Constructing Collective Identities in the Internet Age:

A case study of Taiwanese-based internet forums

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Abstract

The thesis presents a case study of asynchronous Taiwanese-based internet forums, aimed at exploring new perspectives in the question of collective identity construction via internet-forum participation. It develops a discursive-constructivist approach that incorporates the theories and models of Goffman, Butler, Laclau & Mouffe and Melucci, investigating the performative, antagonistic and negotiated dimensions of identities. Methodologically, it deploys a series of analytic tools from linguistics and micro sociology, as well as the methods of content analysis and online ethnography.

Focusing on the questions of gay identities and national identities, the case study tracks down ten years of archives of the local gay forums and political forums, examining the ways in which collective identities take form through speech performance and social interactions in cyberspace. The case analysis of the gay forums finds that the internet gives rise to networked online gay communities, where individual gays' subject-positions are performed. Meanwhile, the forums permit the reconstruction of the Other of the gay community, which ironically results in the creation of an internal Other among the community. Furthermore, the forums allow their grassroots participants to engage in the local gay movement, which eventually leads to change in the public identity of the movement. The case of national identity shows that antagonism between the two oppositional nationalisms in Taiwan penetrates identity practices in this domain; cyberspace is no exception. The local political forums become the space for marking, creating and stigmatising the Other. Nevertheless, they also provide the space for negotiated interactions concerning identity-oriented national projects, as well as facilitate dialogues between Chinese and Taiwanese online participants on the question of Taiwan's future.

To conclude, internet forums do not necessarily lead to the devolution of symbolic and political power of their participants. Mainstream discourses still deeply influence the discourses in cyberspace. Grassroots participation in debates concerning social projects may intervene in decision-making; however, this is dependent on the participants' access to valid information and the decision makers' attitudes towards the grassroots forums. Finally, while connecting people together, the internet is also disuniting people in spreading antagonisms and animosity.

Contents

Acknowledgment

I started my doctoral programme as a practical career project, which ends up AS a journey of love.

The four years of PhD life flash by as I close my eyes. There were countless times when I felt life was hell and the whole study project was pointless. Luckily, the pain was always soothed by family's and friends' loving words, and compensated by the excitement of academic life. There were some glorious moments for a beginner in academia: the first presentation of the PhD project, the first international conference paper, and passing the viva. Even more enjoyably, the fun time with my dear friends from around the world: all the parties, laughs, and heart-to-heart talks we shared warmed up the coldest days in Scotland. These experiences have made me a rather different person who learned to appreciate more about life, thanking for every kindness and goodwill from everyone.

I have a very long list in my hand, but do not know where to start. The order of the names I will mention in the below therefore does not represent the degree of my gratitude. I remember once I joked with a colleague about who would read our PhD theses. The answer is the supervisors, the examiners, and ourselves. Perhaps I can start from those who will probably never read my thesis but still provided me immense support.

First, I owe my greatest gratitude to my parents. They can never quite understand what their daughter is up to and from time to time frown over her crazy decisions. This, nevertheless, has not once prevented them from loving her and helping her fulfil her silly dreams. For the same reason, I thank my husband Ben and my little girl Jade heartily. They gave up most of the pleasure of family life they could have had for the sake of a 300-page piece of work they are not really too interested in. So many times, they picked me up when I fell; when I took off again, they were the wind under my wings. If this thesis is to be dedicated to anyone, that will be them. I am also so grateful to my parents-in-law, especially my mother-in-law. They gladly sacrificed their retired life in looking after Jade when I was away for study. Without their help, it would have been almost impossible for me to continue the project.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In the first year of my doctoral research, I dreaded talking about my project. It was not so much because I was not sure about what the project was aiming for, but more because of the ways some were so certain of what the project was oriented to when they first learned about my research.

Usual guess one: I must be working on virtual identities in cyber forums for role-playing games like MUDs (Multi-Users domain) or real-time chat rooms, where the users can play with or 'try out' identities, such as in gender-bending. Usual guess two: I must be working on virtual communities, where people of shared interests build social relations via bulletin boards, newsgroups, electronic conferencing, emailing, or websites. When I told them neither of the answers quite hit the question, their faces lit up with surprise, 'what else is it, then?'

The usual guesses reflect the major interests of early internet research related to questions of identity (e.g. Rheingold, 1993 & 2000; Jones, 1995 & 1998; Turkle, 1995; Stone, 1995; Holmes, 1997; Shields, 1996; Kendall, 1996; Watson, 1997; Willson, 1997). I began my case study in 2001 and completed it in 2005; during that

time, internet scholars have started to test and re-examine the identity theses arising in pioneer studies. The issue of identity play/experiment has been questioned from different perspectives. Critiques of the disembodiment discourse, as it is presented in Stone (1995) and Turkle (1995), have pinpointed the impossibility of an absolute virtual identity totally disconnected with bodily references and living experiences embedded in daily locales and social locations (e.g., Miller & Slater, 2000; Slater, 2002; Baym, 1998; Wynn & Katz, 1997; Kendall, 1999; Argyle & Shields, 1996; Foster, 1996; Campbell, 2004). The anonymity and absence of bodily presence in the internet are not always celebrated as emancipatory; as shown in empirical studies, identity-building acts/speech may serve to reproduce existing hierarchal social relations or deepen the stereotypes of racial/social groups (e.g. Bassett, 1997; Ignacio, 2000; Nakamura, 2002, 2001 & 2000; Kolko, Nakamura, & Rodman, 2000). The concerns of community studies among internet research are no longer limited to the new relations created in virtual communities of 'like-minded' people as defined by Rheingold (1993 & 2000); the shared ethnic/cultural roots and the existing ties based on locality or nationality that have been nourished and consolidated via the internet are the focuses of a multiplicity of case studies (e.g. Correll, 1995; Mitra, 1999; Miller & Slater, 2000; Arnold & Plymire's, 2004; Hiller & Franz's, 2004; Hampton & Wellman, 1999, 2000, 2001 & 2003; Koku & Wellman, 2004; Carpentier, Lie &

Servaes, 2003). In the year of 2005, when the new theses no longer sound new, when identity play has ceased to be a fresh topic, and when communities on the internet or via the internet have been examined in and out, what new insights, then, can we expect from an internet study on the question of identity?

The world of the internet, as previous internet research suggests, promises us both the continuity with and change in the perception and construction of our social relations. It provides a diversity of communicative forms, ranging from email, bulletin board systems, newsgroups, chat rooms, MSN, and World Wide Web, to the recent hit weblog. Being part of the new media, these forums do not only facilitate information transmission, but also give rise to a plethora of new locales for social practices and ritualistic performance that connect one person to another, the individual to the social. In doing so, the internet permits a platform for the intersection of interests, ideas, living experiences, social actions, and, as emphasized in my research project, discourses loaded with historical memories, ideologies, and power struggles. Via the intersection, the new medium, again, as shown in previous internet research, has been challenging old agendas, such as identity questions. However illuminating they are, current efforts in the field have opened a few, but not all windows to the great view that the internet promises to create. As a testing ground for theoretical development and empirical studies regarding identity construction, the internet, as my research

project aims to prove, is far more exciting than has so far been suggested. To further explore this field, nevertheless, it is imperative to re-examine and articulate relevant theories, via which alternative perspectives would come into being.

I come from a society where identity politics, instead of identity play, saturates the realm of cultural-political life. Struggling for subjectivity and international recognition, Taiwanese Nationalism is yearning for the identity of an independent nation-state, while Chinese Nationalism in the island remains a strong force. Marginalized racial/ethnic identities, including the indigenous and Hakka identities, are being revived via a series of movements. Being the second wave of the local gender movement, *tongzhi* (lesBiGay and other sexual minorities) activism follows the footstep of feminism, fighting for sexual subjectivity and a self-defined identity. While the quest for collective identity dominates the local social/cultural/political landscapes, the question of identity construction is always on the primary agenda. Collective identities, as the local experiences suggest, do not come as pre-given or permanently fixed but *constructed* over time. The Chinese, Taiwanese, Taiwanese indigenous, Hakka, and *tongzhi* identities all have experienced a history of arising and shaping up. Some of them have been mainstreamed, e.g. Chinese/Taiwanese identities; some of them, especially *tongzhi* identity, are still struggling for their places in the identity spectrum. The histories of emergence and construction are constituted as well

as manifested in socio-political discourses and debates. Along with the change of the local mediascape, the locus of identity construction is also shifting. Each identity has its own media experience, growing in its close relationship with particular types of media at different stages. In the local context, the multiplication of the media seems to progress hand in hand with the complication of identity spectrum. This is seen in the mushrooming of political magazines and underground radio/television channels during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Taiwanese Nationalism was on the rise. The simultaneous developments of local internet culture and *tongzhi* activism provide a more recent example, while the coincidence of strengthened nationalistic confrontations and the rapid growth of online political forums is another instance.

The questions of collective identity and its symbiotic relationship with the media in Taiwan inspire us to connect the fields of internet studies and identity research in a new light. Internet practices in the realm of identity formation may go beyond the personal level and move onto the collective one; moreover, they may be intertwined with social/cultural/political discourses and projects, connecting private spheres and public ones. The nodal point (i.e. the privileged signifier of a particular discourse, see Laclau & Mouffe, [1985] 2001: 113) may henceforth shift from 'self', 'bond' or 'tie' to 'collective identity', while the enquiry into identity making on/via the internet is not only limited to its psychological and communal implications (as

explored in existing literature) but also opened up to its political ones. In so doing, we are permitted to interpret online acts, speeches and interactions in the light of their constructing nature that shapes and reshapes politicised collective identities in a contemporary society.

The research project is dedicated to the question of collective identities constructed on/via the internet. Focusing on Taiwanese experiences, I look at the questions of national identity and gay/*tongzhi* identity, both of which are better explored by the local internet users in comparison with other cases. To narrow down the research scope, I focus on the performance of asynchronous internet forums (including bulletin board systems and newsgroups) and reduce the scope of the empirical study to Taiwanese-based forums. In saying 'Taiwanese-based', I refer to the forums based in Taiwan and those mainly or partially participated in by Taiwanese-born discussants, including a number of 'global' (versus Taiwan-based) forums. The selective focus on asynchronous forums is based on the understanding that this type of forums, compared with synchronous ones such as chat rooms, tends to be more issue-oriented, allowing the participants more time and space to develop ideas and debates, while permitting multi-party intensive interactions on the same platform.

To throw new light on the internet-identity nexus, the research project aims to

build a discursive-constructivist approach to the question, in which I triangulate a few

identity theories from the field of social research and cultural studies, including

Goffman ([1959] 1990), Butler ([1990] 1999), Laclau & Mouffe ([1985] 2001), and

Melucci (1989). Each of them touches upon the constructed-ness of collective identity

in different manners, directly or indirectly orienting the focus of research to individual

or intra-group discursive performance/interactions. In adopting Goffman and Butler, I

look into the *performative* dimension of identity construction. As an early theorist of

identity performance, Goffman gives insights into its microscopic aspect embodied in

everyday practices, including bodily and verbal acts. Mining a similar vein, Butler

enriches the thesis with a constructivist touch, while laying stress on the political side

of performative identity. In drawing on Laclau & Mouffe, the project examines

internet-forum practices in relation to the *antagonistic* dimension of collective identity.

Connecting Marxist thoughts and post-structuralist discourse theories, Laclau &

Mouffe envisage the contingent Other, constituted in discursive practices that link up

differential signifying elements. Against the contingent Other, the frontier of an

activism-oriented identity is allowed to take form. Also working on the theories of

new social movement, Melucci provides a *'negotiated'* view of identity, in which a

collective identity emerges in the process where individuals intensively interact for a

feasible action system. Emphasising the performativity of internet-forum practices, I

depart from current literature that tends to look at performative internet-forum practices in terms of 'identity play', and reinvestigate these practices as *performative acts* constitutive of collective representation/construction of an identity. Enquiring into the antagonistic identity in the Laclau/Mouffe sense, the research project construes the internet forum as *discursive space*, where contingent meaning articulations and dialogic relationships between discourses take place. Meanwhile, the exploration of negotiated identities emerging in the internet forum allows us to theorise the medium as *mediating space*, viewing the intensive interactions/argumentations between discussants as ways of reaching agreement on the public identity of a social movement.

Examining these dimensions, the project enquires into the *participatory* aspect of collective identity construction facilitated by the new media. Except for the performative dimension, the constructing process of collective identity by and large occurs at the elite level. Laclau's & Mouffe's and Melucci's approaches to collective identity theorise this level as part of their radical/pluralist democratic projects, both of which address the elite-activists, or, in Melucci's term, the decision-makers of collective actions. The advent of the internet, however, seems to bring these approaches to a 'participatory turn' in the new communicative context. As shown in Taiwanese experiences, owing to its publicly accessible, non-hierarchical and

self-organising nature, the internet forum has facilitated 'grassroots' (versus elite-activists/decision-makers) participation in discursive production and multi-party intra-group negotiations aimed at social change. The question at issue is if the participatory turn can be further implicated in the devolution of symbolic power and decision-making concerning an identity project.

Another task of the project is concerning the methodology. The aforementioned identity theories, save Goffman's, tend to be macroscopic; they provide theoretical frameworks for empirical studies without suggesting practical methods for microscopic analysis. To sharpen the analytic edge of the case study, I embed the methodology in a linguistic approach, incorporating a number of analytic tools from the Ethnography of Communication, conversation analysis, speech act theory, critical discourse analysis and linguistic-oriented sociological theories; which helps to bring to light the process of meaning construction through language use in a particular situation, context, and field of social/cultural/political practice.

The research project is structured as a case study. It looks into two identity questions in a common social context, embedding the questions within an overarching theoretical framework and analysing the texts with a unified methodology. In this manner, the case study juxtaposes and compares the different identity experiences, aimed at revealing the various possibilities of identity practices facilitated by the

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internet forum. The thesis consists of eight chapters. To map out the theoretical

framework of the case study, the following chapter first reviews current internet

literature related to identity issues, and then moves on to the formulation of the

discursive-constructivist approach. This permits an overview of both the questions

that have been touched upon and the territories uncharted, paving the way for my

turning to identity approaches in current social research for new lights. Chapter 3

addresses methodological issues; it maps out the rationale of the methodological

toolkit, while tackling the ethical issues and the limit of the research project. Chapter

4 is the background chapter, orienting the readers to Taiwanese context, including its

history, politics, socio-cultural environment, and mediascape, as well as giving an

account of the history and typology of asynchronous Taiwanese-based internet

forums.

Chapter 5, 6 & 7 constitute the major part of the case study. Chapter 5 aims to

facilitate the case analyses of online practices constructive of gay/national identities.

It works as an exegetical chapter, providing an analysis of the cultural patterning of

local internet-forum practices in relation to the multiple dimensions of identity

construction, with a thorough discussion of the analytic tools that underpin the case

study.

Chapter 6 & 7 look at the questions of gay identities and national identities,

respectively. Both chapters are constituted in three major sections, each of which

tackles a particular dimension of identity-constructive online performance. Sharing

the same theoretical and analytic frameworks, the focuses of the two case analyses are

nevertheless differently placed. The gay identity chapter concentrates on the

experiences of the local MOTSS (Members of the Same Sex) forums. It starts from

qualifying MOTSS forums as networked communities, bringing the ontology of the

gay community to visibility, while allowing the collective performance of gayness via

individual acts. The second and third sections are anchored on the performance related

to *tongzhi* movement. In examining the ways in which 'grassroots' MOTSS discourse

re-articulates the meaning of the Other of *tongzhi* community, I ponder on the possible

drawback of an antagonism-based social activism, manifested in the local MOTSS

experience. The third section looks into the dynamics of MOTSS negotiations

concerning the strategy of *tongzhi* activism, which have effectively influenced the

public identity of the activism. Chapter 7 works on the performance of political

forums, housing most of nationalistic discourse from the islanders and overseas

Taiwanese. In this chapter I look at the performative elements in hostile discourse and

language use, emphasising the contextual meanings of speech acts. The section

addressing the antagonistic dimension of identity construction leads me to the

reflection on the 'dystopian' side of internet forums, which seems to strengthen the

animosity between oppositional nationalists. Meanwhile, the local experience

suggests the utopian side of online forums, via which negotiations between different

political fronts, both domestically and across the national borders, are allowed to take

place. It is, however, also revealed that the participatory aspect of online forums has

its own limits; as shown in the case analysis, although the internet presents itself as a

mediating space, it does not necessarily ensure the occurrence of valid negotiations.

To summarise, the research project attempts to bring new insights into the

possible impacts of the internet on collective identities in a contemporary society. It

places the research question in the Taiwanese context and looks into the ways in

which an identity-politics-saturated society interacts with the new media in different

manners. To bridge the gap between current internet studies and identity theories in

social research/cultural studies, the project synthesises a number of concepts and

models into a discursive-constructivist approach, substantiating it with linguistic

analytic methods and categories. The content chapters go through the general aspect

and specific cases of identity making, raising a series of questions concerning the

opportunities and constraints emerging in the new communicative environment. These

questions lead us to reflect on the current research trends and projects in both the

fields of internet studies and identity theories, re-examining the problems tackled and

opening up the issues unaddressed. We will look at the details in the following

chapters.

Chapter 2

New media, old agenda:

collective identity and the internet

The advent of internet technology and its use have given rise to myriads of comments and studies aimed at understanding the new media and its influences on our life. Researchers from disciplines of social science mainly look at the internet in its two dimensions: the internet as part of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and as a new social construct (Costigan, 1999). Those who look at the first dimension see the internet as a series of data stores or focus on information flood, aiming to improve the users' ability to search and retrieve data from it. Projects relating to this research line tend to be pragmatic, such as the current discourse on the digital divide in relation to the question of access (e.g. Hoffman et al 2000; Hoffman & Novak, 1998; Rice 2002; Norris, 2001; Centre for Democracy & Technology, 2005; Krumme, 2005;UNDP, 1995; Couldry, 2004; US Department of Commerce, 2000). In contrast with this more pragmatic approach, those who look at the second dimension delve into the socio-cultural aspects of the internet and examine the ways in which these aspects open up new possibilities for social life. The diverse research interests for this dimension is manifested in a number of readers concerning the social/cultural

performance of the internet (e.g. Porter, 1996; Shields, 1996; Jones, 1995, 1997, 1998; Holmes, 1997; Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2002; Lister at al, 2003; Gauntelett & Horsley, 2004) as well as individual publications scattering in a few journals specific to 'new media' (including the internet and digitised multi-media), e.g. *The Information Society, New Media & Society, Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* and *Cyberspace and Behaviour*. Some of the most-discussed issues include the internet's impacts on social relations, community formation, social/personal psychology, language culture, and political practices (especially in the public sphere and or related to social activisms).

Just as there is not an overarching perspective that encapsulates the overall phenomena of the internet, there is no single answer to the question of collective identity. Discourses of national/ethnic/community-based identities are largely concerned with the ties and bonds keeping people together, giving them the sense of belonging. Collective identity in this vein is predominantly primordialist, determined by blood, race, language, locality, territory, religion, tradition, or common historical memories (Geertz, 1963; Hobsbawn, 1990; Hutchinson & Smith, 1995). In contemporary societies, where project-oriented (Castells, 1997: 8) and social-activism-based identities become possible, collective identity is no longer

necessarily primordial; it becomes the consequence as well as the matrix of collective actions. The question is thus not merely about self-definition, but about how the definition is made in intra-group dynamics and the balancing of external forces (Melucci, 1985, 1988& 1989; Schlesinger, 1991). Collective identities are sometimes synonymous to 'power centres' (Laclau & Mouffe, [1985] 2001; Laclau, 1990), each of which produce distinctive 'subject positions' (Althusser, 1971) in relation to the individuals' social locations. Race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and class are different subject positions that may coexist in one person (Woodward, 1997; Hall, 1996). In cultural studies, in which the term 'cultural identity' is more commonly used, identity is both about sameness and difference. Cultural identities exclusively based on sameness are usually defined by common historical experiences and shared cultural codes. Identity in this definition is an 'essence', a truth, allowing no change and subversion. In contrast with this essentialist approach, identity based on difference is constructed, defined by the ways in which the boundaries between the self and the Other are demarcated in contexts (Hall, 1990, 1992 & 1996; Woodward, 1997; Gilroy, 1997). However collective identities take form, they constantly entail psychological processes, in which one may imagine oneself as part of a community (Anderson, 1991), integrate historical memories into one's personal memories (Preston, 1997; Schlesinger, 1991), or relate oneself to others by either the principle of sameness or

difference (Hall, 1992 & 1996).

The diverse interests in internet research and the intricacies of collective identity suggest the many potential ways of looking into the implications of the new medium in the old agenda. As will be examined, a plethora of literature directed into this orbit has been produced, which, however, has not exhausted the subject. This is especially the case when it comes to activism-based and differential identities. One of the major tasks of this research project is to bridge the gap between current internet studies and identity projects in social research. It is hence imperative to propose a new theoretical framework that reflects the internet's constructing nature in the realm of collective identity, while going beyond existing perspectives. This chapter addresses the question in three steps. Firstly, it reviews current internet research related to identity construction, which can be divided into three strands. The first strand is concerned with the debates of dis/embodiment and dis/embedding, in which the questions of body and social embedding are at stake. The second strand explores community-based identity facilitated by 'virtual communities' and computer-supported social networks. The third strand examines the internet's contribution to identity-oriented social activisms. In doing so the chapter mainly looks at empirical studies, though some philosophical arguments are also examined for their implications in current practices and future studies. Looking for a new light, the

chapter secondly re-examines a number of crucial dimensions of internet communication in relation to my agenda in the research project. The re-examination of the new medium's constructing potentials facilitates the theoretical turn of the project, grounded on a discursive-constructivist approach to identity. In aiming so, the identity theories of Goffman, Butler, Laclau & Mouffe, and Melucci are triangulated. The former two have been adopted, though not well connected to more analytic methodologies (such as Sociolinguistics) in existing internet literature. The latter two, apart from some exceptions (e.g. Brodocz, 1998), are rarely mentioned in current internet research. To conclude, I reflect on the potentials and limits of internet-forum practices concerning identity construction. The question of potential and limits will underpin the central question of the research project and be further examined in the case study.

I. Internet research in the realm of collective identity

Dis/embodiment, dis/embedding

The discourse of 'disembodiment' is one of the most discussed and criticised among early internet researches. The discourse starts with the premise that internet

communications reside in texts or graphics, but never in bodily presence. In other words, they are *disembodied*. Furthermore, they are, as one may wish, mostly anonymous. Owing to the disembodiment, individuals' online adventures are not to be constrained by embodied experiences. The limits of gender and ethnicity, the boundaries of corporeality are brought down to the minimum, by virtue of which people are permitted to escape from unitary, embodied, and essentialised identities.

The 'disembodiment thesis', to adopt Campbell (2004:10), is central to the early 'cyber-utopian' works into the internet and its implications in identity construction, represented by Stone's 1995 work *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* and Turkle's (1995) popular piece *Life on the Screen*. This line of discourse is by and large based on the experiences of online role-playing games like MUDs (Multi-User Domains or Multi-User Dungeons), which allow the game players to create/re-create personae and interact with other players. As claimed by Stone, we are entering into the 'virtual age' with the advents of innovative communication technologies (Stone, 1995: 17-8). We are growing to largely rely on technologies that mediate the flow of communication between bodies and selves, individuals and groups; that is, our social interactions are increasingly structured in the spaces of communication networks. The new scenario has facilitated the emergence of a variety of 'virtual systems', in which social interactions are performed

via selves/subjects whose physical locations are no longer dependent of the bodies, but mediated within a system of symbolic changes – the information technology. In other words, the virtual systems are not constituted by interactions between embodied selves as those in villages, cities, or clubs, but rather, between 'agencies' – politically authorised personae – grounded by 'technological prosthetics' (Stone, 1995: 96-7). The major difference between embodied social relationships and virtual ones (such as those in MUDs) lies in the 'bandwidth': 'the amount of information exchanged in unit time' (Stone, 1995: 93). The bandwidth in face-to-face social interactions is wide, because it is involved with a wide range of physical performance; in contrast, virtual systems or disembodied social worlds are of narrow-bandwidth, requiring deeper interpretative faculties to envisage absent images during the interactions, and in effect permitting the dramatisation of the 'agencies'.

Resolved to disengage herself from the traditional concept that sees the body as the true site of agency, Stone suggests the possibility of building a multiplicity of subjects outside a single body via technologies of communication, while citing the creation of personae or avatars (the online characters in MUDs) as a positive example. The physical location of the self, as she argues, is no longer to be limited to the body but opened up to the machine. Owing to this change, subjectivity can 'fairly unproblematically inhabit the virtual spaces of the nets' (Stone, 1995: 97).

Based her work on psychoanalytic theory, Turkle's theory of 'serious', 'emancipative' identity play addresses the question of disembodiment from a rather different perspective. She looks at how the internet offers identity laboratories for building a healthy 'protean' self, fluid but 'grounded in coherence and a moral outlook' (Turkle, 1995: 258). 'Identity play' in the Turkle sense can be practiced in all sorts of internet forums which allow the users to freely create and change IDs, such as MUDs, newsgroups, bulletin boards and chat rooms. Unlike Stone, Turkle is not interested in theorising a disembodied subject. Online personae or avatars are seen as the multiple identities or aspects of 'the self'. This view reflects the psychoanalytic perspective of Turkle, who draws on Jung (1971) and Erikson ([1950] 1963) to justify the 'trying out' of the multiple dimensions of the self through identity play in cyberspace. The self, as Jung indicates, is 'a meeting place of diverse archetypes' such as innocent virgins, mothers, eternal youths, and old men. It is liberating to get acquainted with the dark side, as well as other hidden aspects of the self (Turkle, 1995: 178; 259). Cyber forums have provided a relative consequence-free space for experimenting with ideas and social relations, or, practicing a 'psychological moratorium' in the Erikson sense, which facilitates the development of a core-self, or, identity (Turkle, 1995: 203: Turkle, 1999: 644). As Turkle has observed in her case studies, the 'psychological moratorium' in the internet helps her interviewees to act

out unresolved conflicts, work through personal issues, and most of all, externalise

different aspects of the self. In doing so, as Turkle argues, the postmodernist thesis of

the decentred, fluid, and fragmentary self is brought down to earth (Turkle, 1995:

264).

Though echoing the postmodernist theme of multiple selves, both Stone's and

Turkle's thesis are not entirely in the same vein with previous postmodernist thoughts.

The argument of the multiplicity, fragmentariness, fluidity of the postmodernist

subject is first of all antithetic towards the Enlightenment subject, the unified

individual (usually male) with an essential centre of the self (Hall, 1992: 597). To

contest the Enlightenment subject, postmodernist/poststructuralist thinkers turn their

gaze to the historicity and multiplicity of identity in late-/post-modernity. This era is

marked by the diversification of social interactions via mediated experiences,

increasing locales of everyday life, the space-time compression due to international

travels and electronic communications, the mobility of cultural flows, and the

multiplicity of life choices. These conditions bring forth 'disembedded', fluid

identities detached from people's localities, communities and traditions, as well as the

multiple selves of individuals, defined by an increasing number of social locations

where they are positioned within (Giddens, 1991; Preston, 1997; Harvey, 1989).

Furthermore, as Laclau argues, the power centre in the Western society has been

dislocated in the wake of the 1960's social movements. Class is no longer the only

base of identity; instead, the subject is opened up to a multiplicity of new centres (on

which various 'subject positions' are based), none of which can dominate permanently

(Laclau, 1990). As shown, the multiplicity of the subject arises in living experiences

based on diversifying daily locales, social encounters, life choices, and power centres.

In other words, the subjectivity, despite its multiplicity and fluidity, is embedded in

embodied everyday life, which is not a result of one's 'cycling through various selves

via Microsoft windows' as Turkle depicts it, or 'creating multiple disembodied

subjects on machines' as Stone suggests.

Critiques of virtual identity

The thesis of virtual self/identity, as presented in Stone's and Turkle's works, has

brought forth a series of critiques among internet researchers. It is cautioned that the

online world threatens the integrity of 'the Real World' by deepening the inclination

toward solipsism and individuation in contemporary societies (Willson, 1997: 148;

Forster, 1996: 27). The dependence on internet communications, as some

cyber-dystopians claim, results in creating 'paralysed' selves. It is argued that in

losing continuity with offline contexts, online selves are estranged, dispersed, and

therefore paralysed in alienation, and as a result unable to properly participate in politics or collective public life that can only be substantiated physically (Kolko & Reid, 1998: 226). Another worry is that the disembodied identity play could consequentially attenuate the power of, as Castells names it, the 'resistance identity' – generated by devalued/stigmatised groups who take their difference as the vantage point to resist the domination of advantaged social groups (Castells, 1997: 8). The boundary between the self and the Other seems over-determined, when free play of racial/gendered identity becomes possible, or, furthermore, when one can easily take on an identity which is originally ones' Other – the object against which the integrity of identity is established (Woodward, 1997: 315) – via, for instance, gender crossing. It is questioned whether the space for resistance-identity-based politics can be secured once identity play as such becomes a common practice (Willson, 1997: 151). It is also suggested that the invisibility of race enabled by the internet has reproduced histories of racial invisibility, while whites are favoured in both 'the Real World' and virtual space (Sharpe, 1999).

Another line of argument highlights the significance of embedding and embodiment in socio-cultural internet practices (e.g., Miller & Slater, 2000; Slater, 2002; Baym, 1998; Wynn & Katz, 1997; Kendall, 1999; Argyle & Shields, 1996; Foster, 1996). Discourses in this vein place emphasis upon the interplay between

embodied living experiences and disembodied ones, while calling into question the online/offline dualism. Some scholars lay more stress on the bodily references – the bodily-driven emotions, desires, and agency – that motivate and anchor disembodied, tactical online actions (e.g Campbell, 2004; Argyle & Shields: 1996). Some look at the cultural milieu and offline experiences in which internet users are embedded (e.g. Wynn & Katz, 1997; Miller & Slater, 2000). Overall, they see cultural internet practices as something intertwined with offline environments, situations, bodies, values and concerns: the internet is not a separate reality entirely disconnected from the Real World; on the contrary, it is associated with a wider social order and local life. This point is actually acknowledged by Turkle. Although her work is frequently singled out (e.g. Campbell, 2004) or sometimes paralleled with Stone's (e.g. Wynn & Katz, 1997) as representative for the disembodiment thesis, she addresses the question of embodiment when noting the constraint of emancipative identity play: '...the routine formation of multiple identities undermines any notion of a real and unitary self. Yet the notion of the real fights back. People who live parallel lives on the screen are nevertheless bound by the desires, pain, and mortality of their physical selves' (Turkle, 1995: 267).

As some empirical studies indicate, the constraints that prevent identity play from being liberatory are not only physical but also ideological. Bassett's early

participant observation in LambdaMOO (a MUD) suggests the ubiquity of gender

normalisation; cyberspace is no exception. The gendered images in the role-paying

community tend to be archetypal, despite the seemingly wide range of provided

alternatives, e.g. male, female, 'either', 'neutral', 'plural', or, '2nd'. First of all, they

are overwhelmingly white and young. Electronic females are constantly displayed as

hyper-feminine objects of sexual gaze, e.g. long-haired or blonde. Electronic males, in

contrast, are usually tall and masculine, with a pair of striking eyes. In creating and

recreating gendered archetypes, gender performances in the virtual space are in effect

re/constructing regulatory ideals, mobilising 'virtual selves' (if there are any) to

re-materialise their bodies by making selection from idealised virtual body parts. They

are 'compelled' to fit into a category; however virtual it might seem to be (Bassett,

1997).

A more updated example is Nakamura's (2000, 2001 & 2002) study of

'cybertyping'. Against Turkle's argument of the emancipative potential of

disembodiment, Nakamura looks into the practices reinforcing racial stereotypes in

cyber identity play. In her study of role-playing communities, Nakamura discovered

that the predominantly white, male game players are inclined to pick up racial

identities fitting into popular stereotypes. The constant appropriations of stereotyped

male Asian samurai figures like Bruce Lee (the late Chinese action hero) serve to, as

Nakamura observes, enhance the image of the Asian man as 'potent, antique, exotic, and anachronistic' (Nakamura, 2002: 39). While 'cross-dressing' is a popular cyber practice, the white, male game players' appropriations of stereotyped Asian female characters such as Miss Saigon (the musical's character) are normally involved with sexual fantasies exploiting and reifying the Asian woman as 'submissive, docile, and a sexual plaything' (Nakamura, 2002: 44). The act of cybertyping – producing machine-linked identities (Nakamura, 2002: 4), far from increasing the role players' capacity of acknowledging diversity as Turkle suggests (Turkle, 1995: 261), rather deepens the stereotypes of gendered, racial identities and thence reinforces the suppression of the racial/gender groups' existence.

