

CHINESE MALE HOMOSEXUAL VIRTUAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION ON  
YABA (丫吧)

by  
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## Abstract

*Jianshangdejiaoyaba* (肩上的脚丫吧), also known as *Yaba* (丫吧), is a forum on the Chinese website *Baidu Tieba* (百度贴吧) containing stories and questions from users that focus on homosexual experience and identity in China. The members of the forum communicate using *Linyu* (淋语), a form of Chinese Internet Language (CIL). This thesis seeks to understand why and how *Yaba* (丫吧) users use the word *ji* (鸡: chicken) and female kinship terms, two prominent features of *Linyu* (淋语). The research uses methodologies in virtual ethnography to conceptualize *Yaba* (丫吧) as a research site. To better understand the research site and the experience of the research subjects, information on the Chinese homosexual experience is provided. In addition, *Linyu* (淋语) is placed within the greater context of CIL. Posts from the forum are analyzed to understand why users are using *ji* (鸡) and female kinship terms. The research revealed that users use these expressions to shorten social distance and construct a group homosexual identity on *Yaba* (丫吧).

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## Introduction

When I was studying abroad in China during fall of 2018, a gay friend introduced me to the concept of *Linyu* (淋语), a form of Chinese Internet Language (CIL). He shared memes and videos with me, showing me how it could communicate something through text that was deeper and more profound than simply using Standard Mandarin. As an American male homosexual who studies Chinese language, I am particularly interested in different ways identities among members of subcultures and marginalized communities are represented online in China. In my own experience, computer-mediated communication has been one of the more attractive and difficult aspects of acquiring Mandarin. This experience and desire to learn more about *Linyu* (淋语) inspired my research.

*Jianshandejiaoyaba* (肩上的脚丫吧), or *Yaba* (丫吧), as it is referred to by its users, is a forum hosted on *Baidu Tieba* (百度贴吧), the largest Chinese-language platform online. The users post various stories and questions relating to the male homosexual experience in Mainland China. In constructing their posts, they use *Linyu* (淋语) seen across various places on the Chinese internet.

*Linyu* (淋语) has many noteworthy features, and a general overview of *Linyu* (淋语) is provided in this thesis. However, this research focuses on two aspects of *Linyu* (淋语): the use of the word *ji* (鸡: chicken) and female kinship terms. These are two of the more prevalent and unique language choices made by the users of the forum.

In *Linyu* (淋语), *ji* (鸡) is used as a neutral word for male homosexual, which is a

new and innovative usage that sets it apart from the Standard Mandarin. Female kinship term usage still follows typical expectations. That is, terms for older individuals are reserved for those perceived as older. Likewise, individuals wishing to position themselves as less experienced or younger defer to using kinship terms that apply to younger individuals. However, it is noteworthy that these users are male homosexuals using female kinship terms. They are breaking from gender norms. The users use both of these items to position themselves as members of a larger gay community on *Yaba* (丫吧). In addition, they use these terms to shorten social distance.

Academic research on *Linyu* (淋语) in English and Chinese is sparse. *Yaba* (丫吧), with its plethora of resources related to *Linyu* (淋语), is an excellent place to start formally documenting this phenomenon. To observe *Yaba* (丫吧), I utilize methods in virtual ethnography. I treat *Yaba* (丫吧) as my research site, and use the lens of an ethnographer to guide me to understand the forum, the language of its users, and how that relates to their identity and background.

The body of the thesis has four main components. The first section, “Homosexuality in China and Gay Cyberspace,” gives crucial cultural information about homosexuality in China. In this section, I will discuss issues that affect *Yaba* (丫吧) users. The next section, “Methodology: Virtual Ethnography,” will introduce virtual ethnography and briefly outline issues specific to conducting virtual ethnographic research. The following section, “The Language of *Yaba* (丫吧),” will

provide background information on Chinese Internet Language (CIL) and *Linyu* (淋语). The last section provides authentic texts from *Yaba* (丫吧) with analysis.

Students of Chinese language must be aware of CIL and different subcultures to better understand contemporary China and Chinese language. These are forms of the language students could potentially adopt when navigating their own identity in Chinese. The text examples as well as analysis can act as a resource for students of Chinese to understand an example of different ways to represent identity in Chinese, which will be invaluable as they progress in their studies.

Before proceeding to the body of this thesis, it is important to explain a few things about the Chinese language. Chinese has two major character systems: simplified and traditional. Taiwan and Hong Kong use traditional characters, while Mainland China uses simplified characters. This thesis uses simplified Chinese characters because that is the character system used by members on the forum.

Dictionary definitions are provided by the popular Chinese dictionary application Pleco, unless otherwise indicated. Pinyin, the system used to transliterate Chinese, is provided for all characters. Chinese characters are provided throughout, because many characters are homophonous, so it is important to be able to make distinctions with what characters are being used. Lastly, all translations are completed by the author.



## **Homosexuality and Gay Cyberspace in China**

*Linyu* (淋语) is a form of CIL used on various places on the internet. This research focuses on how *Yaba* (丫吧) users utilize specific features of *Linyu* (淋语) to construct their identity and shorten social distance. Because *Yaba* (丫吧) is an online community consisting primarily of Chinese homosexual men, it is important to provide context on the gay male experience in China. Furthermore, understanding how this community utilizes virtual space is important in analyzing *Yaba* (丫吧). Global and local issues affect the users of *Yaba* (丫吧) and it is important that the reader first acquire cultural background necessary to understand how the community is formed and functions.

While the United States and China both have active male homosexual communities, differences in the fundamental cultural framework between the countries affect the way members of these communities navigate their respective identities. Frank L. K. Hsu's seminal text *Americans & Chinese* details one of the fundamental differences between American and Chinese culture. In his words, Americans are "individual-centered" while Chinese are "situation-centered" (1980, p. 12). To speak more broadly, Chinese culture is understood to be collectivist, while American culture is understood to be individualist.

Collectivist cultures seek ingroup harmony (Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). While some individuals within the society may have personal desires that differ from the collective, they will typically suppress these desires for the overall

well-being of the group as a whole. In addition, collective societies tend to have hierarchical structures. In contrast, individualist societies promote the well-being of the individual. In this type of society, individuals will form loose connections with people in their social network, but they maintain the freedom to ignore the desires of others in order to seek individual gain (Wheeler, Reis, & Bond, 1989).

As a collectivist society, the expectation of the Chinese individual to work towards societal harmony affects homosexuals, whose individual desires are often counter to those of society as a whole. In the West, it is common for homosexuals to come out of the closet and reject their families in order to achieve individual satisfaction (Triandis et al., 1988). However, in China, coming out of the closet is seen as disruptive to the family unit. Chinese homosexuals must then find other ways to navigate the experience of coming to terms with their sexuality to seek acceptance from society.

Another aspect of Chinese society often at odds with homosexual identity is Confucianism. Filial piety is central to Confucian beliefs. Children are expected to produce progeny to continue the family bloodline. This pressure, in addition to the family-kinship system central to Chinese marriages, is a limiting factor in a social tolerance for same-sex relationships (Chou, 2001). Children may face pressure from their parents to marry women and produce children in order to continue the family lineage. Those individuals who choose to not marry or enter into long-term homosexual relationships are viewed as not filial and thus failures in the eyes of

traditional parents.

Historically, China has had individuals who have engaged in homosexual acts (Fann, 2003). However, in ancient China, homosexuality was not an identity (Cao & Lu, 2014; Chou, 2001). It was viewed as behavior, and it fit into the power structure of ancient times. The person in the penetrative role was the person with the most power, and by penetrating he was still fulfilling a masculine role (Cao & Lu, 2014). In ancient times, homosexual behavior was socially acceptable. Therefore, it was not at odds with traditional systems, such as Confucianism, that dictated social standards.

Homosexuality as an identity is a Western import to modern China. In the West, homosexuality became medicalized in the nineteenth century. This change had direct impacts on China during the 1920s Republic Period, when notions that homosexuality was a physiological disorder were imported to China by doctors (Cao & Lu, 2014; Choi, Farrer, & Zhongxin, 2006; Rodney, 2007). It was not until 2001 that homosexuality was removed as a mental illness from Chinese official doctrine (Zhongxin, Farrer, & Choi, 2006). Even to this day, the Chinese word for homosexual, *tongxinglian* (同性恋), holds negative connotations. Now, the word *tongzhi* (同志: comrade) is the preferred word for homosexuals to use to refer to themselves.

The word *tongzhi* (同志) was first reappropriated by homosexuals in Hong Kong in the 1990s and was chosen because the word has a positive connotation related to communism and showed that, just like the communist comrades of the past, homosexuals are also fighting a war (Wong, 2005).

As members of greater society as a whole, Chinese male homosexuals are subject to the national discourse affecting society. There are important phases in discourse since the establishment of the Peoples Republic of China in 1949 that affect men who have sex with men (Rodney, 2007).

The first major national discourse is revolution. After the establishment of modern China in 1949, the discourse focused on revolution, which “embod[ied] a militant, offensive political project of ‘class struggle’ and enforces social relationship of collectivism, conformity and self-denial” (p. 89-90). It is easy to see how these social relationships and self-denial could affect an individual with same-sex desire. Individuals having same-sex desire would already not conform to the ideals of the revolution and make it difficult for gay men and women at that time. In addition, the pressure to practice self-denial to help the collective would be at odds with individual desires.

