" represent to them. To M, what cyberspace offers is only on a cultural level instead of political change, but to the new generation, sick of this political language and the implication that people have suffered so much since Mao, political means and includes every aspect of people's life. To the lala generation who arose in an affect economy produced through the use of the Internet in China, consumption becomes a way of resistance, and "depoliticizing" as a way of exercising

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<sup>46</sup> <http://www.cinews.net/bbs/yubi/11504.html>

their agency. I will explore the new form of activism emerged in the control society in Chapter 5

The different interpretation about what is politics also manifests itself in the dualism of the “cultural image” vs. “political right” debate. I have mentioned before that the information from suspicious voices before LCF on the web, possibly from the cyber police, has showed this dualism. No matter whether this dualism came from the cyber police or not, that is, from state discourse which aims to depoliticize the resistance, what is interesting here is that the depoliticizing language echoes what these young lala said after the crackdown of LCF. Although we can still excuse that it is the state which successfully intervened in this event, the success of this intervention is undeniable. It shows a control society is emerging within which everything is subsumed under the sphere of culture through the state biopower. In this new state-biopower, the term “depoliticizing” becomes problematic. In the discipline society, the separation of political, economical, and cultural and the public/private spheres are the function of the machine of discipline. In contrast, activism in a control society emphasizes decentralized agency, that is, a centralized institution like Beijing Sister becomes not so efficient as decentralized websites.

So, how do we understand the relationship between “depoliticizing” as a resistance and the “informationalizing” movement in the new lala activism? How do the two cooperate with or conflict with each other in the context of the lala movement in China? How is the new biopower exercised by the state in a control society different than the one in a discipline society? The subsuming of politics into the sphere of culture is a

phenomenon corresponding to an affect economy produced in the context of the state that on one hand promotes information economy and on the other hand promotes surveillance on society. Activism, corresponding to the affect economy, in the control society needs to use consumption as its claim, its activity and its logic. In this activism, affect is produced and becomes a form of activism and agency, which produces the cyberized/informationalized lala movement. The movement itself has to bring out desire and the desire itself can be absorbed in capitalism. I will explore it further in Chapter 5. Therefore, Beijing Sister, established in 1998 at a time when the web was not popular has a form of activism which is gradually becoming withered in a control society.

### **The Birth of a Control Society: The Third World is better than the West**

In contrast to the severe criticism from the new generation of lala raised through the use of the Internet of Beijing Sister in respect to the failure of LCF, overseas Chinese lala, mainly the web users from Xiaoyu, showed their support for the hard work Beijing Sister had done for LCF and the criticism on the intervention from the Chinese government. In their view, the failure of LCF was a revolution defeated again by counter-revolutionary power. They treated organizers and participants who joined as revolutionary heroes. They severely criticized the political control under the Chinese government and echoed with M that the rights of people should be fought for by forming collectivity on a confrontational model.

Every country has its law and right which is fought for and accumulated by people's struggles little by little, sometimes with blood. Through this process it is hard to avoid that some people are defeated....We learn a lot from this lesson, that is, depending on passion is not enough. We need to keep insistence continuously, one time, second time and third time, till we success. From B.

We are not sad but shocked, angry and feel helpless. The reason we are shocked is that through so many years it still is like this. Water is flowing but the stone still stays here, not moving. The reason we are angry is because CF itself is no more than legitimate. Police are really unreasonable. We are helpless because we can do nothing. So let us not feel sad because it is not necessary when we are not yet ready to give up. from R.<sup>47</sup>

Among those overseas lala, some of them even showed their diasporic sentiment, their eagerness for the future of their homeland, and their feeling of helplessness about the existing political surveillance. One lala compared her diasporic discontent to an ancient Chinese exile poem:

In the world of dreariness  
More lamentably  
Being Born as a dreary girl

A voice I heard saying  
"Go Home"  
Home, to where?

Suddenly turning around  
Homeland is dormant  
As she always has been.<sup>48</sup>

Unlike the young lala in China, these overseas lala did not agree with the hard criticism of organizers, especially of M. Although the overseas lala were also raised through Internet use as the lala in China and formed their identity and community mainly

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<sup>47</sup> Both quotes are from <http://www.yifanbbs.com/ubb/Forum48/HTML/001305.html>

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.yifanbbs.com/ubb/Forum48/HTML/001305.html>

through the Xiaoyu website, they saw establishing organizations and the use of the Internet as beneficiary to each other instead of conflicting. Echoing M, they stated that borrowing international LGBT movement experience and forming organizations along with using socially established gay or gay-friendly individuals to influence society, instead of only depending on the use of the Internet, is essential for the gay and lesbian movement in China.

The question is not IF we need an organization, but HOW to organize. Maybe we can borrow some good experience and practice from some successful international LGBT organizations.....A group is more powerful than any individual. How do you think the homosexuals achieved the right to get married and adopt children in some countries? The rights don't come as a free gift from the heterosexual society! Rather, they are a result of generations of accumulative struggling, fighting, bleeding and suffering. Why can't we contribute, as this benefits not only us but also our offspring?<sup>49</sup>

These further discussions and debates about LCF in Xiaoyu had led to the host—yifanbbs.com—locking all the threads related to it several days later. Yifanbbs.com is a commercial website, and, although registered in U.S., its most significant amount of browsers are from China. Yifan was afraid that this politically sensitive discussion might lead to a firewall block by the Chinese government that would significantly influence its profit (although it still ended in being blocked later since so many Chinese overseas dissents discussed so-called “politically sensitive” issues there). This self-censorship action from Yifan irritated many lala; one of them cynically described this situation:

Commercialism is driven by interest not by human affection. For example, we get benefit through flirting, and then Yifan gets high browsing rates which lead to them getting money from stock and advertisement. So both sides get benefits through this process. But if you want to discuss politically sensitive issues which