Identity in the virtual/networked community

The idea of 'virtual community' has been well explored since the early days of internet research, arising with pioneering scholars' personal experiences of participating in cyber forums. Rheingold's expedition to the electronic conferencing system 'WELL' is a well-known example (Rheingold, 1993 & 2000). The internet forum has been qualified as the 'virtual community' from many perspectives in the earlier stages of internet research (e.g.. Holmes, 1997; Jones, 1995 & 1998; Watson,

1997; Wellman, 1999; Foster, 1996). Despite the diversity of definitions, a virtual

community is in general qualified as community-as-communion. This view is rooted

in traditional community studies, in which the aggregation of people, a sense of

belonging, shared perspectives and culture, as well as social identifications and

interactions are usually taken as essential elements that form a community (Bell &

Newby, 1971: 15-6). For instance, an earlier popular definition given by Rheingold

says '*Virtual communities* are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when

enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human

feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace' (Rheingold, 1993:

chapter 1 in the e-book; the authors' emphasis).

The referents of 'virtual community' range from role-playing online games

known as MUDs (Multi-user dungeons/domains), Usenet newsgroups, chat rooms,

computer conferencing systems, Bulletin Board Systems and emailing-list discussion

groups. They are recognised as *interest-based*, since pursuing and realizing common

interests is the primary aim of participation (Holmes, 1997: 28). An interest-based

virtual community is, as Rheingold holds, a 'groupmind' for its being a 'multibrained

organism', 'a merger of knowledge capital, social capital, and communion' in which

people participate in an ongoing process of group problem-solving and discover the

sense of cooperative spirits (Rheingold, 1993: Chapter 4 in the e-book). The

'groupminds' embodied in the thousands of Usenet newsgroups, BBSs, and computer conferencing communities are arguably 'grassroots' because of their mostly open accessibility.

Another line of virtual community discourse is based on the concept that online *communication* facilitates the emergence of communities, drawn from Carey's ritual model of communication and Anderson's notion of 'imagined communities' (e.g. Forster, 1996: 24; Watson, 1997: 103-4; Jones, 1998: 17; Mitra, 1997). Carey's (1989) ritual model explores the implication of 'communication' from its Latin root shared by other related terms, including 'commonness', 'communion' and 'community'. Media as communicative arenas draw people together in the sacred ceremony of sharing, participating and producing commonality and fellowship. In taking the newspaper as an example, Carey suggests that instead of merely presenting a collection of information, newspapers represent an arena of dramatic forces and actions, calling for the readers' participation. Newspaper reading becomes a collective performance. By associating personal experiences and frameworks with news stories, the readers structure their lives and time into the collective performance. The significance of newspaper reading thus does not merely reside in information acquisition; it is a way of positioning oneself and seeking for affinities with the contending forces of the world, by taking part in the everyday ritual of building

commonality.

Mining the same vein, Anderson (1991) proposed the idea of the 'imagined communities' in linking media use and the formation of collective consciousness. Under the premise that all communities are imagined as it is impossible for one to know the entire membership even in the smallest community, nation is defined as an 'imagined political community' of boundaries and sovereignty, and conceived as 'a deep, horizontal comradeship' in spite of the inequality and exploration prevailing in social relations (Anderson 1991: 6-7). In tying up the rise of nationalist movements with the initiation of print-capitalism in the nineteenth century, two innovative and mass-circulated cultural forms are singled out as the catalyst of national consciousness: the novel and the newspaper. Both of the 'new media' at that time, as Anderson argues, create the sense of 'we-ness', arising when fellow-readers envisage the homeland vividly portrayed in novels, or, when they participate in the everyday ceremony of newspaper reading, being aware of the shared performance in the same ceremony held by thousands of fellow-people.

The internet researchers' adoption of Carey's and Anderson's communication-community theses is in fact not new in media studies. The idea that new communication technologies facilitate new forms of community has been explored in, for instance, the discourse of 'electronic community'. Morley & Robins

hold that by creating an audiovisual space saturated with daily news, popular serials, talk shows, documentaries, and recently reality television programmes, broadcast media constitute a rich resource of cultural references shared by local/regional/national/international audiences. These audiences are in a sense 'electronic communities', divided by the broadcasted 'rituals' they participate in (Morley & Robins, 1995: 65). In other words, the mass media create a symbolic sphere for public participation, through which audiences are turned into *peoples*. Electronic communities are 'abstract' or 'virtual' for the absence of physical presence, which is also part of the nature of internet communities. However, as Holmes contends, the latter may be qualified as abstract/virtual communities in a better sense, given the reciprocity and interactivity of the internet, which permits actual, though not face-to-face, interactions among community membership (Holmes, 1997: 34-5).

New bonds, old ties and support groups in virtual communities

Virtual communities entail social relations, be they interest-based or imagined. Enquiries into social relations in virtual communities have been central to the early conceptualisation as well as the empirical studies of virtual community. One of the most discussed subjects is if there is any bond between virtual community members.

Among others, Willson's critique of virtual community represents a typically dystopian view of the impacts of virtual communities on embodied forms of socio-political actions. She contends that the nature of anonymity and transience of virtual community participation results in the lack of either commitments or moral/political/social extensions beyond the network, especially in the case of the 'lurkers' (silent viewers of online forums). As a consequence, there is no bond to tie individuals to any specific virtual community. In drawing individuals into such bondless social spaces (where they enjoy the free play of multiple identities, as asserted by Turkle), the new form of community paradoxically attenuates the complexity of human engagement in real space community (such as commitment and responsibility) and causes a tendency to withdraw from the active political sphere of 'real' space, or the attempt to realize the embodied form of community (Willson, 1997).

Against this cyber-dystopianism, some empirical studies suggest that virtual communities are, instead of estranging people from social bonds, creating new bonds or strengthening the old ones. Based on her study of a soap opera discussion group r.a.t.s, Baym (1998) indicates that members of online groups tend to develop group-specific identities and purposes, as well as behaviour norms, shared understandings, and participant characteristics. Furthermore, far from being

disconnected or abstracted from the physical world, activities of online groups are constantly embedded in the Real World, as offline contexts are pervasive in online interactions; at times, online social relations are extended into face-to-face ones as community members move their relationships offline. Pre-existing social meanings generate resources for, or, constraints on online social relations, while online practices simultaneously and continuously recreate and modify pre-existing cultures or social meanings through their communicative use. In a similar vein, Darling-Wolf (2004) suggests that the internet may help to consolidate a trans-national identity based on a common interest in popular culture. She looks into the performance of an international online fan club of a Japanese pop idol, arguing that the participants (based in a number of Asian and Western countries) have built a trans-Asian fan identity centred on the affinity for and familiarity with Japanese/Asian culture. Both Baym's and Darling-Wolf's studies shed light on the role of virtual community in the realm of identity construction. In the meantime, they also indicate the interrelation between offline life (television/film viewing) and online performance (interacting with other fans).

The new bonds in the aforementioned virtual communities are facilitated via the *networking* function of the internet which brings together dispersed like-minded individuals. The networking function is well explored in Hampton and Wellman's

case study of Netville (a 'wired' suburb near Toronto), which examines the way in which the internet strengthens existing social relations (Hampton & Wellman, 1999, 2000, 2001 & 2003). The research project suggests that the use of internet technologies, especially emailing, has reinforced the local links within neighbourhoods and households in the wired community. The local network, strengthened via emailing, has supported a variety of social ties and led to more intensive offline social interactions. Consequentially local awareness was enhanced, which is manifested by organised protests against the developer and the telecommunications company. Despite their possible contribution to local links as aforementioned, internet technologies can work the other way round in moving people away from locality-bounded, densely knit group relations towards spatially-dispersed, loosely-bounded networks tied up by shared interests. Koku's & Wellman's study of the scholarly network TechNet presents an instance of interest-based networked community supported by internet technologies. Apart from having fostered a large amount of discussions and collaborative works, the networked community also helps its membership to build social ties and friendships (Koku & Wellman, 2004). It is cautioned that while networked communities open up opportunities for building social relations based on 'achieved' characteristics such as lifestyles, shared norms, and voluntary interests, an increasing proportion of activities in these communities may

eventually attenuate the significance of identities based on 'ascribed' characteristics such as age, gender, race, and ethnicity (Wellman, 1999).

Seemingly a 'global' medium, the internet paradoxically enhances identities based on locality or place of origin. Some empirical studies looking into diasporic identities on the internet depict how nationalistic sentiments are constructed in the new global communicative context. Miller's & Slater's 2000 ethnographical study of the case of Trinidad reveals how ethnic diasporas live out their national/cultural identities via the internet. The study discovers that online forums dedicated to Trinidadians are well explored as spaces for performing 'Trini-ness' among overseas Trinidadians. The Trini-friendly spaces allow culturally specific ways of activities, e.g. Trini-styled sexual banters, insult and flirting, to take place. These practices are considered intrinsic to Trini-ness, but usually suppressed for fears of being misunderstood in their host society. Moreover, online forums provide a space for diasporic Trinidadians to portray themselves as 'true Trinis' who are able to chat in an authentic Trini way as well as showing other aspects of the Trini 'essence' such as the 'appreciation of music, food, sexuality, and being open to new people and experiences' (Miller & Slater, 2000: 92). The study also finds that home pages created by post-teenage Trinidadians, especially the overseas, tend to subsume personal identities within national identity by, for instance, replenishing web pages with core

symbols related to the country, providing all sorts of links leading to information about Trinidad, or portraying the home page operator as primarily a Trinidadian (Miller & Slater, 2000: 105-6). A similar case is discussed by Mitra (1999 & 2001), who finds that home pages created by diasporic Indians in the West are inclined to provide a multiplicity of hyperlinks leading to cultural or informational contents about India, e.g. Indian film music, fashion, food, news and other interest areas. The hypertexts woven by these hyperlinks have, as Mitra argues, constructed a diasporic Indian 'discursive domain' (referring to a specific hyper-connected interest area), drawing together immigrant Indians in a forum where connections between dispersed individuals are built and discussions concerned about the diasporic identity are accumulated and circulated.

Hiller & Franz's (2004) case study of the Newfoundland migrants in Canada presents another instance of internet use in diaspora. Computer-mediated communication (in the forms of emailing, newsgroups, and chat rooms) have helped to establish new ties, retain/nourish old ties, and rediscover lost ties between the pre-migrant, the post-migrant and settled migrant who see the territorial homeland as the anchor of a diasporic identity. This is achieved not only by virtue of the networking function of the internet, but also by virtue of its capacity of creating an atmosphere of 'hyper-reality' of being at home via the sharing of slideshows, home

profiles, and even recipes in message boards. Meanwhile, the diasporic network is also instrumental in serving as an information centre that facilitates migration and relationships-seeking. The instrumental aspect is indicated in Arnold & Plymire's (2004) observation of official websites of the Cherokee Indians. The study suggests that the internet can be substantially contributory to community development and cultural continuity in multiple ways. The Cherokee websites link people to services, organisations, news, and language instruction, which make the community function better; they literally enlarge the community by providing information about genealogy and enrolling people of Cherokee descent into the community; furthermore, these globally accessible websites have helped the ethnic community win financial supports internationally, which eventually benefits the economic development of the community.

Despite the positive cases as shown in the above, it could be problematic to celebrate the consolidating power of online diasporas. As will be indicated, a collective identity can be reinforced by creating the Other. Sometimes, the Other is actually within 'us'. Ignacio's (2000) case study of a global Filipino forum shows the way in which diasporic discourse consolidates nationalist sentiment at the expense of marginalizing women, whose image is intertwined with the Other in a postcolonial context. The study finds that the male-dominated diasporic forum serves to facilitate

essentialist Filipino anti-colonial discourse, which tends to reinforce the stereotypes of Filipino women as either sexually adept, 'good' wives yearning for Western husbands, while seeing these women as the 'lost properties' of the nation. In other words, in developing an anti-Western nationalism, Filipino women are portrayed as the Other, against which Filipino men construct their national identities.

Apart from the experience of online diasporas, internet forums are also valued for their de-marginalising role. Correll's ethnographical work of an electronic lesbian café is an early case study of minority virtual community (Correll, 1995). The study shows that the lesbian café has functioned as a support group and a social space, where lesbian participants feel comfortable to come out, make friends, or even develop cyber sex. The community is significant in its provision of 'a sense of common reality', strengthened by daily conversations taking place within this space (Correll, 1995: 296). The sense of common reality serves to reinforce the qualification of the lesbian café as a community, which helps validate its patrons' identities as lesbians. The sense of shared identity, or, community solidarity is further increased when there is a conflict between its patrons and 'bashers' (unfriendly outsiders). Likewise, the survey of McKenna & Bargh (1998) finds that people from marginalized social groups (e.g. the gay community) feel greater self-acceptance and less estrangement from the society by participating in newsgroups dedicated to these

social groups. Participants of these virtual groups use the shelter of anonymity to express the marginalized aspects of their life, which helps them to reduce the inner struggles caused by these aspects of life and acquire positive group identities. Consequently they tend to become more open about the marginalized aspects with their family and friends.

Internet activisms and woman's identities

Another dimension of the internet's implication in identity construction lies in its impacts on current socio-political movements. Studies looking into the relationship between new media and social activisms suggest that new ICTs are reshaping and energising the field of social activism (e.g. Warf & Grimes, 1997; Kellner, 1997; Hill, & Hughes, 1998; Ayres, 1999; Atkins, 2002; Rheingold, 2002; Meikle, 2002; McCaughey & Ayers, 2003; Kahn & Kellner, 2004; Lax, 2004; Harcourt, 2004; Arnold & Plymire, 2004; Van de Donk et al, 2004). Alongside other traditional means and technologies, new ICTs, including the internet, have been well employed in activist networking, information distribution, campaign organising, publicity, dissidence dissemination, as well as recruitment and social mobilisation. A much-discussed case in this regard is the 1994 Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, Mexico.

The internet empowered the indigenous activism by facilitating document dissemination and mobilisation for demonstrations. This had enabled the activists to draw worldwide attention to the movement and in effect prevented the Mexican government from taking drastic actions towards the activists (Schulz, 1998; Ayres, 1999; Kahn & Kellner, 2004). The new ICTs also create new types of activists, such as the highly-informed, autonomous 'smart mobs' (Rheingold, 2002) or the 'mobile phone mobs' in the 1992 Bangkok political crisis (Atkins, 2002), who made use of personal mobile ICTs in deploying physical political actions. In the meantime, the 'flash mobs' (high-tech-ICT-equipped collective actors engaging in brief, playful street actions) in major world cities are changing the image of collective actors. Other types of internet activism like 'hacktivism' (e.g. creating open-source software programmes enabling dissidents to circumvent official controls) and political 'blogging' (producing weblogs disseminating alternative opinions aimed at influencing policy making) are also examples of ICT-based social activisms (Khan & Kellner, 2004). Ironically, in facilitating the production and circulation of counter-hegemonic discourses (i.e. those objecting to the naturalisation of mainstream ideologies) from politically disenfranchised groups, the World Wide Webs also accommodate the voices of various right-wing groups, e.g. anti-Semite, neo-Nazis, or anti-environmentalist groups (Warf & Grimes, 1997).

Although internet activism is potentially contributory to identity projects in many possible ways, cyberfeminism is the only one that creates a clear link between the two fields. The term 'cyberfeminism' was coined in Australia in 1992, when an artist group 'VNS Matrix' took it to label their agenda: to reconstruct post-human bodies and to terminate patriarchal moral codes (Galloway, 1998; Guertin, 2002). Cultural theorist Sadie Plant adopted the term to name her feminist project and defined it as:

> 'an insurrection on the part of the goods and materials of the patriarchal world, a dispersed, distributed emergence composed of links between women, women and computers, computer and communication links, connections and connectionist nets' (Plant, 1996: 182)

To build the rationale of cyberfeminism, Plant (1996) theorises computing-based media as intrinsically subversive and 'feminine'. The subversive nature of the new media exists in its virtual, decentred, indeterminate, self-organising, and anarchic nature, which has facilitated a thriving 'digital underground', marked by hackerism, cyberpunks, digital arts, cyber-forums, and identity play. This, as Plant holds, has threatened the control-oriented, hierarchical-authority-based patriarchal worldview and order that have penetrated the history of the Western society. Like Stone and Turkle, Plant celebrates gender-bending in cyberspace, praising its

subversive-ness to old identifications embedded in man's reason. To qualify computing-based media as feminine, Plant parallels it with Irigaray's woman. The computer is created for general purposes. It is in a sense 'nothing', as it is not attached to any specific function; the 'nothing' can be turned into 'everything' as it is capable of being multiply adopted. Cyberspace built on computing systems is a space saturated with hyperlinks and connections, by nature against the logic of an hierarchical order. These attributes are exactly what woman has. Woman, as Irigaray (1985 & 1991) postulates, has been a multi-faced commodity in man's economy. She serves as everything but is never allowed to be herself. She is, in man's history, invisible, non-existent. In other words, she is not 'one' but 'zero'. In recognising the absent identity of woman formulated by Irigaray, Plant, rather than viewing it pessimistically, suggests that it is in fact a privilege, which, just like the fluid character of the computer, allows 'zero' to turn into 'anything' (Plant, 1996: 177). Likewise, the intuitive leaps and cross-connections, which have been characterised as hysteria and ascribed to woman, are the features giving strength to cyberspace and woman. The feminised future, as Plant envisages it, is a world where female multi-media artists and programmers 'write programmes, paint viral images, fabricate weapon systems, infiltrate the arts and the industry', where 'identity is not the goal but the enemy', where women are glad to be 'unashamedly opportunist, entirely

irresponsible, and committed only to the infiltration and corruption of a world' rooted

in patriarchy (Plant, 1996: 183).

The early moves taken by VNS Matrix and Plant initiated a new branch of

feminism, which is mostly practiced in the forms of e-Zines (e.g. gURL.com and

Geekgirl), electronic narratives, new media artworks, electronic networks of feminists,

as well as critiques of the new media per se (Hawthorn & Klein, 1999). Overall,

cyberfeminists celebrate 'multiplicity', 'collaborative forces' and 'uncontained

bodies', aim for the transgression of old boundaries, and acknowledge the physical

realities of the conjunction of bodies and machines (Guertin: 2002). They encourage

women to resign from notions of authentic and essential femininity and take

advantage of ICTs to develop a cyborg-like subjectivity in resistance to hegemonic

patterns of identity making (Shields, 1996: 10; Holmes, 1997: 94). These principles to

a great extent reflect Haraway's cyborg imagery, portrayed in her 'A manifesto for

cyborgs' (Haraway, 1990). The cyborg in Haraway's sense is metaphorical. It

symbolises the potent revolutionary subject in an age saturated with high-tech culture.

A cyborg in this vein is a fusion of human agency and machine power, as well as an

embodiment of boundary transgression in the field of dominant dualisms concerning

the Western subject since the Enlightenment, namely, the dualisms of 'self/other,

mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilised/primitive, reality/appearance,

whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man' (Haraway, 1990: 219). It is never a totality with a clear-cut boundary, but a synthesis of parts, mutating strategically in time and space.

The cyborg imagery as the 'constructed revolutionary subject' is created to radicalise the field of feminism (Haraway, 1990: 119). Departing from the trends of socialist feminism and essentialist feminism since the 1980s, Haraway calls for a 'monstrous', 'postgender' cyborg-like subject to replace the morally superior (though constantly victimised), innocent, closer-to-nature, and, most of all, unified revolutionary subject shared by both feminisms. A cyborg-like revolutionary subject is a cross-boundary coalition of various social sectors based on a shared cause, rather than on the shared being of an original organism. Furthermore, the cyborg imagery implies the technological orientation of future feminism, which, far from appealing to greater closeness to nature, sees machines as 'prosthetic devices', 'intimate components', and 'friendly selves' (Haraway, 1990: 220). The task of future feminism is to challenge the informatics of domination, the techniques that shape the life world with technology- or information-based social control measures; to be actively engaged in the production of scientific discourses, processes, and objects; to create a feminist science. The cyborg politics is to make noise and advocate boundary pollution; to subvert the central myth of origin of Western culture; to rewrite the story of its own.

On the internet, the metaphorical cyborg imagery is embodied by feminists who actively turn the new media into 'prosthetic devices' of women. The experience of the US-based Feminist.com, a pioneer feminist online community, is presented by activists Amy Richards and Marianne Schnall as an early example of internet feminism. In the past decade, the online community has provided a lifeline for women poor in resources, e.g. working-class inside and outside the US; a network for campaigners and activists; an assistant system for women who run businesses online; and, a chance for people to grasp feminism (Richards & Schnall, 2003).

Apart from Western experiences, the internet has helped open up new political spaces for women worldwide. The new ICT does not only enable local feminisms but also makes possible a global/trans-national women's movement by virtue of its connectivity. Harcourt (2004) points out that the internet has at least contributed to the women's movement in the following dimensions. Firstly, it supports trans-national women's support groups and activist networks, via which women's local concerns are linked with the global movement. Secondly, it facilitates the organisation of international women's conferences crossing time and space, allowing women from the 'South' to connect themselves with the 'North' and permitting the expression of the voices from Arabian women whose subjectivity is in general highly suppressed in their society. Finally, it breaks up the boundary between activists and academics in

bringing them into the same space; moreover, the boundary between personal and professional is also breaking when women share 'life' in online supportive groups. The downside, as pinpointed by the author, remains. Everyday business in the 'real' world, such as maternity, tends to distract women from their online engagement. And, to cyberfeminists' disappointment, women by and large remain participants in the activities but not in the 'masterminding' of the women-oriented online spaces. The fact is that men remain the major designers and controllers of the electronic world. The digital divide is therefore another issue. The internet is not always as accessible for women as for men, however 'feminine' it is imagined to be.

These experiences somewhat substantiate Haraway's argument of 'empowerment in machines'; nevertheless, the cross-boundary cyborg-like revolutionary subject, apart from in cyberfeminist arts and cyberpunks, is not much seen in online feminism. Current practices of internet feminism suggests that the internet does not only serve to secure gender boundaries, but also to promote a regional, or even global woman identity, notwithstanding Haraway's expectation for a post-gender world.

II. Exploring the discursive-constructivist approach to collective identities on the internet

The above review of current internet researches in relation with identity issues reveals a multiplicity of ways in which the internet is involved in the formation of collective identities. The dis/embodiment thesis has inspired reflections upon the political space of bodily-based identities (e.g. race and gender) in cyber forums. Studies concerned with virtual communities or CMC-supported networks demonstrate how the internet enables new ties between like-minded individuals, reinforces existing bonds in relation to local, national, or diasporic identities, and de-marginalizes disadvantaged social groups. Furthermore, being part of the machinery of contemporary social activisms, the internet is practically empowering social groups, especially women, in various ways. Nevertheless, it is indicated that the internet may also marginalize the identities of disadvantaged racial/gender groups by reinforcing stereotypes or existing gender/racial relationships. Moreover, despite the increasing female internet users, the internet remains a male-dominant space in many aspects.

These researches shed light on the new media's impacts on identity formation in contemporary societies. Some of them, for instance, those concerned with virtual communities and online social networking, attempt to ground internet research in the

tradition of social research/cultural studies. The gap between the two fields, as my

research project endeavours to reveal, is still wide; to bridge the gap, more empirical

studies are needed. It is imperative to look into the *dynamics* of identity construction

on/via the mechanism of the new internet in relation to current identity theories. For a

start, the following pages will re-examine the mechanism of the internet by focusing

on a few attributes that have been ascribed to the internet.

Revisiting the internet: the changes and their implications

The first point concerns *anonymity* in internet communication. This attribute has been

celebrated for its 'emancipative' potential in identity play and its contribution to

de-marginalizing stigmatised, disadvantaged identities, as reviewed in the above.

Discussions of anonymity on the internet frequently parallel this feature with

virtuality, seeing the latter as the effect of the former. To adopt Stone's position (1995),

the virtuality on the internet, manifested in role-playing games or other virtual

systems (ranging form BBS discussions to cyber sex), is facilitated by the anonymity

and narrow bandwidth of the media. Virtuality as such entails a certain degree of

'performance', via which online personae or 'agencies' (again, to adopt Stone's

terminology) can be acted out. Or, to see the relations conversely, virtuality is a

dimension of theatrical performance on the internet; the new medium in this sense represent an ample stage for performances. We may start to envisage the idea of 'identity performance', in replacing that of 'identity play' in cyberspace; given the textually-based feature of internet forums, we should also consider what kind of performativity can be achieved through textual expressions.

Another feature of internet communication worth reflecting on is its *connectivity*. The metaphors of the 'Net' and the 'Web' indicate its connective nature. Although telecommunication technology has always been aimed at connecting people from far distances, none of the preceding ones connects this large number of social milieus, or transcends geographical boundaries as the internet does. The connectivity, embodied in emailing, web links, e-conferencing, and other forms of online groupings, is particularly notable when it comes to virtual communities and online networking, including those involved with social activisms. The internet as a 'connected space' (Jones, 1999: 7), however, does not only connect *people* together. Other issues to look at, regarding the question of identity, include what social levels are connected into a shared space; how different positions on an issue are brought into a forum; and, how social/political discourses intersect, contradict each other and transform through the connection.

Interactivity is celebrated as one of the internet's most privileged features by

pioneer internet researchers John E. Newhagen & Sheizaf Rafaeli (1996). The term

interactivity, however, soon becomes a cliché as it has been repeatedly mentioned

without further examination. A more recent effort on this issue (McMillan, 2002)

explores the multiple levels of interactivity of the internet by locating the question

within previous interaction theories in social research. Three levels of communicative

interaction taking place in the internet are identified accordingly: user-to-user,

user-to-documents, and user-to-system interactivity (McMillan, 2002: 166). The first

two seem to be more relevant to the issue at point, as the third one is concerned with

technology questions. The user-to-user level covers four models: the monologue of

sender to receiver, feedback of message receiver to sender (e.g. email links), the

responsive dialogue of participants (e.g. customer service in e-commerce) and the

mutual discourse of participants (e.g. chat rooms), in ascending order of the strength

of user's control. The user-to-documents level also covers four models: packaged

content (similar to traditional media content), content-on-demand (assuming active

audience), content exchange (e.g. bulletin boards), and co-created content (e.g. MUD),

in the order of the strength of user's activity (McMillan, 2002: 167-172). These

interaction models seem to overlap in practice. For instance, the debates on

bulletin-board forums can be regarded as continuous co-created content if we look at

the discourse as a whole. It also fits the models of responsive dialogue and mutual

discourse when looking at its process of content production. The interaction among

the participants of a newsgroup is a similar case in which the models of responsive

dialogue, mutual discourse, and (continuously) co-created content are applicable.

The exposition of the multiple layers of interactivity actualised on the internet

provides a few angles to qualify the internet as a medium. First, the interactions on the

internet are primarily 'discursive'. In saying 'discursive' in this context, I refer to the

linguistic sense of 'discourse' – as 'actual instances of communication in the medium

of language' (Johnstone, 2002: 2). Discursive interactions, since they are always

socially embedded (as previously reviewed), are intertwined with and constitutive of

social discourses. As McMillan indicates, in those models where users are more active

and have more control, the hierarchy of communication tends to be diminished; the

border between sender and receiver blurs and the relationships between participants

seem to be more egalitarian (McMillan, 2002:169). This observation legitimates an

earlier plea for replacing the notion of audience with those of individuals and

communities, where online interactive communication is concerned (Foster,

1996:28-9).

With reducing institutional forces and open access to content production, the

internet is praised for being *decentralized* and *grassroots-oriented*. The immense body

of the internet is comprised of and sustained by millions of people, ranging from

sophisticated high-tech programmers, socio-cultural/politico-economical elites, to

individuals with less cultural/economical/technical capital. The internet as a whole

appears to resemble a biological, evolving organism that is self-organizing,

developing toward higher and higher levels of complexity. It is argued that the

organising principle of internet communication is the absence of organisation, since

institutional interference from one and only 'central control station' is not present

(Granic & Lamey, 2000). If such were the case, the statement 'the message keeps its

own gate' (Newhagen & Rafaeli, 1996: 5) would seem to make sense. This line of

argument needs to be taken with caution: as a matter of fact, the whole World Wide

Web is penetrated by corporate interests and governmental forces; the recent

agreement between China and Microsoft that enables the American company to help

the country censoring the voices for democratic reformation exemplifies the ubiquity

of institutional power (Watts, 2005).

Nevertheless, in the world of internet forums, the role of institutions seems to

lower down to a significant degree. The relative grassroots-ness of the internet forums

suggests a *participatory* aspect. The term 'participatory' has been taken to cover the

dimensions of dialogic interaction, public accessibility and involvement, as well as

self-organisation/-management in a communicative event, as noted in the literature of

participatory communication (Servaes, 1996: 17-8; Stuart & Bery, 1996: 200;

Jacobson & Kolluri, 1999: 268-9; Carpentier, 2003: 108-9). Among current internet

research this aspect is so far best explored in the publications concerning the public

sphere in the internet (e.g. Friedland, 1996; Knapp, 1996; Poster, 1997; Hill & Huges,

1998; Dahlgren, 2001; O'Donnel, 2001; Dahlberg, 2001a & 2001b; Tsaliki, 2002;

Papacharissi, 2002; Downey & Fenton, 2003; Poor, 2005). The focus of the literature

is by and large placed on the potential impact of internet forums on the Habermasian

public sphere – a publicly accessible realm of social life in which public opinions are

formed through rational debates and open discussions (Habermas, 1989). It has been

suggested that internet forums may contribute to democratic participation in

deepening and widening the mainstream public sphere and stretching the margin of

participation through public deliberation (Dahlgren 2001; Dahlberg, 2001a & 2001b;

Tsaliki, 2002). Moreover, they have facilitated a multiplicity of public spheres to take

place in various forms (Dahlgren, 2001), such as micro-public spheres which contrast

with the single overarching public sphere in Habermas's original formulation

(O'Donnel, 2001), the counter-public sphere which challenges the dominant,

mainstream public sphere (Downey & Fenton; 2003; Dahlgren, 2001), the issue-based

public sphere (Poor, 2005), or, as in postmodernist vision, the egalitarian public

sphere where the hierarchies of gender, race, ethnicity and social status are no longer

dominant in the anonymous, horizontal communicative environment (Poster, 1997).

In either way, internet forums have enlarged the participation in discussions aimed at political/social change. The question to be further investigated is if the participatory aspects of internet forums can be implicated in other forms of practices aiming for social change; if so, what sort of opportunities and constraints will exist, and, how the opportunities and constraints will affect the construction of collective identities.

The internet presents itself as an arena for performances; a connected space where various social forces meet; a discursive space where dialogic interactions take place; a participatory, grassroots-oriented medium which breaks down the boundary between message producers and receivers, as well as subverts the hierarchy between elites and non-elites. These features have brought forth significant structural changes in both media ecology and communicative patterns between people; which does not only make possible new types of communicative practices but also open up new dimensions of 'old' agendas, such as the question of collective identity.

These dimensions have been somewhat touched upon in current internet research, as shown in previous pages. Nonetheless, as pinpointed at the beginning of the chapter, the gap between grounded social research and internet studies is still wide. To bridge the gap, the case study embeds the research question in the strand of discursive/constructivist perspectives on identity questions and tackles the emerging questions in the aforementioned dimensions of internet communication. The

following pages present a number of current approaches to identity, aimed at triangulating them for the development of a multi-dimensional theoretical framework for my research project.

Towards a discursive-constructivist approach to collective identity

In a review essay of current cultural theories of identity, Hall (1996) draws on Foucault, Derrida, Laclau and Butler to synthesise what he designates a 'discursive approach'. The discursive approach to identity, as Hall defines, addresses the question of 'identification' – a never-ending constructing process for an over-determined, strategic and positional identity. In viewing identification as an endless process, the 'discursive approach' objects to the idea that assumes a unified, unchanged, 'true' inner core of the self or a collective self; instead, it views identities, in particular in late modern times, as increasingly fragmented, multiply constructed across different discourses, practices, and positions. Identification in this approach is not about seeking for 'sameness', or, recognising a common origin or an ideal. Rather, it is about marking 'differences' between the self and the Other, about constituting identities (as points of attachment) that are able 'to exclude, to leave out, to render "outside", abjected [sic]' (Hall, 1996: 5).