After the discourse of revolution came a discourse of reform. This change came in line with Deng Xiaoping’s Reform and Opening Up, which opened China up to the rest of the world. This economic reform also opened up new opportunities for gay men to interact with the world.

It is important to note that at the same time that national discourse was shifting away from revolution and towards reform, the AIDS epidemic began to affect China. This epidemic forced the government to publicly acknowledge the gay community (Cao and Lu, 2014). It was the first time that scholarly articles and health pamphlets

geared towards gay men started to appear. This change was important in legitimizing gay men because the government was forced to confront the issue (Zhongxin et al. 2006). Unfortunately, in many cases, AIDS was still associated with being a gay disease, which fell in line with the remnant of Western imports of homosexuality that treated homosexuality as a disorder (Jones, 2007).

The third and most pressing discourse for this research is the discourse of *wenming* (文明) or civilization. Contemporary China is filled with posters promoting citizens to be *wenming* (文明). *Wenming* (文明) is one of the Core Socialist Values announced at the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China (Core Socialist Values, 2017). These are the values that the Chinese Communist Party has decided are the future goals for the country, society, and individual. Signs for these Core Socialist Values can be found everywhere, from bus stops to billboards, showing their importance to government propaganda. Popular tourist destinations have signs encouraging citizens to be *wenming* (文明) when traveling.

With this discourse of civilization comes the discourse of *suzhi* (素质). *Suzhi* (素质) is difficult to define and does not have a direct English equivalent. For the purpose of this research, it can be likened to someone's quality. Someone perceived as a good citizen has high *suzhi* (素质), while someone who is viewed by society as a vagrant has low *suzhi* (素质). Someone of high *suzhi* (素质) is likely well educated. Someone of low *suzhi* (素质) is likely an outsider and potentially a migrant worker (Jones, 2007).

*Suzhi* (素质) and *wenming* (文明) are inextricably linked ideas. Someone who acts *wenming* (文明) has high *suzhi* (素质). Someone who is educated has a positive quality to them. Both *suzhi* (素质) and *wenming* (文明) affect the contemporary Chinese male homosexual in a variety of ways.

The Chinese gay community uses *suzhi* (素质) to differentiate between urban gays and rural gays. Rural gays are often assumed to be of low *suzhi* (素质) because of their education level and lack of connections. Furthermore, there is a stereotype that rural men who have sex with men are prostitutes (Ho, 2010). In this way, they are othered from men actively seeking homosexual relationships.

Amidst the background of this new discourse, New Media has become an important tool for Chinese homosexuals. Shaw's research on sex and identity in cyberspace highlights how in the West, computer mediated communication has allowed for many homosexual men and women to bypass the gay bar and find places for expression online (1997). In fact, many of the people interviewed by Shaw compared online chat rooms to something similar to a gay bar. Some users are interacting actively, while others are lurking and observing.

In China, gay cyberspace is a place without geographical limitations to interact with other Chinese homosexuals. In his personal account of his experience growing up gay in China, Rodge Q. Fann recounts that "before the Internet age, all information about gay sex had been either spread by friends...or, for most gay men, they explored through imagination" (2003, p. 40). The internet became a platform for homosexuals

to explore their sexuality, share their experiences, and find a community.

The AIDS crisis brought homosexuality to the forefront of public discussion and started to legitimize homosexual identity by public bodies. Now with the internet, there are places to organize and develop a group conscious (Kang & Yang, 2009; Jiang, 2005). These virtual spaces offer places for gays to express themselves and also provide public areas for heterosexuals to observe and learn about the gay experience. Gone are the days of bathhouses and public restrooms as meeting space (Jones, 2007). Now there are real opportunities for gays across the country to interact, alleviating feelings of isolation (Jiang, 2005).

These spaces are not without their issues. There are Chinese gay websites ranging from *tongzhi* (同志) literature to news sites (Ho, 2010). However, with changes in economic policy in China and changing ideas on consumerism, many gay websites have become commercialized. The commercialization of gay cyberspace leads to economic restrictions that may limit some gay individuals from having access to content. In addition, the government has strict internet regulations, leading users to self-censor themselves (Ho 2010; Jiang 2005).

As a platform frequently accessed by gay Chinese men, *Yaba* (丫吧) users face many of the social pressures that affect the community as a whole. *Yaba* (丫吧) is listed as a personal *tieba* (贴吧). It was started by a *ba'you* (吧友), a user of *Baidu Tieba* (百度贴吧) with the username *Jianshangdejiaoya* (肩上的脚丫) and was initially used for sharing sexually explicit photos of men and various *ziyuan* (资源:

resources). *Ziyuan* (资源) here refers to photos or videos stored on cloud storing services. However, due to the government's recent crackdown on pornography online, the forum has become a place to share stories and ask for advice (Li, 2014).

Users of *Yaba* (丫吧) are actively seeking homosexual spaces of their own will and desire. They should not be confused for “money boys,” who fall into the category of men who have sex with men but may not actually have homosexual desire (Jones, 2007). This differentiation is important, because the needs and desires of these two groups are different, and they likely do not interact outside of sexual encounters.

Compared to other gay spaces online mentioned in previous research, *Yaba* (丫吧) is unique in that it is hosted within a popular website next to other sites focusing on topics ranging from the United States to the Communist Party. It shares equal status with these other *ba* (吧). This is significant because it shows a change in where gay cyberspace exists on the Chinese internet. Rather than being hidden away from the general public, *Yaba* (丫吧) is in a very public space with a significant number of followers.

The use of an already existing platform to promote normalcy and acceptance is similar to the use of the word *tongzhi* (同志) in the gay community. Just as the word *tongzhi* (同志) shows that Chinese gays wish to be seen in a positive light, populating popular websites with gay content show that Chinese gays feel comfortable expressing themselves online in public spaces.

In addition, because *Yaba* (丫吧) is hosted on an already-existing platform, it



does not suffer from issues of commercialization frequently seen on other similar websites. This allows for discourse on the *ba* (吧) to be driven not by economic pressures but by individual user desires.

In terms of content, there are similarities to other Chinese gay websites. Users make posts about questions related to AIDS and share their stories. While there is no overtly pornographic content, many of the text threads are erotic and depict sexual encounters.

The feature of *Yaba* (丫吧) most relevant to this thesis is *Linyu* (淋语). *Linyu* (淋语) originated as a form of internet language mocking Taiwanese superstar Jolin Tsai (Shen, 2015). It has gained traction in the gay community and can be seen frequently on posts relating to gay culture on Sina Weibo, a Chinese social media platform similar to Facebook and Twitter. Some other websites that feature *Linyu* (淋语) are mentioned later in this thesis and also listed in Appendix A.

While not all posts on *Yaba* (丫吧) utilize *Linyu* (淋语), it is understood that *Linyu* (淋语) is the language of the platform. Users who do not post in *Linyu* (淋语) often apologize for not being well-versed enough in *Linyu* (淋语) to post using it. The following sections will include a more in-depth discussion of *Linyu* (淋语) and its role in group identity.

Homosexuality in China has undergone significant changes in the past hundred years. While historically homosexuality was understood to be a behavior rather than an identity, recent changes in China's history have affected societal conceptions of

homosexuality. In particular, Western imports of homosexuality as a physiological disorder made homosexuality into a pejorative term. Homosexuality was not common in public discourse until the 1980s when AIDS forced the government to acknowledge the existence of gay men. While this was happening, the Reform and Opening Up economic reform was giving new opportunities for gay men in China to understand their identity. New Media and especially the Internet in contemporary times have been crucial in identity formation for Chinese gay men.

Despite a new understanding of gay identity in China, gay men still face many problems. In particular, China's collectivist nature with an emphasis on Confucianism, particularly filial piety, make it difficult for Chinese gay men to choose the lifestyle they desire. Gay men have opportunities to use cyberspace to find individuals with similar struggles as them and form a broader community.

### **Methodology: Virtual Ethnography**

This thesis will use the lens of a virtual ethnographer as a framework for approaching *Yaba* (丫吧). Traditional ethnographies involve a researcher immersing themselves in a defined space over a long period of time. They both observe and participate in the culture (Hine 2000). These ethnographies have a defined research site. Furthermore, the site is observed in a linear time frame. While events of the past may come up in the research, the researcher is unable to return to those times and experience them. Since ethnographers can physically visit research sites, they are able to confirm the identity of their research subjects and have face-to-face interaction with them.

Virtual ethnographies are fundamentally the same as other forms of ethnography in their area of focus. They are concerned with a specific community and a concrete location. However, the internet introduces new elements to the ethnography that must be addressed by the researcher. Both Hine and other cyber ethnographers have outlined the important distinctions between traditional ethnographies and virtual ethnographies that researchers should consider (Hine, 2000; Steinmetz, 2012). These distinctions include the way space is defined, how time is addressed, and how authenticity and truth are navigated.

As mentioned above, traditional ethnographies have a clearly defined physical research site. The World Wide Web is a virtual space, and thus it can be difficult to define the boundaries of the space to research. *Linyu* (淋语) is the focus of this

research, and I have found examples of *Linyu* (淋语) from various social media platforms, including YouTube, Twitter, and Sina Weibo. On these platforms, I have also seen screenshots from messaging platforms like WeChat, the most popular messaging app in China, with *Linyu* (淋语).