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<sup>49</sup> <http://www.yifanbbs.com/ubb/Forum48/HTML/001371.html>

may influence the browsing rate, of course they will delete your articles. Don't treat this place as free entertainment place. He he.<sup>50</sup>

Although registered in the U.S., Yifan's commercial essence is not uninfluenced by censorship and surveillance from the China government. And though compromising with the censorship from Yifan—"under other people's roofs, we have to bow our head"—people suggested going to other places to discuss this issue.<sup>51</sup> The block also motivated overseas lala to build a website owned by overseas lala which includes information, entertainment, research, and sentiments relief functions. The censorship on the crackdown of LCF related discussions also showed up on Yubi, which was also blocked several days later after the crackdown of LCF, which led to further cyber activism, that is, offering different ways to break through blocks and firewalls using different technology. However, the self-censorship from the mechanism of state control was still useful to silence further discussion for the lala movement in China. One of the organizers who also was the forum leader of Xiaoyu at that time, expressed her fear that if she spoke too much about the LCF detail, police would arrest her in the name of the "crime for illegal allying with international force."

Therefore, LCF, from information produced by organizers, suspicious voices, supportive voices and noise in the beginning, to its crackdown by police, and later the sensational realistic narration and debate on the strategy of the gay and lesbian movement in China, shows a tendency of transition from a discipline to a control society. The police

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<sup>50</sup> <http://www.yifanbbs.com/ubb/Forum48/HTML/001412.html>

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.yifanbbs.com/ubb/Forum48/HTML/001395.html>

as the mechanism of state control not only control institutions but they also control those realms outside institutions, such as the surveillance and control of the mind and one's being since the web is not only a media but a media in flesh in terms of the body of lala. It reconfigures what is public and what is private. The life of lala, the being of lala is a machinic-assemblage, therefore it displays itself on the web and is also controlled by the web. One person wrote in Yubi after the crackdown of LCF:

At least several years after LCF no one is daring and willing to organize anything. It is not because we don't have the ability but there is no possibility. And no one is willing to participate in similar activities not because we are not interested but because we don't feel it is safe.<sup>52</sup>

Therefore, activism in terms of a discipline society logic can't function well because we no longer can identify easily who is our friend and enemy, since any information has its power to affect another's body, no matter if this affect is from an enemy, from friends, or from homophobia in enemies, in friends, or in us. Right now we are dealing with the concept of a control society; that is, we can change identifications, and most importantly, affect, and we have unlimited information, within which a new form of activism in the flow of affect and information is emerging. Activism is not so much happening in a fixed time and space and made by "representatives," but it is fighting in the flow of information, a cyber warfare decentralized in places that computers exist.

Moreover, the activism in a discipline society is based on forming centralized organizations, with its agency coming from institutions, within which the separation of

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<sup>52</sup> <http://www.yifanbbs.com/ubb/Forum48/HTML/001308.html>

the political, economical and cultural, and the separation of public/private spheres are the mechanism for subjectivization. On the other hand, activism in a control society is a decentralized form, which arises from an affect economy in which life and politics is subsumed in the realm of culture. Through a comparison of the differences in responding to the LCF event among the organizers of Beijing Sisters, the new lala generation and lala overseas raised through the use of the Internet in China, we can see how the mechanism of control is emerging in China. The mechanism of control produces the mechanic-assemblage body of lala, which gradually substitutes the mechanism of discipline in terms of lala in China. In addition, the mechanism of control expands its logic to another world, that is, the overseas lala who live in a western environment that is closer to the logic of a discipline society and identifies with a confrontational model, representational politics, and the institution as a form of agency, and who are gradually subsumed and influenced by the control mechanism from China. Hence, the control society becomes exercised first on those third world bodies without much resistance residue from a discipline society. In the case of China, where the governmentality of its discipline society is a socialist one, the mechanism of control is easier exercised without much resistance from “representational politics,” a form of civil society in western discipline society.

## Chapter 5: Resistance without Essence: Activism in the Mechanism of Control

Although the Chinese government represses the development of lala civil society—a civil society with a machinic sociality through the use of the Internet—lala activists also use this modern technology to resist state control and discipline. In this chapter, I will link lala activism to gay and lesbian activism in China, that is, tongzhi activism as a whole, in discussing resistance against censorship and control. "*Tongzhi*" literally means "comrade," and is in fact the term used by communists and Nationalists to refer to their revolutionary compatriots. A new usage has emerged, and "*tongzhi*" has become the preferred term Chinese gay men and lesbians use to refer to gay people. "Tong" means "same" or "homo-", and "zhi" means "goal" or "aspiration." Thus this simple word "*tongzhi*" alludes to those who share the revolutionary aspiration for equality for those with same-sex desire (Chou 2000, p. 193). Hence, the resistance and activism of lala is inseparable from and constituted by the notion of tongzhi.

Tongzhi activism against censorship and control has arisen not only among tongzhi in China but also tongzhi diaspora, especially in the U.S., constituted by the Internet. Such activism is at the same time an intimate network between local and global communication technologies and political strategies. This activism reconfigures what can be done locally and globally, in virtual spaces and actual spaces. Hence, the bodies of tongzhi activism, like lala bodies in the use of the Internet, require us to rethink subject identity and political activism as machinic-assemblages which are beyond organism-

closed thinking. This machinic-assemblage activism, arising from the intertwined relationship of civil society, technology, state power, and global capitalism, also requires us to use the concept of a control society along with a discipline society in order to understand the new form of resistance which has arisen in globalization. Therefore, to explore tongzhi activism we are at the same time engaged in the discussion of the transformation of global capitalism, the role of the nation-state in this global shift, as well as new forms of organization of resistance which have arisen from it.