This approach is constructivist/constructionist in its sharing of the basic argument of social constructionism, which rejects the assumption that social reality is determined by any 'nature' or exists as pre-given. Instead, this strand of academic thought sticks to the idea of contingency, viewing social reality as something constructed through cultural practices and social forces, and therefore historical and non-inevitable, other than possessing an inherent structure to be discovered (Hacking, 1999: 33-38). Secondly, Hall's view, seeing identity as fragmentary and multiple, is primarily postmodernist. In another article on cultural identity, Hall (1992) contrasts the conception of the Enlightenment subject and that of the post-modern subject. The former views the human person (usually described as male) as a unified individual with an essential centre of self, i.e., a lifetime identity. The latter subverts the conception of a fixed, centred identity and turns the gaze to the historicity and multiplicity of identity in the late- or post-modern era, which tends to be fragmented and fluid, defined in an increasing number of social locations.

What makes this approach a favourable starting point for developing the theoretical framework for my research project is, however, its integration of Laclau & Mouffe's theory of antagonistic identity and Butler's thesis of performative identity, both of which have provided theoretical frameworks for a number of case studies, e.g. Howarth et al (2000) based on Laclau's & Mouffe's theory, Campbell (2004) and

Barrett (1999) based on Butler's argument. These theories address the question of collective identity by pointing to processes where identity is discursively constructed or materialised, which facilitates a better understanding of the discursive/performative aspects of identity-oriented internet practices. Nevertheless, to further explore the interactive/participatory aspects of internet practices in relation to identity projects, it is imperative to stretch the margin of the approach by reaching out beyond the field of cultural studies. Researches and observations into the new media have indicated the significance of the internet's role in contemporary social movements. As will be argued, the internet does more than promote a pre-existing public or historical identity; it works at the intermediate level where the constructing process of activism-oriented identity takes place. This process needs to be understood in connection to current social movement theories that throw light on the constructed-ness of collective identity from an interactive/participatory perspective.

Bearing these issues in mind, I propose a discursive-constructivist approach for interpreting the cultural/social practices constitutive of collective identities. Inasmuch as this approach is developed for my research project, it is grounded in the experiences of the Taiwanese-based internet forums. Overall, the approach takes the constructivist thesis that identity (as part of social reality) is constructed, and looks

into the question in its performative, antagonistic, and activist dimensions. To elaborate on the performative aspect, the approach adopts Goffman's analytic categories for self-presentation, linking them up with Butler's philosophy of performative identity that directs the subject area into the orbit of constructivism. To shed light on the antagonistic aspect, it adopts Laclau & Mouffe's identity theory in their radical democratic project. To enquire into the interactive/participatory aspects of internet forums in relation to collective identity construction, the approach incorporates Melucci's theory of negotiated identity in collective actions. In objecting to a pre-given identity and emphasising the constructed-ness of collective identities, Melucci's identity theory is perfectly aligned with constructivism. The adoption of Melucci broadens the vision of the discursive-constructivist approach by relating the identity question to activism, while directing the focus of analysis to the interactive aspect of identity construction.

A few basic concepts need to be defined before we move on to the specific identity theories. The first one to be dealt with is the concepts related to the term 'discourse'. The term 'discourse' in linguistic studies, as mentioned previously, refers to actual instances of linguistic performance (Johnstone, 2002: 2), or, in general, 'the use of language' (Cutting, 2001: 2). In the Foucauldian sense, a discourse is a

systematically organised set of statements, giving structure to the manner in which a particular domain of the life-world is to be talked about, as well as providing 'descriptions, rules, permissions and prohibitions of social and individual actions' concerning the domain (Kress, 1989: 7). Discourse production involves *discursive practices* – 'serious speech acts' that claim to be knowledge and truth (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1986: 48). Discursive practices in this vein are usually made systematic and justified through institutionalisation. The term 'discourse' is also adopted by Habermas as a synonym of 'argumentation', as in his communicative action theory (Habermas, 1984 [1981]). My case study touches upon the three levels of meaning at different points; however, to avoid confusion, I will only refer to the term in the first and the second meanings, while adopting the word 'argumentation' as it is understood in Habermas's formulation.

The second set of concepts to be explained concerns the Saussurian idea of signification. Saussure understands 'signs' as the basic symbolic forms of language. A sign consists of two elements: the 'signifier' and the 'signified'. The former is the sound-image (i.e. the word); the latter is the concept or mental picture that sound-image evokes. 'Signification' involves the process in which a particular concept is brought to light through the constitution of a set of signifiers (de Saussure, 1974). Barthes further develops the concept by extending it to visual symbolic forms

and, not less significantly, specifying two levels of signification: denotation and

connotation. The denoted message – the first meaning of a sound-image – is '*a*

message without a code', an 'analogon', from which an immediate corollary can be

drawn. The connoted message (the second meaning), aesthetic or ideological, refers to

'a certain "culture" of the society receiving the message', entailing representational

(e.g. photographic) techniques that bring out the meaning (Barthes, 1977: 17;

emphases the author's).

Another Saussurean concept crucial to the discursive approach is that of

'relational identities' (de Saussure, 1974). The identity, or, the meaning of a word is

not defined by its reference to an external object, but by its *difference* from another

word in the same set of system. For instance, in the paradigm of family membership,

the term 'mother' derives its meaning in its difference from 'father', 'grandmother',

'daughter', and other terms of family members. Likewise, the meaning of 'man' is

decided by its relation to 'woman' in gender, or 'boy' in age, or 'animal' in biology.

The concept of relational identities (to see an identity in its negative relation to other

identities) has been adopted as the foundation of antagonistic identity (i.e. the

Self/Other difference) in the discursive approach as Hall (1996) defines. However, the

adoption is conditional. Though initiated as a departure from idealism (holding that

essence comes before experience), the Saussurean model is criticised as a new

essentialism (Derrida, 1974; Laclau & Mouffe, [1985] 2001) in presuming a closed and complete linguistic structure, in which differences and relations between signs are fixed and the correlation between signifier and signified is not only isomorphic but also arbitrarily determined.

The structuralist essentialism becomes the departure point for post-structural discourse theorists, who use the concepts of differences and relations but leave out the presumption of fixed system. The rationale of this line of theorisation lies in Derrida's idea of *différance* (Derrida, 1978: 278-293 & 1982: 1-27). Against Saussure's presupposition of a fixed system of difference, Derrida holds that a signified can never be perfectly attached to a signifier, since it can always be displaced and substituted by another. In other words, there cannot be any fixed system of difference giving an eternal bond between a signifier and a signified. The absence of fixed identity between signifier and signified reflects the logic of différance, a coined term combining the meanings of difference and deferral. Here Derrida plays with the double meanings of the French word différer, taking on both the meanings of 'differ' and 'defer' in English. To 'differ', as Derrida argues, is also to 'defer' the possibilities of difference (as the determinant of meaning) that cannot be actualised in a system of difference. The concept of différance provides the theoretical ground for the argument of a constructed differential character that temporarily determines an identity. This

argument will be further examined later in the chapter. The following pages move on

to the core ideas of the individual theories incorporated in the

discursive-constructivist approach, suggesting the ways in which they may shed light

on my research project. To begin with, I will first look at Butler's and Goffman's

performative theories, continuing with Laclau's & Mouffe's model of antagonistic

identity and Melucci's idea of negotiated identity.

Performative identity: Butler and Goffman

Goffman's classic piece *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* ([1959] 1990) is an

early attempt to theorise the performative aspect of everyday practices in relation to

self-identity. This text maps out the usual patterning (primarily of a Western

middle-class society) in which an individual sends out messages to define her/his

situation or position via various sign-vehicles. A much-adopted concept from the book

is *front*, the expressive equipment that an individual knowingly or unknowingly

employs to define the situation during the performance. A front consists of setting and

personal front. The former refers to the scenic parts, e.g. a funeral cortege or a living

room; the latter refers to relatively fixed elements like sex, age, racial and any other

biological characteristics, as well as more mobile or transitory elements like speech

patterns, facial expressions, postures, clothing and bodily gestures. The

mobile/transitory dimension of a personal front is often loaded with social implications, making explicit the social status, the temporary ritual status and the interaction role of the performing individual. In embedding one's personal front in its social situation, one is turning the personal front into a building block of a social front. A given social front, normally related to an established social role, is a 'collective representation'. It tends to be institutionalised, gives rise to abstract stereotyped expectations and takes on a meaning in stability (Goffman, 1990: 33-37).

The idea of front contributes to the understanding of the question of identity in envisaging various aspects of a performative self. Although the idea is originally applied to a more functional dimension of one's social existence (i.e. the social role), it nevertheless provides an analytic angle for looking at the cultural aspects of collective selves (i.e. identities), when the focus is shifted from the social situations onto cultural symbolism and historical experiences. An identity-based front is hence a collective representation (as much as a given social front), organising a number of performative elements that are manifested through sign vehicles.

Focusing on the question of gender, Butler's ([1990] 1999) theory of performative identity starts from her critiques of hegemonic gender discourses permeating western societies (regulating sexuality within the reproductive domain) as

well as essentialist gender politics (based on essentialised gendered identities). The central argument is that gender, instead of being a pre-emptive law situated before practice, is produced and sustained by repeated stylised performances via corporeal signs and other discursive means. Inasmuch as it is a construct, rather than an essence, it should permit subversions and reconstructions, materialised via strategic bodily acts.

Enquiring into the corporeality of identity, Butler adopts Foucault's formulation of the body in his Discipline and Punishment (Foucault, 1975). Looking into the historical relation of body and power in western societies, Foucault traced the ways in which different disciplining projects have been operated to create a docile, useful body for the interest of the Establishment in the past few centuries. The body, according to Foucault, is the site where the soul is inscribed upon, while the soul, carved out through the workings of power machineries and knowledge productions in various domains, 'is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body' (Foucault, 1984: 177). In extending Foucault's thesis, Butler holds that the gendered body is also constructed though disciplinary productions, an effect of the interplay of institutions, practices and discourses which designate gender ('the soul') as stabilised, coherent, and regulatory, serving the interest of the heterosexual, patriarchal society. Gender as an identity is produced 'on the surface of the body' through a series of

corporeal significations, e.g. gestures and acts. Butler writes:

> Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality (Butler, 1999: 173; the author's emphasis).

Furthering her conceptualisation of performative gender/identity, Butler indicates that performative acts in this domain are 'public', stylised through repetition over time. Moreover, as gender is historically constructed, there is always a temporal dimension of gender-related actions. Knowing the performativity of gender/identity, Butler suggests that parodic bodily/cultural practices, such as drag, may serve to subvert regulatory gender relations, e.g. compulsory heterosexuality, and therefore transcend hegemonic/essentialist gender borders.

Calling for subversive bodily acts (e.g. drag), Butler does not limit the dimension of gender performance to bodily acts but keeps it open to other 'discursive means'. This position allows us to apply Butler's idea to text-based practices in asynchronous internet forums. Both Goffman's and Butler's identity theories, though located in rather different academic traditions, suggest that personal performative acts can be construed as cultural practices leading to the presentation/materialisation of a collective/social identity. Developed in the manner of micro-sociology, Goffman's

performance theory is based on his observation of the middle-class American society around the mid twentieth century. Published at the end of the twentieth century, Butler's argument is firmly in line with the discursive/constructivist schools, reflecting on the philosophical aspect of identity questions. Goffman's work contributes to my research project useful categories for practical analysis, while Butler's theory, though methodologically insufficient, adequately complements Goffman's by linking it up to the discursive-constructivist project. We may thus start to look at the discursive/constructing aspects of individual practices in internet forums, which allows us to transcend the view of identity play that considers individual performance not more than personal.

Antagonistic identity in articulatory practices

Laclau's and Mouffe's discursive approach to collective identity, as formulated in their 'Hegemony and Socialist Strategy' (Laclau and Mouffe, [1985] 2001), is marked by the emphasis on its antagonistic, contingent, and hegemonic aspects. Their concept of collective identity underlies their project of a radical democracy that accepts the strategic articulation of activist collective identity. To map out their idea of identity, a number of concepts drawn from Marxism and post-structuralism, notably Gramsci's

hegemony, are 'radicalised' and incorporated. A collective identity can only be consolidated when an antagonising Other that negates the identity exists. The Other is constitutive of the antagonised identity in the sense that it brings to visibility the *frontiers* of identity construction for the antagonised social group/community by showing its *limits*, which can be strategically turned into self-defined boundaries of identity differentiation. As it is constructed against the Other, rather than pre-given, a strategic collective identity can never be a fixed category, but instead opens up to a new synthesis traversing multiple subject positions, articulated against a common Other. The new synthesis as a contingent totality may become a 'hegemonic formation', partially fixed around a *nodal point* (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 113).

Laclau's and Mouffe's task of formulating a contingent, antagonistic identity starts from their critical reading of Althusser's conceptualisation of 'overdetermination'. In taking the structuralist Marxist's assertion that everything existing in the social (as a symbolic order) is overdetermined, Laclau and Mouffe advance their argument of the impossible fixity, i.e., the lack of an essence, of social relations. However, the discourse theorists depart from Althusserian argument at the point that he argues for ultimate determination by the economy in the last instance, which is logically incompatible with his earlier account of the social (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 97-100). The disarticulation of economic determinism facilitates

Laclau's and Mouffe's elaboration of the concept of overdetermination, turning it into the starting point of their discourse theory and approach to identity.

Laclau and Mouffe start with the premise that every object in the social is constituted as an object of discourse and every social practice is a discursive practice. A social object (as a discursive construct) is, furthermore, not unified by an underlying, *a priori* principle; instead, it is constituted in the logic close to what Foucault has formulated as 'regularity in dispersion' in discursive formation. The aspect of dispersion of discursive formation/construction lies in its lack of a common theme, style, and constancy of concepts. On the other hand, a discursive formation/construct has its regularity. It is in an ensemble of *moments*, a designate term for articulated signifiers, in contrast with *elements*, signifiers that have not been subsumed into a formation through the process of *articulation* – the practice that establishes a relation among elements, by virtue of which their identities are modified and hence a semi-stable discourse is generated. According to Laclau and Mouffe, the process of articulating elements and transforming them into moments of a totality is permitted 'in certain contexts of exteriority'; in short, a discursive formation can only be totalised in the presence of a certain exteriority. It is the very 'totalising effect' where the aspect of regularity of a discursive formation/construct resides: elements are articulated and reduced to moments as part of a totality against an outside where

other elements reside. The identity of such a totality is therefore relational, since it is not determined in interiority but in exteriority. This regularity is, nevertheless, different from what is asserted in the Saussurean model in which the relational identities of discursive elements in a (language) system are inherently fixed. In Laclau and Mouffe's model, it is something that emerges in dispersion, inasmuch as an *a priori* principle underlying the discursive formation is absent. Moreover, as the discourse theorists argue, the articulation that transforms elements into moments can never be complete (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 105-7). In other words, all identities are relational and all relations are subject to contingent articulations. A discursive construct is, accordingly, a changeable ensemble of moments contingently articulated in the presence of a specific exteriority: it exists in the field of overdetermination.

The argument of the contingent discursive formation, or, the impossibility of its being a fully 'sutured' totality, coincides with Derrida's statement of the absence of a centre, or, the transcendental signified. Laclau and Mouffe, however, differentiate between their discourse theory and Derrida's formulation of *différance* (see previous discussion). Somehow, as Laclau and Mouffe contend, there must be a partial fixation of meaning so that it can be subverted. What a discourse aims for is indeed to construct a temporary centre, or a privileged discursive point, to partially fix the meaning. This privileged 'discursive point' (or signifier) that partially fixes the

meaning of a signifying chain, is called a 'nodal point' (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 112-3).

The conceptualisation of contingency, articulation, and nodal point paves the way for Laclau's and Mouffe's formulation of the identity of a historical subject. A social identity is, inasmuch as it is a social object and thus a discursive construct, precarious, impossible to be ultimately fixed. There is, nonetheless, a partial fixation that renders the precarious identity present. The boundary that demarcates an identity is not shown in its positivity, but on the contrary, in its negativity. In viewing 'objectivity' in negativity, Laclau and Mouffe turn their gaze to Marxist tradition and dig into the concept of antagonism: the negativity that differentiates one social identity from another is not structurally inherent, but rather, the work of social antagonism. The concept of antagonism is, as it is emphasised, not to be assimilated to another two Marxist concepts: contradiction and opposition, both of which require a full identity of one object so that it can be contradicted with or opposed to another – logically incompatible with the theory of 'partial fixation of identity'. Instead, antagonism exists in the impossibility of fully constituting an identity due to the presence of the 'Other', an external force that negates, or blocks, the full constitution of an identity (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 125). The 'Other' is designated as the 'constitutive outside' in Laclau's later work (Laclau, 1990: 17). It is an antagonising

'outside' as it denies one's full identity; the presence of the outside is, however, 'constitutive' for the identity in rendering its limit, and thus boundary, visible. Antagonism in this light can be mutual: a 'constitutive outside' can be turned into the antagonised once its outside-ness is recognised and resisted; moreover, it is as much contingently constructed as the antagonised 'inside' is, since both of them are part of the social and unavoidably fall into the field of overdetermination.

By virtue of the Marxist turn, the political aspect of Laclau's and Mouffe's discourse theory is brought to light. Whereas a social identity is discursively constructed against a 'constitutive outside' and the 'constitutive outside' is equally subject to construction, identity is no longer the locus of logic, but that of politics, i.e., open to struggles aimed at fixing its meaning through discursive processes. This is exactly the point at which Laclau and Mouffe move with their discourse theory into the field of radical democracy, and where the Gramscian concept of 'hegemony' is radicalised. The idea of 'historic bloc' in Gramsci's original format – a number of sectors unified by a collective will – is explored and re-conceptualised into that of 'hegemonic formation'. To facilitate the re-conceptualisation, the post-Marxists propose an articulatory principle that they define as the logic of equivalence. Based on this logic a totality (partially fixed) of equivalent moments is allowed to take form. This is done by subverting the original differential characters of a number of elements

and linking them up as equivalents according to their common difference from an outside, i.e., the equivalence between the elements is not defined by their internal sameness, but by their shared antagonistic relation to a common outside. In doing so, a shared frontier confronting another totality (the outside) is established. This partially fixed totality of equivalents, constructed around an instituted nodal point, is known as a *hegemonic formation*. The places of differential moments are filled in with *subject positions* (the vantage points in which an individual relates itself to the world) in a socio-political context. In this new formulation the ideas of hegemonic formation and subject positions are held up to substitute for 'historic bloc' and 'historic forces (or sectors)' in Gramsci's theory of hegemony (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 127-138). A hegemonic formation in Laclau and Mouffe' project of radical democracy is the subject of a social activism, whose identity should always remain strategic. Therefore the shared frontier that demarcates the hegemonic formation needs to be 'essentially ambiguous and unstable, subject to constant displacement' (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 134). Besides, in articulating various forces into a new formation, the articulating force per se is facing a redefinition in accordance with the identity of the hegemonic formation (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 138-9).

Laclau's and Mouffe's recipe for identity-oriented radical democracy revitalises both Gramscian hegemony and poststructuralist conceptions of discourse

and difference. Their formulation of articulatory practices – the critical process for linking up a hegemonic formation against the constitutive outside – sheds light on the constructing nature of antagonistic, identity-related utterances/arguments in internet forums. By virtue of this perspective, we are allowed to construe the dialogic relationships of these utterances and arguments, and how they are implicated in the production of collective identities in nationalist/gender movements, as to be examined in the case study.

Activist identity in interactive negotiation

Melucci's formulation of collective identity is embedded in his theory of contemporary social movements and the idea of 'the democratisation of everyday life' in complex societies. In the post-industrial Western Europe and North America (or any other complex societies), where the multiplicity and changeability of social interests are common features, the site of political relationships, marked by the mediation of opposing interests (Melucci, 1989: 165), has moved from the national political systems to a broader range of social life. The political relationship, that permitting the process of decision-making to take place via the confrontation and mediation of opposing interests, is what makes possible the condition of modern

democracy. Accordingly the politicisation of wider social areas also implies the extension of democracy into the terrain of everyday life (Melucci, 1985, 1988 & 1989).

However, the wholesale democratisation of social life does not come as a free blessing. Rather, the rights of everyday life, the rights that relate to 'space, time, birth, death, individuals' biological and affective dimensions, and the survival of the planet and the human species' are the goals to strive for via the process of politicisation (Melucci, 1989: 173). The impossibility of ensuring interests without being political accounts for the rise of contemporary social movements, such as feminism, black and civil rights campaigns, student activism, the ecological movement, and, more recently, the queer movement.

For Melucci, democracy is about getting one's voice heard via the means of representation, and the right to refuse or modify the condition of representation. It also allows an individual to choose what s/he belongs to, while holding the right to shift from one belonging to another in order to produce new meanings. Democracy in this fashion will only be achieved via the work of multiple 'public spaces' that represent social units or interests without being controlled or repressed by governmental institutions, state structures and party systems. They include various research institutes, task forces, committees, and other mobile, strategic forms of

representation. According to Melucci, these public spaces are essential to contemporary social movements, or, in the favoured term of Melucci, collective actions. They provide the political spaces for negotiation of interests and decision-making among the representatives, as well as render visible the voices and demands of the represented, and the issues and conflicts raised by diverse movements. Furthermore, they render power visible and hence negotiable. Therefore, the demands, issues and conflicts cannot be overlooked by the decision-making bodies and the society.

The accounts for the interrelations between public spaces, social movements (or, collective actions), and democracy explain how democracy can be disarticulated from the sphere of statal politics and fall onto the aspects of everyday life. They also indicate the significance of 'democratic' identifications – the sense of belonging based on free will – in contemporary social life and politics. In formulating his theory of collective action, Melucci further envisages the generation of collective identities and their role in collective actions.

As Schlesinger pinpoints, Melucci's concept of identity is both meaning constructing and activistic. Identity is 'the reflexive capacity of producing consciousness of action' as well as 'the result of decisions and projects' open to individual or group participation (Schlesinger, 1991: 155). The activistic perspective

of identity is elaborated in Melucci's 1989 work *Nomads of the Present*, in which

collective identity is specified as essential in making possible the mobilization and

maintenance of collective actions. The argument is based on his seeing social

movements as something that arises at the difference between expectations and reality;

however, as he proposed, this difference will only be recognized when social actors

are aware of who they can be and what they can do. The presupposition of his identity

theory is far from assuming a pre-given identity prior to a movement; rather,

collective identity is a social construct, emerging from the very process of building

the goals and means of actions in a specific context:

> Collective identity is an interactive and shared definition produced by
> several interacting individuals who are concerned with the orientations of
> their action as well as the field of opportunities and constraints in which
> their action takes place (Melucci, 1989: 34).

Collective identity thus defined presupposes a theory of negotiation. What is

left out is who would be the 'several interactive individuals' partaking the process of

negotiation. In giving credit to systems of representation, Melucci seems to recognize

the necessity to render the decision-making to the hands of social elites. Despite his

acknowledging the 'inevitable difference' between the representatives and those

whom they imagine to represent, as well as his indicating the need to control this

difference in order to achieve a 'radical' or 'progressive' democratic project (Melucci, 1989: 166-7), little has been said about how this can be done. A possible cue may be his adoption of Klandermans' (1986) category of recruitment networks, referring to the existing networks of social relationships which are involved in a series of collective actions, usually in the form of small groups. According to Melucci, these networks constitute a crucial intermediate level of collective action, giving the social spaces for individuals to 'interact, influence each other, and negotiate and hence establish the conceptual and motivational framework for action' (Melucci, 1989: 31).

Can the interactive, negotiated, intermediate level eventually diminish the difference between the representatives and the represented in recognizing their collective existence and their mutual social world? How much can these small groups reflect the 'social demands' of a wider community or social group? In line with Melucci's argument that power can only be controlled when it is visible, I propose that the difference between the representatives and the represented can only be diminished when it is rendered visible. Further more, the difference will only become visible when a publicly accessible and minimally moderated speech space exists. Basing on this proposition I hold the view that sees internet forums as mediating spaces for negotiating activism-oriented collective identities. It permits argumentative negotiations between the represented (of a social movement) who are concerned about

the public identity of the movement. Meanwhile, it facilitates the mediation between

decision-making (concerned with the 'collective' interests) and the individual needs of

the membership of the collectivity. The represented, given their lack of power in

directly interfering in decision-making, are viewed as 'the grassroots', who may,

nonetheless, influence the decision-making by negotiating with the representatives, or,

elite-activists. As will be revealed, 'the inevitable difference' in a social movement

(Melucci, 1989: 166-7) does not only exist between the representatives and the

represented, but also between the represented. In fact, in online-forum practices,

negotiations between the 'grassroots' are more likely to take place.

The conceptualisation of 'mediating space', tailored-made for an identity

research project, provides an angle for observing the participatory aspects of the

internet's role in a social movement engaged in 'identity politics', in which identity is

central to political mobilisation (Woodward, 1997: 24). Other than being an activist

tool (as examined in current literature), the internet also alters the relationship

between elite-activists (the representative) and the 'grassroots' (the represented), as

well as the relationship between the represented. These new relationships, as will be

further investigated, may influence the process of constructing a public identity of a

social movement, and ultimately render the identity more democratic in Melucci's

sense.

The question of empowerment

The aforementioned identity theories constitute a multiple-dimensional approach to collective identity construction. A collective identity is not a transcendental essence but materialised in bodily acts/discursive practices. It is contingent, woven in antagonistic articulatory practices, as well as a product of negotiated interactions, based on social actors' understanding of the external environment of their actions.

This approach, as triangulated above, suggests a bottom-up process of identity construction. In looking at the performance of internet forums, it places emphasis on the constructive actions and practices of individuals/the 'grassroots'. This position is underpinned by the proposition that the internet may facilitate individuals/the 'grassroots' to participate in the projects of collective identity: in virtue of internet forums, collective identity can no longer be merely prescribed by cultural/social/political elites; rather, it becomes a field of co-construction, in which individual actions and grassroots interactions continuously reinvest its implications. In expecting an increasing symbolic power of individuals/the 'grassroots', this research project, nevertheless, does not presume a necessarily emancipatory or empowering nature of internet forums. As will be argued, the symbolic power facilitated by internet forums fluctuates in contexts. Any claim to an absolute utopianism or dystopianism will be invalid, since it ignores the nature of the questions and their

external conditions that rewrite the potentials and limits of internet-forum practices from time to time.

To incorporate the aforementioned research lines into a case study, it is imperative to develop a corresponding methodology that covers the various dimensions at issue. This is to be addressed in the following chapter. Not surprisingly, when the internet has changed both the landscape and performance of the media, it has also challenged the traditional ways of media research. To tackle the question, I cross over disciplinary boundaries and triangulate a number of analytic tools and categories, with the ambition to broaden the methodological aspects of media research, just as the internet has enlarged the realm of socio-cultural practices.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The foregoing chapter sketches the performative, antagonistic, and negotiated dimensions of a discursive-constructivist approach to collective identity in the context of internet forums. The theoretical framework of the approach does not come up *a priori*; it emerges during the course of data collection, evolves as the research progresses, and comes into the final shape after nearly three years of data research. As the theoretical framework is settled, the research questions come clear.

Along with the process of triangulating theoretical framework and 'discovering' research questions, the analytic framework for the content research is under construction. It is determined by the approach taken in the study: as the approach is defined as discursive-constructivist, it is directed into the orbit of a linguistic analytic strategy, which, as will be explained in the chapter, serves best to throw light on the ways in which the multiple dimensions of identity construction are materialised in corresponding practices in the text-based internet forums.

This chapter provides an account of the methodological aspect of the case study, mapping out the principles and process of data collection and research design, as well as the rationale of the analytic framework. It also describes the limits of the

methodology and some ethical issues concerning online ethnography and discourse research. To facilitate the readers' knowledge of the broad range of data as well as the duration of fieldwork, the documentation of the sources used, together with dates and the extensiveness of the threads reviewed, is included in the Appendix.

I. Data collection and research design

In *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Glaser and Strauss propose their approach to grounded theorising, in which the theory is to be 'discovered' from data systematically obtained during the process of research. This approach suggests that the analyst should embed research design and theoretical generation in data analysis, and advance the process of data collection progressively as the research unfolds. The preliminary analysis helps clarify the research question and develop the theoretical framework as the basis for further data collection and analysis, while new results of data analysis feed into the ongoing process of theoretical development and help to refine the theoretical analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In other words, there is a dialectic relationship between theory building and data collection, as the latter is guided strategically by the former (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983: 174).

The principle of grounded theorising underlies the research design of my case

study. The research project started with an ethnographical method, which is understood as a research process in which the researcher 'closely observes, records, and engaged in the daily life of another culture' (Marcus & Fisher, 1986: 18). The research method proved productive in internet research, facilitating a plethora of studies on the new media users' cultural, social, and political practices in natural settings (e.g. Rheingold, 1993; Baym, 1995a, 1995b & 1998; Bechar-Israeli, 1995; Turkle, 1995; Basset, 1997; Nakamura, 2000, 2001 & 2002; Miller & Slater, 2000; Campbel, 2004). Owing to the public accessibility (in most of the local cases), the internet forum creates an ethnographic site open to unobtrusive observation of 'another culture' – if internet-forum performance can be so understood (see Chapter 4 for the rules of participation in Taiwanese-based asynchronous forums). To understand Taiwanese-based forums as they are, I took the advantage and conducted my fieldwork without engaging in the forums' activities. I 'lurked' through all sorts of major portals of local forums as well as a number of Taiwanese-based global forums at the beginning stage, which helped to build my basic knowledge of the cultural patterning of those forums. During the initial stage of the fieldwork, I located the questions of national identity and gay identity as the research subjects, since the participations regarding these fields were the most active. Other questions of collective identities (for instance, indigenous identity) were dropped for the lack of

corresponding active online participations. To get a general picture of the practices

that may be constructive of national identity, I focused the early fieldwork on a few

domestic political forums, for the question of national identity overlaps that of

political identity in Taiwan. Meanwhile, I closely watched a few global political

forums concerning Taiwanese politics and cross-strait relationships; in so doing I

aimed to find out how Taiwanese and PRC discussants interacted about the issue

under study. For the question of gay identity, I focused on tw.bbs.soc.motss, the

biggest Taiwanese online gay forum, as well as a number of gay boards on

university-based Bulletin Board Systems. Based on the early fieldwork, I

distinguished a few phenomena that I consider relevant to collective identity

construction.

Firstly, I observed some community-like features, e.g. reciprocity, communion,

moral and practical supports, in the gay forums (see Chapter 2 for definitions of the

virtual community). To map out the way in which an online gay community would

work, I conducted a content analysis of the activities taking place in tw.bbs.soc.motss.

The details of the content analysis are further explained in Chapter 6. In the

meanwhile, I was surprised to see intra-group antagonisms, along with the presence of

communion, arising in online gay communities, and less surprised to see

confrontations, verbal fights, and even hate speech occurring in the aforementioned

political forums (see Chapter 4 & 7 for further accounts for domestic politics and ethnic struggles in Taiwan). To understand the possible implications of antagonisms, Laclau's and Mouffe's formulation of social antagonism was brought into the theoretical framework of the case study at this point. Based on my understanding of the formulation, I started to search for possible 'nodal points' of identity-oriented discourse in both political and gay forums. A few keywords were distinguished for next stage of data collection. I looked for more relevant data in the archives of tw.bbs.soc.motss and tw.bbs.soc.politics by using the keyword search engine provided by open.find.com.tw, a major portal noted for its archival service. For other forums where a search engine is not available, I looked through their archives of major historical debates. 'Shopping around' for available data, I was inspired by Marcus's strategies for data collection in a multi-sited ethnography. To examine the circulation of cultural meanings diffuse in time and space, the researcher, as Marcus suggests, may follow the people, the thing, the metaphor, the story, the biography, the conflict, or other traces and cues to search data for constructing the object of study (Marcus, 1995). Searching by keywords, I followed the metaphor. At the end of this stage of data collection and a preliminary analysis of the data, I located 'heterosexual hegemony' as the nodal point of the discourses of antagonistic gay identity and 'Chi-na' as that of antagonistic Taiwanese identity (see chapter 6 & 7 for further

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accounts of the two signifiers).

When searching for data concerning antagonistic identities, I found antagonistic discourse in gay forums was sometimes sparked when the discussants failed to agree on certain aspects of current gay activism. Similar scenarios also occur in political forums: long discussions concerning national identity usually take place when discussants disagree with each other on the directions of nationalist projects and corresponding actions. Owing to this discovery, I was prompted to adopt Melucci's negotiated view of collective identity, which explains how an activism-oriented identity is constructed as the result of intra-group interactions. To substantiate this dimension, sequential data collection was conducted. This time, I followed the 'event'. Discussions surrounding the annual gay right events since 2001 were located, while discussions about the campaigns for rectifying the name of Taiwan were selected as the object of study in relation to the issue of national identity. Again, I used keyword search to find out the data.