*Linyu* (淋语) on the greater internet will be discussed in more depth later. However, to narrow the scope of the research, I have chosen to focus on a single forum, *Yaba* (丫吧). This decision will allow for tighter analysis of a specific community. This forum is a public place on the internet, and anyone can virtually visit it whenever he or she wants. Furthermore, the quantity of posts and constant activity on *Yaba* (丫吧) allows for a variety of texts to analyze.

However, it is important to remember that virtual space is only a component of what makes up part of someone's daily experience. *Yaba* (丫吧) users are working and going to school. They have real meaningful connections outside of *Yaba* (丫吧), and many of the posts on *Yaba* (丫吧) are recounting events in their nonvirtual lives. Since I am not privy to every single interaction that users might have in a day, I am only able to provide generic information on the gay male experience in China to give context to the lives of *Yaba* (丫吧) users outside of the virtual world.

I began observing *Yaba* (丫吧) in September of 2018, and I have been collecting posts throughout this time. There are many levels to *Linyu* (淋语), and as I read more posts I began noticing patterns. I formulated a hypothesis from my observations that users utilize *Linyu* (淋语) and in particular female kinship terms to show a strong

sense of community. Users frequently use the term *jiemei* (姐妹: older/younger sister) to refer to other users. In addition, they use the word *ji* (鸡: chicken) in a variety of ways, ranging from the literal to figurative. As I noticed this phenomenon in a large number of posts, it became the central focus of my research.

The virtual world of *Yaba* (丫吧) has time-stamped documentation of every post made on the forum. This means I could hypothetically analyze posts made since the creation of the forum. To limit the scope of this work, I will focus on posts that show representative examples of *Linyu* (淋语) featuring female kinship terms and the word *ji* (鸡) posted in February of 2019. There are posts or comments nearly every minute on the platform, so this restriction is to make the research manageable and also to have a controlled time frame.

As there are hundreds of posts made a day, this time frame is more a matter of convenience to limit the scope of the research. This decision falls in line with what other virtual ethnographers recommend when choosing timelines. As mentioned above, the internet allows us to see a record of past events with time stamps of when they occurred. However, because my research does not focus specifically on how *Yaba* (丫吧) users are reacting to events in real time, I chose to limit the time frame of my research to a month. I also decided to only analyze recent posts because internet language is constantly changing, and the posts I collected and observed reflect *Linyu* (淋语) usage in this moment.

Identity and authenticity are also important in ethnographic research. *Yaba* (丫吧)

is an anonymous platform, and therefore I have no way to confirm the identity of the users. I do not have access to their age or geographic location. They do not use their real names. It is here that I will make a few educated assumptions based on the post content on the forum.

I will assume that the majority of active users are gay, male and living in Mainland China. Active users differ from followers in that they are posting and replying to comments on the forum instead of lurking in the background. There may be users posing as gay or there may be other users who are straight but interested in gay culture. However, the vast majority of posts I observed were stories written from the perspective of a gay male in China. I am only able to see posts by users actively posting, and while there may be many other users lurking on the forum, I cannot account for them. I cannot verify if these stories told by users are true, but my research is not concerned with the authenticity of post content. Therefore, I can disregard concerns about the truth of post content.

The reader may be curious as to why I did not conduct interviews in order to gain a profile of various users. I attempted to conduct interviews after receiving approval from the University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). I developed a set of questions concerning the user's personal background and language use.

I made a recruitment post on *Yaba* (丫吧) looking for people to participate. My post was ignored and mocked by *Yaba* (丫吧) users. Within an hour, it had been deleted by forum managers. Undeterred, I proceeded to privately contact members,

but I was met with no response again.

I then contacted forum managers and was invited to a private group chat for *Sanmumu2* (三木木 2), a *ba* (吧) also associated with *Linyu* (淋语). When I made my recruitment post in this chat group, I was called a *tewu* (特务: spy) and did not receive any follow-up responses. It was at this point, I began contacting friends and asking them to post in any groups they might be in asking for interviewees. They were met with similar frigidity.

There are a few potential reasons why these posts were unsuccessful, and they reflect attitudes of Chinese netizens. Online scams are common in China, so users might be unwilling to trust internet strangers. I was also upfront that I was an American student in my post. I felt it was important to be transparent with users about my intentions and background. However, US-China relations are very tense right now, so users might not be willing to talk to an American researcher. In addition, as I mentioned in the section on homosexuality in China, it is still difficult for many Chinese gay men to publicly address their sexuality outside of cyberspace. They may not want to be associated with this type of research. Regardless of the reason, I was unable to aid my research with interviews. My examples will rely purely on posts from *Yaba* (丫吧) and be supported with academic research and other sources related to *Linyu* (淋语) available online.

In referencing posts and quotes from the platform, I will be directly quoting posts. *Yaba* (丫吧) is a public forum, and users posting are aware that their posts can be

accessed by anyone. These posts could be found in the future, but since they cannot be linked to a specific individual, there is little harm in making a direct quote.

Lastly, I will address some of my own assumptions in this research. While I will work to objectively analyze the post content, I will undoubtedly bring in some bias that may affect my analysis. I have personal experience interacting with Chinese male homosexuals both in Mainland China and in the United States. I identify as gay, and I am a user of *Linyu* (淋语). I have studied Chinese for five years now, both here in the United States and in immersion in China. On my most recent Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), I scored Superior, meaning I can communicate using both academic and colloquial discourse. Despite this, I sometimes miss nuances of communication, and I will rely on native Chinese speakers and academic resources to help me parse out some of the more nuanced aspects of the language and to support my research.



## The Language of *Yaba* (丫吧)

This research focuses on specific linguistic features of *Linyu* (淋语) on *Yaba* (丫吧), and thus it is crucial to provide an overview of Chinese Internet Language (CIL) as well as the features of the language used specifically on *Yaba* (丫吧).

CIL has many unique features that vary from what is considered standard speech. In his article on CIL, Lu highlights the following features of Chinese internet language: homophonic character use, new meanings given to traditional Chinese characters, pictographic characters, introduction of Japanese and English loanwords, using animals as new symbols, and introduction of dialect words (2009).

To better explain each of these different features of CIL, I will provide examples with explanations. Some of these examples will be specific to *Yaba* (丫吧), while others will be common internet expressions.

### Homophonic character use and dialect words

Homophonic character use is common throughout the Chinese internet. Internet users will choose characters that share the same sound as another character, but they will intentionally use a different character to convey a new meaning or model a dialect pronunciation of a word.

3Q is a prime example for this type of word play. The Chinese word for three is pronounced *san* (三). Paired with the English letter Q, *sanQ* (3Q) becomes a close approximation to the English “thank you.” Another example is *jiangzi* (酱紫: dark reddish purple). This expression comes from how the expression *zheyangzi* (这样子:

this way) sounds when pronounced quickly. Chinese netizens chose new characters that match in sound to this word (Jiangzi (Fangyan), n.d.)

Members of *Yaba* (丫吧) use the Chinese word for Paris, *Bali* (巴黎) in place of *bali* (吧里), the word for “within the *ba* (吧).” *Bali* (巴黎) is a foreign place outside of China. *Yaba* (丫吧) users use the word as a way of simultaneously positioning themselves as “other” and also above the average netizen.

#### Pictographic characters

The Chinese writing system is logographic and contains thousands of unique characters (Norman, n.d.). Some characters have taken on new meaning in CIL based on what they look like instead of what they mean. A classic example is the word *jiong* (囧), an archaic word for window. However, in CIL *jiong* (囧) has been recycled. Now, *jiong* (囧) is used as a smiley-face because of its shape. This new meaning is unrelated to its classical meaning.

#### Introduction of Japanese and English loanwords

*Da call* (打 call) is a new internet word that mixes Chinese and English. In *da call* (打 call) the word *da* (打) means to hit, but it is also the word in the phrase *dadianhua* (打电话: to make a phone call). *Da call* (打 call) is misleading to English speakers, because it is not a newer, more hip way of saying “to make a phone call.” Rather, *da call* (打 call) means to support someone. This example shows that English loanwords in Chinese internet language can take on new forms unrelated to their meaning in English.

## Using animals as new symbols

Likewise, Chinese words can also take on new meaning. *Haigui* (海归) is the Standard Mandarin word meaning “to return from abroad” or “a returned student from abroad.” The CIL term *haigui* (海龟) is homophonous with *haigui* (海归) but means “sea turtle.” This new word adds a sense of adventure and foreignness to original *haigui* (海归).

As shown from the above examples, there is often overlap between different categories of CIL. For example, *Haigui* (海归) and *haigui* (海龟) are both a homophonic character substitution and also a new symbol for an animal. In the same way, 3Q (三 Q) is an introduced English word written using Chinese sounds.

Gao conducted a study interviewing Chinese netizens to understand the connection between CIL and identity and found that netizens “tend to identify themselves with those netizens who exhibit similar linguistic performances,” and that these performances give the users a “sense of uniqueness or even superiority.” (1992, p. 25). In essence, CIL is not only a way of establishing one’s own individual identity online. It is also a means of identifying with a specific group of people and asserting uniqueness from the general public.