The study of globalization has provoked hot debates on the left on the changing role of the nation-state in the acceleration of the flow of global capital. The neo-liberal discourse often claims that globalization will diminish the nation-state barrier of free-trade and allow global citizens to engage in the free exchange of information, goods and service. Besides criticizing neo-liberalism, the phenomenon of the displacement of the nation-state in globalization demands the left to reexamine the relationship between the regulatory function of nation-state and global capitalism. On the one hand, people such as Negri and Hardt claim that a new form of supranational sovereignty, the Empire, has arisen along with global capitalism. The old analytic tool that treats the nation-state as a unit of analysis to understand global capital and politics is no longer useful. On the other hand, people claim that the unit of the nation-state, although its function has changed since the mid-1970s from regulating capital flow to accelerating it, is still the most efficient tool to understand the radical reconfiguration of the global economy and politics (Aronowitz and Bratsis, 2002). Paralleling with these debates on the role of nation-state, the weakening function of institutions in civil society in terms of resistance also demands us to rethink what kind of new form of organizing is arising. People following Negri and

Hardt tend to view a new form of organization of discontent, called multitude, as having emerged in response to the declining capability of institutions in civil society such as trade unions, green parties, and labor movements. On the other hand, people disagree with Negri and Hardt and argue that the “multitude” cannot function and organize without being based on the concept of citizenship, that is, without being rooted in the sovereignty of nation-states. In and against those debates on the role of the nation-state and forms of resistance, I would argue that those debates are emerging from the reconfiguration from a discipline society to a control society. I will use the tongzhi movement as an example to discuss the new form of control and resistance arising in the age of globalization.

Tongzhi activism is the wrestling space of different forces such as nation-state sovereignty, the international human rights movement, transnational capitalism, and civil society. Because the very concept of tongzhi is constituted by the use of the Internet, its activism requires us to rethink a new form of nationalism, nation-state sovereignty through state institutions, transnational capitalism, and civil society that has arisen in relationship to technology. As I demonstrate in chapters three and four, the organizing force from the state to its citizens in order to reify this China “nation-state,” or, in other words, the state bio-power, is not only through discipline-style traditional institutions such as schools, *danwei* (work units), etc, that is, not only bio-power through institutionalization, but through telecommunication technology. Moreover, citizen discontent for state bio-power is also organized and formed through the use of telecommunication technology. It is this civil society with a machinic sociality that allows us to explore tongzhi activism, the new form of resistance arising from the

interrelationship of the international gay and lesbian rights movement, technology, and transnational capitalism.

### **Tongzhi, the International Gay and Lesbian Movement, and the Control Society**

Tongzhi activism has its history linked with people from outside of China. In the mid-80s, some gay salons were started in Beijing and participants were both local Chinese and westerners. Western gays even publicized a “gay manifesto,” written in public toilets. Foreign gay officials who work in China have been involved in and have facilitated local tongzhi activism. In the mid-90s, people from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other countries were not only involved in local tongzhi activism but also the study of tongzhi by their different professional status, such as diplomats, scholars, journalists, and officials. Hence, the emerging of tongzhi activism in China was strongly facilitated and supported by international gay and lesbian activists from the beginning. The significant influence from international gay and lesbian movements was shown in the first tongzhi gathering held in Beijing. Of the total fifty-to-sixty people, more than ten participants were from overseas.<sup>53</sup>

Although tongzhi activism in China has been influenced by the international gay and lesbian rights movement and activists have welcomed support from outside, local activists do not just copy discourse and strategies from outside but adopt them in a

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Wan Yan Hai, January 2002. In 1993, an official from the Hong Kong Tongzhi Health Promotion visited China. In 1994 and 1995, scholars and journalists from Hong Kong and Taiwan conducted research and surveys in China about homosexual life there and published the study in both places. And even at the Lesbian Cultural Festival event in 2002, there was one participant from Taiwan who was contained and investigated by police.

pragmatic matter. Cui Zi An, the pioneer gay activist, artist and film critic in China, in his speech in the IGLHRC (International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission) award ceremony as an awardee, astonishingly made a nationalistic speech in response to this western human rights honor. He claimed that the term “ren quan”(human right) is an improper term for the tongzhi movement in China in recent years. The term ren quan has been criticized by the Chinese government for its use by other countries, especially the U.S., to describe the situation in China, instead of examining inequalities and the violation of humanity in their own countries. Because of this double standard and the use of this term as a violation of human rights, Re quan has become an unwelcome term not only to the Chinese government but also to a society with anti-imperialistic and nationalistic characteristics. Therefore, Cui argued that the discourse of the tongzhi movement should borrow Dr. Sun Ye Sen’s slogan “Zi you (freedom), Ping Deng (equality), Bo Ai (compassion),” a slogan used in the context of a nationalist revolution for reaching a better society.<sup>54</sup>

Not only trying to invent a new discourse different from the discourse of international gay and lesbian rights movements, tongzhi activists also pragmatically adopt different strategies in working in the political system of this “capitalized” socialist China. Cui mentioned two points which contribute to the difficulty of developing organizations in China. First, due to the overwhelming and frequent political campaigns in the Maoist period, the people in the People’s Republic of China are very sick and tired of political movements. This point echoes what young lala said in the crackdown of the Lesbian Cultural Festival. The young urban generation, who grew up in the economic

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<sup>54</sup> Lecture notes from IGLHRC, Felipa Award Ceremony in New York, May 14, 2002.

reform period in the 80s and 90s, is a generation experiencing a better material life, and they have also embedded the trauma from their parents and grandparents' generations. To them, organization that implies a political campaign is something unnecessary and suspect for personal political interests. Second, under the current political reality in China, it is hard to develop organizations independent from the Chinese Communist Party's lead. Due to the above limitation, using established individuals to influence society is more efficient than developing an organization. Opposing the confrontational model often used in the history of socialist China, that is, the "revolution," Cui states that the tongzhi movement should use alternative ways to resolve problems. For instance, international exchange not only has the benefits of finding resources but it also forms international pressure on the Chinese government. The similarity of Cui's argument with the new generation of lala in China and even with the cyber police at the Lesbian Cultural Festival event is an interesting phenomenon. This similarity among the executives of state bio-power and its subjects suggests that not only is the new governmentality emerging, that is, the control society, but the subjects produced by this new form of bio-power also emerge with a new form of resistance. Neither borrowing western style human rights discourse and resistance such as a confrontational model, nor being against outside support with anti-imperialist and nationalistic sentiment, tongzhi activists do not conceive dichotomy between East and West.