The question of performativity surfaced when I started to look into the meanings of nicknames, signatures and recurrent vocabularies (e.g. popular swearwords), some of which seemed to suggest or declare certain social experiences and beliefs, as well as the participants' positions on particular issues. Butler's and Goffman's formulations were triangulated into the discursive-constructivist approach

consequently. More data collection followed, while Goffman's category of 'front' indicated the major direction for this stage of data gathering.

The process of data collection, as described, reflects the principle of 'purposive sampling', in that the researcher deliberately and consciously selects samples through non-random procedures for developing the emerging theory (Deacon et al, 1998: 50). Based on the general principle, the case study adopts 'theory-based sampling' and 'typical case sampling' to select individual examples for addressing different questions. Theory-based sampling refers to the way in which the researcher seeks out cases that best manifest or represent the interests of the researcher's theoretical construct. The values of the samples are determined by their 'information-richness'; the number of samples that account for a certain phenomena can be as few as one instance (Patton, 1990: 177 & 169). This method is used in selecting samples for discourse analysis in Chapter 6 & 7. For explaining the cultural patterning of online-forum participation – tackled in Chapter 5, typical case sampling is adopted. This method identifies cases that exemplify the key features of phenomena under study, mainly aiming for initiating the reader into an unfamiliar situation; the claims to typicality need to be supported by more generalised sampling evidence (Patton, 1990: 173-174; Deacon et al, 1998: 53). The evaluation of the typicality of a case in my study of internet forums relies on the experiences built up in the long-term

fieldwork from 2002 to 2005 across a wide range of internet forums (see Chapter 5

for descriptions of the forums). As to the sampling for the content analysis in Chapter

6, please see the chapter for details.

II. The analytic framework:

As noted in the introductory chapter, the research project covers two identity

questions with an overarching theoretical framework. These questions are to be

addressed within the same set of analytic framework corresponding to the theoretical

one, though some analytic categories and techniques will prove to be more useful in

tackling one identity question than the other one. The analytic framework of the case

study is primarily linguistics-oriented, underlain by my choice of a

discursive-constructivist approach. Laclau's & Mouffe's identity model begins with a

discourse theory that is primarily concerning language; Butler's and Goffman's

theories both give importance to verbal signs, which are regarded as part of the

performative elements of identity/the self; Melucci's negotiated identity suggests a

necessary process of verbal interactions between the activists, through which the

boundary of a public identity can be defined.

On the other hand, choosing asynchronous internet forums as the research

object also predetermines my linguistic turn in methodology. Internet-forum practices are constituted in speech; that is, they are primarily language-based. This nature of the internet forum, be it synchronous or asynchronous, has encouraged a wealth of researches looking into its socio-cultural implications from a linguistic perspective. A case in point is *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Volume 9, Issue 1, a special issue entirely devoted to linguistics-based analyses of communication on the multilingual internet (Danet & Herring, 2003).

My turning to a linguistic analysis of discourse, furthermore, is also rooted in my choice of the research questions. Locating Taiwanese-based forums as the research object, the case study begins with an aim to interpret the communicative patterning of particular cultural groups in relation to meaning production (identity construction). This is where the Ethnography of Communication comes into the picture. Aimed at an ethnographical study of communicative behaviour in specific cultural settings, the research method views speaking as a community-based social act, and suggests the researcher to closely and systematically observe, record, and interpret the modes and functions of language use, including the organisation of communicative units, the patterning of communication, and the interrelation of this patterning to other aspects of culture (Gumperz & Hymes, 1972; Hymes, 1977; Saville-Troike, 1989).

The Ethnography of Communication contributes to my case study in indicating some useful categories that facilitate the further development of the analytic framework. The research tradition is primarily concerned about the language competence and performance of the 'speech community' (Saville-Troike, 1989: 3); the concept of 'speech community', as will be explained in Chapter 5, works as a conceptual category for defining the internet forum as both a socio-cultural group and a meaning production space. Another valuable concept is 'communicative event', which envisages the actual linguistic practices in internet-forum participation as a complex system, involving the message form/content, setting, scene, addressor, hearer/addressee, purpose, outcome, norms of interaction and interpretation, and various forms of speech (languages, dialects, lexicons, codes, and registers) (Hymes, 1977: 55-62).

These concepts give the starting point to define online speech practices as the *text*, something that is engaged in 'production of significance' (Barthes, 1977: 126). Taking the form of communicative event, internet-forum participation as the text is not only constituted in *signifiers*, but also in *utterances* and *actions* of *functions*, produced by one to many *participants* who hold particular *positions* in *situations*, perform *ways of speaking*, organise and interpret speech within specific socio-cultural *contexts*, and *interact* in certain pattern. To further understand how these textual

elements work in reference to identity construction, I reach out from the Ethnography of Communication (which works well as a guideline), and enrich my methodological map with a number of linguistic concepts and theories.

The first one brought onto the map is Goffman's 'footing', a conceptual category aimed at extending the 'addressor-hearer/addressee' category and exploring into the multiple dimensions of the speech participant and the ways in which these dimensions are accomplished (Goffman, 1981). The idea of footing, as will be shown in Chapter 5, helps to define the various roles of online-forum participants in relation to the situations in which the participants are engaged, the ways of speaking that are performed, and the dimensions of identity construction the participations are implicated in.

For looking at the patterning of interaction among the participants, I turn to 'conversation analysis' (CA) and particularly draw on the model of 'turn-taking'. CA as a research field and analytic tradition is known for its interest in exploring the various mechanisms underlying human communication in conversational settings, such as who holds the right to speak, what rules of talk the participants are following, how the 'floors' (speech opportunities) are passed, and how the 'turns' (a shift in the direction of speaking flow) are taken (Mey, 2001: 134-9). Its central goal may reside in the description and explication of the mechanisms in their own rights, or in

applying the acquired knowledge of conversational organisation to practical interactions (Have, 1999: 8). My interest in CA lies at the second level: some fine categories regarding 'turn-taking' (developed by CA's pioneers Harvey Sacks and Emanuel Schegloff), including 'adjacency pairs' and 'next position', will facilitate my understanding of the mechanisms behind the speech-based interactions in the internet forums. The model is, nevertheless, taken loosely. The social interactions in asynchronous internet forums are 'conversation-like': joining an asynchronous internet-forum event by sending a post is functionally similar to taking a turn in a conversation. However, as will be shown in Chapter 4 & 5, an 'internet-forum turn' is structurally different from a conversational turn in daily life; therefore, it requires some modification of the model for its further application.

In seeing online speeches as functional 'utterances' and 'actions', I nod into the direction of speech act theories, which holds the view that utterances can be analysed as social actions (Atkinson & Heritage, 1989:5) and looks into the intentions of the actions (Cutting, 2001: 2). The concept of speech acts originates from John L. Austin's 1962 work *How to Do Things with Words*. The central argument is that people are *doing* in *saying* something; which means, every utterance we make is indeed also an act aimed at having certain effect upon the hearer. Therefore, in making an utterance, we are producing a 'locutionary act' (the act of saying

something) that holds some 'illocutionary force' (the intended function of words) and may achieve some perlocutionary effect (the hearer's action in response to the utterance) (Austin, 1962). This line of argument is further developed by John R. Searle, who defines the speech act as the basic element of linguistic communication (Searle, 1969: 16) and groups speech acts (or illocutionary acts) into a series of macro-classes. *Representatives* (or *assertives/constatives*) concern the truth and falsity of propositional content; *commissives* express the speaker's self-committing to an action; *directives* make explicit the speaker's intention to have the hearer carry out an action; *declarations* are aimed at changing the reality; and, *expressives* bring out one's psychic attitudes (Searle, 1979). The typology is further elaborated in later research, e.g. Bach & Harnish's detailed list of speech acts (Bach & Harnish, 1982).

The concept and taxonomy of speech acts is relevant to my case study both in the performative and in negotiated dimensions of identity construction. The term 'performative' is indeed Austin's keyword, referring to the action aspect of utterances (Austin, 1962). The case study takes a narrower sense of the term and focuses on discovering the 'performativity' (with regard to identity) of various elements in internet-forum messages. Similar to the case of CA, the concept of speech acts is deployed in an expansive sense, since the communicative elements in an internet-forum message are not limited to utterances only.

Another point at which the concept of speech acts comes into the picture is my adoption of Habermas's methodology for a critical apprehension of consensual speech, which serves as a good basis for understanding the process of discursive negotiation in internet forums. According to Habermas, every time we speak, we raise a number of (testable and criticisable) validity claims explicitly or implicitly. A rational consensus among communicators can only be achieved when the validity claims (usually thematised during the course of argumentation) are vindicated or redeemed through better argument that provides convincing reasons (Habermas, 1979 & 1984). To substantiate the argument, Habermas stipulates four types of universal validity claims in correspondence to four types of speech acts: *truth* claims (expressed by *constatives*, regarding facts), *rightness/appropriateness* claims (expressed by *regulatives*, regarding the legitimacy of interpersonal relations), *truthfulness* claims (expressed by *avowals* or *expressives*, disclosing the sincerity and the subjectivity of the speaker) and *comprehensibility* (concerning the intelligibility of utterances) (Habermas, 1979: 58 & 68). As noted in Chapter 2, the achievement of a *shared* definition among the collective actors lies at the heart of the Meluccian negotiated identity; it is the task of my case study to examine the ways in which validity claims are raised, tested, redeemed, and vindicated in the course of identity negotiation (as part of consensual communicative actions).

Finally, I place emphasis on the concept of context in relation to pragmatics –

a linguistic paradigm that places emphasis on language use. Pragmatics studies

language performance in relation to the physical and social world, the

socio-psychological factors which influence communication, and the time and place

in which the words are uttered and written (Cutting, 2001: 2). It is concerned with

meaning production in relation to a 'speech situation' (Leach, 1983: 15) and sees 'the

use of language in human communication as determined by the condition of society'

(Mey, 2001: 6). Both conversation analysis and speech act theories can be subsumed

under the roof of pragmatics for their concern about language use (as in e.g. Grundy,

1995; Mey, 2001; Cutting, 2001; Davis, 1991; Lerner, 2004), though it is argued that

speech act theories sometimes lack insight into the aspect of context (Atkinson &

Heritage, 1989:5). The concept of context is essential in my case study, since it is

aimed at understanding linguistic practices of certain groups of people, concerning

specific cultural/political questions in specific spaces and at specific points of time.

My emphasis on context leads to an overview of the social, cultural, and political

aspects of Taiwan in Chapter 4, and extensive accounts of the backgrounds and

discourses regarding gay and national identities in Chapter 6 & 7. To systematically

look into the contextual element, a number of categories and concepts, including

'members' resources', 'communicative presumptions' and 'intertextuality' are

deployed. Chapter 5 will discuss these ideas in detail along with the analysis of practical performance of Taiwanese-based forums.

Unlike some studies on synchronous internet forums (e.g. Campbell, 2004; Denzin, 1999), the data analysis of the case study will not be presented by citing extracts of discussion threads. Compared with the synchronous forum (e.g. IRC), the exchanges in the asynchronous forum are less like daily conversations, in which the conversational turns mostly take the form of short sentences. The message body of a post of the asynchronous forum tends to be sizeable; sometimes, it can look tedious when it contains a few citations of previous posts in the thread. Besides, as it is *asynchronous*, sometimes a follow-up in response to a previous post may only turn up a few hours or even a few days later, and thus there can be some quite irrelevant posts in between. Under these circumstances, citing extracts of discussion threads along with the analysis may risk making the text lengthy and awkward. To avoid this, I will present the data analysis via making summaries of the threads and quoting utterances or passages of posts that best exemplify the cases or explain the situations. With these efforts, the readers should find it reasonably easy to follow my arguments without getting lost in the word jungle. The appendix that documents the sources used should also help the readers to get the picture of the extensiveness and variety of the threads that are included in the thesis.

III. Limits and ethical issues of research in internet forums

One of the most common questions I have encountered from people who are interested in my work is: 'how do you know what you have seen in the internet is *real*?' In some way, the internet subverts our cognition of reality for its saturation with 'masks and masquerades' (Wallace, 1999). Knowing well the game of online identity play, Turkle (1995) chose to interview her informants face-to-face in her office for collecting credible data. Among the Taiwanese-based internet-forum participants, doubts about the trueness of one's story or identity frequently arise. Given these conditions, how can I claim what I have observed from my fieldwork in the internet forums is 'real'?

My answer to this question is: whatever occurs in the internet is part of the *social reality*, as it is constructed and interpreted by people, and subjectively meaningful to them (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Theoretically it is possible that a gay-forum participant who performs him/herself as gay and actively takes part in the discussion of gay identity is actually heterosexual. However, whatever s/he has said has constituted part of the performance of the gay forum, intervened in the interactions between the co-participants, and caused certain effects in, for instance, sparking a series of follow-ups. It is, furthermore, a mistake to ascribe the logic of

'identity play' to all identity-oriented performance in the internet, for not all internet forums are meant for 'identity experiment' or 'identity workshops' (see Chapter 2 for relevant reviews). The internet forums I look at are first of all dedicated to specific interests – politics and gay community. In other words, the discussions are oriented to share interests; therefore, the participant is expected to speak truthfully, rather than playing with masks and masquerades. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that exceptions are possible, which, though, should not affect the general picture built on the basis of long-term fieldwork.

Ethical issues are also a common concern among online ethnographers. Different views of the ethics of conducting online ethnography or discourse research have been produced in the past (e.g. Jones, 1994; King, 1996; Waskul & Douglass, 1996; Paccagnella, 1997; Sharf, 1999; Lindlof & Shatzer, 1998; Mann and Stewart, 2000). The core issues include 1) if the cyberspace or internet forums form a public or private space; 2) if the obtaining of informed consent from the subject is essential; 3) if the researcher should introduce him/herself and his/her research project to the online forums under study; 4) the protection of identifiable human subjects. Answers to these questions are split, partially because they are discussed under different situations. For instance, the content of mailing-list groups sharing personal experiences is regarded as more private (Sharf, 1999), while posts in publicly

accessible Usenet newsgroups or online chat rooms are taken as public acts

purposively intended for public attentions (Paccagnella, 1997). The answers to the

question if informed consent is essential are therefore very different. Some (e.g. Sharf,

1999, Waskul & Douglass, 1996) hold that the researcher should try to obtain consent

from the author of every post under study; Pioneer internet researcher Rafaeli,

however, sees it as unnecessary, since the 'public discourse' in the internet is not less

public than tombstone epitaphs, graffiti or letters to the editor (cited in Paccagnella,

1997). Likewise, opinions about the protection of identifiable subjects differ from

each other. Given the anonymity of internet communication, Jones (1994) argues that

the question of protection does not exist, as none of the communicators is actually

'identifiable'. King (1996) holds a different view and suggests that the researcher

should remove every possible reference to one's 'identity', including the nickname,

the signature, the header of message, and even the name and type of the group where

the message comes from.

Doing the case study, I first adopted the view seeing publicly accessible

forums (esp. those that require no registration or subscription for entry) as public

forums, and seeing the discussions concerning 'public affairs' of a community (e.g. a

nation, or, a gay community) as public discourses. However, to take into account the

local forum participant's view on the issue, I posted my name and a brief description

of my research project to both tw.bbs.soc.politics and tw.bbs.soc.motss, from which most of my samples are retrieved. The responses I have obtained from the newsgroups suggest that the discussants of political issues are generally insensible to a researcher's watch, seen in the very few follow-ups to my post to tw.bbs.soc.politics. The post to tw.bbs.soc.motss, in contrast, obtained more attention. Although my existence as a researcher was not entirely welcomed (for instance, one follow-up to my post accused all researches of internet discourse of being 'exploitative' and 'consumptive'), there was not any special concern shown about the privacy issue. One follow-up even noted the public nature of online forums and encouraged me to continue my fieldwork in the site. This phenomenon, as I interpret it, is perhaps due to the fact that both sites are part of the tw.bbs * newsgroups, where messages are meant for being circulated publicly and globally.

Despite my relaxed attitudes towards the public/private issue in the context, I agree with the point that the researcher should try to protect identifiable subjects, despite the 'virtuality' of their identities. Although the risk of exposure caused by my case study is low, since all information has gone through translation (see below for a further account of this point), I created false nicknames to substitute for the original ones of the participants when their speech is alluded to. When the nicknames and signatures per se are the material under analysis, I translate them as they are. This, as I

consider, does not violate the protection principle, since the analysis of nicknames and signatures is done individually without drawing on the name/signature owner's utterances or any other information (e.g. the email address) that can disclose their personal information. To facilitate whoever is interested in tracing back to the original data, I keep the date of the post and the name of the forum for reference.

A final methodological issue to address is the language problem. The research project is based in the Taiwanese context. Apart from the data retrieved from soc.culture.taiwan (a Usenet newsgroup), the messages of all the forums under study are mostly written in Chinese. The case study unavoidably involves a great deal of translation. In general, liberal translation is adopted. However, I transliterate words or phrases into the Roman alphabets (italicised) when they conveyed particular meanings (e.g. nicknames) or when English equivalents are absent, and provide the original Chinese words when they first appear in a chapter. These will facilitate Chinese readers to understand the text better and non-Chinese speakers to get a flavour of what the original texts look like, despite the existence of language barrier.

Chapter 4

Politics, society, media and internet forums in Taiwan

This chapter gives an overview of the context of the case study, introducing the historical and socio-political aspects of Taiwan, its changing mediascape, the development of the internet, and the structure of Taiwanese-based internet forums. It starts from the timeline of major socio-political transitions from the sixteenth century onwards, while explaining the formation of current ethnic groups. The second part delineates the transformation of the media sector, including the 1990s deregulations of the print and broadcasting media, finishing at the rise of the local Internet culture. Finally it looks at the infrastructure of Taiwanese-based asynchronous internet forums, giving a general picture of the patterning of cyber-forum practices in the local context.

I. The socio-political landscape and ethnic composition

30,000 B. C. – 1945: Pre-nationalist era

Taiwan is a mountainous island surrounded by the Taiwan Straight, the South China Sea, and the Pacific Ocean, with Mainland China in the west, Japan and Korea in the

North, and South East Asia in the south. The population of Taiwan roughly consists of two racial groups: the Han-Chinese communities and the indigenous tribes related to the Austronesians. The latter constitute approximately 2% of the total population (4.3 million) (GIO, http://info.gio.gov.tw/ct.asp). Before the invasions of European expeditions, the indigenous tribes were the principal residents on the island. This status began to face challenges in the wake of European expeditions. In 1624, the Dutch East Indian Company established its business in south Taiwan and subsequently brought in a large number of migrant workers coming from the coastal provinces of southeast China. The second European expedition in Taiwan was organised by the Spanish, who had settled in the north and been expelled by the Dutch in 1642. The Dutch era was ended in 1662 when the last Ming general *Koxinya* and his followers fled from the Manchurian Empire (the *Ching* dynasty) and built a short-lived kingdom, annihilated by the Manchurian force in 1683. The following two-hundred-year *Ching* reign of Taiwan was marked by the expansion of the Chinese settlement. As the Han-Chinese immigrants were notably increasingly, the indigenous people were eventually outnumbered (Lee & Liu, 1994: 13-73). Anthropologist Chen holds that the current Han-dominant society in Taiwan first came into form during this period of time, when it gradually transformed from an immigrant society into a native society in transplanting the societal structure and lifestyle of southeast China (Chen,

1987). The earlier 'Chinese society in Taiwan' was constituted by two ethnic communities: the majority Hoklo and the minority Hakka. The Hakka community has been a less visible ethnic group, as they tend to speak Hoklo dialect and the official dialect Mandarin. Be it controversial, the term 'the native Taiwanese' in current popular discourses mainly refers to the Hoklo community, constituting over 80% of the population in recent statistics (Shih, 1997).

The late nineteenth century witnessed the colonisation of Taiwan by Japan, after the island was given away when the Chinese Empire lost the first Sino-Japanese war in 1895. In integrating Taiwan into its empire, Japan initiated a series of projects for modernisation, along with the imposition of the movement of Japanification, aimed at transforming the Taiwanese into the Japanese. The end of WWII terminated Japanese imperialism and brought Taiwan into the hands of Nationalist China. A new era hence began (Lee & Liu, 1994: 121-154).

1945-1970s: The early Nationalist era

In the wake of the republican revolution, the last Chinese emperor stepped down. The first nation-state in China, 'the Republic of China' (ROC), ruled by the Nationalist Party (*Kuomingtang*, known as KMT) was established in 1911. Twenty-six years

later, the new China encountered the invasion of its old enemy Japan. The second

Sino-Japanese war was later developed into part of WWII that changed the shape of

the world map. The Cairo Declaration signed by the Allies in 1943 acknowledged the

request of the then Nationalist leader, Chiang Kai-shek, who insisted that Taiwan

should be 'returned' to China after the end of the war. In 1945, the Nationalist

government took over from Japan. In 1949, Chiang was defeated by the Chinese

communists and fled to Taiwan with his military forces and over one million refugees.

Taiwan became the centre of the KMT regime. The post-war refugees eventually

settled in Taiwan and formed the second largest ethnic group, known as 'the

mainlanders' (Lee & Liu, 1994: 155-192).

A major incident occurring prior to Chiang's retreat overshadowed the ethnic

relationships in Taiwan in the following decades. On 28 February 1947, police

brutality in Taipei triggered an island-wide rebellion of native Taiwanese,

discontented with the corrupted KMT government. The incident, known as the '228'

(28 February) Incident, became a bloody ethnic conflict between the mainlanders and

the native Taiwanese. Casualties were said to amount to 10,000-30,000, mostly native

Taiwanese. The incident was followed by the subsequent implementation of martial

law, allowing the Taiwan Garrison Command to arrest and execute intellectuals whose

speech was regarded as endangering national security. A number of native elites were

forced to flee overseas and later became the pioneers of Taiwanese Nationalism. This period is later remembered as the 'White Terror' era (Ge, 1993).

Despite the authoritarianism in domestic politics, the KMT regime in Taiwan was self-labelled as 'Free China' (in contrast with the communist China, People's Republic of China), with the support of the US and first world countries. However, its status in the international community faced a severe challenge in 1971 when the United Nation acknowledged PRC's legitimacy. Taiwan was no longer regarded as representative of China, and has never since been readmitted by the UN. The situation became worse when the United States started to build up diplomatic relationships with PRC in 1978 and terminated its official diplomatic tie with the ROC. The diplomatic crises of the 1970s consequently triggered a major wave of identity crisis, which underpinned the subsequent political reform of the 80s marked by the 'nativisation' of the political sector, as well as the awakening of 'Taiwanese consciousness' (Yin, 1988: 108-9).

1980s-2000s: the great transition

The 1980s in Taiwan were the years of great transition. Against the Nationalist one-party state, the opposition (self-named '*tangwai*', taking on the meaning of

'outside-the-party'), based on the native Taiwanese as the long-term politically disadvantaged community, had progressively gained ground in political power via its engagement in elections since the late 1970s. In 1975, Chiang Kai-shek died and left the ruling power to his more liberal-minded son, Chiang Ching-kuo. The 1977 *Chung-li* incident, an unplanned ten-thousand-people demonstration caused by a local election fraud, inspired the opposition to switch their battleground from election campaigns to street activism. The political activism culminated in the 1979 *Mei-li-dou* (Formosa) incident, in which an unregistered peace rally turned into a violent conflict between the police and the demonstrators. All of the opposition leaders were arrested and put to trial. To demonstrate his liberal attitude, Chiang Ching-kuo loosened the control of the media and permitted full coverage of the trial, which consequently allowed the voice of the opposition for the first time to be revealed to the public. The incident is later recorded as the turning point of the opposition movement, inspiring the political engagement of the people, whose support of a radical political reform helped the opposition's subsequent success in the 1980 general election and forced the ruling power to loosen its tight fist on politics (Lee, 1987: 111-59).

The period of the late 1980s to the early 1990s is marked by the political transformation 'from hard to soft authoritarianism': while remaining intrinsically authoritative, the government permitted a certain degree of liberalization in the

political sector (Chen, 1997: 232). A series of liberating measures were taken,

including the lifting of ban on the establishment of new parties in 1986, facilitating

the transformation of the former *tangwai* into the present Democratic Progress Party

(DPP). In the following year the martial law was lifted and replaced with a

more-relaxed National Security Law, just a year before the death of Chiang

Ching-kuo, who had been hit by ill health for years. His successor Lee Deng-hui was

hailed as the first native Taiwanese national leader, whose pro-independence attitude

had eventually led to the disunity within KMT. Some leading members left the party

and established the New Party and the People First Party (PFP) in 1993 and 2000

respectively. In taking advantage of a disintegrating KMT, the DPP candidate Chen

Shui-bian won the 2000 presidential election. The KMT era in Taiwan was brought to

an end after nearly half a century. The next year saw a further breaking up of KMT,

when former president Lee, along with his followers, built the pro-Taiwan 'Taiwan

Solidarity Union' (TSU). Within less than two decades, Taiwan has transformed from

a one-party autocracy to a multiple-party democracy. Up to June 2003, there are in

total one hundred and one parties on an island with 22.8-million population, though

the political arena is dominated by the four major parties (DPP, TSU, KMT, and PFP)

(Taiwan Year Book 2004).

Owing to the relaxing of the political environment, the other social sectors

were allowed to flex their muscles. In 1980, the consumer movement pioneered new social activism by founding the first consumer rights organization. This was followed by a series of environmental protection movements culminating in the island-wide anti-nuclear-power movement, initiated in 1985 and continued to date (Chang, 1990). The Labour movement in Taiwan was initiated in the 1980s. In 1987, the Labour Party was established, though it soon split into minor segments in the following year and never succeeded in making itself a significant force in domestic politics (Chang, 1991: 61-2).

Apart from the aforementioned movements, the mid 1980s also witnessed a series of 'ethnic revivals'. In privileging Mainland Chinese culture as 'orthodox', the KMT government had been suppressing the languages and cultures of the pre-war settlers' communities, including the Hoklo, the Hakka and the indigenous people. With the unfolding of political reform, resistance to cultural suppression had turned stronger. The renaissance of the Hoklo culture is intertwined with the development of Taiwanese Nationalism, to be expounded in Chapter 7. The Hakka ethnic revival movement was initiated in the 1988 'Returning Me My Mother Tongue' campaign, which had contributed to the appearance of the first Hakka television programme in the next year and Hakka daily news broadcasting since 1991 (Su, 1993: 267). However, a full-blown Hakka cultural movement did not start until 2001, when the

DPP government set up the Council for Hakka Affairs. The establishment of the digital Hakka television channel in July 2003 is a recent landmark of the movement. Taiwanese Pan-aboriginalism, uniting the twelve indigenous tribes in Taiwan, aims for the improvement of both living and cultural rights. It dates back to 1983, when some indigenous students started to distribute the manually printed newsletter '*Koushangching* (The Green Mountains)'. The next year saw the founding of the Alliance of Taiwan Aborigines (ATA), which has initiated a series of campaigns on promoting aboriginal rights, ranging from de-stigmatisation, rescuing child indigenous prostitutes, recovering indigenous names, to self-determination. Being a minority in terms of population and resources, pan-aboriginalism was forced to cooperate with stronger allies, including the then opposition DPP (Chang, 1991: 72). So far, the indigenous communities remain disadvantaged in terms of social, political and especially economic power, though some of their cultural rights, e.g. the recovery of indigenous names, have been improved.

Meanwhile, gender movements were advancing in the changing social climate. Gender issues first appeared in the local public discourses in the early 70s, when the current vice president Liu Shiow-lien declared her 'New Feminism', attempting to localise western feminist thoughts in the patriarchal 'Chinese society'. A more recent and influential effort is Li Yuan-cheng's 'The Awakening of Women' magazine

(founded in 1982), which had been the major organiser of a series of campaigns aiming to promote gender issues in the public sphere. The 'Awakening' campaigns had facilitated the advancement of gender politics. Since the mid 80s, a number of non-governmental women rights organisations have actively participated in policy making (Ku, 1989; Chou and Jiang, 1990: 83-5; Chang, 1991: 65-7). While women's rights are improving, local feminism has progressively transformed from gender politics to 'sexual politics', marked by its emphasis on sexual subjectivity and the liberation of bodies (Lin, 1997). The 'sexual' turn of local feminism has paved the way for gay activism. We will look at this issue in detail in Chapter 6.

II. From silent to tumultuous: the changing mediascape

The suspension of martial law in 1987 is not only a turning point of the political reforms, but also a critical moment of the local media history. The late 1980s to the mid 1990s experienced a major transformation of the mass media of Taiwan, changing from a tight-controlled state apparatus to a pluralist, highly capitalized marketplace. A further wave of transformation came in the mid 1990s with the blossoming of internet use. New issues and questions arose consequently in the wake of the transforming mass communicative environment.

When the media were the government's mouthpieces

The aforementioned suspension of martial law marked the beginning of the end of an era in which the media served almost entirely as 'ideological state apparatus' (Althusser, 1971) of KMT government, supporting and advancing the policies of the government as well as reinforcing its dictatorship. The control was enabled by the ruling power's monopoly of the media sector and a tightened censorship.

The history of the state/military owned broadcasting dates back to 1949, when the ROC relocated to Taiwan. At that time, there were only ten radio stations: two of them were owned by the military, seven belonged to the KMT-based BCC system, and only one was run privately. Prior to 1992, the BCC system and state-run companies still dominated most of the market and FM frequency channels, while the former held 20 stations and the number of the latter reached 12. What is noteworthy is that the then private radio companies (20 in total) were not entirely out of the control of the state. Among them the largest 'private' radio company Chen-Sheng Broadcasting Company is in fact half owned by the military. Most of the other private companies at that time were small and local, holding medium-wave AM stations of poorer quality of transmission (Wang, 1993: 110-112).

Similarly, the television system was predominantly controlled by the state.

Prior to 1997, there were three terrestrial television stations, Taiwan Television

Enterprise (TTV), China Television Company (CTV), and Chinese Television System

(CTS), inaugurated in 1961, 1968, and 1971 respectively. Taiwan provincial

government banks held 49% of the shares in TTV; 60% of the shares in CTV were in

the hands of KMT; 80% of the shares in CTS belonged to the military. Domestic

investors who held shares in the television companies mostly had close connections

with the government, or KMT, or the military, while the companies' general managers

all came from military backgrounds (Wang, 1993: 117).

Newspapers in the martial law era were also to a great extent part of the state

apparatus. Up to 1985, there were 31 newspapers in total. 20 of them were privately

owned, four owned by KMT, two by the government, five by the military. Most of the

privately owned newspapers, including the two major newspapers, the China Times

and the United Daily News, backed KMT's policies. The China Times represented the

voice of the reformist wing of KMT, while UDN expressed preferred views of the

military and other national security systems. The exceptions were the Independent

Evening Post and the People's Daily, which were considered more independent,

though of a much smaller circulation (Tien, 1989: 198).

During that time, dissidence was only seen in the aforementioned

alternative newspapers, some opposition political magazines, and the 'underground'

media, including a few illegal cable television systems and radio stations as well as illegally distributed videotapes produced by independent studios. The alternative media played a crucial role in the local political reform by nurturing reformist intellectuals, disseminating dissidence, and promoting the opposition (Lee, 1987). In contrast, the contents of the legal media were under severe surveillance of the government through the imposition of pre-circulation censorship and the implementation of laws and regulations restricting the freedom of speech, including the Martial Law, the National Mobilization Law, and the Publication Law. These controlling measures were taken to ensure that no taboo subjects would be touched upon. The then political taboos of KMT authority included questioning the legitimacy of the government, the fundamental policies of anti-communism, and the reunification of China based on the Three Principles of the People (written by KMT founder Dr Sun Yat-sen) – accordingly the voicing of Taiwan independence (from China) was the most forbidden subject (Tien, 1989: 204).

After the deregulation: pluralistic or commercial-oriented

The period of the late 1980s to the 1990s witnessed a dramatic transition of the local mediascape, resulting from the convergence of the political transformation, the

domestic economic growth, and the introduction of global capitalisation in the regional media industry.