After conducting surveys, he found that Chinese netizens hope their language use is:

1. entertaining and interesting
2. technologically well-informed and being able to keep up with social

development

3. modern, fashionable and cool
4. internationally oriented or transnational
5. unconventional and even rebellious
6. young, fresh, and innocent
7. deterritorialized or unconfined by geographic location
8. sophisticated; not easily seen through

These different features will frame my discussion on *Linyu* (淋语) and provide context as to how *Yaba* (丫吧) users make decisions on how to navigate their identity on the forum. While there is research on CIL, there is very little research specific to *Linyu* (淋语). Among academic sources in English, I was unable to find any articles or references related to the topic. For academic resources in Chinese, there are only two articles. The articles that do exist only provide basic background information and do not delve into specific examples of language use. However, once I stepped out of an academic context and began looking down other avenues, I found a plethora of resources discussing the phenomenon.

One of the most comprehensive of these sources is an article written by a Chinese internet user on Zhihu, a popular question-and-answer website similar to Quora or Yahoo answers (Zhou, 2014). The article, “The Past and Present of *Lin* (淋) Culture,” gives a detailed outline of the history of what the author calls *Lin* (淋) Culture. *Lin* (淋) here refers to Jolin Tsai, the famous Taiwanese singer. In the section “What is *Lin*

(淋) Culture” the author provides the following definition:

In essence, *Lin* (淋) Culture is...similar to other internet subcultures. It developed from netizens mocking Jolin Tsai...The tenets of Lin Culture are as follows:

1. *Linlin* (淋淋) is the mother of the universe.
2. *Linlin* (淋淋) is not Jolin Tsai. Jolin Tsai is just the personification of *Linlin* (淋淋) in Taiwan.
3. Nobody works harder than *Linlin* (淋淋). Anyone who works harder than *Linlin* (淋淋) will be sucked away.
4. The believers of Lin Culture truly love *Linlin* (淋淋). They are commonly referred to as *benzhiqishi* (本质骑士: essential knight). Fans of Jolin Tsai are *weiqishi* (伪骑士: false knight).

From a first glance, these tenets read like something from a cult. They make little sense to anyone outside of *Lin* (淋) Culture. However, these tenets give us some important insight into exactly what *Lin* (淋) Culture is and how that affects *Linyu* (淋语) usage. The tenets are strange and fresh. In the same way, *Linyu* (淋语) is unique, interesting, and funny, and it falls in line with what other researchers have identified as roles that CIL can fill for users.

There is an air of sarcasm around the tenets, and there are inside jokes contained within the writing. Both *benzhiqishi* (本质骑士) and “works harder” are references to Jolin Tsai songs. There is also a strong emphasis of the fact that Jolin Tsai fans are fake and that the worshippers of *Lin* (淋) Culture are interested in a being referred to

as *Linlin* (淋淋).

The Chinese term *Linyu* (淋语) contains the character *lin* (淋), a homophone for the same *lin* (林) in Jolin Tsai's Chinese name, *Cai Yilin* (蔡依林). However, the *lin* (林) in Jolin Tsai's name means "woods," while the *lin* (淋) in *Linyu* (淋语) also appears in the word for "gonorrhea." This character choice is intentional and yet another example of how *Linyu* (淋语) started out as a way to make fun of Jolin Tsai.

To better understand this word play, it is important to understand fan culture in China and Jolin Tsai. Jolin Tsai is a Taiwanese pop star sometimes referred to as the "Asian Madonna" (Jolin Tsai: Biography, n.d.). According to "The Past and Present of Lin (淋) Culture," her first album, *1019*, was mediocre and showed little talent. After a public breakup with Jay Chou, another famous Taiwanese musician, Jolin Tsai skyrocketed to stardom (Jay Chou: Biography, n.d.). Anti-fans view her relationship with Jay Chou as a publicity stunt.

Fan culture was the main impetus for the rise of *Linyu* (淋语). After releasing her 2006 album *Dancing Diva* (《舞娘》) and accompanying music videos, fans of the Japanese artist Mika Nakashima (中岛美嘉) accused Jolin Tsai of copying her style. It was then that on *Baidu Tieba* (百度贴吧) fans began organizing to mock Jolin Tsai. They began using parts of her lyrics to make fun of her, and it became common to make memes using Jolin Tsai's face. The people involved with mocking Jolin Tsai even started importing real-life events into their speech. In 2010, a Taiwanese youth stabbed his father one hundred and thirty times, resulting in his death. When

interviewed after the incident, the youth proclaimed he loved Jolin Tsai (Erkan, 2010). Soon, members of *Baidu Tieba* (百度贴吧) started using 130 as a special number, and even today the number is frequently used in circles that use these *Linyu* (淋语). This new introduction of a new reference to *Linyu* (淋语) shows that *Linyu* (淋语) is still evolving and changing. These words and expressions became what is today referred to as *Linyu* (淋语).

Now that I have gone over the history of *Linyu* (淋语), I want to move into its current status. Though my research focuses specially on *Yaba* (丫吧), I will still provide information about *Linyu* (淋语) across the internet. This will provide a broader understanding of *Linyu* (淋语) before delving into specific example on *Yaba* (丫吧).

The first example I want to talk about it is from *Bilibili* (哔哩哔哩). *Bilibili* (哔哩哔哩) is a Chinese video-hosting website similar to YouTube. The links for the videos discussed are available in Appendix A. This example is listed as an Open Online Course, and it is titled “A Practical Tutorial in Lingsh” (Gongkaike, 2017).

The course contains three separate videos. The first video starts with an introduction to classical *Linyu* (淋语) and modern *Linyu* (淋语). For classical *Linyu* (淋语), the creator of the course wrote a poem in the style of classical Chinese with *Linyu* (淋语) words. The second video reviews modal particles in *Linyu* (淋语) and the last video reviews specific vocabulary.

This video extracts some of the more central parts of Lingsh, particularly modal

particles. In *Linyu* (淋语) most sentences use either *re* (惹) or *lu* (噜), both of which are particles netizens claim are styled after Jolin Tsai's accent (Zhou, 2014). They replace the Standard Mandarin *le* (了), which in this context follows adjectives, to convey a change in status, such as in the sentence: *Ni pang le* (你胖了: You heavy *le*), meaning "you have gained weight." The *le* (了) indicates that the person has gotten heavier since the last time here or she was seen by the speaker.

The next example I want to discuss also comes from *Bilibili* (哔哩哔哩). A user named *Dilinglinglin* (低龄龄淋) has created a series of videos called *Linyuzhongzi* (淋语中字). In these videos, the user translates videos from spoken *Linyu* (淋语) into *Linyu* (淋语) written in Chinese characters. The majority of these music videos feature divas of the music industry such as Nicki Minaj, Ariana Grande, and Cardi B. These videos are updated regularly, and the most recent music videos from all three artists have been translated. *Dilinglinglin* (低龄龄淋) also has videos from gay YouTubers, such as Michael Henry, translated into *Linyu* (淋语).

The creator of these videos is claiming that the language of these English-speaking divas and gay men is in fact *Linyu* (淋语). Therefore, the video creator uses Chinese characters for *Linyu* (淋语). This decision shows that to some netizens, *Linyu* (淋语) is broader than a way of communicating that makes fun of Jolin Tsai. *Linyu* (淋语) in fact embodies a certain type of character or personality type. Furthermore, these translation videos give insight into how *Linyu* (淋语) can be used to convey a certain attitude that standard texts would not be able to accomplish.



This factor is particularly important on online forums where text is the main way to communicate.

The last example I will give is also from *Bilibili* (哔哩哔哩). While *Linyu* (淋语) is on various places all over the internet, videos with subtitles help bridge the gap between spoken communication and online text. The video, titled “The top foreign language choice of gays: Hello to the fundamental rules of *Linyu* (淋语)!” features four gay men talking about various aspects and uses of *Linyu* (淋语) (2016). One of the speakers states, “the way you speak will make you become a social butterfly of the gay community.” Another speaker emphasizes, “to show respect, we need to call each other *jiemei* (姐妹) based on age difference.” The contents of this video show that *Linyu* (淋语) is fashionable. Furthermore, it is entertaining and interesting. It is a way of positioning oneself as part of the male homosexual community.

*Linyu* (淋语) is a type of CIL that originated as part of the fan culture around Jolin Tsai. However, over time it has spread to broader use and become associated with gay male subculture. The scope of this research will focus specifically on how *Yaba* (丫吧) users construct their identity through use of *Linyu* (淋语). I have narrowed my focus down to how members of the platform refer to themselves and other platform users. In particular, I will analyze the use of the word *ji* (鸡), meaning “chicken.” I will also analyze how female kinship terms are used by members of the platform and contrast this with how they are expected to be used based on cultural and societal conventions.

I will also place example posts within the framework of the gay male experience in China to better attempt to understand how social pressures in the community and the rise of the Internet as a means of communicating and organizing have changed the gay male experience.

*Ji* (鸡) has different layers of meaning in Chinese culture. It is one of the animals of the Chinese zodiac. In addition, in ancient China, the chicken was a symbol of wealth because the words *ji* (鸡) and *ji* (吉: auspicious) are homophonous (Xian, 2017).

Users of *Yaba* (丫吧) have turned Chinese traditional understanding of *ji* (鸡) on its head and introduced it as a way of referring to people. They use it as slang for penis. This usage is not innovative, as both the term *jiji* (鸡鸡) and *jiba* (鸡吧) are expressions for penis used by the general public. However, *Yaba* (丫吧) users also use the term *ji* (鸡) to refer to people. Sometimes, they will use *ji* (鸡) to refer to penis, people and food all in the same sentence. They are balancing various meanings and using them in unique and often humorous ways.