Cui's emphasis on using established individuals' power to change society is also linked to the difficult situation of forming an NGO in China in the recent political environment. We can look at the history of the struggle of the Wan Yan Hai, the internationally known gay and AIDS activist, in order to understand the limitations of

resistance through institutionalization. Wan started his advocacy in the early 90s when he was on the staff of the China National Health Education Institute of the Ministry of Health. At that time, AIDS was a very sensitive issue to the Chinese government, and society in general did not have knowledge about it. Mostly, people thought it was a disease of foreigners and not related to the Chinese. Although at that time the government internally discussed the possible disaster AIDS might bring, Wan was excluded and fired in 1994 due to his public advocacy of AIDS prevention. After that, Wan could not find a job in state institutions. He then started getting international funding to keep his advocacy. He used international NGOs who offered a personal fund to form the Aizhi Action Project, a project based on the promotion of education on AIDS prevention.<sup>55</sup> Due to the environments gradually opening to NGO, Aizhi Action has become an official institution since October 2002. However, the latter can only register under the Industry and Commercial Department as a corporation which has to pay tax instead of under the Civil Affairs Department as an NGO institution. As Wan said:

It is too difficult to go to the Civic Affairs Department to register as an NGO. First, you have to have a hook-up (state) institution. Second, you have to pay 100 thousand RMB for the registration fee. Third, the same character NGOs can only register one in one administrative area. Under such restrictive rules, we really don't have the ability and confidence to register as an NGO. So we register as a corporation. Among those restrictive rules, finding a hooked-up institution is the most difficult thing. Therefore, under those difficult rules, although the Aizhi Action Project is an institution with NGO characteristics, we still have to pay taxes from donations; we have to go to the Industry and Commercial Department to be examined each year, and we can't have many of the

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<sup>55</sup> "Why does the 'Asian Hero' make the government nervous? The difficult environment for NGO development, the emergency for the third force to develop a civil society." ("Yazhou Yingxiong' Yuanhe Ling Zhengfu Bumen Jinzhang? Fei Zhenfu Zhuzhi Shengchun Lubu Weijian, Gongming Shehui Fazhan Gidai Disanzhong Liliang) *21th Century Global Report*. [www.nanfangdaily.com.cn/hg/20021028/ss/zgxw/20021080813.asp](http://www.nanfangdaily.com.cn/hg/20021028/ss/zgxw/20021080813.asp)

other benefits for an NGO institution.<sup>56</sup>

Although not registered as an NGO but as a corporation, the Aizhi Action Project is still treated as an NGO internationally and gets funding based on the trust of Wan personally. This kind of civil society institutionalization through a charismatic leader who negotiates with the Chinese political reality and international funding is an emerging phenomenon of varying degrees of autonomy which represents social interests and influences policy (Richard Bum and Xin Zhang, 2003). In China, the NGOs are mostly the branch of international or transnational NGOs which work under their own organization mission (Albert Chan, 2003). For local people who want to do something to change their surroundings, they are required to have a skillful means of negotiating with their own mission, administrative departments and international funding. The structural problems such as finding a state institution for overhead, fund raising for registration fees and project expenses for *goyi* (commonweal) activities is the reality of NGO development. Therefore, in China an NGO is not so much identified by its legal status but by what it does. The content of the mission determines the possible tension with the government and possible international funding resources. If the mission is very legitimized and not threatening to the state regime, many rules can be bypassed such as paying taxes if this organization is registered as a corporation. If the mission is still provocative to the government such as Wan's organization, the tension between them needs to be carefully examined and managed. Wan was arrested in August 2002 and was in jail for one month due to his advocacy of the AIDS issue in the Henan province. It was international support

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<sup>56</sup> quoted from above article.

that helped release him. In this reality, NGOs are not so much independent from the state but are patronistic GONGO (government organized non-governmental organization) with transnational characteristics.

There have been many debates about the changing functions of institutions in transitional China under economic reform. The capitalist dynamic economy has replaced the previous government's economy and social life under Maoist socialism. The "deinstitutionalization" happening in this economic reform questions whether the function of party-state declines or not. Or other research uses different terminology to describe the new forms of institutions emerging from the detotalization of Mao, such as "capitalism with Chinese characteristics," "capital socialism," "Confucian Leninism," "institutional amphibiousness," etc. (Goldman and MacFarquhar, 1999, p. 333). It seems that the landscape of reforming institutions is polymorphous or a subject continuously in flow (Goldman and MacFarquhar, 1999). The overemphasis on the "decentralization" of governmentality in China is actually another form of neo-liberalism. It does not see a new form of governmentality arising under this "decentralization"—that is, a new state bio-power, the mechanism of control—but rather one that is decentered but none the less efficient and powerful.

Civil society is also a concern for many scholars in this context. Whether China can become an "independent," "autonomous" civil society in this economic reform concerns many researchers, especially researchers in political science. The patronistic GONGO or other corporatist models of civil society have disappointed many western scholars.

Some pessimists argue that the putative appearance of tiny islands of socioeconomic autonomy within the emerging post-reform political configuration reflects not an authentic empowerment of society but the heightened fusion of state and society, marked by ever 'tighter,' even more interpenetrative alliances between officials and entrepreneurs. (Goldman and MacFarquhar, 1999, p. 357)

Nevertheless, according to Michael Hardt's reading of Foucault, the "autonomous" civil society never exists at first but rather is a product of the mechanism of discipline through state bio-power (Hardt, 1997). The "authentic" empowerment of society is always already a product of western capitalist state bio-power and functions not so much to "represent" people but exercises the mechanism of discipline from the state through different institutions. Therefore, the question right now is not so much how "autonomous" civil society can arise under China reform policy but what the "new" form of resistance *is* and *can* emerge in this transition.