The late President Chiang Chin-kuo was acknowledged as the key figure of the socio-political transformation of Taiwan in the late 1980s (e.g. Lee & Liu, 1994; Lee, 1987; Tien, 1989). A week after the establishment of DPP, Chang gave a public speech announcing the ruling party's opening up to democracy (Lee, 1987: 242). The next year saw the first sign of the state's loosening grip on the freedom of speech, when the Martial Law, allowing the sanctioning of speeches and printed materials for 'national security' reasons, was suspended. The next year came the deregulation of newspapers when the restriction on the publication of new newspapers and the limitation on the number of pages were lifted, in response to which the number of newspapers and their pages have been growing ever since (Tien, 1989: 201). Up to 2003, there were 602 officially registered newspapers, among which four major broadsheets, including the China Times, the United Daily News, the Liberty times and the Apple Daily, dominated the market (Taiwan Year Book 2004). Having enabled the government to restrict the freedom of speech, publication, correspondence, popular assembly and association for decades, the National Mobilisation Law was lifted in 1991 (Tien, 1989: 206-7)

The local press in the post-deregulation era, alongside the complication of

political spectrum, was saturated with partisanship. For instance, the UDN retained its

affinity with KMT and the pro-unification position after the party stepped down. The

Liberty Times is known for its support of TSU (the Taiwan Solidarity Union) and the

pro-independence position. A new impact has been made by the 2003 appearance of

the tabloid-chic Apple Daily, attracting readers with a picture-driven editorial logic

and exaggerated headlines. The new competitor has pushed the three major dailies as

well as television journalism into a new wave of 'tabloidisation', marked by populism

and triviality (McNair, 2002: 106, 109). Despite the deregulation, the local

newspapers encountered declining readerships (dropping from 76.3 percent in 1998 to

some 50 percent in 2003), resulting from the recent economic slowdown, rising costs

of paper, high penetration of cable television, and in particular the rapid proliferation

of the internet (Taiwan Year Book 2004). In response to the age of new media, the

major newspapers have established their online outlets, some of which have become

active internet content providers. For instance, the pioneering ChinaTimes.com

(founded in 1995) has grown into a multi-media audio-visual platform in 2002 and in

the next year transformed into a content portal, providing news, other contents and

general services (ChinaTimes.com).

The changing broadcasting, however, was more than a by-product of political

transition; both the growing domestic economy, as well as the intensive capitalisation

and the globalisation of media industry played important roles. The first wave of local underground media appeared in the early 1980s, when illegal cable television systems, known as 'the Fourth Channel' (in contrast to the three legal channels), mushroomed around the island. Media researcher Weng (1993) indicates that the Fourth Channel actually arose to meet the need of the growing middle class who longed for both open information and plural media content. Among the mushrooming 'Fourth Channels', near forty 'Democracy Television' systems, functioning as the political tools of DPP politicians, were established from 1989 to 1992. Satellite dishes, as an alternative to the Fourth Channels, also became popular. The growing 'underground' broadcasting systems, underpinned by both political and commercial interest, finally pushed the government to enact the Cable Television Law in 1993, allowing the legalisation of existing systems and the construction of new ones (Lee & Liu, 1999: 380-9). In the next year, the government furthered deregulation by permitting the establishment of the fourth domestic terrestrial television channel, the DPP-based Formosa Television. Four years later, the fifth terrestrial television channel, the Public Television Service, was inaugurated. Radio-wise, the government loosened up its control over the number of radio stations in 1994. By 2003, there were 154 established radio companies, and another 20 were under construction, while 3,217 radio program production companies were registered (Taiwan Year Book 2004).

Around the same time, trans-national media corporations set their eyes upon the Asian market, including music industry and broadcasting. The 'globalisation' of Taiwanese music industry was initiated in the early 1990s, when trans-national music corporations, including PolyGram, Warner Music, Sony Music, EMI, BMG Music, and Universal Music Group established branches on the island. The international brands dominated the local market via merging with local companies, recruiting local artistes, and promoting regional/global music products through regional/global campaigns. Among all, music television channels, mostly affiliated with trans-national music corporations, played the major role in promotion campaigns of trans-national music products (Lee, 1998). These music channels were part of the cable-delivered multi-channel broadcasting, saturated with foreign content and capital. The early history of Taiwan's new broadcasting era was closely linked with the launch of AsiaSat 1 satellite (in 1990), whose footprint covers 38 countries across Asia (Atkins, 2002: 49). Via trans-national satellite television operation and local cable delivery systems, foreign brands, including a number of Star TV channels, HBO, ESPN, CNN, Discovery, and some Japanese channels, came into the local households. In the meantime, domestic/regional cable television channels, invested by domestic media moguls, were established to compete with international brands (Su, 1995; Ku, 1996). Up to February 2004 there were five terrestrial stations (to be integrated into a joint

digital television system) and 132 satellite channels (transmitted through cable systems) operated by 60 domestic and 19 foreign companies (Taiwan Year Book 2004), while 80% of television viewing was facilitated by cable-delivered systems (Chen & Liang 2003).

The growing multi-channel broadcasting represents the convergence of enormous domestic and international capital. In fact, the local policies concerning media and ICTs since the late 1999 have been dominated by the logic of capitalism, encouraging liberalisation and foreign investments for the maximum output value and the growth of the digital economy (Kuan & Chen, 2003: 114). This resulted in the conglomeration of the cable television industry, controlled by both domestic and international players. So far, the industry is controlled by four conglomerates, including China Network Systems Co. (20% shares held by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation), Eastern Multimedia Group (EMG), Pacific Communications Co, and Taiwan Broadband Communications Co. (owned by the global investment firm The Carlyle Group). All of them expanded their footprints from cable systems to the multi-media, ranging from broadband, telecommunication, internet content provision to digital television (Couto, 2003). Among them EMG was also a major content provider, owing eight programming channels, two shopping channels, and two regional channels for foreign audiences (the Taiwan Year Book 2004)

As shown in the above, the transformation of the local mediascape has been closely interrelated with politics and economics. The media had formerly been highly manipulated to reinforce the regime of then ruling power; it later, on the other hand, facilitated the rise of the opposition, who took alternative/illegal media as activist tools. Partially as the result of political reform, the media sector experienced a dramatic change, transforming into a combination of deregulated newspapers and multi-channel broadcasting. The post-deregulation era was marked by the logic of liberalism, digital economy and media convergence, in which print media operators expanded their business into the field of electronic-commerce, while multi-media conglomerates controlled the hardware, system operation and content provision of broadcasting. This tendency reflects the government's changing policies of communications, viewing the media more as a crucial industry rather than a state apparatus. The same logic also encouraged the rising internet use. We will look at the development of the Internet in Taiwan in the following pages.

Wiring the island: the rise of internet use

Concomitant with the deregulation of the mass media, internet use in Taiwan burgeoned in 1990, when the Ministry of Education inaugurated TANet (Taiwan Academic Network), an academic network aimed at supporting educational research

activity of schools and institutions. Owing to the government's enthusiasm in promoting the digital economy, the domestic internet infrastructure has been advancing rapidly (Sun, 1998: 2). The north-south optical fibre backbone network has already been completed and has reached 1,134 Gbps by the end of June 2004 (Find, 20/01/2005). The number of internet users is growing significantly. According to the annual survey conducted by Taiwan Network Information Centre (TWNIC, 01/2005), up to the end of 2004, there were approximately 13.32 million internet users, amounting to 58.4% of the entire population, compared with the 67.4% internet penetration of North America (Internet World Stats, 31/03/2005).

These statistics suggest that Taiwan is a highly wired island, where internet penetration is only 9 % lower than the leading country. The active internet use is made possible by virtue of the networking of three major internet Service Providers, including the aforementioned TANet, HiNet (operated by Chunghwa Telecommunication, a former state-run enterprise) and SEEDNet (funded by the Ministry of Economy and some private players). The integration and further development of networks were set into action via the 'National Information Infrastructure Plan', kick-started in June 1994 as one of the government's major efforts to develop the digital economy. Up to October 2004, there were 66,342 WWW

severs and 4823,538 internet hosts, while the number of registered websites reached

265,139 up to March 2005. Broadband use has also become common, as 53.78% of

Net users depend on broadband services (TWNIC, January 2005).

Apart from the rapid growth of domestic infrastructure and content

provision, international internet connection has been expanding progressively.

At the end of June 2004, Taiwan's international connection bandwidth reached

528 Gbps, rising 1.5% and 335% respectively from the same period in 2003

and 2002. Historically, the U.S. has been the major destination of Taiwan's

internet connection and the bandwidth between the two countries continues to

grow steadily. Nevertheless, the local user's reliance on U.S. contents has

been decreasing in recent years, as the share of bandwidth connecting to the

U.S. in Taiwan's international internet connection has been sliding every

season, from 73% in the end of 2000 to 57% (with bandwidth at 33,960Mbps)

in June 2004. In contrast, the share of bandwidth connecting Taiwan to other

Asian Pacific countries, especially Japan, Hong Kong and Mainland China,

has been rocketing, accounting for 16% (9,716Mpbs), 13% (7,468Mbps) and

7% (4,258Mbps) of the international internet connection of the island (Find,

20/01/2005).

Users-wise, the internet generation represents the younger, better-educated, better-off population from more urbanised regions. Some 95% of the population aged 16 to 25, 85.15% of the age group 26-35 year old, and 68.74% of age 36-45 year old have been on the internet for various reasons, while around 42% of 45-55 and nearly 16% of age over 56 are internet users. Internet users in the capital city Taipei constitute 78.26% of its residents, compared to 36.92% in domestic rural areas. Where socio-economic status is concerned, internet penetration in households whose economic heads have a master's degree and above is 87.02%, followed by 86.56% with a university degree, and 77.01% with a junior college degree. There is a 90.90% penetration in households of an average income of 150,001–200,000 NT dollars (compared with nation-wide household average income at some 89,000 NT dollars, Taipei Times, 23/08/2004), and 89.61% in households of an average income of 80,000-11,000. The gender gap is not significant, though, as female internet users account for 59% of the entire gender group, compared with some 63% penetration among Taiwanese males (TWNIC, January 2005).

The local internet users of the earlier days shared the national fever of speech liberation, made possible through the aforementioned media deregulations. A considerable share of internet users started to try out the new discursive space provided by online forums. In a 1996 survey, 17.67% of internet users considered

participating in asynchronous online forums (in the form of bulletin board systems

and newsgroups) their most important online activities (the 1996 Survey of Internet

Use in Taiwan, Yam.com). With the multiplication of internet functions, the

landscape of the so-called 'virtual space' is transforming. The local internet users

seem to be adopting all sorts of new activities; for instance, online shopping has

become common, representing 6% of online use nowadays. So far, information

searching, WWW surfing, and connecting with people (e.g. emailing, Messenger, and

a/synchronous internet forums) remain popular online activities, representing 23%,

13%, 36% of the most common internet use. Though the percentage of online-forum

participation seems to be sliding, it remains one of the most important internet

activities, as 11%-14% of the local internet users see it the most common internet

activity apart from WWW surfing and emailing (the 2004 Survey of Internet Use in

Taiwan, Yam.com).

Internet utopianism and dystopianism in the local context

The local arguments on the socio-cultural impacts of the internet share the universal

debates between the utopian and dystopian perspectives. The dystopian views are

mainly concerned about the anonymity of online communication that has led to

various types of crimes, including smuggling and sexual transactions (which are still illegal in Taiwan). The power of online rumours or forged information is also a worry. One of the notorious cases is the famous political rumour 'Giving up Huang' throughout the 1994 Taipei mayoral election campaign. It was widely rumoured that the unpopular KMT candidate Huang had lost the support of his party, which encouraged its supporters to vote for the preferred rival Chen for fear that its major enemy candidate Chou might be elected. Though the causal relation needs to be examined, it is a fact that candidate Huang, the victim of the rumour, eventually lost the campaign (Chuang, 1998). Online terrorism is also a concern. A well-cited case is the 1-December-1995 emailing threat to president Clinton from a Taiwanese address. Although no act of terror occurred, it led to the government's resolution to keep a tighter control on Internet message flows under the pressure of the US government (Sun 1998).

Another cultural argument falling on the dystopic-utopic spectrum is concerning the challenge of online speech to the established social values and beliefs. Very recently feminist academic Ho, locally well known for her discourse of sexual liberation, was involved with a legal case concerning the provision of web pictures depicting bestiality in her web page. A number of NGOs accused her of distributing obscene visual contents, potentially harmful for under-aged internet users. Against the

accusation, Ho and her supporters appealed to the freedom of speech (Chuang, 24/9/2003). Ho's case represents the societal fear of the threat to existing social order and morality, posed by the nearly ungovernable Internet communication. On the other hand, it exemplifies the way in which the internet serves as a convenient and powerful medium for channelling subversive discourses. The empowering potential of the internet is highly regarded amongst the new generation of social activists who see discursive fields as primary battlefields (Cheng 1998; Lin & Cheng, 2001).

An early example of internet use in social activism is the publishing of the newsletter 'the South', launched in 1995 by environmental protection activist and internet practitioner Chen and his colleagues. The newsletter soon became a shared online headquarters for minority groups and social movement organisations. Apart from the production and distribution of alternative discourses, social activism also takes place on the internet in the form of online petitions and social mobilisation, both of which are frequently associated with offline activities. Beneficiaries of the new tool range from local feminism, gay activism, environmentalism, and the anti-nuclear movement, to the movement for sex workers' rights (Lin & Cheng, 2001). A fine example is the 1999 'Night Right' campaign, protesting the police's 'clamping -down-on' late-night gay gathering in public spaces. The activists successfully promoted the campaign by employing the internet as its major tool for social

mobilisation and dissidence dissemination.

Asynchronous online forums, especially the discussion boards on Bulletin Board Systems, played a crucial role in the aforementioned events. The aforementioned 'Giving up Huang' rumour was primarily transmitted through discussion boards, so were the announcements of many online petitions and social movement events. The 1999 'Night Right' campaign was solely promoted through BBSs. The anonymous threat to president Clinton originated in and travelled by TANnet BBSs. Before developing into a websites and then a weblog, 'the South' started its humble beginning in the form of bulletin-board post. A lion's share of grassroots social debates takes place in online forums, including those on Ho's legal case. These phenomena suggest that online forums may potentially enable grassroots participation in discursive construction, public sphere and social movement, although this potential needs to be further examined. In their observation of internet use in Taiwanese social movements, Lin & Cheng (2001) find that the digital divide has prevented the labour movement, pan-aboriginalism, and feminism from taking advantage of the new media. For the former two, the divide is mainly caused by the low internet literacy among blue-collar labours and the indigenous communities. The websites dedicated to these movements end up reaching sympathetic or curious outsiders of higher internet literacy, rather than their target readers. For feminism, the

generation, rather than the knowledge gap marks the divide. The 'cyber-generation' feminists are in alignment with local liberal academics, prioritising discursive productions and see online forums as essential tools. By contrast, the 'older' generation, who started from the early 'woman's rights' era, tend to devote themselves to practical campaigns concerning women's socio-political life. Online discussion is viewed as a waste of energy and time, rather than a constructive process.

Generation gaps in this regard do not only exist in feminism but also among the local cultural elites. June 1996 witnessed a collective debate between established cultural critics and internet practitioners who held different opinions about the local bulletin board culture. Inside the circle of online-forum participants, 'power gap' is another issue. In her explorative analysis of the local internet practice, Sun indicates the asymmetric gender relations in offline world is reproduced online. In online debates of public affairs, participants identified as males are usually paid more respect, while female participants of brilliant arguments are frequently mistaken as males. Furthermore, male participants are less hesitant in flaming, provocation and aggressions. In contrast, female participants tend to be more polite, tolerant and sometimes self-effacing (Sun, 1998).

The utopianism and dystopianism concerning the local internet practice in general or online forums in particular reveal some of the major questions concerning

the new media in its cultural aspect. Nevertheless, a systematic analysis of online-forum practice in the field of identity construction is not yet produced; nor has the question of empowerment been addressed in relation to collective identity. The following chapter gives a closer examination of online-forum practice in Taiwan, which will facilitate our further exploration of its implications in the formation of collective identities.

III. The rising grassroots public forums

As indicated in the above, participation in asynchronous internet forums has been a major internet activity among the local users. According to my search via Yam.com, up to July 2005, there were at least 634 active BBSs and 3205 individual discussion boards in Taiwan, not to mention those attached to the websites of commercial or governmental organizations. The rather crowded online speech space is shared by a few major players, ranging from individual TANet-based BBSs, Web-based virtual groups, media-affiliated forums, governmental discussion boards, and tw.bbs* newsgroups. Despite the diversity the local asynchronous internet forums in general share a common culture, which was rooted during the time when the forerunner TANet BBSs arose in campus.

TANet BBS

In September 1997, a few university students set up their private bulletin board system MoonStar with an IBM PC and an 8MB RAM internet card, maximally allowing 12 logons at the same time. The system soon grew with its popularity. Up to January 2003, when I started to observe the forums on the system, MoonStar.twbbs.org.tw has grown into one of the most popular BBSs in Taiwan, attracting utmost 4000 logons at a time and 33,000 viewings on a regular day. Everyday, hundreds of visitors log on MoonStar for different purposes. They meet friends, play online games, hunt for information, or publish writings. Less uncommonly, people gather around here for discussing all sorts of subjects, ranging from leisure activities, computer games, pets, fortune telling, sports, fan clubs, financial investment, politics, sexuality, to academic interests. Sometimes, people simply login to gossip.

MoonStar.tw.bbs exemplifies a successful case amongst the BBSs built on Taiwan Academic Network (TANet), which mushroomed in the early 1990s. In many ways TANet BBS is a modified replica of Usenet. Usenet (also known as Netnews or News) is a worldwide-distributed discussion system. It is a 'users' network' in which people exchange 'news' (either messages or articles) with each other from their local

sites via the intermediary of news servers. Usenet was originally designed as a forum

for Unix users' discussing computing problems or troubleshooting; since its

burgeoning in the late 1970s, it has grown from a 3-site network into an enormous

collector of public forums, housing 6000-9000 discussion lists of a broad range of

topics. Traditionally these discussion lists are known as 'newsgroups' (or 'groups' for

short). Via logging on their accounts at Usenet-linked sites, people can access

newsgroups, subscribe to one or many of them, read or write 'news' in the form of

post, or comment on previous articles through the aid of 'newsreader' programmes.

The sites linking to Usenet come from government agencies, universities, high

schools, businesses of all sizes, and even home computers. The major concentration

of Usenet sites is in the US, though many of them are in Canada, Europe, Australia

and Japan (Usenet FAQ archives, www.faqs.org/faqs/usenet/what-is). Not surprisingly,

English is the major language used in Usenet newsgroups. During the course of my

online ethnography, I have discovered only one Chinese-written newsgroup:

talk.politics.china.

By the time of its introduction into Taiwan (when TANet first linked up to

JcNCnet in the East Coast of the US) in the early 1990s, Usenet has already

aggregated 3million users spanning five continents (Baym 1995: 138). Despite its

international reputation, Netnews has never been popular in Taiwan due to the English

proficiency of local internet users, who tend to shy away from further participation once encountering the foreign-looking operation system and content. Nevertheless, the idea of running publicly accessible forums embodied by Usenet newsgroups was echoed and BBS came as a solution (Liu, 1997).

The history of local BBSs long precedes the launch of TANet. As seen in the case of MoonStar, building a BBS requires no more than a few computers, some free software, and a few enthusiastic participants. However, before being introduced into TANet, BBSs were more or less the privilege of computing engineers or people who had higher IT literacy and familiarity with English operation systems. The ecology changed in 1992, when a pioneering Chinese-interfaced BBS Formosa was launched by Sun Yat Sen University. Within more than two years, over 120 Chinese-interfaced, campus-based BBSs were built on TANet. The estimated number of users was around 200,000 at the time, some of which came from overseas. With the expansion of the national network, the use of TANet BBSs had gone beyond the academic circles and spread onto governmental institutes and other organisations. In 1997 the TANet BBSs have saturated the local internet, while more than 600 BBSs have been built among campuses. The average number of coterminous users of the first thirty of the most populated systems reached 8,000 (Huang, 1997).

The significance of TANet BBS is not confined to its popularity. As the

forerunners of Taiwanese-based asynchronous internet forums, discussion boards on

TANet BBSs have become the paradigm for local online forum practices. For many,

'BBS' is the generic term covering all sorts of forms of online discussion. For some,

online discussion is BBS.

Technically, BBS is a computerized meeting and announcement system that

allows people to carry on discussions, upload and download files, and make

announcements without the people being connected to the computer at the same time.

The diverse activities available on MoonStar are based on this very simple function.

Most TANet BBSs were first built in telnet (Telecommunication Network); some of

them stick to the early constructions despite the rise of Web-BBSs. Telnet is the

command and program getting users to login from one internet site to another; it is

text-based, of usually white print on black screen, and solely conducted by keyboards.

A TANet BBS usually provides both synchronous or asynchronous message

exchanges. The synchronous form of message exchange is known as 'chat room',

functionally similar to Internet Relay Chat (IRC). The asynchronous type of message

exchange may take the form of one-way and one-off communication (known as

announcement board), or multi-way, on-going communication concerning a shared

interest (known as discussion board).

Similar to the Usenet, TANet discussion boards house a wide range of interests.

On Usenet, subjects of discussion are sorted by 'newsgroups'; on TANet BBSs, they are sorted by 'headings', each of which leads to a discussion board. Different BBSs may host different subject headings; by and large they overlap. Most of the discussion boards on TANet BBSs are built on a permanent basis, though some of them may die away when they no longer attract visitors. Occasionally, an additional board is set up for a specific event. For instance, a board dedicated to all the medical staff fighting against the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) epidemic was launched in MoonStar on 19 May 2003, when the epidemic shocked the island.

Rules, regulations, and Netiquette

The visitor to a TANet BBS may 'walk in', or, 'lurk' any headings with a 'guest' ID, i.e. no registration is required. However, to join the discussion, it is essential to register a personal account with a reliable email address, for instance, one linked up to the servers of an academic institute or a recognisable organisation. The exchange of messages is done via emailing. An email contributing to a discussion will first go to the host system, which distributes posts, configuring them in a unified form and dispatching them to the desired discussion board. A participant can either introduce a new discussion topic, or write up *follow-ups*. A follow-up comments on the discussion

frequently by citing or quoting the utterances of previous posts, which sometimes

results in tediously-sized posts with long quotes and few new ideas. In Netnews, all

the messages/articles are *threaded*. 'Thread' is an internet jargon, referring to a series

of posts surrounding a common topic. Normally, a visitor to a Usenet newsgroup will

first encounter a long list of thread titles. To view the discussions in a 'thread', the

visitor clicks on the thread title and discovers the opening post and its follow-ups. The

configurations of TANet discussion boards are comparatively messier: the posts are

usually arranged in the order of arrival rather than subsumed under thread titles; the

relationship between the opening post and its follow-ups is indicated by the prefix

'Re:'. Sometimes the follow-ups could come up with different but related titles.

The use of emoticons, e.g. the smiley :-), and the respect to Netiquette (Net

Etiquette) among TANet BBS participants are the legacies of the Usenet. The former

is less popular in current local use. The latter, though remaining significant, is

interpreted differently. For instance, the use of '*Zhuyin Wen*' is a controversial topic.

Zhuyin Wen is a BBS terminology, referring to the alphabetic writing system used

exclusively in Taiwan for aiding learners to read the corresponding Chinese characters.

Using *Zhuyin Wen* to substitute for proper writing is popular among the local BBS

writing. For some, it is done for congeniality or playfulness; nevertheless, its

excessive use is sometimes regarded as a violation to Netiquette and widely criticized

(Su, 2003). In spite of the controversy, the use of *Zhuyin Wen*, along with other TANet

BBS practices, has later spread to Web-based asynchronous internet forums. Its

influence is seen, for instance, in the discussion of its use in the netiquette board of

www.gamer.com.tw (a popular Web-BBS specialized in discussions on online games),

which ran for nearly two years.

Discussion boards in WWW: the second wave

The year of 1998 witnessed the burgeoning of advertising-supported 'virtual

communities' (VC). Citifamily.com.tw, a forerunner in this business, started with the

provision of a platform for online alumni clubs. In offering the free service, the

company gathers revenues by selling commercial space to advertisers. Activities in a

Citifamily community typically include announcements, discussions, polls, picture

sharing and chats. The size of Citifamily grows, as new types of communities are

included; so far, it has become a general portal housing all sorts of virtual

communities. Another successful case is iClubs.com.tw, a collector of idiosyncratic,

membership-required discussion groups, accessed via mailing list or the iClubs portal

site. Tacocity.com.tw and Youthwant.com.tw are two later successful cases. The

former is specialized in geographically based local communities; the latter is

exclusively for the youth.

Apart from the professional VC portals, two of the major local portals Yam.com and Kimo.com.tw joined the market in 1999 by providing entries to Yamtopia and Kimo groups, respectively. The latter has transformed into a Taiwanese version of Yahoo! Groups after the merger of Kimo.com.tw and the Taiwanese branch of Yahoo! Facilities available in these VCs are almost identical. Amongst the others, discussion boards are the essential. The scales of discussions in these group-oriented boards vary widely due to their subjects. Whereas a Yahoo! Group devoted to some pop idol can easily gather nearly 2000 membership and over 65,000 postings a week, a group dedicated to an indigenous tribe, e.g. Lalauran in Tacocity, could merely attract 15 postings a week at its best.

As group-based discussion boards mushroomed, large entries of general discussion boards started to emerge in major commercial portals since 1999. Major players include Yam.com, Kimo Yahoo!, Hinet and eDirect, all of which cover a wide range of discussion lists. Overall, the advertising-supported discussion boards are Web-based. Compared with TANet BBS (mostly telnet-based), Web-BBSs are less student-oriented. Furthermore, they are more accessible, not only for their users friendly interface, but also for their less strict requirement for participation. Except the discussion boards of 'Membership Only' groups, most of the commercial forums are

open to lurkers, who can 'walk in' by simply clicking a button.

Governmental discussion boards turned up hand in hand with commercial virtual communities around the late 1990s. They are attached to the official sites of governmental agencies and departments, including the Presidential Office, aiming for public deliberation of policies and public affairs. In comparison with TANet BBS and commercial discussion boards, governmental discussion boards (GDBs), save a few exceptions, seem to be much less lustrous. For instance, the general discussion board on public affairs of the E-Government Entry has attracted little engagement despite the extensive list of topics. In the entire month of November 2003, there were only 23 new threads, the busiest of which had gathered merely 9 postings. Despite so, amongst GDBs there are some successful cases, which, to the researcher's surprise, are mostly run by the local governments of some rural counties. The Citizen Forum in the official site of capital city Taipei gathered over 150 new threads in November 2003; the busiest one held 25 postings. This is not to be compared to the case of its less significant neighbour Taoyuan county: the local GDBs were loaded with nearly 1000 new threads in the September-November 2003 archive; one of the busiest threads gathered over 300 postings, according to the search on 29 November 2003.

The cause of the cold response to E-Government discussion boards may need a further investigation. However, it will be a mistake to interpret the light traffic as a

lack of interest in discussing nationwide affairs. On the contrary, the most vigorous

debates in the Taiwanese-based internet forums are predominantly concerned with

domestic politics and national policies. They scatter in the forums built on TANet

BBSs, commercial portals, independent BBSs, and the online outlets of traditional

media. The popularity of mainstream-media-affiliated forums suggests the

relationship between online discourse and mainstream discourses. The implication of

this relationship is one of the project's major tasks and will be extensively explored in

the following chapters.

The traffic of media-run forums mainly concentrate on three electronic

newspapers: ChinaTimes.com, udn.com, and Ettoday. The former two belong to two

major newspapers, the China Times and the United Daily News, while Ettoday is an

investment of the media mogul Easter Group, owning eight cable television channels.

News Discussion (*hsin-wen-tui-tan*) and Let's Talk (*you-hua-chiu-shuo*) are

the two forums affiliated to ChinaTimes.com. News Discussion is a lightly moderated

forum, where people create new threads liberally. The topics are mostly political or

socio-cultural, though not necessarily concerning recent news events. Some

well-participated threads in the forum have run over years. The thread entitled 'On the

Chinese political culture' is one example. It was initiated in 6 November 2002, when

Old Fellow posted a series of articles on the genealogy of Chinese political culture.

His critical views won him a good size of readership and follow-ups. Up to 12 December 2003, when the thread collected its last follow-up, it attracted 2756 postings and 31,749 page views in total. Let's Talk, in comparison, is designed for soliciting immediate responses to recent controversial news events. Hot debates between the regulars of the forum are common; strong stances are rarely given up. Similar scenarios occur in the public forums on Ettoday.com and udn.com. Confrontations between the participants of the former concentrate on the discussions of political issues, in particular those concerning national identities. A thread entitled 'I am Taiwanese' in the forum ended up collecting 6858 follow-ups between 21 June 2003 and 25 November 2003. As the discussion of the 'Taiwanese' thread went on vigorously, another thread entitled 'I am Chinese', initiated on 5 August 2003 as a counter force, collected up to 2731 postings till 25 November 2003.

The udn.com public forums are more similar to Let's Talk. The discussions are thematised and threaded, of direct links to the newspaper's reports. Participation in these forums is highly active. A report on Chinese military exercise in October 2003 successfully evoked such an excitement among the discussants that the thread on the event and relevant issues attracted 1603 posts in a month. In comparison with other Taiwanese-based forums, the udn.com public forums more likely house voices of PRC participants. This is probably caused by the political stance of the United Daily

News, which is known for the affinity for Chinese Nationalism. The phenomenon exemplifies cross-strait, if not global, grassroots interactions facilitated by the internet. This tendency is further discussed in the following pages.

Towards a global participation

Connections between TANet BBSs have been built since 1992, when the forums first emerged (Huang, 1997). Via the connections, posts originating from individual BBSs are selectively transferred from one system to another. Technically the transference is done via news servers, which work as gateways transporting newsfeeds from the upstream systems to the downstream. Consequently a locally contributed posting may end up being distributed globally. The acts of sharing resources ultimately led to the formation of tw.bbs.* newsgroups, known as the Taiwanese version of Newsgroups.

According to the 1998-published [FAQ] about tw.bbs.* newsgroups, the Taiwanese-based newsgroups have spread over more than ten countries, while the readership amounts to hundreds of thousands. So far there are more than 200 active tw.bbs.* newsgroups, each of them devoted a particular social interest. Tw.bbs.* newsgroups are public boards supported by the newsfeeds of allied TANet BBSs and other bulletin board systems. They can be accessed via either of the individual

systems, or via a few commercial portals such as Yam.com and Openfind.com. Messages posted to the allied discussion boards will be automatically transferred to the global outlets, sorted by a multiplicity of interests. For example, tw.bbs.soc.politics is the global board dedicated to politics and tw.bbs.soc.motss is one dedicated to homosexuality. The classificatory and naming systems are modelled on Usenet Newsgroups. This is best exemplified by the naming of the aforementioned homosexual forum, in which the major elements of its name, 'soc.motss', referring to 'Members of the Same Sex', is actually a reproduction of the Usenet precursor soc.motss.

Although sharing a common language, PRC discussants seldom participate the Taiwan-based forums. Exceptions, as indicated, appear in udn.com forums, where viewpoints from PRC participants are not uncommon. Some PRC participants even set up group-based forums aimed at cross-strait participation on the platform provided by udn.com. The forum entitled 'On the future of China', built by a resident in north China is a recent example. The discussion board dedicated to 'Mainland' Chinese users in ETtoday.com, dating back to 2002, is another Taiwan-based forum where interactions between PRC and ROC participants take place.

In contrast with the localness of domestic forums, the cyberspace created by international brands is saturated with transnational participation. The discussion

boards on Yahoo! Chinese (already closed down in 2005) are tailor-made for Chinese users in North America; the origins of participants range from China, Taiwan, HK, Malaysia, Singapore, to, occasionally, Japan, as how the participants identify themselves. Soc.culture.taiwan is an active English-written, overseas-Taiwanese-based Usenet newsgroup, dating back to September 1989. Its participants are mainly but not limited to Taiwanese students at Northern American universities. Participants identifying themselves as overseas Taiwanese from other corners of the world (e.g. London), overseas Chinese, Americans, or foreigners in Taiwan also frequent the forum. The issues commonly under discussion in the forum include Taiwanese politics, the PRC-ROC relationship, American politics, and ethnic relationships in North America. The Yahoo! Chinese discussion boards and soc.culture.taiwan exemplify the ways in which the internet facilitate trans-national interactions in virtual 'diasporas'; tw.bbs.* newsgroups, in comparison, exemplifies a home-based, globally accessible place, via which the sense of proximity to home generates.

Overall the Taiwan-based/Taiwanese-based forums share some universal features of asynchronous forums (represented by Usenet newsgroups) in the production format of messages and the basic rules of interactions. The phenomena, e.g. the preference for self-organising, grassroots-oriented BBSs, or, the 'virtual'

cross-strait relationships, however, are context specific. In next chapter, the gaze

will be turned to the identity constructing elements of the contextualised

internet-forum practices, while the analytic tools that underpin the analysis will be

spelt out along the discussion.