It is common for Chinese people to use kinship terms regardless of actual blood relation. This usage typically follows societal understanding of gender roles. To understand why *Linyu* (淋语) users on *Yaba* (丫吧) would use kinship terms like *jiejie* (姐姐: older sister), *meimei* (妹妹: younger sister) or the combined term *jiemei* (姐妹: sisters), I am going to invoke the work of Kaidi Zhan on politeness strategies in Chinese (1992). Zhan points out that “Chinese speakers try to be polite by shortening

the social distance between the speaker and the addressee” (p. 9). Close familial kinship terms usage is not necessarily directly related to blood relations.

In my own experience, I have a close female Chinese friend who is a few years older than me, and I call her *jiejie* (姐姐) and she calls me *didid* (弟弟: younger brother). This language use shortens the social distance between us while also falling into a hierarchical structure determined by age and experience. Chinese family structures are very close, so the use of kinship terms creates a feeling of social closeness between individuals.

In the context of an online platform of anonymous strangers, the use of these kinship terms creates bonds and connections. These users do not use the names they use in daily life. In addition, the profile photos on their accounts are generally not their own photos. They come from all over the country. Their backgrounds are diverse, and the stories they tell show that they are of different social statuses. However, in the world of *Yaba* (丫吧), everyone is *jiemei* (姐妹). Everyone is a member of a family that is linked not by blood, but by common experience and shared identity.

Kinship terms used on *Yaba* (丫吧) tend to be feminine, the most common being *jiemei* (姐妹). Sometimes other terms such as *ayi* (阿姨: aunt) or *po* (婆: old woman) are used. These terms fall in line with perceived status. For example, on posts made by younger users, they will refer to themselves as *meimei* (妹妹). They are seeking help from an older *jiejie* (姐姐). On the other hand, when a younger user is trying to emphasize that an older user is experienced, he may defer to using terms like *ayi* (阿

姨), which imply a certain level of experience.

Text on a page does not carry the same emotions as those in speech. The *Linyu* (淋语) translation videos mentioned above are a prime example of how internet language is able to compensate for aspects we rely on in spoken communication. In addition, the modal particles mentioned also give off a different sensation than those used in Standard Mandarin. Dialect words are incorporated into this new CIL and it feels both foreign and fashionable. *Yaba* (丫吧) users utilize *Linyu* (淋语) in surprising and humorous ways that help to express membership to a common community.

Before continuing, some terminology specific to *Baidu Tieba* (百度贴吧) and Chinese internet forums must be explained. These are applicable generally to *Baidu Tieba* (百度贴吧) and not specific to users of *Yaba* (丫吧). It is later in the research that language use specific to this group will be addressed.

First, it is important to understand what a *ba* (吧) is and how they are made. A *ba* (吧) can be translated as the word “bar” in English and is a place for Chinese internet users of common interests to gather (Kunming, Spotti, & Kroon, 2014). The *ba* (吧) are very diverse, and vary from city-specific *ba* (吧) to cooking forums. They are created by individual users and can be joined by anyone who wishes to subscribe to the *ba* (吧).

Posts on the *ba* (吧) are called *lou* (楼: building) and the creator of each thread is referred to as the *louzhu* (楼主: floor/building owner). Each progressive post

underneath the top floor is referred to in chronological order starting from “second floor.” The fortieth reply to a post would be on the “forty-first floor”.

## ***Yaba* (丫吧) Posts and Analyses**

The following sections contains six posts from *Yaba* (丫吧). Instead of providing full comment threads, I have provided the first post made by the *louzhu* (楼主), the post creator. Instead of providing entire text threads, relevant replies and comments. If the text contained emojis, I kept them. Appendix B has a screenshot and the front page of *Yaba* (丫吧). Appendix C has a sample post. These can serve as a reference for how these posts appear to *Yaba* (丫吧) users. Readers interested in reading the entire thread can refer to Appendix D, which has links to each post. For each post, I have provided the original Chinese text, pinyin transliteration, translation by lexical unit, and a full translation.

### Post 1

【不老男神】 52岁小鲜肉 摄影师  
【*Bu lao nan shen*】 *52 sui xiaoxianrou sheyingshi*  
【Not old male god】 52 age fresh meat photographer

“【Not old hunk】 52-year-old hunky photographer”

1楼: 是 gay, 已 出柜, 骚鸡们 可以 嘛  
1 *lou*: *shi gay, yi chugui, saojimen keyi ma*  
1 floor: is gay, already come out of closet flirty chickens can (modal particle)


“1 floor: He’s gay, already came out of the closet, what do you think, you flirty chickens?”


On the first floor, the *louzhu* (楼主) shares a photo of a photographer and asks if the other *saojimen* (骚鸡们) think he is attractive. It is common to see posts asking how people perceive someone’s attractiveness. One of the more curious features of

this language is the use of the word *sao* (骚). *Sao* (骚) means “coquettish.” It has negative connotations, and it is generally used to refer to women. However, the poster pairs *sao* (骚) with *ji* (鸡). *Saoji* (骚鸡) word-for-word means “flirty chicken,” but in this context it is just another way of referring to Chinese male homosexuals.


An entry from Jikipedia, an online crowd-sourced dictionary focusing on documenting new Chinese words as they appear, says that “unlike Standard Mandarin, *ji* (鸡) in *Linyu* (淋语) is not a derogatory term. Instead, it is a “commonly used pronoun and indicator” (Ji, 2018). The same entry goes on to state that “among users of *Linyu* (淋语), *ji* (鸡) is not really aggressive language, so much that *saoji* (骚鸡) actually leans more towards a positive connotation.”

The members of the forum are taking words and giving them new meaning and connotation. This falls in line with former research done on CIL. An animal that in ancient China is viewed as strong and loyal is now used in new and unique ways. Many users responded saying that the man in the photo was unattractive, but a commenter on the 18<sup>th</sup> floor disagrees.

18楼:	楼上	的		珍素	挑食,
<i>18 lou:</i>	<i>loushang</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>ji</i>	<i>zhensu</i>	<i>tiaoshi,</i>
18 floor:	floor above	(attributive marker)	chicken	really	picky,

男人	70岁		还能	硬起来,	都	还能	生孩子,
<i>nanren</i>	<i>70 sui</i>	<i>jiba</i>	<i>hai neng</i>	<i>yingqilai</i>	<i>dou</i>	<i>hai neng</i>	<i>shenghaizi,</i>
men	70	age penis	still can	get hard	even	still can	have children,

他	只不过	才	50	出头,	依然	身强力壮,
<i>ta</i>	<i>zhibuguo</i>	<i>cai</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>chutou,</i>	<i>yiran</i>	<i>shenqianglizhuang,</i>
he	merely	just	50	a little more than,	still	strong and vigorous,

有	什么	不可以	的	
<i>you</i>	<i>shenme</i>	<i>bukeyi</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>jiji</i>
have	what	not can	(final particle)	chicken-chicken

“18 floor: The gays above are too picky. Men can still get hard even at 70. They can still have children. He’s only just 50 and still strong and vigorous. What do you mean you can’t with this penis?”

The comments above the 18<sup>th</sup> floor in general are rejecting the photographer in the original post and saying he is too old. The reply on the 18<sup>th</sup> floor uses multiple meanings of *ji* (鸡) in the same sentence. He first calls the people in the comments above too picky, referring to them as *ji* (鸡). This usage is similar to the usage on the first floor, and it is simply a term for referring to people.

The comment continues, saying that even men who are seventy years old can get erections. He uses the words *jiba* (鸡巴) and *jiji* (鸡鸡), common euphemisms for penis used not just by members of *Yaba* (丫吧). He also opts to use emojis as a stand-in for the Chinese character for *ji* (鸡). This example shows that there are multiple ways to use the same word. There is a combination of terms specific to *Linyu* (淋语) and those used by the general public. This post exemplifies how *ji* (鸡) can take on various levels of meaning. It shows how *Yaba* (丫吧) users use *ji* (鸡) to identify themselves to and other homosexuals.



Post 2

【30 岁】 有没有 快 30 的 🐔  
【30 sui】 youmeiyou kuai 30 de ji  
【30 age】 to have not have almost 30 (attributive marker) chicken

来 聊一聊 以后, 想想 就 心酸  
lai liaoyiliao yihou, xiangxiang jiu xinsuan  
come talk future think just heart sour

“【30 years old】Are there any almost 30-year-old gays that can talk about the future, just thinking about it makes me sad.”

Before analyzing the language use in this post, I will provide important cultural context. The poster is expressing his concerns at turning thirty. In China, there is a social expectation that one will be married by thirty. The *louzhu* (楼主) mentions that he has no way to come out of the closet, and he is asking other gay men on the platform for help.

This meber is using an emoji instead of the word *ji* (鸡). The use of emojis is not uncommon on *Yaba* (丫吧). Sometimes it appears to be for censorship purposes. For example, posts that use the word *she* (射), which means “to ejaculate,” will often use a snake emoji. The word for “snake” in Chinese *she* (蛇), and differs from the word for ejaculation by a tone difference. These emoji substitutions are often for sexual words.