The institutionalization of civil society with patronistic characteristics instead of confrontational ones in relationship to the state, according to the GONGO condition in China, is the new form of resistance arising from the control society. Hardt states that the civil society in Foucault's analysis is not so much the resistance force in opposition to the state but the mediator between state and people, and institutions within it play the discipline function of state bio-power. However, the new characteristics underlining the reality of the development of GONGO are the cooperation of individual activists with international NGO. This new form of organizing and activism requires us to reexamine resistance in the control society along with the discipline society. That local individual activists combine international forces, both funding resources and human rights discourse, and adjust to local political systems is a phenomenon of resistance close to the notion of multitude. Yet both similar and different from Negri and Hardt's multitude which directly

confronts the Empire, the tongzhi multitude tries to fit in existing institutional channels, invent new ones, or if both do not work, become entropy instead of profitable and useful energy under the bio-power of state mechanism. This multitude is not only in and against the state, but it is also beyond and within the state, combining forces outside and inside, or criticizing or supporting it depending on different local and global environmental conditions.

The debate of the role of institutions in the economic and political reconfiguration in globalization seems trapped in the dichotomy of the institution as a useful analytic tool or not in order to analyze current complex phenomenon. In the context of tongzhi activism, however, the issue whether or not the institution is still a useful idea to understand current sociopolitical conditions is not the main concern. The main point, instead, is how the existing function of the institution can be utilized, or if not, how to invent new strategies to cooperate with, transform, or deconstruct it by multitude. The force of multitude of tongzhi resistance not only provokes the debate of the role of institutions in globalization. Because tongzhi identity is constituted through the use of the Internet and its resistance also intimately links it to utilizing this telecommunication technology, the multitude of tongzhi activism provokes the role of institution in globalization in relationship to technology.

## Wired Tongzhi: The Internet, transnational civil society, and global capitalism

That people use the new technology of the Internet in order to change society is not surprising. As the major part of community building, the formation of tongzhi websites is often driven by the state's censorship of homosexuality, which leads the Internet to become the only space—a commercial space allowed by the state—to form a community. The motivation of building a tongzhi website was summarized well by a website manager from the northeast part of China:

Before July, 1999, I had no access to any information about homosexuality, so I thought I was the only one in the world. I hid those feelings deep in my heart, and did all I could to suppress my homosexual affection. One day, I saw an advertisement in a newspaper which announced a tongzhi club with its phone number. Although there were only a few words in the ad, I felt exhilarated. I called this number, and got to know [someone] who stood up and actively promoted gay rights and culture. So, from that time I vowed to myself that if I had the chance, I would do something for tongzhi, even just a little. But how? Yes, build a website. I registered an account, surfed tongzhi websites, learned to build my own website, and finally a very immature tongzhi website was born in December 1999.

He hoped his website would offer an environment for healthy interaction among tongzhi in his area, and more people would understand homosexuality, which would help to eliminate discrimination. At first, the website only offered ways to make friends, post messages, and read tongzhi literature. In March 2000, he posted a prominent online gay novel, *Beijing Tongzhi*.<sup>57</sup> The police accused him of distributing pornography and forced him to shut down. They also confiscated his computer as a tool for crime. In June 2000,

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<sup>57</sup> *Beijing Tongzhi* is a famous web fiction, and is disseminated widely on Tongzhi websites. It was then adapted by a Hong Kong director to make the film "Lan Yu."

he reopened, and his site is gaining popularity again with around 800 people visiting it in one day.

Another tongzhi website manager described how his website became the most important project in his life. It offered significant support for other tongzhi, and expressed his and other supporters' strong belief in building a good website that could benefit the tongzhi movement in China:

The most important characteristic of our website is that it's truthful. Through hard work, the website not only became [my] spiritual support, but also became a labor of love for other tongzhi. Now we're using better equipment, funded by the users whom we serve. A year has passed, and it's gone through many ups and downs; it was shut down several times, we were harassed by our Internet hosts, etc. But we still stand strong, and will not fall. We have a stubborn faith which will not be threatened by unreasonable people or things. We want emancipation, emancipation not only for ourselves but also countless other confused tongzhi. If you say there is no reality in cyberspace, please come to our website.<sup>58</sup>

The Internet provides a means for communities in China, as well as in other places, to communicate with and find support from outside. As Kalathil (Kalathil, 2002) has shown, in China, many groups critical of the government, such as human rights organizations, the democracy movement, and Falun Gong, often collaborate with outside organizations, such as international NGO's, and Chinese overseas activists. The Internet becomes a useful tool and offers a space not only for domestic but also transnational civil society to develop. Activists build electronic mailing lists and websites through which

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<sup>58</sup> The material of the two cases of webmasters is drawn from "The Report of the Internet and Health Conference" posted in China tongzhi emailing list.

they intensively exchange information about events, government actions, and ways to respond to government regulation and surveillance.

Homosexuality is a topic still censored by the Chinese government and the taboo of it has become the driving force in forming a *tongzhi* transnational civil society. This transnational civil society is formed with the use of the Internet, and therefore, is a machinic-assemblage multitude combining with local and global forces. *Tongzhi* transnational civil society began to develop as early as 1996, soon after the Internet arrived in China. A gay activist and publisher from Hong Kong held an Internet workshop in Beijing to train gay activists in China about the use of the Internet, and afterwards continued to support their use of the Internet. In 1997, Chinese students studying in the U.S. established websites in Chinese to disseminate information about political and social gay issues. In 1998, local *tongzhi* websites in China started to develop.<sup>59</sup> Chinese *tongzhi* websites have developed quickly ever since; according to a survey conducted by the Aizhi Action Project and the Aiqing Baipi Shu website, by 2001 there were around 200 *tongzhi* websites in China.<sup>60</sup>

This transnational civil society is a product of the difficult situation of channeling a multitude through institutions on the one hand and the capacity of Internet technology to organize a multitude on the other. Since there is not much space for the development of a civil organization independent from the Chinese Communist Party, any sensitive issue can utilize the Internet and its telecommunication technology to organize and develop in different degrees, to fight here and there. In November 2001, the *Tongzhi*

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<sup>59</sup> From Chinatongzhi emailing list, December 16, 2001.