Chapter 5

The internet forum as identity constructing space

Chapter 2 distinguishes the theoretical framework of the research project, in which three dimensions of collective identity construction are spelt out. A further discussion of the methodological choice is provided in Chapter 3. This chapter, as noted in the introduction chapter, aims to map out the cultural patterning of the local internet-forum performance with regard to the various dimensions of collective identity construction, and to provide an exegesis of the analytic toolkit deployed in the case study. To begin with, the chapter defines the Taiwanese-based internet forums as 'speech communities'. The focus is then narrowed down to the patterning of actual communicative encounters taking place in these spaces, which are understood in the category of communicative event. This is followed by an analysis of the participation frameworks and interaction patterns of online speech practices, referring to the ideas of 'footing' and 'turn-taking', respectively. Finally, the chapter explores the concepts of speech acts, examining the ways in which identity negotiation and performance are embodied in specific words and phrases.

Internet forums as speech communities

A speech community by its loose definition, as suggested by Boomfield, is 'a group of people who interact by means of speech' (quoted in Hudson, 1980:26); or, as more strictly defined, it is 'any human aggregate characterised by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs' (Gumperz, 1972: 219), or 'a community sharing knowledge of rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech' (Hymes, 1977: 51).

A typical Taiwanese-based asynchronous internet forum fits in the category in many ways: it usually consists of regular participants, who interact by means of written texts. Despite the indefinite membership, regulars tend to have frequent interactions and share some rules of speech. It is also the case that the forum participants share certain 'background knowledge', or, in Fairclough's term, *members' resources*, which involve the linguistic, factual and ideological elements generally known by the members of a speech community, allowing its membership to interpret the utterances and acts produced in a speech event or other forms of text (Fairclough, 2001: 9, 118). The background knowledge/members' resources may include shared socio-cultural understandings, familiarity with the issue and history of discussion, and familiarity with group-specific language culture that may differ among individuals.

I started with my fieldwork as a 'newbie', or, *hsin-shou* (新手) in Chinese, i.e.,

a new participant visiting a discussion board or BBS with a 'blank mind'. Normally a

newbie may be informed of the cultural norms of a forum by reading the 'Guidelines

for *hsin-shou*', telling you what to do and what not to do, usually available in every

TANet BBS forum. However, such guides cannot equip a newbie with the members'

resources immediately. A discussion board of certain history would have developed

some lexical features or vocabularies for specific situations, or, in a linguistic

terminology, its own *register* (Johnstone, 2002: 147). On Soc.motss.tw, the global gay

board, a '*ke-ke*' (哥哥, older brother) means a gay man who plays the 'masculine' role

and, usually, gives anal sex. In contrast, a '*ti-ti*' (弟弟, younger brother) refers to a

gay man who plays the 'feminine' role in a homosexual relationship and, usually, is

given anal sex. Another example is the use of the alphabet C or CC to refer to 'sissy'.

For most of the time, there is no instant way of gaining one's communicative

competence as such. Usually the puzzles would only be solved when a humble newbie

posted queries and had them replied to.   Sometimes, the 'on-board' jargons are less

mysterious when there are discernable traces of 'off-board' discourses. A fine example

is the common use of the term 'uni-pig' (*tung-chu* 統豬), a local internet jargon

emanating from political forums. The term is residual of the early ethnic conflicts,

when a Taiwanese-born settler would resentfully name a Chinese-born settler 'pig'. It

would, therefore, possible for whoever knows the history to associate 'uni-pig' with a unification supporter, in particular one from the post-war settlers' community. In this case, it is the Taiwanese members' resources that facilitate the interpretation of the internet jargon.

Despite the idiosyncrasies, a part of the language subcultures in the Taiwanese-based forums are universal. A post created locally may easily travel around via individual forwarding or collective message exchanging between systems. The discussions on 'tai-ke' (台客, Taiwanese bloke), a sub-cultural terminology in the 1970s, were initiated in an entertainment board and ended up spreading globally. Among them was a post providing a checklist for discerning tai-ke. During my fieldwork I have spotted the post everywhere, from political boards to joke boards, to name only a few. The aftermath of the discussions is the broad use of the term across local forums, though the referents have multiplied by individual interpretations. While the term was initially adopted to describe a particular fashion style among working-class youngsters from the 'native Taiwanese' community, it is sometimes invested with more negative meanings. For instance, an article entitled 'The analysis of tai-ke' defines tai-ke as self-important airheads, showing off truly poor taste (20/02/2003, tw.bbs.talk.joke). Another factor of the universal language subculture is the 'circular migration' of the participants, which is commonplace among Taiwanese

internet forum goers. It is not uncommon to see participants seeking for information about other discussion boards or sharing experiences of adventures in different forums. It seems logical to visualize the movement of online 'backpackers' who jump from one location to another, especially when I have indeed a few times spotted familiar nicknames travelling across different forums. Apart from the two factors, the most powerful one is perhaps the mechanism of tw.bbs.newsgroups, which enables one locally produced message to be circulated globally (see relevant discussion in Chapter 4).

The language culture manifests one of the cultural facets of Taiwan-based internet forums. Given the mobility of messages and participants, given the connectivity between each other, these forums (especially the TANet-based) as an ensemble are 'speech communities' that, as will be examined in the following pages, co-construct a shared cultural patterning in many aspects. As a whole, local internet forums are embedded within a common socio-cultural structure, surrounded by the same grand discourses and societal events. Trans-forum discussions of an identical topic commonly occur. It is particularly true when major events arise. A recent instance is the discussions about the 2004 presidential election in Taiwan. The current president Chen won re-election by the slightest of margins the day after surviving an assassination attempt. His opponent Lien soon demanded a recount and alleged that

the assassination was a fake staged to boost popular sympathy. The next few days saw

online debates flooding various headings across different forums. In one of my major

ethnography sites, tw.bbs.soc.politics, the traffic volume increased from an average of

15,000 posts to more than 40,000 ones in the one-and-half-month archive. In

tw.bbs.soc.motss, the total number of posts during the same period of time increased

to more than 25,000, two thirds more than usual. Interestingly, similar phenomena

were seen in some seemingly unlikely sites, such as tw.bbs.entertainment.tv, where

active discussions concerning the incident took place among gossips about soap

operas and music videos.

Discussion threads as communicative events

An asynchronous internet forum dedicated to certain social interest may contain

dozens to thousands of threads. A thread comes into being once a post with a new title

arrives at a forum; it comes to the end when it fails to attract new posts, awaiting

being 'revived' whenever a new follow-up comes up. Usually a dead thread will be

cleared when the archival space is full. An exception is the posts of tw.bbs. *

newsgroups, which have been entirely archived since 1994 by Openfind.com, known

as the warehouse of the newsgroup system.

A new thread usually comes up contingently and spontaneously when a participant decides to make the first move. Occasionally, especially in the talk boards attached to online media outlets or commercial portals, thread topics are pre-designed, either by system operators or editors. The discussion board 'Let's Talk' (*You-hua-chiu-shuo*) at ChinaTimes.com is a typical case, where daily topics are given, based on current news events. In a guided discussion off-track speech is normally not tolerated. Interestingly enough, as I have observed, the reproachful voices usually come from the participants, rarely from the moderators. Among Taiwan-based forums, guided discussions are options. They function more as boosters of traffic loads while inviting visitors' engagement on public issues. For those who are not interested, there is always somewhere else to start their own threads in the same system.

Be it spontaneous or pre-designed, a discussion thread is a *communicative event*: it consists of messages, topics, speakers, and interactions, being situated in a particular communicative context, in which the participants share some general purposes, use the same language variety, and maintain the same rules for interaction (Saville-Troike, 1989: 27). Once an opening post appears, a communicative event begins. A follow-up is an individual (positive or negative) reaction to the previous post(s). It may invite more follow-ups, either from the sender(s) of previous posts or

new participants who just join the discussion. A follow-up is supposed to be interactive, though not necessarily dialogic. From time to time we see messages coming up in the mood for assertions without any intention to discuss about the assertions. Regular Mr X of 'Let's Talk' was a pro-DPP hard-liner who had been posting his political statements on that discussion board. His messages were basically repetitions, despite the daily renewal of the thread topic. They were never real 'follow-ups' in the sense of addressing preceding posts and mostly did not even correspond to the thread topic. In response to other participants' reproaches he gave the answer 'this is the way I am' and refused to make any change. A prolonged thread is often a product of the contributions of several, or, not less commonly, a couple of persistent participants. Fang's & Wang's survey on local internet-forum practices confirms my observation that most of the traffic on discussion boards goes to the discussions of a few hot issues, which are usually the works of a few devotees. An example provided in the survey is a thread entitled 'Give me the reason for unification' originating from a university-affiliated political forum. The thread attracted 239 posts in a month; nearly half of the posts were contributed by four major participants, one of which contributed 51 posts (Fang & Wang, 1998).

The time span of a communicative event in a Taiwan-based asynchronous internet forum may last from days to years. A follow-up to a preceding post may

come up as soon as in a couple of minutes, which is often the case in hot debates on current affairs. Or, it may appear years after the thread is 'dead', when someone, say, an archive researcher, occasionally discovers the thread and brings it back to life. It took me literally less than a second to see my first post on tw.bbs.soc.politics emerging on the top of thread list; however, not until a few hours later did I see the first follow-up of my post. Theoretically, a discussion thread, as a communicative event, can be indefinitely extended, so long as it can attract new follow-ups. Threads dealing with controversial issues can last for years. The thread on Taiwanese Independence on the political board at Yahoo! Chinese had come into existence since 2001 and survived up to 31 March 2005 when I last visited the thread. Most of the contributions came from a few devoted regulars. They had debated the issue from various perspectives, ranging from Taiwan's history, culture, origin, and political system to its status in international society, though the discussion went on and off, as the regulars were not always engaged.

The intertextual context of internet-forum performance

Internet-forum practices do not exist in a social vacuum. As it is commonly claimed that no one lives online only, internet forums are one of the locales in everyday life.

Internet-forum practices take place along with other daily activities and are constantly

intertwined with them; they are, therefore, embedded in various social discourses and

ideologies. This phenomenon suggests that the significance of internet-forum

messages, to adopt Fairclough, should be interpreted in their 'intertextual context'

(Fairclough, 2001: 127-9). The emphasis on the context of language use, as discussed

in Chapter 3, lies at the heart of pragmatics. The concept of intertexuality, first

proposed by Kristeva (1986: 111), looks at the way in which one text takes on

meaning in its *dialogic* relation to other texts. The focus is placed upon the

articulation of meanings and the formation of discourses within a set of related texts.

The significance of context in the interpretation of internet-forum messages

may be best understood in actual instances. The term 'the Yellow Peril' (*huang-huo*,黃

禍), which dates back to the thirteenth century when the Mongolians conquered the

West, has been picked up by Taiwanese online participants in various contexts to

express anti-Chinese sentiments. The recent revival of the term came with the

publishing of the banned Chinese book 'The Yellow Peril' in 1991, in which novelist

Wang Lixiong adopts the symbolism for his critique of contemporary Chinese politics.

As the term first coined by the West in the collective fear for 'the yellow', it is

particularly targeted at China in current use. The allegation of 'the Yellow Peril'

comes up when the discussion turns to the threat of China, be it the rampant increase

of illegal Chinese immigration to the West, the shadow it has cast on the regional safety, or its competition in the international economy. During the SARS crisis in 2003, the discourse of 'the new Yellow Peril' arose along with the accusation that China was solely responsible for spreading the disease, as well as with the recurrence of stereotyping Chinese people as backward and unhygienic.

Interestingly enough, the same term may also be taken in reference to something entirely unrelated. Traditionally the word 'yellow' could mean 'pornographic' in Chinese. 'The Yellow Peril' in this context is related to the social fear of the mass circulation of pornography. Therefore, to talk about 'the Yellow Peril' in a discussion thread regarding online pornography will have nothing to do with China; likewise, the same term would appear in a thread on SARS with no relation to pornography. The discourse of 'the Yellow Peril' exemplifies the interrelation between online speech and the external world, in which the former tend to be inspired by social events and embedded within current beliefs. It also tells us about the way in which the symbolism of metaphors may subtly shift or entirely change in contexts. At times, internet-forum participants are the force that initiates the changes.

Another case in point is the meaning reconstruction of the term 'Chi-na' (支那). Originally the word is a Japanese term (pronounced as Shi-na in Japanese) for naming the Chinese empire. It was turned into a negative term in the late nineteenth

century, when the Japanese right-wing militants started to refer to '*Chi-na*' as a declining, old power that no longer merited any respect in every sense. The term is no longer in use in official language since WWII for its negative implication, though the residue of the discriminating term remains among the current Japanese right-wing forces (Wikipedia Japan, 2005). Naming China '*Chi-na*' therefore can be as insulting as naming the black 'Nigger' in contemporary English. The negative symbolism is gladly taken by pro-independent discussants who bring the historical term into the context of current anti-Chinese-Nationalist or anti-Chinese sentiment. Dysphemisms such as *Chi-na-jen* (支那人, China man), *Chi-na-mei* (支那妹, China woman), or simply *Chi-jen* (支人, China people) have been invented and widely adopted in online discussions across various forums. By contrast, they are rarely heard or seen in face-to-face conversations and mainstream media discourse – too aggressive in the first case, and too political incorrect in the second. However, outside the context, *Chi-na* is simply a historical term rather than a resentful dysphemism.

To encode and decode the hidden meanings of the context-specific terms circulated in the local internet forum requires some prior knowledge, or, as suggested, some members' resources. The prior understanding of the contextualised discourse would facilitate the generation of 'communicative presumptions', the mutual beliefs between the hearer and the speaker about the intention of some utterance (Bach &

Harnish, 1982:12). In other words, the various contexts created inside or outside local internet forums are implicated in the meaning construction/interpretation of particular actions, e.g. calling China 'the Yellow Peril' or *Chi-na*. This will be further examined in Chapter 7, in which the performativity of swearwords is under analysis.

Owing to the asynchronous nature of communication, internet-forum discussants are allowed time for reflecting and revising their previous arguments. To defend their positions, discussants tend to draw on external resources, ranging from mainstream or alternative (usually online only) media discourses, academic works, online articles, and messages originating from other discussion threads. A discussant may bring in supportive material by reformulating pre-existing speeches; s/he may also use editing tools to cut and paste, or to forward messages, or to insert a 'hyperlink' in the text. Among these common internet-forum practices, cutting-and-pasting is sometimes taken as a strategy to create instant and sizable presence in a thread. The aforementioned 'Mr X' in 'Let's Talk' is one of the experts. I have seen him pasting a series of similar articles in his posts, as well as bombarding the thread with an identical press cutting. Despite the lack of original ideas, press/article cutting can be constructive. On a community-oriented discussion board or in such a newsgroup, it is a way of sharing resources and building up the community's own database. I was once hunting for posts on Gay Pride in

tw.bbs.soc.motss and accidentally discovered a number of valuable news cuttings, which did facilitate my understanding of that event.

However it is done, the act of drawing on external resources connects a discussion board text with others. When the participants cut, paste, forward an article, or insert a web site address, they are building *visible* intersections of the texts they are currently producing and the external discourses they make connections with. When they digest references, reformulate others' arguments into their own, or simply adopt a few lines from the books at hand, they are *embedding* their speech within the matrix of pre-existing texts. Consequently, arguments or sets of ideas flow from one text to another when *articulated* via the making of new discourse.

Usually, the most available and preferable sources come from the online outlets of mainstream media, e.g. ChinaTimes.com and udn.com. Although online forums are argued to be alternative media, the influences of mainstream discourses seem prevalent for their constant provision of topics, raw materials and terminology for online forums. This is seen in the 'pan-blue/pan-green' (also known as the blue camp/the green camp) confrontations that saturate political discussions. In Taiwanese political discourses, the term 'pan-blue' signifies the political camp consisting of the former ruling party KMT and its ally The People First Party (PFP), in reference to the blue ground of the party flag of KMT. Likewise, 'pan-green' is named after the

ground colour of the flag of the current ruling party Democratic Progressive Party

(DPP) that, along with its ally Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU), constitutes the

'pan-green' political camp. The two labels – the 'pan-blue' and the 'pan-green' – first

appeared in mainstream newspapers in 2000 and 2001, when the PFP and TSU were

established, respectively. The terms were soon adopted and popularised in the local

online forums. The first appearance of the term 'pan-blue' in tw.bbs* newsgroups

dates back to October 2000, while the term 'pan-green' March 2001. They have

become part of local-forum vocabulary after years: in the three-month archives since

April 2005, the terms 'pan-blue' and 'pan-green' appear in 30,457 and 11,978 posts,

respectively, from different tw.bbs * newsgroups.

Despite the dependence on mainstream discourses, alleging that online speech

is simply a reproduction may not be correct. On the contrary, online speech proves

to be vigorous in deconstructing and rearticulating new meanings, in particular at a

sub-cultural level. The aforementioned discourse of '*tai-ke*' is an interesting example.

The term '*tai-ke*', roughly takes the meaning of Taiwanese-born bloke, used to be

circulated as a negative term among the younger generation of the post-war settlers'

community in the 1970s, referring to Taiwanese youngsters as a lower class of beings.

It became a topic of online discussion not long ago after being adopted to describe

'down-market' pop singers by two young Taiwanese presenters (from the post-war

settlers' community) of a popular television programme. The discussions split into different directions. Due to their ethnic background, the two presenters became the common enemy of some Taiwanese-born discussants, as the term aroused the historical memory of the earlier and still residual discrimination in which the post-war settlers' community despised the native Taiwanese as a lower class of beings. In revenge, some tried to spread the term '*Chi-ke*' (支客, as one of the *Chi-* words), aimed at stereotyping the post-war settlers' community. Some discussants dropped the antagonism and welcomed it as a fresh term for cheap popular music products and their performers. Some spread it as in jokes. Some appropriated it as a synonym of working-class youngsters who tend to share a certain style of clothing, be on their noisy scooters, and, possibly, admire *tai-ke* musicians. Some, perhaps the most creative, subverted the negative old meaning and related it to the positive image of native Taiwanese men in recent soaps and other forms of popular programmes. They may have humble looks but they also are decent and hard working, pleasant and optimistic. Various checklists for qualifying *tai*-ke have been developed during the widely spread and prolonged discussions, though no conclusion or agreement has ever been reached. The discussants seemed happy enough in freely articulating the idea of *tai-ke* with other discourses. To speak in a Derridian term, the meaning is always deferred, as it is being endlessly deconstructed and rearticulated (Derrida, 1978; see

Chapter 2 for more discussion). In the *tai-ke* case, the power of deconstruction and reconstruction comes from bottom up, i.e., it is the grassroots who are involved in the word play.

Footings: the multiple faces of internet-forum participants

An online forum is saturated with various stances, positions, social alignments, and projected selves – or, in a word, *footings*, as Goffman defines (Goffman, 1981: 128). Apart from the posts hunting for information or commercial interests (e.g. adverts), online participations by and large take place with the projection of personal opinions. They are co-constructions of 'addressing selves', who animate their current desire, belief, perception or intention (Goffman, 1981: 147).

The idea of footing is developed as a conceptual category by Goffman to explore the diversity of the linguistic concept 'speaker', with regard to the role the speaker is playing in a conversational encounter. A footing is usually completed though the speaker's utterances via the adoption of particular codes, such as words, terms, language variables, or ways of speaking. The footing of a speaker during a conversational encounter is not necessarily permanent. It may shift at different points along with the participant's switching between codes or adopting a new sound marker,

e.g. tone quality, rhythm, volume, pitch or stress (Goffman, 1981: 126-8). The former language technique is generally known as 'code-switching' (Johnstone, 2002: 140, 214).

The footing of an addressing self may tell the way in which the speaker engages him/herself in his/her speech, differing in the degree of his/her belief in the truth of the speech. This is exactly the logic that underpins Goffman's categorisation of 'animator', 'author' and 'principal'. A speaker who does not necessarily speak his or her own words (e.g. a priest) is an 'animator', or a 'narrator'; a speaker who expresses his/her own feelings and words is an 'author'; a 'principal', in comparison, is a speaker who tells his/her beliefs, establishes his/her position in his/her words, or, commits him/herself to his/her words (Goffman, 1981: 144-5). The diversity of internet-forum participants is, of course, not to be exhausted by the categorisation. When the issue under discussion comes to a controversial one, the participants either enter verbal fights or argumentations, both of which are present in the local online forums, though the former is more commonly spotted. The devotees of online confrontations are usually those who are committed to their words of beliefs, i.e. principals. A principal becomes a *missionary*, as I will name it, when s/he persistently advocates a specific agenda. Regular Taiwan Folk in the political board of Yahoo! Chinese was known for his (or her?) assertions of an independent Taiwan. S/he

constantly debated with pro-China participants and argued about Taiwan's de facto

independence from every sort of perspective. Be the topic concerned with the

independence issue or not, whenever Taiwan Folk appeared in a discussion, s/he came

with the same agenda. Her/his strong political stance is subjected to no negotiation

even when encountering collective slashes from her/his opponents.

Sometimes, an addressing self becomes, in my term, an *appropriator* when

seeking for evidence to substantiate one's argument. The aforementioned Mr X in

Let's Talk is an example. He cuts and pastes others' publications, mostly news reports,

instead of producing his own speech to imply his stance in various discussions. An

appropriator is a masked addressing self who presents one's position via citing the

voice of an 'objective third party'. To appropriate others' publications or speech is

therefore an act of showing 'evidence', an act of demonstrating the legitimacy of

one's stance and opinions in current or previous utterances: 'this is not my personal

opinion only; this is also how the (reliable) others think about it'. This type of practice

is commonly spotted when the participant endeavours to prove the validity of his/her

argument.

When an online communicative event develops into an argumentation, a new

set of footings also arises. An argumentation occurs when communicators enter a

give-and-take aimed at dispelling doubts so that a mutual understanding can be

reached (Habermas, 1981: 17-18). In Taiwanese-based forums, this process tends to take place between participants who show willingness to modify their stances towards the subject at issue. It begins when a participant questions the validity of previous claims made in another participant's utterances and calls for the redemption or vindication of the claims. A prolonged online discussion is usually built up in the negotiations between a few, or, frequently, two major contributors to the thread. The negotiations about a point at issue form, to adopt Harré & van Langenhove (1991: 396), a major 'storyline' in the communicative event. A long thread may contain more than one storyline. The participants who build up a storyline, given their engagement in defining the orientation of the negotiations, are, as I will term it, *dominating negotiators*; a participant who endorses or collaborates other participants on developing an idea/position of another negotiator is a *collaborator*; a participant who endeavours to mediate controversies or bring the argumentation back on track is a *mediator*. The footings of negotiators are changeable. A dominating negotiator may shift to a collaborator when engaging in the aforementioned collaborating moves. A collaborator may become a dominating negotiator, when s/he starts a new storyline, or when s/he takes over the place of a dominating negotiator who has permanently or temporarily quitted the event. A mediator may turn him/herself into a dominating negotiator, when s/he is not contented with the outcome of his/her mediation. In a

1995 MOTSS discussion (in tw.bbs.soc.motss) on the relation between sexual

liberation and erotic liberation, participant Fine, who initially joined the event as a

mediator, turned herself into a dominating negotiator by starting a new debate after

her/his effort of mediation was disregarded.

The process of argumentation may involve the presentation of footings based

on one's social/collective identity. It is particularly the case when it comes to a

long-term debate, in which the participants, especially the hardliners, are keen, or,

sometimes, forced to make explicit their identities or backgrounds to legitimate their

stances in the debate. For instance, Angel, who presented him as a Chinese Unionist

in the political board of Yahoo! Chinese, was driven to disclose his/her

Chinese-immigrant-in-the-US identity after s/he was asked to provide the ground for

his/her pro-unification speech. In this case, the legitimacy of his/her footing – a

Chinese Unionist – exists in his/her self-claimed Chinese origin and his/her

knowledge of the historical relationship between Taiwan and China.

Online interaction as turn-taking

The idea of action-oriented negotiation and discursive articulation lie at the hearts of

Melucci's and Laclau's & Mouffe's identity approaches, respectively. Both ideas, as

the case study exemplifies, can be realised in internet-forum interactions.

Interpersonal interactions in internet forums take the form of follow-up writing, which, as suggested in Chapter 3, can be understood as turn-taking in a conversational encounter. Online negotiations are accomplished via turn-taking-like exchanges between participants. Articulation, as to be further examined in the following chapters, may, although not necessarily, emerge in a similar process.

Utterances produced in different turns (or follow-ups) in an online communicative event are to some extent *related*. This relatedness, as Schegloff & Sacks have indicated, is *achieved*. The achieved relatedness in two adjacent utterances (produced by different speakers) is what makes the utterances qualified as 'adjacent pairs', such as 'question-answer', 'offer-acceptance/refusal' and 'greeting-greeting' (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973: 295-6). The 'relatedness' between an adjacent pair is manifested in 'next position' – the position made available by a current speaker (who produces the first pair part of the adjacent pair) for whoever intervenes as the immediately following speaker to adopt in his/her utterance (i.e. the second pair part) (Sacks, 1992, Vol. II. 555). In asynchronous internet forums, the related, or, in my term, dialogic utterances are not always sequentially adjacent. Frequently, the relatedness or dialogic relationship between utterances in internet-forum messages is achieved when a participant cites/quotes a prior utterance and makes his/her comment on or other types of responses to the utterance. When a participant creates the

relatedness between his/her utterance and a prior one in this manner, s/he is taking the

'next position' oriented to by the prior utterance via, again, in Sacks's term, the

technique of 'sequential positioning' (Sacks, 1992, Vol. II. 555-8). In the meanwhile,

s/he is creating a 'next position' for whoever is willing to take the floor. For instance,

in contesting the validity of a previous utterance of another participant, s/he is

assigning his/her co-participant a speech position to redeem or vindicate the utterance

under contest.

When a 'next position' is directed at a particular individual or group, it is

aimed at, to adopt Goffman (1981: 133), an 'addressed recipient'. In an I/you

conversation or us/them confrontation, the identity of the addressed recipient is

unambiguous, though its presence in the ongoing communicative event is not

necessarily ensured. For instance, in local online nationalist discourse, a

pro-independent participant may speak of 'they the pro-unification', while none of

'them' is present in the discussion thread when the utterance is made. Nonetheless, in

addressing a specific social group, one is giving floor to its membership, who may

join the communicative event at any moment. An 'us' discourse may end up a

collective monologue in the absence of the addressed Other. Such is often the case in

MOTSS boards, where 'the heterosexuals' are constantly addressed (as the Other of

the homosexuals), while they have little presence in these spaces.

The footings and speech positions as defined in the above constitute the participation and interaction framework of a communicative event in the internet forum. Their implications in identity construction will be further discussed in Chapter 6 & 7 along with the case analyses. The following pages look into the functional aspects of online utterances, turning to speech act theories (as outlined in Chapter 3), which facilitate my analysis of online discourse in reference to identity negotiation and identity performance, respectively.

Speech acts in identity negotiation

As indicated in Chapter 2, collective identity in the negotiated dimension is concerned with the shared definition of the 'orientations' of social actions, as well as the 'opportunities and constraints' of the field in which the actions take place. This shared definition, according to Melucci, cannot be pre-given, but constructed through 'negotiated interactions' between the core activists of the movement (Melucci, 1989 & 1988). In Melucci's project, the 'negotiated interactions' take place in 'public spaces' – the decision-making centres of social movements. In the age of the internet, as my case study argues, the level of identity negotiation is devolved to 'grassroots' members with whom a social movement is concerned.

The construction of collective identity in this vein is underpinned by the way in which the negotiators mutually understand the given environment, i.e. the opportunities and constraints concerning the social activism. To reach such a mutual understanding, an identity-oriented negotiation entails, to adopt Habermas, the making of *truth claims*. Truth claims in Habermas's sense refers to validity claims that convey propositional contents and experiential presuppositions in relation to external reality, carried by *constatives* (Habermas 1979: 58 & 68). Truth claims are aimed at the mutual acknowledgement of certain social facts (the given environment of the activism). To argue about a feasible public identity for gay activism, for instance, one must make claims about some social reality, which one regards as relevant to the feasibility of the identity. In Taiwanese-based online forums, argumentations regarding gay identities are primarily concerned about the validity of truth claims about the social acceptance of an identity project, while those regarding national identity are concerned about the validity of truth claims about the political reality to which Taiwanese Nationalism has to face up. The process of identity negotiation in either case is first and foremost one that is constituted by the participants' actions questioning or vindicating the truth claims, ultimately aimed at a consensus on the identity issue.

Another type of Habermasian validity claim that is crucial to identity

negotiation is *truthfulness/sincerity claims*. Truthfulness claims are validity claims that disclose the sincerity and the subjectivity of the speaker in communicating, carried by *expressives* or *avowals* (Habermas, 1979: 58 & 68). This type of validity claims are usually made when negotiators define their footings as the collective actors in Melucci's sense (Melucci, 1988 & 1989), who are concerned about the feasibility of the identity-oriented project at issue. Truthfulness claims also appear when negotiators aim to convince their co-participants of their willingness to listen to others' opinions, which is common in political discussions where the rooted antagonism between the pro-independence and the pro-unification camps sometimes prevents the discussants from trusting in each other's good intentions.

Speech acts as identity performance

A typical asynchronous internet forum consists of the nickname of the post creator, the message, and, frequently but not necessarily, the creator's signature at the end of the message. The basic format of an internet-forum post indicates the existence of a speaker behind the speech, or, a doer behind the deed; that is, internet-forum discourse is always the performance of a living individual, engaged in a number of 'identities'.

Unlike the face-to-face interaction, online speakers seem to enjoy the freedom of deciding who they want themselves to be. This impression comes from their free choice and change of IDs, or, nicknames, which are also the basis of the popular discourse of 'identity play' on the internet. In creating a nickname, a speaker is also creating an identity that may, or may not, represent the state of one's true being. True or fake, it is a way to provisionally define oneself in a space. Inasmuch as a nickname may come up in every sort of possibility, it may be arbitrary to pin down its implication, in particular when there is no obvious sign of its relation to the discussion topic, though some nicknames do leave traces for further interpretations. In the context of MOTSS boards, a nickname consisting of the term 'queer' seems to reveal more about the speaker's self-identification, compared with a less suggestive nickname such as 'Wind'(風 *fung*), 'Treasure Island' (金銀島 *chin-yin-dou*), or, 'July' (七月 *chi-yue*). Likewise, a nickname 'All the Chinese are the Yellow Peril' (中國人都是黃禍 *Chung-kou-jen-dou-shih-huang-huo*) taken by a participant of a political discussion board is a fairly strong hint of his/her antagonism against China (See previous discussion of the meanings of the 'Yellow Peril').

In taking a suggestive nickname a participant is to some extent making explicit whom s/he consider her/himself to be in the particular time and space, which can be further asserted in the participant's signature. A typical signature file is usually

made of plain text. It can be as short as a few words or as long as several lines. Similar to the case of nicknames, some signatures are more 'performative', in the sense of Butler ([1990] 1999) and Goffman ([1969] 1990), than the others. For instance, a signature consists of one's assertion of Taiwanese independence unmistakably expresses the speaker's national identity; in contrast, a signature citing a romantic poem seems to work less explicitly in terms of identity performance.

A nickname creates the first impression of the *subject position* the speech performer takes up during the course of participation; a signature serves to reaffirm the impression. A 'subject position' in the poststructural discourse is the vantage point that an individual embeds him/herself within in building his/her subjectivity as well as in relation to the external world. An individual may hold a number of subject positions in accordance with the social location/situation s/he is involved in (Davies & Harré, 1990; also see Chapter 2 for relevant discussions). In Taiwanese-based forums, the performance of a subject position is sometimes done in an explicit way. The aforementioned nickname 'queer' is an explicit gesture *positioning* oneself as a sexual subject. Despite the multiplicity of subject positions, more than once I found a familiar nickname (with or without the same signature) reappearing in different threads or forums, which implies the inclination of sticking to one 'identity' (ID) amongst online participants. It is also possible that one uses more than one nickname

in the same discussion thread; for instance, in a 2003 tw.bbs.soc.politics discussion on

national identity (as cited in Chapter 7), dominating negotiator Leo used two

nicknames to negotiate with different co-participants. The act of sticking to one

identity seems to me also an action of maintaining a coherent self-identity across time

and space, though this explanation should be made with caution inasmuch as it might

be simply done for the sake of convenience. I used 'phdmum' as my ID in

tw.bbs.newsgroups for my fieldwork, and, for the aforementioned reason, never

intended to change it.