44 楼: 老娘 已经 31 了 惹, 一个  
44 lou: laoniang yijing 31 le re, yige  
44 floor: Old mother already 31 (aspect marker) (modal particle), one

人 过 呗, 反正 我 是 跟 我 妈

*ren guo bei, fanzheng wo shi gen wo ma*  
 person live (modal particle), anyway I am with I mom

说 了 我 不 结 婚 的。 不 想  
*shuo le wo bu jiehun de. bu xiang*  
 say (aspect marker) I not marry (final particle). not want

当 骗 婚 鸡, 鸡 也 是 有  
*dang pianhunji, ji ye shi you*  
 be lie-marriage-chicken chicken also be have

素养 的 惹  
*suyang de re*  
 accomplishment (final particle) (modal particle)

“44 floor: I’m already 31 years old. Just be alone. Anyway, I already told my mom I’m not getting married. I don’t want to be a in a fake marriage. Us gays also are also self-cultivated.”

In the response on the 44<sup>th</sup> floor, the poster uses two noteworthy expressions. The first is *laoniang* (老娘). This word is typically reserved for elderly women to use when referring to themselves. The word *lao* (老) literally means old but conveys feelings of having experience and being knowledgeable. *Niang* (娘) contains the female radical (女) and as a noun means “mother.” The commenter on the 44<sup>th</sup> floor is positioning himself as older and more experienced, and he is preparing the first poster to expect to be given advice. He also uses a feminine kinship term to further emphasize that he is part of the same group as the poster.

The next term worth noting is *pianhunji* (骗婚鸡). This term contains *ji* (鸡), which here can be understood to mean “person” or in this context male homosexual. *Pianhun* (骗婚) means “false marriage,” and oftentimes refers to a male homosexual

marrying a woman to satisfy societal expectations. The commenter feels this type of behavior is unacceptable and he is willing to break societal norms to avoid being a participant in a false marriage. Furthermore, he is making the assertion that his individual rights are more important than harmony within his family.

The reply on the 44<sup>th</sup> floor also insists that *ji* (鸡) must have *suyang* (素养). *Suyang* (素养) means something like accomplishment, but it is more linked to one's cultural education and moral decision-making. These behaviors and accomplishments are directly related to someone's level of *suzhi* (素质). Someone with high *suzhi* (素质) will have *suyang* (素养). The words are even linked by the shared character *su* (素). This word choice reflects how some *Yaba* (丫吧) users are concerned with their behavior fitting into the national discourse of *suzhi* (素质). Furthermore, they are willing to sacrifice group unity within their family to find this high *suzhi* (素质).

Post 3

【丫吧】	学历	大	调查
【Yaba】	<i>Xueli</i>	<i>da</i>	<i>diaocha</i>
【Yaba】	Educational background	big	survey
【Yaba】	“Big Survey on Educational Background”		

1 楼:	姐妹们	留	数字	即可,	看看	🐔场
1 <i>lou</i> :	<i>jiemeimen</i>	<i>liu</i>	<i>shuzi</i>	<i>jike</i> ,	<i>kankan</i>	<i>jichang</i>
1 floor:	sisters	leave	number	that's all,	see	chicken farm

是不是	人均	985 惹	! ? ?
<i>shibushi</i>	<i>renjun</i>	<i>984 re</i>	! ? ?
is or isn't	average	985 (modal particle)	! ? ?

“1 floor: Sisters, just comment a number, let's see if all the gays are from 985 schools!”

This post asks the other members of *Yaba* (丫吧) their academic credentials by asking if everyone is from a 985 school. Project 985 is a select set of thirty-nine Chinese universities that the government wants to become world class in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Project 211 and 985, n.d.). These are considered some of the best universities in China, so the poster is trying to gauge if everyone has attended these notable schools. The original poster also attached a photograph with twelve different numbered options, ranging from top-notch Ph.D. graduate to middle school graduate. Education, *wenming* (文明), and *suzhi* (素质) are all linked, and the *louzhu* (楼主) is trying to do an informal survey to understand what type of group he is a member of.

The standard way of asking questions to a big group is to use the term *dajia* (大家), an inclusive term meaning “everybody.” However, the *louzhu* (楼主) opts to use the word *jichang* (鸡场: chicken farm). As with previous posts, the poster is using *ji* (鸡) to refer to people, and he is extending the metaphor that gay men are *ji* (鸡) by using *jichang* (鸡场) to refer to the group as a whole. This word choice is inclusive of everyone on *Yaba* (丫吧) and reflects the poster’s perception that there is group solidarity on *Yaba* (丫吧). He is also emphasizing that this survey is specifically for gays.

7 楼: 不好意思 我 幼儿园 毕业 的  
 7 *lou*: *Buhaoyisi wo youeryuan biyede*  
 7 floor: Sorry I kindergarten graduate (phrase-final particle)

“7 floor: Sorry, I only graduated from preschool”

Comment to floor 7:

这么 小 就 可以 出来 做 🍗 嘛  
*Zheme xiao jiu keyi chulai zuoji ma*  
 This way small just can come out be chicken (modal particle)

“You can be a gay that young?”

The poster on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor makes a joke that he only graduated from pre-school. This interaction is typical of posts on *Yaba* (丫吧). Oftentimes, users will respond in sarcastic or unexpected ways to a serious question. The anonymity of the forum allows for users to embody different personalities in their responses.

A user commented back to the pre-school comment surprised that someone so small could *zuoji* (做鸡). *Zuoji* (做鸡) typically means to be a prostitute and is reserved for use with females. The male equivalent is *zuoya* (做鸭), because the word for duck in Chinese, *yazi* (鸭子), is a euphemism for male prostitute. Choosing the female term is intentional because members of *Yaba* (丫吧) frequently play with gender. In addition, *ji* (鸡) is the common pronoun for male homosexuals. This word choice is a multi-layered inside joke, playing on that fact that the person can both *zuoji* (做鸡) in the sense of being a gay man and also *zuoji* (做鸡) in the sense that they are pretending to be young and being a prostitute at that age seems funny to the commenter.

12 楼: 13 是 🍗 校。 不好意思 忘记 写 噜。  
*12 lou: 13 shi jixiao. buhaoyisi wangji xie lu.*  
 12 floor 13 is chicken school sorry forget write (modal particle)

“12 floor: 13 is a chicken school. You forgot to write it.”

On the 12<sup>th</sup> floor, a user comments that the *louzhu* (楼主) forgot to mention that a

school number 13, saying that it is a *jixiao* (鸡校). The number 13 here is a reference to the incident where a Jolin Tsai fan stabbed his father 130 times. Oftentimes, the users will associate anything with 13 or 130 as gay, and will use these numbers to create imaginary gay spaces.

Post 4

【南京 🐔】  
 【*Nanjing ji*】  
 【Nanjing chicken】

“【Nanjing Gay】”

1 楼: 有 蓝鲸 解解 纹眉 的  
 1 *lou*: *you lanjing jiejie meiwen de*  
 1 floor: have blue whale older sister tattoo eyebrows (phrase-final particle)

嘛。 介绍 一家 性价比 高 点  
*ma. jieshao yijia xingjiabi gao dian*  
 (modal particle) introduce a quality-price ratio high a bit

的。 本可 要 捣持 一下。 好 站街  
*de. benke yao daoichi yixia. hao zhanjie*  
 (phrase-final particle).I want straighten updo. very expensive

惹。 本可 眉毛 太 难看 噜 🐔🐔  
*re. benke meimao tai nankan lu jijj*  
 (modal particle) My eyebrows too ugly (modal particle) chicken chicken

“1 floor: Are there any Nanjing sisters that get their eyebrows tattooed? Introduce a place with a cheap place with good quality. I need to fix mine up. It’s so expensive. My eyebrows look so bad 🐔🐔”

In this post, we get a user asking for advice and for places in Nanjing, an eastern Chinese city in Jiangsu province, to get his eyebrows done. It is not uncommon for members of *Yaba* (丫吧) to ask for advice or assistance in solving problems. In this

case, the user is asking for a place to get his eyebrows done.

The original post is full of internet slang that positions the user as young. First, the user refers to *Nanjing* (南京) as *lanjing* (蓝鲸), the word for blue whale. This expression originates from the Nanjing dialect, where speakers do not differentiate between *n* and *l* sounds. At the same time that the user is using Nanjing dialect, he is also incorporating Northeastern dialect. The expression *daochi* (捣持) is a Beijing Dialect expression meaning “to tidy up” (Daochi, n.d.). This interdialect mixing reflects how in cyberspace one’s identity is not necessarily linked to a physical location. There is more freedom to mix different styles of speech, whether for humor or to be more globally inclusive.

The poster asks for *jiejie* (解解) to introduce a place. This term is a homophone for *jiejie* (姐姐), older sister. Therefore, the word only represents the sound of older sister and removes the female association. This character choice creates a differentiation between the literal meaning of the word and the idea that it can also be appropriated by Chinese male homosexuals and used in a new context. Both *jiejie* (姐姐) and *jiejie* (解解) are used interchangeably by members of the platform.

It is also noteworthy that the user chooses to use *jiejie* (解解) instead of the more generic *jiemie* (姐妹). He is making a point to show that he is of lower hierarchical rank than someone who would know information about places to get eyebrows done. He is asking for help, so he positions himself as beneath the *jiejie* (姐姐) who would know more.