<sup>60</sup> "The Report of the *Tongzhi* Internet and Health Conference," Aizhi Action Project, 2001.

Internet and Health Education Conference was held in Beijing. This underground conference invited around thirty *Tongzhi* website managers and activists to discuss strategies for health education on the Internet. Originally the conference was planned for the summer of 2001, but because of the suppression of the Lesbian Cultural Festival in May of that year, the organizers then decided to delay the conference until November, close to World AIDS Day (December 1<sup>st</sup>). Organizers also suspected publicity before the event, spread primarily over the Internet, led to intervention which contributed to the failure of the event. Hence, organizers avoided publicity before the conference and instead publicized afterward.

The Lesbian Cultural Festival, a way of organizing the multitude through an institution, is risky under the current political reality in China. Another event, the Tongzhi Film Festival, also failed partially due to its way of organizing multitude and not bypassing an institution model. The Tongzhi Film Festival, the Tongzhi's first film festival and held by the Beijing University student film association in December, 2001, was forced in the middle of its festival to close by the government. This event was not published until three days before its start. The advertisement was only published online yet attracted around thirty members of the media, which included web media and official media such as the Xinhua News Agency and China Central Television (CCTV). Although the host of this event, the student film association, avoided linking this festival to tongzhi issues, but called it only a film event set for academic studies, the media promoted it only by the provocative issue of homosexuality.<sup>61</sup> On the first day of this event seven hundred people showed up; some people even came from other cities. This

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<sup>61</sup> From the China Tongzhi News Website (*zhongtong xingwen wang*), *Chinatongzhi list*, December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

festival was a nine day event but was closed on the third day due to its influence beyond the organizers' imagining. This event attracted attention from the National Security Department and the University's upper level executives. Organizers closed the festival under the pressure from those state forces. Organizers criticized the media's hysterical promotion, especially web media that caused this event to be forced to end in the middle. The University also threatened to expel the leader of the student film association. The Tongzhi Film Festival event, therefore, is a confrontation between market forces and state discipline.

Compared to the Tongzhi Film Festival, the Tongzhi Internet and Health Conference avoids state institutions. This form of expression of multitude is allowed in the control society. This conference was primarily organized by the Aizhi Action Project and sponsored by two NGOs outside China, the Canadian Civil Society and the Hong Kong Zhixing Foundation.<sup>62</sup> The model of using international NGO funds and collaboration with local activism was an efficient strategy developed and facilitated by *tongzhi* activists. Tongzhi activists, who are local website managers, activists, tongzhi diaspora living and studying in the U.S., including many who travel frequently back and forth to China, are a transnational assembly along with the use of the Internet.

In facing the police and ISPs' harassment, the transnational *tongzhi* movement offers legal and financial aid in combating repression. Police harassment of gays and lesbians in China now is not only harassment through intervention in public discoursing places and bars, but also through arresting and fining tongzhi website owners, or shutting

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<sup>62</sup> "The Report of the *Tongzhi* Internet and Health Conference," Beijing Aizhi Action Project, 2001.

down websites. Police equate tongzhi websites with websites distributing pornography information, a crime under the 32<sup>nd</sup> Article of the Security Bylaw. Mostly police punish by shutting down websites, but if they use arrest, they at the same time inform family members and work units in the name of running pornography websites.<sup>63</sup> This police harassment will be posted on internal emailing lists by involved persons in order to find help. Activists use international human rights discourse and legal information to support and offer strategies.

In addition to the juridical realm of tongzhi oppression, in the commercial space ISPs often fail to service their customers because of homosexuality. For instance, one ISP stopped its service with the excuse that tongzhi websites use too much space and cause problems with the normal functioning of the server. “For keeping other customers with the same server from proper functioning, the company will stop our service to you. We will return your money to your account and please save a copy of your website content. We will stop our service next Wednesday and please find another suitable ISP,” a message sent out by ISP to tongzhi website owners stated.<sup>64</sup> After those web managers called the company, they found that it was actually because the company was afraid of police arrest that they had to stop their service. Transnational activists offer financial support in the emergency cases of tongzhi websites being shut down. For instance, one of the most popular lesbian websites was closed by its ISP and later on allowed to reopen under women’s issues. This off and on website situation not only influences browsing speed but also costs extra to maintain. Due to the fact that tongzhi websites in China are based on

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<sup>63</sup> Chinatongzhi list, March 7, 2002.

<sup>64</sup> Shanwu Zhongguo ([www.bizcn.com](http://www.bizcn.com)), resource from Chinatongzhi list, July 1, 2002.

personal funding or donation, when emergency cases happen such as a shut down by ISP, tongzhi in diaspora then fund raise through the Internet in order to save the community.<sup>65</sup>

The ISP shut down of tongzhi websites is a self-regulation not so much by law but by homophobic sentiment. In another case of shut down of a tongzhi website, one ISP, Xiamen Shuzi Yingqing Wangluo Jixhu Coporation.Ltd.(www.c-jet.com) self regulates its web content not only according to the standards offered by the police department but it adds more regulation according to its own interpretation. This company added homosexuality as dangerous information on its announcement that was sent out to inform customers of their regulation. In facing this homophobia from an ISP, activists use both international human rights discourse and customer rights to combat discrimination. As Wan wrote in reply to the company:

Today I opened your company website and out jumped the announcement on the screen. It claims that related departments emphasize certain aspects of dangerous information, and the 10th item focuses on "homosexual, and unhealthy information".....However, according to the definition of dangerous information from national law, we cannot say homosexual content is dangerous information (even *People's Daily* and *Xinghua News Agency*, official media, have reported homosexual related topics). Is a homosexual website unhealthy? Can you and related departments (is it Xiamen Police Department?) define what "unhealthy" means? According to the World Health Organization's 1992 International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision, it says sexual orientation is not an obstacle. So what is the law that homosexual websites disobey?. ..