Nicknaming and signature making can be understood under the concept of

speech act, given the illocutionary force (the creation of the impression of one's

identity) they may carry. Theoretically, all utterances in online forums may be viewed

as speech acts, since they may produce certain forces that eventually generate certain

effects. A MOTSS board participant may deliberately pick up a few stereotypically

feminine words to *hint* his identification with '*ti-ti*' (弟弟 younger brother). In this

case, he is selecting *code-markers* – language variables that mark the speaker's

social/educational status, physical characteristics, or psychological conditions

(Saville-Troike, 1989:72) – which indirectly orients his co-participants towards the

belief in his sexuality. In Sacks's term, he is performing *orientative identification*

(Sacks, 1992, Vol. I: 328-9). Sometimes, self-identification via speech acts comes in a

more direct way. A 'feminine' gay who intends to demonstrate his self-identification could do himself justice by simply saying 'we *ti-ti*'. In such a case the speaker's identification is *claimed* via attaching himself to an *inference-rich category* (Sacks, 1992, Vol I: 330-2; 333-338). An inference-rich category, as Sacks defines it, refers to a social category that is usually identified with a set of knowledge and facts said to be belonging to this category (Sacks, 1992, vol. I: 40-44). Instances of inference-rich category include 'Jew', 'Catholic', 'pan-blue', 'pan-green', '*ti-ti*', or, as will be elaborated in Chapter 7, '*Chi-na-jen*'. Following this logic, activities or practices that are seen as belonging to an inference-rich category is, as Sacks terms it, *category-bound* (Sacks, 1992,vol I, 333-338). In performing orientative identification, as seen, the speaker is uttering indirect speech acts, whose illocutionary force may be interpreted by logic, or, by contextual understanding (Mey, 2001: 122-3). In the above case, it is the contextual understanding (of the local MOTSS culture) that provides the cue for interpretation. The utterance 'we *ti-ti*', which can be understood as 'I *am* part of the sexual group *ti-ti* and I am now speaking for the group', on the other hand, is an *assertive* (as a type of constative) (Bach & Harnish, 1982: 42), unambiguously stating who the speaker believes and desires the co-participants to believe he is.

The utterance 'we *ti-ti*' may be, as commonly seen in MOTSS forums, followed by a series of constatives regarding some truth that *ti-ti* the sexual group

believes in, agrees with, or denies. Sometimes, the 'truth' conveyed in the constatives is concerned with the identity or attributed features of the sexual group. In this case, these constatives, as I argue, are performative of the sexual identity in the way that they present their belief in (or denial of) certain facts concerning the identity. In some cases (as will be further examined in Chapter 7), identity-performing *constatives* are not directly attributed to a claimed identity; therefore, the interpretation of their performativity would involve certain inter-contextual understanding. To adopt Sacks, it is another way of performing orientative identification. Apart from *constatives*, *expressives* also play a role in discursive performance of identity. An extreme example is name-calling or swearing, which, as will be elaborated in Chapter 7, is taken as a way of performing collective *antagonism* against another nationalist/political camp, via which one is in effect reinforcing the existing demarcation between one social collectivity and another.

The chapter begins with the concepts of speech community and communicative event, giving a general picture of how the internet-forum provides a space for social interactions and communicative practices. It illustrates the intertextual-context aspect of the discursive space, explaining how online speech performance is socially embedded and dialogically interacting with existing

discourses. The discussion of internet-forum participants' footings, turn-takings, and speech acts is tied up with the question of identity construction, which paves the way for the following case analyses in Chapter 6 & 7, where I will employ the analytic framework to address the questions of gay identity and national identity, respectively. The exploration of the performative, antagonistic, and negotiated dimensions of collective identity in empirical experiences will lead to reflection upon the empowering and participatory aspects of internet-forum participation, in which some current arguments in internet and social research will be re-examined.

Chapter 6

Co-constructing Gay identities in MOTSS

I. Introduction

The post-martial-law era in Taiwan has experienced a radical change in the political, socio-cultural, and media landscape. The first opposition party was progressively taking over the ruling power. The flourishing social movements representing various social interests and units were shifting their battlefields from streets to cultural grounds. Meanwhile, the media was undergoing a wholesale deregulation, with ownership changed from the government to local media moguls and global capitalists.

Among the radical social transformations was the simultaneous emergence of the local lesbian-gay movement and the internet culture. Breaking through the late 1980s social panic towards the AIDS epidemic, the lesbian-gay movement in Taiwan was first initiated by the burgeoning of lesbian/gay literature, performing arts, and films, e.g. the award-winning *Vive L'Amour* (the best picture of the Venice Film Festival in 1994). It then made its presence felt via campaigns for de-stigmatisation and civil rights, and more recently, via its turning to identity politics. Despite internal differences, gay activism in Taiwan is overall marked by its agenda for self-defined

collective identity and equal rights in everyday life. Hand in hand with the emergent

gay community embodied in arts and campaigns was the rise of local gender/queer

studies, marked by the first LesBiGay conference in 1996. Apart from the changing

literary, academic, and socio-political landscapes, the local lesbian-gay movement is

also manifested in the marketplace. The first Chinese glossy targeting at lesbian-gay

consumers G&L was launched in 1996. The first multi-purpose lesbian-gay shop, Gin

Gin's Bookshop, has also become part of everyday scenery in central Taipei, the

capital city since 1999. Lesbian/gay cafes and pubs are growing, not only in numbers,

but also in their dynamism in promoting lesbian-gay rights. Meanwhile, the first radio

programme dedicated to the lesbian-gay community went on air in 1995. Serious

discussions about lesbian/gay issues started to appear in mainstream media, e.g. the

gay columns in the China Times since 1995; along with this is the circulation of a

number of elite gay/lesbian publications, the oldest of which, 'My Girl Friends', dates

back to 1994.

At the same time, the rapid growth of internet use was (and still is) changing

the ecology of discursive productions in society, with the mushrooming of internet

forums, notably the discussion boards on TANet (the national academic network)

since 1992. As a consequence of the coincidence, local discussion boards dedicated to

lesbian-gay communities came into existence in 1994. Modelled after the Usenet

newsgroup soc.motss, the local lesbian-gay boards share a global name: MOTSS, Members of the Same Sex. The online forums are recognized as the safest and most accessible space to come out (Kefei, 1995). They are praised for providing alternative/dissident media against homophobic forces as well as discursive spaces for self-definitions (e.g. Kefei, 1995; Huang, 1997). Their role in the local lesbian-gay movement is also said to be crucial in terms of social mobilization and recruitment (Lin & Cheng, 2001). These observations suggest a close relationship between MOTSS boards and the lesbian-gay community and its movement; however, little detailed account has been given about how this close relationship can influence the construction of lesbian/gay identities, which, as indicated, is essential in the local lesbian-gay movement.

This chapter aims to explore the unanswered question about the relationship between gay identities and MOTSS boards. To address it systematically and holistically, the chapter places the case study within the analytic framework mapped out in previous chapters. Gay identities on the internet are to be understood from their performative, community-based, antagonistic and negotiated dimensions. In looking at the first and second dimension, we start from an overview of MOTSS-board participation. MOTSS participants are examined as performers of gay identities, acting out their sexualities through speech practices. MOTSS boards in this aspect are

viewed as social spaces where 'closeted' gays are made 'visible' and connected with each other, by virtue of which an online gay community is brought into existence. To understand the antagonistic and negotiated dimensions of identity construction in this context, we look at MOTSS boards as 'discursive space' and 'mediating space'. In doing so, we will talk about MOTSS forums, rather than MOTSS communities, as in previous dimensions. The discursive practices in MOTSS forums will be examined in their contribution to the formation of the Other, 'heterosexual hegemony', against which a collective gay identity is constructed. In viewing MOTSS forums as a mediating space, we enquire into the interactions between MOTSS participants who are concerned about the public identity of the lesbian-gay movement. MOTSS participations in this vein are negotiations, shortening the distance between individuals who hold different understandings about the opportunities and constraints of the identity.

In exploring 'gay' identities in MOTSS, this case study is to a great degree limited to male gay experiences. Theoretically, MOTSS boards are meant for both lesbians and gays. Nonetheless, in current practice MOTSS boards, including the global board tw.bbs.soc.motss, are predominantly male-gay-oriented, depite with a few exceptions. Lesbians tend to participate in 'Latzih (拉子, lesbian) Heaven' on TANet BBSs or other private lesbian-only forums, although these forums are

sometimes subsumed under the general heading 'MOTSS'. Most of my data is

retrieved from the newsgroup tw.bbs.soc.motss, the major outlet of MOTSS speech.

Some of them come from individual MOTSS boards, including a few instances from

lesbian boards where the public identity of the movement is debated. I adopt the

generic 'MOTSS' in referring to all the forums mentioned in the following pages,

despite the aforementioned difference between them. To better understand MOTSS

performance in the field of identity construction, the following pages will first give an

introduction to the trajectory of the movement and major discourses related to its

development.

II. *Tongzhi*: the movement and the discourse

The current Taiwanese lesbian/gay movement is known as the *tongzhi* movement. The

public identity of the movement '*tongzhi*' emerged in 1992 when the first '*Tongzhi*

Film Festival' was inaugurated. The word '*tongzhi*' (同志, pronounced as *tung-ji* in

Hong Kong dialect) was first introduced into gay discourses as a translation for

'queer' in Hong Kong. It originally denoted 'comrade'. The first part of the word

'*tong*' (同) is equivalent to the word 'same' in English and the second part '*zhi*' (志)

generally takes on the meaning of 'will' as in 'collective will'. It becomes a preferred

collective name for lesbian-gay community in Taiwan primarily for its implication of

solidarity, which is considered as essential among the activists. The identity is well

acknowledged by the local activists, gender researchers, the younger generations of

lesbians/gays and even the media.

The dawn of the *tongzhi* movement arrived before the emergence of its public

identity. In 1990, the first local lesbian group 'Between Us' was established. Around

the same time, the women-based 'Sister Camp' had its first meeting on campus. The

next few years witnessed the mushrooming of campus-based lesbian/gay societies and

task forces dedicated to gay rights. These societies and task forces constitute the elite

level of the movement; some of them have become the leading groups of collective

actions aimed at the improvement of the social recognition of the community as well

as its membership's civil rights. In 1995, the first campus-based Gay and Lesbian

Awakening Day (GLAD) event took place, which led to the establishment of a

permanent nationwide student lesbian/gay union. The same year witnessed the

beginning of the activism when a pioneer task force took to the streets to protest an

official report on homosexuals that the activists considered as biased. This type of

'reactive' protests, some of which have developed into more organised campaigns,

became a major strategy of local gay activism. They usually took place after the

occurrence of some particular incidents or social events, and turned the issues

regarding the incidents or events into their appeals (Chuang, 2002).

Apart from sporadic, reactive actions, *tongzhi* community started to make its presence felt in organised mass gatherings. Historically the *tongzhi* movement has been aligned with feminism from the very beginning. Most of the local academic discourses concerning homosexuality are produced within research groups or centres under the umbrella of gender studies, by and large organised by feminists. Besides the domain of discursive production, the early collective actions of the movement were largely affiliated to the local feminism. The community first publicly presented itself as a social group when some of its membership took part in the 1996 'Woman 100' demonstration (Chuang, 2002). Since that time the *tongzhi* community has been a major ally in the coalition of feminists and other social minorities organisations, e.g. those for prostitution rights.

The physical collective presence of the *tongzhi* community, the demonstration of the homosexual as part of the national population, has paved the way for current gay politics aiming for substantial influences on policy making. In his review of *tongzhi* activism in the past decade, Chu (2003) describes the gay activists' turning to active political engagement as 'the civic turn'. In advocating full citizenship of the *tongzhi* community, the goals of activism have shifted from protesting the unfair socio-political system to engaging in reforming the system. The civic turn is

manifested in a few organised actions, notably the establishment of the Front for

Tongzhi Citizenship in 1996, the lobbying for gay rights in the 1998 mayoral elections

and the 2000 presidential election, as well as the holding of the annual festive events

'*Tongzhi* Civil Rights Movement' since 2000.

Along with activism, the *tongzhi* community is transforming from a

stigmatised, other-defined social minority into a self-defined, active cultural group.

The transformation is manifested in its search for new 'names'. Identity politics in

Taiwan (ranging from nationalisms to indigenous movements) is marked by the quest

for a proper collective name that can define and legitimate the movement. For

instance, in naming the country 'Taiwan' rather than 'the Republic of China', the

Taiwanese nationalists are abolishing its political origin from republican China.

Likewise, in naming the pre-Chinese-immigration residents in Taiwan 'the indigenous

people' or 'the first nation', the indigenous activists are defining their position in the

local history as well as self-differentiating from the Taiwanese/Chinese nationalisms.

The emphasis on proper naming is rooted in Confucianism (the dominant political

philosophy in some 'Chinese' societies), which relates the appropriateness of naming

to the legitimacy and success of social actions. According to Isaacs (1975: 32), the

significance of naming exists in its relation to the acquisition of a basic group identity:

by acquiring a name one acquires a pre-existing/prescribed identity, representing the

history, origins and value systems of a group.

Prior to the advent of *tongzhi* movement, lesbians and gays were generally labelled a rather sexology-/psychiatry-rooted name, '*tong-hsin-lien*' (同性戀, 'same-sex love(r)', the Chinese equivalent to homosexuals/homosexuality). The media coverage of '*tong-hsin-lien*' was mainly related to small crimes (e.g. male prostitution) or medical reports, while the discursive power over the subject was in the hands of pathologists and criminologists. Since the mid-1980s, when issues of AIDS and those of homosexuality started to hit the headlines concomitantly, epidemiologists became first in line (Wu, 2001). '*Tong-hsin-lien*' as a social label in this period did not only represent abnormality but also a threat to the society, as it is blamed for spreading HIV virus (Huang, 2000). What is noteworthy is that the referent of '*tong-hsin-lien*' during this period of time was the male rather than the female. Besides the pathological name, some other stigmatising labels were also attached to male gays, such as '*jen-yao*' (人妖, 'homo-freak', a dysphemism for transvestites) in 1970s or 'glass' (an earlier gangsters' jargon for ass) up to 1980s. In contrast, stigmatising labels referring to lesbians are few. In fact, until the advent of the 90's *tongzhi* movement, lesbians had been nearly invisible in public discourses and media representations.

The stigmatising element of the term '*tong-hsin-lien*' has, however, gradually

faded with the unfolding of the movement; it is sometimes comfortably adopted by lesbians/gays for self-naming. Meanwhile, owing to the translation and localisation of the Northern American and Western European gender studies, English terms such as 'gay', 'bi', and 'lesbian' (and its Chinese variations, *latzih*, equivalent to 'les') began to appear in popular discourses and daily conversations. The gender difference between lesbians, gays, and bisexuals started to be marked, while the collective name *tongzhi* became common. Another locally made identity *'Cooer'* (酷兒, cool child; my translation) was proposed in 1994, with the publication of a special issue of an alternative journal, introducing queer theories to the local readers (Isle Margin, January 1994). Originally coined for translating and localising 'queer', the new identity *Cooer* is said to embody the spirit of sexual transgression. It subverts 'normal' sexualities and embraces all sorts of sexual minorities, including sex workers and sadomasochists. Unlike the Western experiences, in which queer politics tends to challenge traditional, civic-oriented gay activism, the Taiwanese *Cooer*/queer School is glad to work with the *tongzhi* activism in striving for civil rights (Chi, 2000).

By virtue of the *tongzhi* activism, these new identities, or 'differential moments' in the Laclau/Mouffe sense ([1985] 2001), constitute part of the *'tongzhi'* community in the fashion of hegemonic formation in which a number of subject positions are articulated into a coalition sharing a common identity (see Chapter 2 for

more discussion). To stretch the boundary of the subject of activism, a few subject positions marked by sexuality, including gay, les, bi, as well as transgender, transvestite, and more recently, sadomasochist, have progressively been incorporated into the subject of *tongzhi* activism. The trajectory of the shifting *tongzhi* identity is manifested in the themes of the aforementioned '*Tongzhi* Civil Rights Movement' events. In the first three years, the movement was specifically dedicated to lesbians and gays. However, in 2003, two more sexual minorities, bisexuals and transgender, were subsumed. In the 2004 'Taiwan Pride' *tongzhi* parade, the coalitional identity was further expanded as the sadomasochist group BDSM Company joined the party. The strategic stretch of identity boundary is noted in the official announcement of the 2004 parade. The collective action defines *tongzhi* as both 'dissident citizen' and 'diversified subject' and declares that the 'diversified subject' that encapsulates a number of sexualities is totalised as a 'combating coalition', not on the basis of similarity, but on the common difference from the 'normal, mainstream, heterosexual moralities and bodily-determined gender divisions, etc that have long existed in the "straight" society' (Taiwan Pride 2004, http://twpride.net/2004). In other words, it is against the dominant, 'straight'-based moralities – the antagonising force that marginalizes the sexual minorities – that these minorities are articulated as equivalent and totalised into the *tongzhi* community, while their pre-articulation differential

characters are subverted.

On the other hand, the construction of a double-faced identity — dissident citizen/diversified subject — reflects the activist tendency in which the civic gay activism and *Cooer*/queer politics are incorporated into the *tongzhi* activism. As will be further examined, the task proved to be a tough one. The civic route aims for civil rights and appeals to political engagement; the *Cooer*/queer School subverts established systems (especially sexual moralities) and calls for transgression. To incorporate the two distinct and sometimes oppositional routes suggests the need to mediate the internal difference within the *tongzhi* community. As a matter of fact, debates on the hegemonic/activist identity have constantly arisen in MOTSS forums, especially in the wake of mass *tongzhi* events. The instability and controversial aspect of *tongzhi* identity suggest that it is constantly under re/construction. As the chapter aims to present, MOTSS forums have been the sites of 'grassroots' actions engaging in the process of construction.

III. The emergence of Us: building gay communities online

We are MOTSSers

In an early review of Taiwanese MOTSS boards, MOTSS operator and gay activist

Kefei (1995) indicates that the rise of lesbian/gay discussion boards was the

consequence of the general discrimination against homosexuality in BBSs. Before the

presence of MOTSS, issues concerning homosexuality had little presence in BBS

discussions. Occasionally they were 'smuggled' into discussion boards of sexuality,

religion, or psychology, where the voices of homosexuals or their supporters were not

necessarily taken positively. In a few cases, reactionary forces against homosexuality

surfaced and triggered vigorous debates between pro-homosexual and

anti-homosexual participants. Some of the debates lasted for months with hundreds of

posts. As Kefei has observed, these debates tended to stereotype and antagonise the

tongzhi, since the discussion boards were by and large heterosexual-oriented and

tended to diminish pro-homosexual voices. As a reaction to the biased environment,

the first Taiwanese MOTSS board was set up on a bulletin board system of

Chung-Yang University in 1994. The fashion of building MOTSS forums was then

initiated and spread into most universities and some prestigious senior high schools.

Apart from the campus-based boards, individual, web-based forums also arose as alternatives.

Overall, MOTSS boards work as a network by making connections and sharing resources, as most of the TANet BBS boards do (see chapter 5). The globally accessible TANet-based newsgroup tw.bbs.soc.motss is the centre of the network, supported by a number of major MOTSS boards. When a locally produced post is transmitted to the newsgroup (or other MOTSS boards), its origin will be indicated at the bottom of the message. The indication of the origin of a post is a way of identifying the post sender with a greater collectivity. Joining online discussions locally or globally has been an issue among MOTSS participants since the early days. It is argued that there is no point to run individual boards if most messages would end up circulating globally. A post from the MOTSS board at Formosa BBS tries to give an answer to the question from the perspective of identity. It argues that the locality (the system where the user logins) of the participant could be a badge of honour, as MOTSS boards usually have their own characteristics. To identify with one MOTSS board suggests identifying with a particular attribute, though this attribute may be more self-defined than publicly recognized. The locality of a MOTSS participant thus provides a marker that differentiates 'us' from 'them', i.e. those who come from other MOTSS boards. Occasionally I spotted utterances like 'go back to your own board!'

in a discussion when there are serious arguments arising in the global board tw.bbs.soc.motss. However, this is not common to see MOTSSers placing much emphasis on the locality-based identity.

MOTSS memberships may also be observed from the perspective of 'speech community', as suggested in the previous chapter. A typical Taiwanese discussion board membership as a cultural subgroup may be temporary and indefinite. Nevertheless, regulars tend to have frequent interactions and share certain core rules of speaking and 'members' resources', i.e. the shared socio-cultural understandings, familiarity with historical issues and discussions, and the group-specific language culture. In the case of MOTSS boards, their quality of being communities is doubly sustained by the shared sexual orientation among memberships. They are not only communities marked by speech interactions; rather, they are communities made of connections between individuals of the same social category via online verbal interactions.

In accordance with the discourse of locality-community-identity, the newsgroup tw.bbs.soc.motss seems to provide another boundary of differentiation. As the abbreviation 'tw' (Taiwan) indicates, the newsgroup is very Taiwanese-oriented. Though being accessible globally, the newsgroup tends to attract participants located in or originating from Taiwan. This tendency is easily discerned from the posters'

familiarity with local contexts, from their email providers, or, expressions such as 'Taiwanese gays'. Being the shared social space of local MOTSS goers, tw.bbs.soc.motss brings to visibility the social ontology of the gay community in Taiwan. The attempt of the following pages is to explore the way in which the newsgroup provides a social space that connects individual gays of Taiwanese-origin into a community and in the meantime consolidates the communion among them. To examine how the collectivity is produced and presented, I start from linguistic performances that present individual participants as forum-speakers as well as 'gays'.

Out in MOTSS: performing gayness in MOTSS speech

Below is a fragment of a post from tw.bbs.soc.motss:

> ...It could be such a joy to meet new friends in BBS, if not for some of
> their eagerness to inquire on my profession right after their greetings...
> It was also the case when I was a student. I always felt uncomfortable
> whenever a first-met asked me about where I was studying. How could
> I possibly feel comfortable to let you know the names of my university and
> department when we hardly knew each other....How if I get outed
> after I tell them all my details?

The poster's worry of exposing himself too much is typical among MOTSS participants who are ambivalent about 'coming out' in MOTSS boards. Although

having been celebrated as the most secure and friendly social spaces to come out due to the anonymity, MOTSS boards are no heaven. The threat of being 'really' outed is there, while the comfort and joy of virtually outing is tempting. As some, in echoing the aforementioned post, pinpointed, people went on MOTSS to find friendships, or, not uncommonly, relationships. Presenting oneself as gay is unavoidable to join the online society; being presented as gay offline is nevertheless the least favourable.

A further question of self-identification in MOTSS is not about the degree of self-exposure but about the forms of self-exposure. For an identity based on sexuality, the body is both the driving force and the manifestation. In a bodiless space such as MOTSS, presenting a bodily-driven and -manifested identity seems to require some creativity, since what can be made and seen in MOTSS are words and paralinguistic symbols. In Chapter 5 I tried to create a typology to account for discussion-board speech in relation to identity performance. In that typology a poster is first of all discerned as an addressing self, who expresses her/his current desires, beliefs, perceptions, or intentions; or, s/he may be an animator/story-teller, who transmits other's utterances or experiences. Either being an addressing self or an animator, a poster creates a first impression by showing an ID, or a nickname, which to some extent represents how s/he considers who s/he is in the particular time and space. A signature file may either reinforce that position or present another dimension of the

'self'. Apart from creating nicknames and signatures, identity performance can also be practiced through self-disclosing utterances in the message as Baym has suggested (Baym, 1995:153).

These different forms of self-exposure will be further explored in the following pages, which aims to map out the way in which MOTSS participants enter and position themselves in online gay spaces. The analysis of MOTSS participants as individual self-presenters will facilitate the understanding of tw.bbs.soc.motss as an online gay community, in which every individual action is ultimately constitutive of the configuration of the community. To adopt the aforementioned typology, I first focus on the category of naming and secondly look at the signature files and then move onto other self-disclosing utterances in the main body of the message.

Nicknames

A nickname is the chosen ID of an internet-forum speaker/participant, the first message s/he sends to a speech community. It is not necessarily permanent or universal; usually, an internet-forum participant is allowed to change her/his nickname as s/he wishes. It is therefore a temporary and movable identity, persisting or shifting according to the *position* that the speaker takes up during the course of

participation. Nicknaming in this sense is a speech act, a statement aimed at creating a recognisable image of an individual.

In MOTSS boards, not all the nicknames inspire people's imagination of the name owners' sexuality, although MOTSS boards are supposedly exclusive for *tongzhi* participants. A nickname such as 'Knowing nothing about wind and rain' is equally likely present in any other sort of discussion board. Some MOTSS participants even choose to leave out nicknames. Nevertheless, there are quite a number of MOTSS participants who well employ this tool to create part of their personal 'fronts' – the ensembles of personal attributes that make individuals 'identifiable' (Goffman, 1990: 34). Some may be assertive of the posters' personal values regarding sex or relationships. Some may brag about their physical attractiveness. Some may represent the participants' positions on particular issues. To create personal fronts, the aforementioned performative elements are frequently adopted. By playing with these elements creatively, some MOTSS participants enter the online social spaces with showy gestures; in other words, they do not merely 'come out', but come out as individuals of distinctive character.

Putting the word 'gay' in a nickname might be the easiest way of introducing oneself to a gay community, though it is not common among MOTSS participants. Usually, it is done in a more sophisticated way. Some participants are good at poetic

language. A nickname like 'Body Totem' (身體圖騰 *Shen-ti-tu-teng*)or 'Erotic, Just a Bit' (情色，只有一點點 *Ching-se, chih-yiu-yi-tien-tien*) signals the sexual element in a participant's identity. Likewise, 'Men & Cigarettes, the Driving Forces of My Life' (男人，菸，酒，我生命的動力 *Nan-jen-yien-chiu-wo-sheng-ming-te-tung-li*) gives a *hint* of one's sexual desire. Identity performance in this fashion is *orientative*, or *hinted*, in Sacks's terms. To make an identity 'hintable', the addressors and addressees need to share understandings in certain cultural codes or background knowledge. For instance, the reference to physical desire in this case is part of the function that makes the identity performance orientative.

A participant may also take the floor with more flamboyant gestures. Thanks to the absence of bodily presence, a MOTSSer can proudly claim his physical attractiveness in naming himself 'Hairy, Beefy' (多毛體壯 *To-mao-ti-chuang*), 'Muscular and Powerful in Sex' (陽剛猛男 *Yang-kang-meng-nan*), 'Bronzed and Sturdy' (古銅強壯 *ku-tung-chiang-chuang*), or, simply 'Handsome Me!' (我是帥哥 *Wo-shif-shuai-ke*). Of course, bragging about one's physical beauty is not the only way to create one's individuality. Many a MOTSS participant makes his nickname a statement of personal values. '100% Pure-love-ism' (純愛百分百 *Chun-ai-pai-fun-pai*) and 'Simply Want to be Fucked' (只想被幹 *Chih-hsiang-pei-kang*) are contrary examples of stating one's attitude towards relationships. Nicknames like 'Destroying

Morality' (敗德 *pai-te*) and 'Subverting the Mainstream' (顛覆主流 *Tein-fu-chu-liu*) disclose the participants' affinity for *Cooer*/queer politics. In contrast, 'Health, Sunny Boy' (陽光健康男孩 *Yang-kuang-chien-kang-nan-hai*), 'Sunny, Sporty, and Studying' (陽光，健康，認真讀書 *Yang-kuang-chien-kang-jen-chen-tu-shu*) or 'Healthy Lifestyle' (健康的生活 *Chien-kang-te-shen-huo*) are gestures aligning the MOTSSers with conservative values. Be they self-celebrating or statement-making, identification in this vein is more or less, again, to adopt Sacks, *claimed*, making explicit the name owners' sexuality via identifiable import.

Being gay sometimes is more complicated than being sexually attracted to same sex. In Taiwan (or perhaps universally) there is a general typology for classifying gays. Although it is not recognised unanimously, the typology seems to penetrate the entire local gay community so that it frequently shows its influences on self-naming among MOTSS participants. A MOTSS post tries to outline the typology as below:

> *Ke-ke* (哥哥 older brother): No 1 (i.e. giving anal sex), keen to care for others, not sissy (or, C, for short)
>
> *Ti-ti* (弟弟 younger brother): No1 or No 0 (given anal sex), caring for others and also hoping to be cared for, not C.
>
> *Chieh-chieh* (姊姊 older sister): No 0, caring for others and also hoping to be cared for, C.
>
> *Mei-mei* (妹妹 younger sister): No 0, wanting being cared for, C.

This 'unofficial' typology underlies the making of nicknames like 'Silly, Childish *ti-ti*', 'Gay *ti-ti*', or 'Ted *ke-ke*'. An adoption of the typology is not necessarily a gesture of submission. The nickname 'I am 100% C, feminine, and girlish' (我 就 是 100% C 女 人 味 娘 娘 腔 *Wo-chiu-shih*-100%-C *nui-jen-wui-niang-niang-chiang*) could be a message of resistance to the mainstream values that favours masculine gays. By picking up well-known category-bound (belonging to an inference-rich category) terminology as such, a participant is 'claiming' his identity on the basis of the common knowledge of the subculture. It is also an act to align oneself with a subgroup in a greater community.

As indicated above, a MOTSS participant is normally free to change his ID. This flexibility of shifting ID facilitates the shifting of one's self-positioning according to the topics one is currently engaged in. A discussion thread as a communicative event is defined by the topic of the opening post. A participant who joins the event can walk in with his universal ID or create a new one in accordance with the situation. To shift from one ID to another in this case might be to shift from one position to another. In a long debate about the social effects of a gay parade, a few participants chose to demonstrate their support to the collective action via nickname making. One participant called himself '*Tongzhi* Come Out, Glorifying Our Time' (同志出走，光榮時刻 *Tongzhi-chu-tzo-kuang-jung-shih-ke*), while another presented

himself as 'A Parade of Pride and Affection' (驕傲與感動的遊行 *Chiao-ao-yiu-kang-tung-te-shih-ke*). One remarked on the contribution of the event by naming himself 'Today, We Write the History with Actions' (今天我們以行動重寫歷史). A similar case is seen in a discussion thread on the 2004 War in Iraq that eventually brought down the dictator Saddam Hussein. Some participants of the thread placed emphasis on their attitudes towards the war by creating new IDs. 'Shame on You Bush' (布希真可恥 *Pu-hsi-chen-ke-chih*) leaves little ambiguity about the nickname owner's attitudes towards the war wager, American president George W Bush. 'Anti-American is Anti-the-Whole-World' (反美就是反全世界 *Fan-mei-chiu-shih-fan-chuan-shih-chieh-chieh*) is a statement holding an opposite position. 'Let's Go to the Anti-War March after the Discussion' (待會一起去遊行吧 *Tai-hui-yi-chi-chiu-yiu-hsing-pa*) is more than a statement but an invitation to practical actions. These examples suggest MOTSS communities' capacity of accommodating multiple subject positionings in which MOTSSers embed themselves within various vantage points to build their subjectivities. As shown, a MOTSS participant's identification is far from being limited to sexuality, but open to different aspects of social life s/he is currently participating in.

Signature

If a nickname serves to create the first impression of a DB participant, a signature file may serve to reaffirm the impression or to create another one. Despite the availability, not all MOTSS participants would bother making efforts to build signature files. To the further disappointment of an identity researcher, MOTSS signature files seem to show less direct links to one's gayness. A great number of signature files here are quotations of the posters' favourite lines, taken from verses, poems, maxims, or even soap dialogues, without identifying authorship. Some are mysterious graphics requiring much imagination. Some are advertisements for individual websites or home pages, or any other sort of business.

Fortunately enough, some MOTSS participants do make use of this tool for identity construction. Signature files of this kind are more or less presented in *assertives/constatives*, as defined in Chapter 3. A statement about self can be constative, if it is meant to reveal some 'truth' of the self. A signature file like 'I am a high-ranked officer in day hours, but a cool young chick at night...' is a statement, although we have no way to prove how true it really is by merely a 'fly-on-the-wall' observation. 'I smile when Death comes, if I have had the one I truly love' is about how the speaker evaluates life. 'Men were born to love men' asserts a universal truth

in the speaker's view. An utterance like 'Men should look manly. Heroes should love beauties. Those are the rubbish discourses I hate most' leaves no doubt of the signature maker's critique of prevailing social discourses. A more activism-oriented signature may contain slogans of gay activism, such as 'de-stigmatising' or 'reconstructing sexual rights'.

Overall, signature files are the less-explored performative spaces in MOTSS boards. It seems to me that MOTSS goers enjoy themselves more in the agility and compactness of nicknaming. A signature file is like a traveller's luggage dragging behind, while a nickname is like a wallet carrying all the essentials. It is so much easier to travel light, be it a trip in the Real World, or a shift in identity spaces. Another explanation is that the message body of a post is a more attractive space for an advanced identity performance, since it is of better flexibility in size and content. This aspect of linguistic practice in identity performance is explored in the following.