8 楼: 盐水🐔  
8 *lou*: *yanshuiji*  
8 floor: salt-water-chicken

“8 floor: Nanjing salted chicken ”

A commenter on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor comments that the user is a *yanshuiji* (盐水鸡). This comment is a joke about where the *louzhu* (楼主) is located and that he is a gay male. *Yanshuiya* (盐水鸭) is one of Nanjing’s most famous local specialties. However, instead of using the original word for the dish, which has the word *ya* (鸭), “duck,” the commenter has cleverly substituted the word *ji* (鸡). The comment evokes the user’s geographic location and his sexuality all with a short line of word play.

Post 5

【我的老师是🐔吗】 怎么发些奇奇怪怪  
【*Wode laoshi shi ji ma*】 *zenme fa xie qiqiguai*  
【My teacher is chicken (question marker)】 how post some strange

的 东西  
*de dongxi*  
(attributive marker) things

“【Is my teacher gay】 Why does he post these strange things?”

In this post, the *louzhu* (楼主) is asking the members of *Yaba* (丫吧) if his teacher is a *ji* (鸡). He shares a picture from his teacher’s moments page, a function on WeChat for sharing photos, texts, videos and links to articles. In China, it is not uncommon for students to have their teachers’ social media accounts. The picture has a bunch of cooked chickens in it. As with many posts on *Yaba* (丫吧), most of the comments are not useful to the *louzhu* (楼主) in really understanding the answer to his



question. Some users suggest *louzhu* (楼主) should express his love for his teacher.

Others pretend to be the teacher and express anger in being outed on the internet.

2 楼: 你 可以 跟 他 一起 咕咕叫

2 lou: *Ni keyi gen ta yiqi gugujiao a*

2 floor: You can with him together (chicken call onomatopoeia)

“2 floor: You can cluck like a chicken with him.”

The reply on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor mixes the animal meaning of *ji* (鸡) with the neutral expression for gay men. *Gugu* (咕咕) is the onomatopoeia the sound chickens make.

The replier suggests that the *louzhu* (楼主) *gugujiao* (咕咕叫), or “make chicken sounds” with his teacher. This word choice is entertaining and creative, because this

type of language can very rarely be used on humans. The replier on the second floor is extending the metaphor that gays are chickens. He is blurring the lines between what

human and animal and what exactly *ji* (鸡) mean. There are also sexual implications with this language, because *jiao* (叫) means “to call out,” and is found in the word

*jiaochuang* (叫床: to call out in ecstasy during sex).

Post 6

【什么样的  最 好吃? 】

【*Shenmeyangde ji zui haochi?*】

【What type of chicken most delicious?】

“【What type of  tastes best?】”

1 楼: 本可 好 喜欢 吊烧鸡。

1 lou: *Benke hao xihuan diaoshaoji.*

1 floor: I really like braised chicken.

“1 floor: I really like braised chicken.”

In this post we see more examples of semantic blurring with what exactly *ji* (鸡) means to different *louzhu* (楼主). The *louzhu* (楼主) says in his first post that his favorite dish is *diaoshaoji* (吊烧鸡), a real dish and not a play on words. Many of the replies are also about food. Other replies are overtly sexual and the *louzhu* (楼主) fully acknowledges that the responses are valid interpretations of his original question.

2 楼: 当然 是粗 又长 的 鸡  
 2 *lou*: *Dangran shi cu you chang de ji*  
 2 floor: Of course is thick and long (attributive marker) chicken

最 好吃 惹  
*zui haochi re*  
 most delicious (modal particle)

“2 floor: Long and thick penises are the best, obviously.”

3 楼: 白斩鸡 最 好吃  
 3 *lou*: *Baizhanji zui haochi*  
 3 floor: white cut chicken most delicious

“3 floor: Cantonese poached chicken is most delicious.”

5 楼: 男人 的 大 🐔🐔  
 5 *lou*: *Nanren de da jijj*  
 5 floor: Man (attributive marker) big chicken-chicken

“5 floor: Men’s big penises”

10 楼: 麻辣鸡 靴靴  
 10 *lou*: *Malaji xuexue*  
 10 floor: Spicy chicken thanks

“10 floor: Spicy chicken, thanks.”

These posts show a variety of meaning. Some replies focus on food, while others

focus on penises. There is some ambiguity in the reply on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor. The poster says he likes *malaji* (麻辣鸡), which is also a real dish. However, *malajia* (麻辣鸡) is also a nickname given to Nicki Minaj. It is unclear if the user is referring to the food or to the icon Nicki Minaj. This example is yet another layer given to the meanings *ji* (鸡) can have. Other users are not subtle at all in defining their specific desires for certain types of *ji* (鸡).

18 楼:	粗的	长的	上翘的	青筋	暴起的	微黑的
18 lou:	<i>cude</i>	<i>changde</i>	<i>shangqiaode</i>	<i>qingjin</i>	<i>baoqide</i>	<i>weiheide</i>
18 floor:	thick	long	upturned	blue vein	bulging	blackish

蛋蛋	大的	龟龟	外翻的	包皮	适中的	米青	多的
<i>dandan</i>	<i>dade</i>	<i>guigui</i>	<i>waifande</i>	<i>baopi</i>	<i>shizhongde</i>	<i>miqing</i>	<i>duode</i>
balls	big	turtle	fanning out	foreskin	moderate	rice green	many

浓的	甜的	我最	稀饭
<i>nongde</i>	<i>tiande</i>	<i>wo zui</i>	<i>xifan</i>
thick	sweet	I most	porridge

“18 floor: thick, long, raised up, with bursting blue veins, slightly dark, big balls, with the head slightly turned out, an appropriate foreskin, and thick, sweet, cum, that’s my favorite.”

Comment from *louzhu* (楼主) in response to post on floor 18:

天	惹,	老	阿姨	真	会	吃
<i>Tian</i>	<i>re,</i>	<i>lao</i>	<i>ayi</i>	<i>zhen</i>	<i>hui</i>	<i>chi</i>
Sky	(modal particle)	old	auntie	really	can	eat

“Oh my god, this old auntie really knows how to eat!”

The commenter on 18<sup>th</sup> goes into a detailed description of his ideal *ji* (鸡). The *louzhu* (楼主) replies using a female kinship term *laoayi* (老阿姨: old aunty). This post and the reply shows that the *louzhu* (楼主) is also willing to take *ji* (鸡) more

euphemistically.

The *louzhu* (楼主)'s reply on the 18<sup>th</sup> floor contains the term *laoyi* (老阿姨), an expression meaning “old auntie.” This response matches the in-depth detail of the 18<sup>th</sup> floor post. The description is so vivid and detailed that the *louzhu* (楼主) can assume that the poster is very experienced. Thus, he can refer to the poster as *laoyi* (老阿姨: old lady/aunt),. In this instance, age difference does not matter. Rather, the poster's experience puts that at a position that deserves respect.

23 楼: 广东人                      表示    你        想        吃    什么    🐔  
23 *lou*: *Guangdongren*        *biaoshi ni*        *xiang*        *chi shenme ji*  
23 floor:Guangdong person    express you        want        eat what        chicken

烧鸡,                      白切鸡,                      葱油鸡,                      酱油鸡,  
*shaoji,*                      *baiqieji,*                      *congyouji,*                      *jiangyouji,*  
roast chicken,    white cut chicken,    scallion oil chicken,    soy sauce chicken,

盐焗鸡,                      手撕鸡,                      炖鸡                      等等,  
*yanjuji,*                      *shousiji,*                      *dunji*                      *dengdeng,*  
salted chicken,    shredded chicken,    stewed chicken    etc.,

你    想        吃    什么    🐔  
*ni xiang chi shenme ji*  
you want        eat what        chicken

“23 floor: As a person from Guangdong, I ask what kind of 🐔 do you want to eat? Roast chicken, white cut chicken, scallion oil chicken, soy sauce chicken, salted chicken, shredded chicken, stewed chicken etc., What type of 🐔 do you want to eat?”

Comment from *louzhu* (楼主) in response to post 23:

我    在    肇庆                      吃    了                      一    回        烧鸡                      和  
*Wo zai Zhaoqing chi le yihui shaoji he*  
I    at    Zhaoqing    eat (modal particle) once        roasted chicken    and

蒸鹅掌,                      太    好吃                      了

*zhengezhang tai haochi le*  
steamed goose too delicious (modal particle)

“When I was in Zhaoqing, I ate roasted chicken and steamed goose. It was so delicious!”

In this response on the 23<sup>rd</sup> floor, the person replying lays out a long list of real dishes popular in China. He does not make any indication that *ji* (鸡) could also be sexual. As such, the *louzhu* (楼主) also responds with a story about eating chicken. Again, the comment is only focused on food and is not sexual.

The above examples are representative of posts commonly seen on *Yaba* (丫吧). They show the different layers that can be applied to the simple concept of *ji* (鸡). *Ji* (鸡) can refer to its original meaning “chicken.” It can also be used as a term that Chinese male homosexuals use to refer to themselves or other male homosexuals. *Ji* (鸡) also has phallic connotations. Posters can employ any of these meanings in a single post, and they often jump between different meanings.

The users of *Yaba* (丫吧) have also appropriated a traditional animal symbol to take on new, modern meanings. This usage is important in community formation because they are redefining how the word is used. The users of *Linyu* (淋语) on *Yaba* (丫吧) have arrived at a word that is not *tongxinglian* (同性恋: homosexual), which still holds negative connotations. With this word, they have created a neutral word to refer to themselves and other homosexuals. Moreover, the users have taken the word usage a step further and started employing clever word play that blurs the lines between the animal form of the word and its new definition as a way to refer to male

homosexuals.