I want to warn your company that when you publicize those announcements, you have to follow the law. If you manipulate the law, you are illegal. If you shut down a homosexual website, we will sue you for breaking commercial contract.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Chinatongzhi list, June 4, 2002.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted from Wan Yan Hai, Chinatongzhi list, June 13, 2002.

The using of consumer and property rights for developing gay and lesbian civil rights is a strategy not new in the history of the gay and lesbian movement. As John D'Emilio demonstrates, the formation of gay identity is due to capitalism that needs "free" labor, that is, the mechanism of it directly undermines the family as an economic unit of production. Capitalism "frees" individuals from their economic dependency on the mechanism of the heterosexual family and makes individuals become wage laborers, which opens up a space of different erotic practices other than heterosexual marriage (D'Emilio, 1997). It is this close link between capitalism and the formation of gay identity that both develops and constrains the right of same-sex erotic practice. In order to "become gay," either you become good labor or a good consumer. The identity politics of same-sex desire is both constituted and contaminated by capitalism. It is harder for people who are among the poor or who are in a different ethnicity and who practice same-sex eroticism to form an identity and fight for rights because their energies cannot be subsumed to qualified labor such as middle-class, white, and male. The significant change of human relations through capitalism in the nineteenth century and the twenty-first century manifests itself in different forms under the development of telecommunication technology and global capitalism, again happens among the relations between human and human, human and machine, and machine and machine. *Tongzhi* is qualified as a good Internet consumer. It is this power of consumption that gives the space to form *tongzhi* identity and community besides the control of homosexuality issues in traditional media.

Due to the fact that homosexuality is still a topic directly censored by the Chinese government through its control of traditional media and social and political institutions, government controlled media simply does not touch upon issues related to homosexuality. However, the Internet, as a new medium, is distinct from traditional media, such as radio, television, and print media. *Tongzhi* websites have played a significant role in the *tongzhi* movement. For instance, collaboration between mainstream websites and *tongzhi* websites is developed for communication between sexual minorities and mainstream society. In 2001, Sohu.com, one of the most popular search engine websites in China, invited *tongzhi* activists and scholars to an online show. Within the two hour show, the highest visiting volume reached twenty thousand.<sup>67</sup> The profitable *tongzhi* customers have been the target for commercials. In contrast to the online show, another TV show invited the same *tongzhi* activists and scholars but was later punished by the government. In 2000, Hunan Satellite TV invited *tongzhi* activists Cui Zi An and Shito and scholar Li Yin He to discuss homosexuality in China under the Youhua Haohao Shuo (Time to Talk If You Have Any) program. It was the first time TV in China invited *tongzhi* activists to discuss this issue. However, after that specific show the whole program was closed by the government and its director was punished.

As part of the new “information economy,” the Internet is subject to less state control, but is more driven by market forces. While, as shown above, commercial forces can be used to constrain speech and expression on the Internet, it is those very commercial forces which also become a source of resistance for the *tongzhi* resistance, as they develop new strategies in the commercial sphere. Multitude, channeled more through market forces or other means such as telecommunication technology than

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<sup>67</sup> Phone interview with Cui Zi An, February 2002.

through institutions, the latter implying the possible confrontation with Communist Party's leaders, is a manifestation of resistance in a control society along with a discipline society.

### **Tongzhi Movement: a “*beside*” resistance**

Tongzhi activism is a multitude that resists the Chinese heterosexual nationalism promoted by the Chinese government. The bio-power of this Chinese heterosexual nationalism is exercised not only through the state's institutions but also through telecommunication technology such as the Internet and other surveillance information technology. This bio-power is developed along with the development of global information economy, as I contend in Chapter three. On the other hand, the multitude of tongzhi, because its body is constituted also through the use of the Internet, is a civil society with machinic sociality. This civil society, because of its intimate link to the Internet, is a transnational assembly. This assembly skillfully balances differences such as international human rights discourse and funding, nationalism, and global capitalism in and against Chinese heterosexual nationalism. Both the mechanism of control from the state and tongzhi resistance is impossible without the development of an information economy. Therefore, I argue that in order to understand the new mechanism of control and the new organization of multitude, we need to use the concept of control society along with that of a discipline society, within which state bio-power and resistance is not so much formed based on a Keynesian-Fordism economy but through an affect economy. Resistance in this affect economy is a resistance combined with consumption and

discontent forces not so much through encounters with humans but with machines. As Cui Zi An stated, if art is a way of expressing true feeling in socialist China, the commercial force is a convenient tool for us to use it.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, the information economy makes the multitude channel through market forces combined with technology. In June 2000, the survey “Inquiry on Chinese Homosexuals” was conducted by officials and published in the mainstream media. This survey showed a lot of problematic viewpoints toward tongzhi and raised serious debates in mainstream web media such as sinanet.com. Wan Yan Hai contends that the discontented voice can only be expressed and allowed in cyberspace, a space produced through an affect economy.<sup>69</sup>

The characteristics of activism in the mechanism of control tend to be an individualistic rather than a representational model, characterized by transnational cooperation rather than only within the nation-state, and commercial forces rather than civil rights, and a machinic-assemblage rather than a human centered civil society. In the case of the Lesbian Cultural Festival, because of its strategy based on the model of a discipline society, that is, not cooperating with commercial forces but through institutionalization, it failed in the control society. Combining with commercial force, such as the Hu Nan Wei Shi event and the Tongzhi Film Festival event, although being punished later on, was a comparatively successful strategy in terms of publicity. Agency expressed through institutions is too risky in the mechanism of control. Events such as the Sohu.com online show are the safest activism since multitude channels through the commercial sphere only and does not need to be confronted with institutions. If multitude

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<sup>68</sup> Interview by phone, February, 2002.