Another feature of the posts is the use of female kinship terms. *Yaba* (丫吧) has users from all over China. However, they are anonymous. Female kinship terms shrink social distance between strangers spread across the entire country.

Finally, the users follow traditional understandings of the kinship term system in Chinese to refer to other *Yaba* (丫吧) users. When a user wants to position himself as less experienced, he can use kinship terms like *meimei* (妹妹: younger sister) to refer to himself. In addition, he can flatter more experienced users by using kinship terms reserved for use for those who are respected or older. Through this usage, they users a sense of family among the community on *Yaba* (丫吧).

## Conclusion

To better understand how Chinese male homosexual netizens were using language to construct their virtual identities, I observed *Yaba* (丫吧), a virtual space populated by Chinese male homosexuals posting about their experiences and asking questions. I observed the platform and noticed users using both the word *ji* (鸡) and female kinship terms in ways that differ from Standard Mandarin. I hypothesized that they were using these words to shorten social distance and identify themselves as members of the homosexual community on *Yaba* (丫吧).

I used supporting research on CIL and homosexual experience in China to contextualize these posts and support my findings. On *Yaba* (丫吧), *ji* (鸡) is sometimes used as a euphemism for penis, a word for food, and a neutral word for gay. Users switch seamlessly between these different meanings, sometimes blending them. Within the context of contemporary China, where homosexual identity is not accepted by society, it is significant that users choose to use this word. In *ji* (鸡), they have found a term that, unlike *tongxinglian* (同性恋: homosexual), is neutral and even sometimes positive. They have found a way to refer to themselves and the members of their community and construct a virtual identity that is unified and without judgment.

Likewise, *Yaba* (丫吧) users use female kinship terms. Extended kinship term use is common in China, and *Yaba* (丫吧) users follow expected hierarchical structure with kinship terms. However, *Yaba* (丫吧) users invoke terms that are different from

their gender in order to emphasize their uniqueness. *Yaba* (丫吧) consists of strangers. They come from a variety of backgrounds and geographic locations. Extended kinship term usage allows the users to shorten social distance and show they are part of a larger community.

The extended kinship term usage and use of the word *ji* (鸡) are features that are markers of *Linyu* (淋语). However, their usage still fits in with what other scholars have identified as common aspects of CIL. *Yaba* (丫吧) members interchangeably use the word *jiejie* (姐姐) and *jiejie* (解解) just as other netizens on the greater internet use the homophones *haigui* (海归) and *haigui* (海龟). Furthermore, *Linyu* (淋语) is unique and fashionable. Users incorporate dialect words freely in a deterritorialized way that breaks down geographic limitations. They use fresh language that is oftentimes not easily understood by netizens who do not use *Linyu* (淋语). By using *Linyu* (淋语), *Yaba* (丫吧) members are constructing a shared virtual homosexual identity. They are creating a virtual family that they can rely on for advice and share stories with.

There are some limitations to the research in its current form that could be addressed by future researchers. The geographic location of the researcher made it difficult to interview members of the male homosexual community in China. Being able to make this type of connection organically in person would have allowed for deeper analysis into the male homosexual experience in China. It would have afforded more opportunities to interview individuals about their experiences in order to provide



a more updated detailing of homosexuality in contemporary China. In addition, it could have led to meeting *Linyu* (淋语) users that would have been able to provide more information on their language use. Future researchers would be advised to slowly incorporate themselves into the *Linyu* (淋语) user community both online and in person to make these connections.

Lack of research on *Linyu* (淋语) is also a limitation of the research. Fortunately, the framework provided by CIL researchers was relevant and impactful in approaching *Linyu* (淋语). However, much of the history behind *Linyu* (淋语) is anecdotal and relies on trusting articles from netizens. Furthermore, I was only able to see *Linyu* (淋语) in its current state and was unable to see how it changed. That is not to say a history of *Linyu* (淋语) could not be created by looking at posts online from ten years in the past. However, that type of research is outside the scope of this project, but would make for insightful background information.

The sheer quantity of posts on *Yaba* (丫吧) was overwhelming and made it initially difficult to decide a direction. For future research, the constant posts are exciting. There are a few ways future projects could approach *Yaba* (丫吧) posts. One way would be to analyze entire threads to understand why *Yaba* (丫吧) members talk about certain topics and how they approach them. Researchers could also try to understand some aspects of the daily experience of *Yaba* (丫吧) members by analyzing post content. *Linyu* (淋语) could be taken further to examine how it appears on other forums and places on the internet.

*Linyu* (淋语) usage on *Yaba* (丫吧) shows how one marginalized group constructs community identity through language use. For students of Chinese, this type of linguistic knowledge can be useful in navigating their own identities in Chinese. Understanding the deeper issues behind why individuals communicate the way they do online is also revealing as to how cultural norms and national discourse affect individuals. There is still much work to be done documenting and analyzing different variations of CIL. *Linyu* (淋语) in particular has a plethora of resources and examples online for future researchers to dive deeper and learn about the world of *ji* (鸡) and *jiemei* (姐妹).

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## Appendix A

### Links to Forums and Videos Relevant to Research

#### *Baidu Tieba* (百度贴吧)

*Baidu Tieba* (百度贴吧) Home Page

<https://tieba.baidu.com/>

*Yaba* (丫吧) Home Page

<https://tieba.baidu.com/肩上的脚丫>

*Sanmumu2* (三木木 2)

<http://tieba.baidu.com/三木木2>

*Yinxionglinmeng* (阴雄淋盟)

<http://tieba.baidu.com/阴雄淋盟>

*Gongzhulinlin* (公主林林)

<http://tieba.baidu.com/公主林林>

#### Article on *Linyu* (淋语)

“The Past and Present of *Lin* (淋) Culture” Article

<https://www.zhihu.com/question/21287651>

#### Videos from *Bilibili* featuring *Linyu* (淋语)

“A Practical Tutorial in Lingsh” Video

<https://www.bilibili.com/video/av8683705/?p=2>

*Dilin* (低淋) Video Creator Main Page

<https://space.bilibili.com/94805480>

【*Linyuzhongzi* (淋语中字)】Ariana Grande-break up with your girlfriend, i'm bored

<https://www.bilibili.com/video/av42951353>

【*Linyuzhongzi* (淋语中字)】卡迪逼 Cardi B-Ring(feat. Kehlani) 官方 MV

<https://www.bilibili.com/video/av29916610>

【*Linyuzhongzi* (淋语中字)】麻辣鸡 Nicki Minaj 新单《Hard White》官方 MV

<https://www.bilibili.com/video/av42342586>

## Appendix B

### Yaba (丫吧) Home Page Screenshot

Below is a screenshot of the home page of *Yaba* (丫吧) with explanations of important sections. This screenshot was taken on February 21, 2019.



1. *Jianshangdejiaoyaba* (肩上的脚丫吧) logo
2. *Jianshangdejiaoyaba* (肩上的脚丫吧) name
3. Number of followers
4. Number of posts
5. Posts, the number in the gray box indicates the number of comments



## Appendix C Example *Yaba* (丫吧) Post

Below is a sample  
from the mobile

*Yaba* (丫吧) post  
version.

Post Title  
*Louzhu* (楼主) ID

1 *Lou* (1 楼)

Replies

3 *Lou* (3 楼)

4 *Lou* (4 楼)

5 *Lou* (5 楼)

Reply



Photo  
Username  
Experience

This is a real post taken on February 21, 2019. I have removed the names and

profile pictures of the users for anonymity purpose. Below I will detail each of the sections.

1. Post title: each post has a title; in this post the title is asking if everyone has started school yet or not.
2. *Louzhu* (楼主): The person who creates each post is known as the *louzhu* (楼主), which is a traditional word for an owner of a building but in this context means original poster.
3. 1 *Lou* (1 楼): The first *Lou* (楼: floor) in every post is the text or photo that the *louzhu* (楼主) chooses to accompany his title.
4. Replies: For replies, users can choose either to see all replies or to only see replies by the *louzhu* (楼主). Many posts on *Yaba* (丫吧) are stories told by the *louzhu* (楼主), so it is convenient to be able to narrow down what one is seeing.
5. # *Lou* (#楼): Each success post beneath 1 *Lou* (1 楼) is numbered in chronological order. Each user has a photo (the black circle) and a username. In addition, users receive different badges based on how frequently they post next to their username.
6. Reply: This is the place that users can click to add their own reply to the post.

## Appendix D

Below are the links to the posts mentioned in the analysis section of the thesis. They are organized in the order mentioned in the thesis and Chinese titles are provided.

1. 【不老男神】52岁小鲜肉摄影师

<https://tieba.baidu.com/p/6032778320s>

2. 【30岁】有没有快30的👉来聊一聊以后，想想就心酸

<https://tieba.baidu.com/p/6032866123?pn=1>

3. 【丫吧】学历大调查

<https://tieba.baidu.com/p/6035105611>

4. 【南京👉】

<https://tieba.baidu.com/p/6034788362>

5. 【我的老师是👉吗】怎么发些奇奇怪怪的东西

<https://tieba.baidu.com/p/6031831199>

6. 【什么样的👉最好吃？】

<https://tieba.baidu.com/p/6032939400>