<sup>69</sup> Wan Yan Hai, “Tolerance is not an Analogy for Dictatorship”, unpublished paper.

does not channel through commercial activities, it can be expressed through underground civil assemblies and sponsored by international funding, such as the case of the Tongzhi Internet and Health Conference. Negri and Hardt state that the society of control extends its bio-power outside social institutions and functions through flexible and fluctuating networks. I argue that resistance in a control society, because of its link to telecommunication technology, is also like the bio-power of control; it is outside social institutions, and cooperates with forces outside the nation-state and global capitalism.

The debate of the role of the nation-state in globalization has been trapped in the dichotomy of using nation-state or supranational sovereignty as a unit of analysis in the reconfiguration of politics and the economy by global capitalism. Avoiding this dualistic thinking, I draw Stoler's link of Foucault's state racism to western colonial history and argue that the birth of the nation-state is itself a dynamic process involving the intertwining of different forces: colonialism, discipline practices, desire, capitalist primitive accumulation, etc. Therefore, the nation-state itself is not an entity fixed through time but an aggregate assembled by different forces, both ideological and material ones depending on different historical moments. Debates on the issue of globalization are still trapped in the nation-state concept; that is, the nation-state is treated as a fixed entity with a fixed essence, also civil society and "citizenship" issues accompanied with it.

The mourning of the loss of (the first world) citizen-subjects' position and capacity to act and struggle, and its disorientedness and psychopathology in the late-capitalist social and cultural conditions is articulated "well enough" by Fredrick Jameson. Jameson's claim that there is no place for the subject to stand ideologically and no

oppositional conscious allowed in this late-capitalist postmodern condition is another version of neo-colonialism. The mourning of the lack of oppositional conscious that is possible under the postmodern condition is at the same time denying and dismissing other methods of survival and struggle of the oppressed. In this neo-colonialism, the “others” should feel the same “loss” as western subjects about the death of their subjectivity. Ironically enough, as Chela Sandoval points out, there have always been many people, such as the colonized, the outsider, the queer, the subaltern, and the marginalized, who have never been allowed to enter into this “citizen-subject,” so where is the death of subjectivity for those to mourn for? On the other hand, it is the colonized, the outsider, the queer, the subaltern, and the marginalized with not only their “psychopathologies” but also their survival skills, strategies, and theories that provide the rich resource for us to learn from in facing the postmodern late-capitalist condition (Sandoval, 2000).

If modern subjectivity and its form of resistance are the product of the tactic of discipline from modern nation-state bio-power, a new condition which arises from the late-capitalist globalization, then we are required to identify where the new power and resistance is. The concept of multitude, drawing from Spinoza, is not constrained and can not be delineated only by the concept of citizen-subject. Multitude is from the plane of immanence, is force affecting and being affected by each other, and can be both organic and non-organic, or organic and non-organic combining together and aggregating another force, including the forces from machine and technology. Therefore, the concept of multitude pushes us to rethink our fixed view of nation-state, civil society and citizenship identity politics.

Therefore, the resistance of tongzhi, I contend, because its multitude is a machinic-assemblage agency, is in the openness of the human organism to technology. This openness is not only queered beyond the label “lesbian” and “gay” in terms of sexuality, but in terms of the politics of resistance. Tongzhi politics of resistance are neither limited in the concept of nation-state nor of Empire; they are neither against global capitalism nor support it, and are neither postcolonial subjects nor nationalistic ones. As Eve Sedgwick contends, queer by definition is without definition, because queer has no essence. It is this concept of no essence that demands that we trace the reifying process of nation-state and identity politics, and the deconstructing process of this reification due to the transformation of global capitalism in this historical moment. Tongzhi is the development of a new kind of resistance which could never have been produced under early western political, social and economical organization. As Sedgwick suggests, the *beneath* and *behind* are those dramas of exposure in delineating the typos of the depth of hiddenness in critical theories, which is already hard for us to let go. Not even mentioning the *beyond*, which is so hard to get a little distance from because of its sentiment of transcendent “calling” that bosses us around and dismisses our not transcendental enough emotions, the Tongzhi movement, therefore, I treat it as a *beside* resistance, that is, *beside* nation-state and Empire, *beside* supporting and against global capitalism, and *beside* postcolonialism and nationalism. Tongzhi resistance is a force of becoming that is not-yet revealing the wrongness of those theoretical categorizations, not-yet transcending them but is *beside*.

## Conclusion

Through exploring the formation of lesbian identity through the use of the Internet in China, in this thesis I courageously suggest several new concepts of thinking in exploring existing phenomenon. While suggesting those new concepts and tracing the tendencies of shift, I do not mean to abandon the existing frameworks and concepts in order to understand. Like the concept of *beside*, this thesis aims at teasing out new thoughts and at the same time trying to keep both the new and old thoughts remaining *weak, that is, both new and old thoughts remain on the same plane*, “desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping” in their relations instead of a dichotomy which confronts each other (Sedgwick, p. 8). Or, if the concept of weak theory, drawing from Silvan Tomkins, is not a usual way for people to think, we can practice thinking another way, that is, how to make a theory that is not paranoid. Things are in becoming, including this thesis. The function of writing this “becoming” is not so much to prove that lala is an identity, a resistance, a community *really* formed through the use of the Internet in China in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, but rather a function which might possibly contribute to provoking thought and new compelling discourse.

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