Self-disclosure in utterances

The previous discussion of identity performance touches upon the two major fashions of performing one's 'gayness' in MOTSS messages. One may 'claim' an identity by picking up category-bound terminology in self-naming. Or, one can 'hint'

it by speaking in particular tones or giving particular gestures.

Claiming or hinting gayness in utterances is more strategic than doing it by nicknaming or creating signatures. If a nickname is a nametag, a category-bound membership picked up during the course of interaction is thus a cap that can be put on or taken off at some point of conversation. The most-commonly-worn caps among MOTSS goers are those listed in the aforementioned typology of gays. It classifies one's gayness into a cluster of categories, including *ke-ke/ti-ti* (older/younger brother), *chieh-chieh/mei-mei* (older/younger sister) and their variations, such as 'man', 'C', '*a-yi*' (阿姨, aunty), '*lao-nian*' (老娘, Madam I), and any other terms referring to someone's place in the spectrum of masculinity-femininity by traditional definitions.

Though debatable, these category-bound terms nonetheless frequently turn up in MOTSS discussions. Interesting enough, it seems more common to see self-identification with categories closer to the pole of femininity than that of masculinity. Likewise, stereotypically female tones or girlish words are also of higher presence than manly ones in MOTSS speech. This kind of 'womanish' front is sometimes created as a resistance to the classification of gays in the aforementioned typology, as well as the 'mainstream' values that favour muscles and masculinity in the gay community (as will be further explained in the section on antagonistic *tongzhi* identity). This resistant nature of identity performance is seen in individual MOTSS

utterances like '"Madam I " don't care for playing 'man', '"Madam I" only want to be like myself', or, 'Yes, I am an aunty. I don't have gay rights...' This kind of resistant utterance usually turns up when the discussion touches upon the hierarchical typology and the 'mainstream' value that privileges masculinity. The 'womanish' front in this situation implies one's *footing*, i.e. position, regarding the issue. To perform or discern the footing, one needs to hold certain 'members' resources', e.g., MOTSS terminologies of gayness. In resisting to the mainstream value, the presentation of the *footing* is also a *subversive* act, constituting part of the collective front of the 'disadvantaged' group in gay community.

Apart from reflecting the taxonomy of gayness, the making of footings may also disclose one's position in the 'moral spectrum' amongst *tongzhi* community. This type of footing can be displayed by making explicit claims. In this case, the speaker usually adopts the pronoun 'I' to start the utterance that reveals his/her stance, such as '*I am* proud of being a *tongzhi*, but *I feel* so ashamed when seeing such negative media representations of (*tongzhi*) (18/01/2004, tw.bbs.soc.motss; my emphasis)', or '*I am* a *tongzhi* who supports freedom of speech...*I don't agree with* the opinion that all media representations of *tongzhi* have to be positive (22/02/2003, tw.bbs.soc.motss; my emphasis)'. In both case, the speakers present their footings of a specific type of *tongzhi* (a *tongzhi* who is ashamed of the 'black sheep' of the community, or, a

tongzhi who is not partial to the community).

Sometimes, this type of footings is made in a less explicit way. A usual technique is to make a series of statements concerning a point at issue, while indicating the speaker's alignment with the moral position in the statements. For instance, a participant of a discussion on the legitimacy of sex-and-drug gay parties discloses his/her moral position by stating the 'importance' of maintaining existing social/moral order and concluding his/her posting with 'I know I sound like a moralist. Perhaps I am just getting old...(18/01/2004; tw.bbs.soc.motss)'. In saying 'I know I sound like a moralist', the speaker suggests that s/he is the author of the foregoing statements, whose moral position is in alignment with mainstream morality. A more implicit way is to label 'the Other' who holds a position opposite to the speaker's. For example, in the aforementioned discussion thread, a participant labels another participant who strongly disagrees with promiscuity as the 'moral majority' in an ironical tone ('Here comes the moral majority. Accept my standing ovation!'). The utterances are followed by a series of criticising statements. In doing so, the participant is indirectly disclosing his/her position by presenting who s/he is not. In other words, the footing of self is made explicit by presenting the Other.

This type of identity performance can be more 'political', when the activism of *tongzhi* movement is the concern. In this case, footings are usually made in a more

explicit way; moreover, the speaker tends to present him/herself as part of a collective

self by adopting the pronoun 'we'. A participant of a discussion of the 2004 *tongzhi*

parade shows his/her anti-parade footing in saying 'I don't think holding a *tongzhi*

parade is the best way... *We can* express the bright sides of *tongzhi*...in better ways,

can't we? (04/10/2004; tw.bbs.soc.motss)'. In contrast, another participant who holds

opposite opinions aligns him/herself with the activists in claiming '*we are* making our

presence felt (by holding *tongzhi* parades)...*we don't* have to please them (the

heterosexual), *do we*?' In the two examples, the speakers both present themselves as

part of the collective actors of the *tongzhi* movement. The pronoun 'we' refers to the

tongzhi community. As shown, there is no agreement about *tongzhi* parades among

MOTSS participants. The pronoun 'we' hence does not necessarily always refer to the

entire *tongzhi* community. A participant of the 2003 parade marks the intra-group

difference in defending the action: '...*we* are fighting for our own rights, not for *you*

who do nothing but stab us on the back... (02/11/2003; tw.bbs.soc.motss)'. In

adopting the pronouns 'we' and 'you', the speaker defines a political spectrum of

tongzhi activism, unambiguously positioning him/herself in the spectrum.

Nicknaming, signatures and self-disclosure in utterances are major

strategies among MOTSS participants for introducing oneself into online gay

communities. The act of self-presentation or identity performance defines one's temporary existence in a space. Since it is temporary, it can be done strategically as a way of showing one's stance in a debate, or a situational footing during a communicative event. These identity performances remind us that MOTSS boards are not only electronic 'bulletin boards'; rather, they are social spaces participated by individuals of flesh and blood. The following pages will advance our understanding of MOTSS boards as communities by examining how individuals are connected into a larger collectivity through frequent interactions.

The making of 'us' in everyday trivialities

Thanks to the orientation of a few gay friends, my knowledge of the social group is not entirely built on media representation or academic books. This rather shallow life experience does not equip me well enough for commencing a research project into gay issues. However, my understanding of this part of the society has been progressively improved as the time span of my online ethnography in MOTSS boards extends. At the beginning of 2003, to facilitate a systematic analysis of MOTSS communities, I decided to conduct a content analysis of the posts in tw.bbs.soc.motss, the global newsgroup that collects most of MOTSS posts in Taiwan.

Based on previous observation, I created a list of categories for classifying discussion threads according to the interests of their topics. The listed categories include 'information seeking/sharing', 'advice seeking', 'gay issues (including identities)', 'life experiences (relationships, coming out, and other life stories)', 'public affairs (politics/non-political)', 'gay arts', 'personal interests/hobbies', 'gossips', 'friend-making', and 'others'. The typology is mainly based on the usual way of classifying discussions in TANet BBSs. To collect the data I visited the newsgroup on a daily basis from 6 February to 6 March 03 in 2003. To classify discussion threads, I clicked on the topic and skimmed through and found out what category might best define their interests. In so doing, I avoided making judgements by simply reading the topic of the opening post, since the interest of a discussion may be turned into another later on. When there is more than one topic appearing a discussion thread, I classified the thread according to which topic is best discussed in it.

MOTSS as social space

At the end of one-month data collection, I gathered 1774 threads and 15232 posts as the data for content analysis. The amount of the posts represents the average

traffic in tw.bbs.soc.motss. Below is the result:

Discussion type	Threads	Posts	Longest thread
Information	44.48%	26.13%	44 posts
Advice	1.97%	2.05%	45 posts
Friend-making	2.03%	1.10%	16 posts
Life experiences	16.18%	15.56%	109 posts
Love/sex	8.06%	8.31%	109 posts
Come-out	1.07%	1.33%	50 posts
Others	7.05%	5.92%	42 posts
Gossip	15.84%	16.55%	119 posts
Gay arts	17.87%	21.31%	104 posts
General	1.97%	1.98%	25 posts
Crystal Boys	15.90%	19.33%	104 posts
Personal interests	6.60%	7.44%	133 posts
Gay issues	2.03%	2.76%	53 posts
Identities	1.69%	2.45%	53 posts

Public affairs	1.35%	2.10%	67 posts
Politics	0.73%	1.46%	67 posts
Non-political	0.62%	0.64%	31 posts
Others	8.17%	4.92%	45 posts

The result suggests that the local MOTSS discussion threads are most likely opened for a very practical reason: information seeking or sharing, taking up 44.48%. If we add on those threads opened for advice-seeking (1.97%) and those for friend-making (2.03%), we may say that almost half of MOTSS discussion threads are initiated by practical needs. The second biggest group of threads is about life-experience sharing, taking up 16.18%, just slightly higher than threads opened for gossiping, taking up 15.84%. The list also suggests that MOTSS goers seem to be pretty enthusiastic about sharing their interests in 'gay arts', as 17.87% of the threads are under the heading. Only 2.03% of the discussion threads are concerning serious gay issues, and only 1.35% are about public affairs.

The statistics also suggests that practical needs may be the most common motive force for postings; they are nonetheless not the major reason for which MOTSS visitors stay. The percentage of the information seeking/sharing posts is only 26.13% (compared with 44.48%), while the longest thread in this category contains

44 posts. In contrast, longer threads appear in less practical categories, e.g. those about personal interests/hobbies, gossips, life-experience-sharing, and gay arts. Some of them easily collected more than a hundred of posts.

What is noteworthy is that apart from those surrounding everyday trivialities, longer MOTSS threads, including those concerning gay issues or cultural life, are usually triggered by the occurrence of controversial or popular events, e.g., Gay Pride in June, or the '*Tongzhi* Civil Right Movement' event in September. I began my data collection for content analysis at an interesting time. During the whole month the newsgroup was saturated with discussions about 'the Crystal Boys' (*Nieh-tzih*), the first local television serial on gay life. 15.9% out of 1774 threads of the month are posts sharing enthusiasm about this programme. The longest discussion on this topic attracts 104 posts. This explains that month's high traffic in the 'gay art' category, and somewhat accounts for the lack of interest in more serious gay issues. In his response to a post opened for discussing gay identity, one poster suggested his fellow participant to save his time for now, since MOTSS communities were sucked into the vortex of 'the Crystal Boys' and no one would bother paying attention to his post. Not surprisingly, that thread was soon buried by the snowballing 'Crystal Vortex' and disappeared in no time.

Networking communities, Consolidating communion

The content analysis of MOTSS discussions gives an overview of the common scenery in this space. This landscape reminds me of the scene of a community pub. People go there to meet friends, to look for some chats, to discuss recent life experiences or current news, to circulate information, to get some tips for getting girlfriends or good car insurance, or, simply to pass some time. Through spontaneous gatherings in a local social space as such, people get to know each other, and, via frequent interactions, are networked into a community. These social gatherings produce and manifest certain spirit of the community: the prevailing values and ideas, the common culture, and the shared problems and concerns. Compared with traditional public houses, MOTSS boards are mainly based on sexuality rather than locality (which can be of importance, though) and exist without physical presence. People see each other's temporary 'fronts' online but not faces in flesh and blood; they may have heart-to-heart talks without knowing each other's real 'identities'.

In spite of the absence of physical presence, MOTSS boards as social spaces are no less capable of bringing individuals into communities and in the meantime bring them to *visibility*. While offline gay spaces are still few, tw.bbs.soc.motss has successfully built an online gay community of theoretically infinite boundaries. It is a

space where people witness or join the collective presence of gays on a daily basis. After nearly four years of observation, I have learned to know about the community progressively, including the usual verbal expressions, where its membership may gather, what issues they frequently discuss, what sexual objects they love best, their shared fears and angers, and their collective hope for social acceptance. I have heard numerous coming-out stories, and, thanks to some enthusiastic MOTSSers, encountered hundreds of online articles or reports about gay issues or their cultural life.

Those who expect to see 'rational debates' of public issues in online forums may feel disappointed with the fact that MOTSS discussions seem to concern more about the private sphere. The percentages of discussion threads aiming at public affairs and gay right issues may hit higher scores when there are election campaigns or controversial or mass gay events. Some identity-oriented discussions may be intertwined with those of 'the Crystal Boys', since the television drama touches upon a multiplicity of practical issues regarding gay life. It may also be the case that those who are interested in political/public issues would simply go to political boards. Overall, it is the norm that tw.bbs.soc.motss goers do spend much more time in sharing private emotions, personal interests and life experiences in everyday routines: those they hate and love, recent anecdotes, relationships, sexual desires and activities,

personal stories of coming out, and experiences of discrimination. Horoscopes and pop idols are more attractive subjects, in comparison with current affairs and political figures. Gossiping is certainly another popular activity in the social space. Conversations surrounding daily trivialities are indeed the heart of the newsgroup. It is through these seemingly insignificant verbal interactions that MOTSS participants make connections with each other, build temporary social relations, and network themselves into a community. What emerges here is the image of a group of 'people', realising their lives in all sorts of aspects of everyday routines.

The high percentage of information/help seeking posts suggests that providing practical and moral support is another important function of the newsgroup. 'Ah, the Almighty Board!' is the subtitle commonly coming up with a post aiming for help or information. Problems to be sorted may range from coming out to parents, troubles in relationships, to one's PC problems, or, even the title of a song aired in MTV. During my fieldwork I have hardly seen the newsgroup disappointing information-seekers. For most of the time, MOTSSers show great warmth and support to each other. A post telling how one's experience of HIV infection received more than five hundred follow-ups, most of which were sympathetic and supportive. There are, of course, some exceptions. In self-differentiating from heterosexuals, MOTSSers demonstrate a strong sense of 'comradeship'. A poster who is suspected as a peeping straight man

will find no friendship here. For instance, a post asking for help to finish one's school report on 'the cause of homosexuality' was criticised and ignored, while the report was considered saturated with 'straight' points of view. Any attack on homosexuality or gays is by no means tolerated. As will be examined in the next section, antagonism towards the usually absent heterosexual-Other (in MOTSS) has underpinned the consolidation of a collective *tongzhi* identity.

Being the global outlet of MOTSS posts, tw.bbs.soc.motss connects individual gays from every corner of Taiwan, via which the social ontology of 'Taiwanese gays' is brought to visibility. The high daily traffic (over 500 posts) suggests the high energy of the online community, which underlies the making of the community, as well as the self-definition of the community's ontology and its future. The following two sections look at the way in which MOTSS discussants participate in the construction of gay identities from antagonistic and negotiated dimensions respectively. Both dimensions demonstrate the grassroots power against elite discourses and projects. The investigation of these phenomena, however, will not necessarily lead to a celebration of the emancipating potential of internet forums, but will be further examined from the perspectives of power-knowledge and the democratisation of everyday life.

IV. The 'outside' inside us: antagonisms and identities

In the introductory section of the chapter we have touched upon the antagonistic aspect of current *tongzhi* movement. As the latest '*Tongzhi* Civil Rights Movement' event proclaimed, the activism-oriented *tongzhi* identity is built against 'normal, mainstream, heterosexual moralities and bodily-determined gender divisions' (Taiwan Pride 2004, http://twpride.net/2004) that marginalize sexual minorities. In terms of Laclau and Mouffe, the *tongzhi* identity is constructed on the basis of an antagonism towards a 'constitutive outside', an antagonising Other that blocks a social group's full identity by showing its limits and in the meantime renders clear the possible 'frontiers' of its identity construction (Laclau & Mouffe, [1985] 2001; Laclau, 1991). The antagonistic *tongzhi* identity has, as indicated, crossed over the old boundary of 'homosexuality' as in the 'homosexuals'/'heterosexuals' binary oppositions and expanded into an all-inclusive collective identity.

The creation of an expanded *tongzhi* identity is done via contingent *articulations*, the practices that establish relations among 'elements' (gay, lesbian, bi, transgender, transvestite and sadomasochists). By virtue of the articulations, the elements are turned into the constituent parts (or 'moments' in Laclau's & Mouffe's term) of *tongzhi* community (as a hegemonic formation). The expansion of the

identity reflects the tendency, as pinpointed by Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 138-9), that

a hegemonic formation may embrace an opposing force (e.g. the

likely-to-be-heterosexual-based sadomasochists) when it accepts the parameter of

articulation defined by the articulator (*tongzhi* community). The new articulation is

frequently done at the expense of the subversion and redefinition of the original

identity of the articulating force. In the *tongzhi* movement, the public identity has

shifted from one based on the homosexual/heterosexual antagonism to one

constructed on the difference between 'heterodox, marginalized sexualities' and the

'mainstream, middle-class sexual moralities'. As will be revealed, the shifting route of

identity construction has ironically caused intra-group confrontations when a

consensus on the antagonistic identity is absent.

The experience of the *Tongzhi* Civil Rights Movement suggests that an

antagonistic collective identity (*tongzhi* identity) is subject to contingent articulations.

These practices may occur at the level of activism. They may, as this section aims to

explore, occur at the level of 'grassroots knowledge' among the community

membership, whose everyday interactions may facilitate the reconstruction of the

identity. To better understand the grassroots articulatory practices in MOTSS forums

(as a grassroots discursive space), the focus of the following pages is placed upon the

polysemy of the 'constitutive outside' against which the identity of the 'inside' (i.e.

tongzhi) is constructed. In focusing on the polysemous 'outside', we look at the speech of 'heterosexual hegemony'. During the past decade, MOTSS speeches on the subject have constituted a discourse paradigm of the 'outside' centred on the concept of 'heterosexual hegemony'. For examining the patterning as well as the outcomes of co-construction, I employ Sacks's ideas of 'next position' and its variation 'sequential positioning'. In adopting these analytic categories, we are allowed to watch closely the process of articulatory practices taking place in internet-forum interactions. This process, as I will argue, tends to arise in contestations among MOTSS participants. In accentuating the next/sequential positioning, we are looking at the 'relatedness' of utterances as well as 'constructing' nature of floor taking, due to which discursive elements are brought up, articulated, and transformed into moments of an evolving formation.

Articulation in contestation

Historically MOTSS forums have functioned as the major site of discourse production for the lesbian/gay community. On the one hand, they are collective strongholds/dissident media against antagonizing forces/mainstream media, in which protests against stigmatisations and repressions are made; since the earlier days, when

the local gay activism first started to rock the system, MOTSS forums have been the

major space where the gay community fought against anti-homosexual forces which

appeared in the forums as metaphorical gay-bashing or as a reaction to gay discourse

(Kefei, 1995; Huang, 1997). On the other hand, they are the sites where individual

positions are registered. MOTSS forums work as platforms where various life

experiences, views, opinions and ideas intersect, are confronted, and not surprisingly,

clash with each other. Despite a common appeal to solidarity, there exist no

homogeneous 'gay values' or 'gay viewpoints'. Efforts that are aimed at pinning

down 'gay essence' or 'gay spirit' (e.g. being anti-war) are usually dismissed. Neither

can the quest for the collective good guarantee compromises between MOTSS

participants. In MOTSS forums, long discussion threads are mostly the consequence

of vehement disagreements among the discussants. As a local *Cooer* writer has noted,

these spaces have allowed internal differences and discontents to emerge, as they

serve to facilitate dialogues between different subject positions (Hung, 2000).

The confrontation of positions and the clash of viewpoints create opportunities

for contesting and henceforth reconstructing discourses concerning identity issues.

Among them is the popular discourse of 'heterosexual hegemony'. Having first

appeared in tw.bbs.soc.motss (the major local MOTSS forum) in 1995, the term is one

of the academic-turn-grassroots MOTSS buzzwords: thanks to enthusiastic

'intermediaries', fashionable concepts and jargons, e.g. Freudian psychoanalysis in the earlier days, or, more recently, discourses of 'erotic subjectivity', have been introduced to the community and localized as grassroots knowledge. Apart from a few well-drafted introductory posts, the term is by and large used to define everyday situations, e.g. daily practices in relation to existing social/legal/medical systems. More significantly, it emerges when there is disagreement among discussants and when some of them are accused of complying with the mainstream system.

The disagreements in which discussions on 'heterosexual hegemony' are involved embody the divergent trajectories of *tongzhi* identification among the community. One of the common pleas in MOTSS speech is to remove the 'mark' of the *tongzhi* community. Speeches in this vein usually appear in response to biased media representations manifesting a hierarchical sexual order. Heterosexuals (as the dominant majority) are viewed as 'principal' human beings, the 'normal', or, the 'unmarked' as Laclau puts it. The minority homosexuals are in contrast antagonized as the 'abnormal', i.e., the 'marked' (Laclau, 1990: 32-3). The quest for removing the mark is underpinned by the argument that homosexuals/*tongzhi* are not different from heterosexuals except in their sexual orientation and therefore their existence as principal human beings should not be denied. The following statement in a much-echoed post represents this point of view:

... homosexuals are also human. We contribute to the world and bring warmth to people, *same* as other people ... They (heterosexuals) are not of a higher class, and we are not of a lower one. We are equally good, in terms of integrity, abilities, and contributions to the world (26/03/1998, tw.bbs.soc.motss; my emphasis added).

An opposite way of responding to the biased sexual order is to recognize its negation and turn it into the vantage point from which a positive *tongzhi* identity is built. In this fashion *tongzhi*/homosexual is a self-differentiated, rather than an other-differentiated category. The mark, or, the limit of being part of the 'normal', is turned into the frontier of an antagonistic *tongzhi* identity, self-defined by its difference from the 'normal, principal' order. Somehow, the new form of identity construction does not fall into the heterosexual-suppressor/homosexual-the-suppressed dualism of the past; rather, it explores the possible field of identity making by investing the implications of its constitutive outside. This tendency is manifested in the discourse of 'heterosexual hegemony' in everyday MOTSS speech.

The MOTSS understanding of the term 'heterosexual hegemony' has long gone beyond the earlier definition that sees it as 'an oppressing system that designates sex for procreation' (Jao, 1997: 174). Instead, it is freely articulated with other elements according to immediate contexts. For instance, in a series of discussions on

the 2003 Iraq war, some discussants attempt to build a relation between 'the hegemony of the American' and 'the hegemony of the heterosexual' by naming the heterosexuals 'the war wagers' and the dominators of world order. Apart from such 'expansive' interpretations, MOTSS discourse on heterosexual hegemony is, nevertheless, more often related to sexuality, and, as noted above, occurs when the advocates of 'difference' and the supporters of 'sameness' clash. These clashes, as we will soon witness, allow for the emergence of 'next positions' favourable to the occurrence of articulatory practices that ultimately reshape the concept of 'heterosexual hegemony' and consequently change the outside/inside difference and its boundaries.

A 2000 discussion thread on incest in tw.bbs.soc.motss exemplifies the way in which the heterosexual-hegemony discourse is brought up, contested, and reconstructed. The discussion is an instance of the long-term MOTSS debates on the relationship between *tongzhi* community and social moralities. It is initiated when a post reveals the writer's personal experience of having a homosexual relationship with his brother. A debate on the propriety of incest, based on the case at hand, is triggered later after a series of comments on the case, which emphasized ethical considerations. In that post, the participant Noodle Cat defines 'incest' as an act deviating from '*lun-chang*', the existing social norms/order, or, the normal human

relationship in Confucian ethics. The assertive speech of ethics gives rise to an opportunity for reflecting on the position of *tongzhi* in the 'normal' morality. Another respondent contradicts the ethical view by connecting between anti-incest and anti-homosexuality in terms of their marginalized positions in the mainstream sexual moralities. The term the 'heterosexual morality' first pops up in the debate:

> ... Against *lun-chang*? Sounds quite familiar ...
> Isn't it the way in which we homosexuals are diminished by the *heterosexual hegemony/chauvinists*, the anti-homosexual, and the homophobic? 'You homosexuals are against *lun-chang*!' 'Abnormal!' (Toshiko, 18/12/2000)

The articulation of *lun-chang* and 'heterosexual hegemony' sparks off an exchange focusing on *tongzhi* identity and 'heterosexual hegemony'. In response to the articulation of *lun-chang* and heterosexual hegemony, participant Frankenstein opens up the question 'what the position of *tongzhi* shall be once it dislocates the heterosexual-based values'. This questioning response to Toshiko's previous text gives the latter the opportunity to elaborate on his understanding of the *tongzhi* positioning. To answer the question, Toshiko refers to *Cooer*/queer theories. Here he argues:

Do we need to build another hegemony ...after we break with the heterosexual hegemony that regulates people with so-called '*lun-chang*', 'family values', 'social order', etc ... I would say, instead of emphasizing 'norms' or 'orders', we should learn to respect 'pluralism'. Isn't this what we *Cooer* can identify with best? (18/11/2000)

The reference to the *Cooer*/queer spirit brings forth a further questioning into the essence of that spirit and of the *tongzhi* space. The floor is then taken by another *Cooer* advocate Sea, who defines heterosexual hegemony as a system of binary oppositions that demarcates the normal from the abnormal while diminishing the latter. In contrast, *Cooer* embraces the abnormal as part of 'us', including 'bi, transvestite, incest, sadomasochism, and any other 'sexual minorities who have been marginalized by the system'.

In facilitating the unfolding debate, the mechanism of 'next position' paves the way for articulatory practices that link up a few discursive *elements* and turn them into differential *moments* in the discourse of 'heterosexual hegemony'. The terms '*lun-chang*' (i.e. Confucianism), 'social order', and the 'system of binary oppositions' are brought up, paralleled and ascribed to the category of 'heterosexual hegemony'. Meanwhile a chain of equivalence between *tongzhi*, *Cooer*, pluralism, and 'any sexual minorities marginalized by the system' is suggested. By virtue of situational articulation, furthermore, the imported concept 'heterosexual hegemony' is localized, while indigenous elements (e.g. Confucianism) are contingently included in the chain.

To further examine the contingency of these articulatory practices in MOTSS communication, we look into another common theme of MOTSS discussions pertinent to the 'heterosexual hegemony' speech – the 'CC gay/Man' dichotomy in *tongzhi* community. In this series of discussions, 'heterosexual hegemony' is no longer concerned with mainstream sexual moralities; rather, it is the male body that is at stake. Discussions regarding the prevalent biased aesthetics preferring masculine gay bodies have been recurring in MOTSS forums. The focal points of these discussions are usually the diminished status of CC gay (local MOTSS jargon for 'sissy' gay) as well as the possible power relationship behind the theory of male beauty. The 'mainstreaming' of bodybuilding and the preference for masculinity are feared to be creating a marked category, namely the CC gays, within the community. Moreover, it is cautioned that the 'CC-phobia' indeed embodies the *tongzhi* community's subjection to 'heterosexual hegemony', marked by phallocentrism and the worship of manliness.

A few 1997 discussions represent early MOTSS practices that articulate the elements 'worship of masculinity', 'phallocentrism', and the 'mainstream' into the chain of 'heterosexual hegemony'. GG, in citing a celebrity, urges the *tongzhi* community to rethink the bodybuilding fashion that 'reduces the beauty of *tongzhi* to the beauty of muscles' (30/10/1997, ntu.bbs.motss). This reductionism is described as

'a colonized aesthetics among male *tongzhi*' in an immediate follow-up from participant Bi, whose view is countered by Major's questioning on 'what a pre-colonized aesthetics should be', while rejecting the accusation of reductionism. Participant NG then takes the floor and answers the question by pointing to the 'exclusiveness' and the 'macho/sissy' hierarchy underlying the preference. In response to this comment, Major demands intra-group consensus by posing another question, 'is it proper to create internal struggles within the *tongzhi* camp on this issue, when we are still fighting against the domination of the heterosexual society?'

The questioning of the propriety of 'internal struggles' over the issue facilitates the position taken by Bi, who takes the opportunity to state his understanding of the power relationship implicated in the biased values concerning gay bodies. In so doing he first articulates the element 'hegemony' with the 'preference for masculinity':

> the prevalent aesthetics cannot be so overwhelming if it hasn't been reinforced and *hegemonized* ... A new minority (e.g. CC gays, less-muscular gays) is brought forth concomitantly when such a *hegemony* takes form... (31/10/1997, ntu.bbs.motss; my emphasis added)

The articulation of 'preference for masculinity' and 'hegemony' is elaborated in later interactions between Major and Bi. The former denies the theory of hegemony

and argues about the 'long-existing history' of these preferences. This argument paves the way for Bi's articulation that builds on the connection between the 'heterosexual system' and 'mainstream gay values':

> ... *heterosexual* publications have been playing the 'educatory' role for *tongzhi* in presenting the 'masculine males/feminine females' binary. It is hard to tell when we have started to take on these values...However, what is undeniable is that once the values become the *mainstream* (in our community), there is a *hegemony* ...(01/11/1997, ntu.bbs.motss; my emphasis added)

Within the 'next positions' created by questioning and dissenting utterances, as shown above, a new chain of equivalence is progressively building up, while the 'preference for masculinity', the 'mainstream gay values' and 'heterosexual hegemony' are paralleled as equivalent. This chain is affirmed in a thread of later discussions dealing with the same subject, in which earlier postings are cited as starting points for sequential speech positions. For instance, tw.bbs.soc.motss participant Rodo defines the category 'mainstream gay' in reference to the masculine/CC gay debates. He depicts the subgroup 'mainstream gays' as those who believe they are enhancing the collective image of *tongzhi* to a better place by living up to mainstream values, i.e., earning good salaries, building bodies, dressing up properly and practicing other professional-middle-class life styles. They fear that their

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efforts may be wiped out due to the 'bad image' of CC gays; owing to these fears they 'collaborate with the heterosexual hegemony and suppress their own folks'. The assimilation of 'heterosexual hegemony' into 'mainstream gay values' has in effect stigmatised CC gays, 'those who wear the original colours of *tongzhi*'. He concludes the post with a plea for internal pluralism, in which 'plural/unfettered gay bodies are respected' (22/12/1997, tw.bbs.soc.motss).

In aligning the preference for masculinity with 'heterosexual hegemony' and naming 'mainstream gays' collaborators of hegemony, the post suggests the opposition between the 'antagonizing force' – 'mainstream gays'/'collaborators of the heterosexual hegemony' – and the 'antagonized' – 'CC gays'/'the wearers of the original faces of *tongzhi*'. The former is the unmarked, while the latter is the marked. The demarcation is similar to the before-mentioned articulation in the incest discussion, in which 'heterosexual hegemony' also works as the nodal point of the discourse of the 'antagonizing force' (Confucianism/normal social moralities). In this case, the 'intra-group antagonizing force' (i.e., Confucian gays) marginalizes 'deviant' sexualities, epitomized here by incest.

No matter how the intra-group division is drawn – between 'masculine'/'mainstream' gays and CC gays, or, between 'moralist' gays and 'immoral' gays, the discourse of an internal 'heterosexual hegemony' implies the

breaking up of the traditional boundary of *tongzhi* identification. In an ideal vision, *tongzhi* as a totality is greater than the sum of lesbians and gays. Both the *Cooer* speakers (in the first case study) and the latest development of the *Tongzhi* Civil Movement aim for a *tongzhi* identity that is expanded into a coalitional identity for all sorts of sexual minorities, or, in terms of Laclau and Mouffe, a hegemonic formation that articulates all sexual minorities into a chain of equivalence, sustained by its shared difference vis-à-vis 'heterosexual hegemony'. The case studies exemplify the way in which the conceptual 'outside' is substantiated through articulatory practices, by virtue of which new frontiers of *tongzhi* identity (amorality/emancipated body), transformed from its limits rendered visible in antagonism (immorality/stigmatised body), are constructed. However, as we have seen in the case studies, the antagonism that enables the frontiers to emerge does not emerge outside the MOTSS community, but within it. As the forums are virtually exclusive for gays and confrontations are therefore mostly intra-group, the accused practitioners of 'heterosexual hegemony' are simultaneously the 'collaborating insiders' ('moralist'/'mainstream' gays), rather than the embodiment of straight society. In other words, the borderlines differentiating 'us' from 'them' actually cut across the sexual group marked by homosexuality. The 'heterosexual hegemony', the constitutive outside of antagonistic *tongzhi* identity, as embodied in the aforementioned divisions, is inside 'us'.

The outside-in-the-inside-ness of an antagonistically constructed *tongzhi* identity in MOTSS experience manifests a possible drawback for a hegemonic project rooted in counter-hegemonic antagonism. As Laclau and Mouffe have noted, the identity of the articulating force cannot remain unchanged after articulation (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 139). This tendency is reflected in the shifting definitions of *tongzhi* identity in the course of the *Tongzhi* Civil Rights Movement, as the activist subject is expanding. What is noteworthy is that the post-articulatory identity may exclude what was originally included as the result of the modification of its meaning, which is not always done without discontent from those who are excluded in the new situation. Furthermore, an identity project based on antagonism may risk internal struggles, when consensus over the objective of antagonism is yet to reach, and the objective is tainted by the internal differences over the issue. The two case studies represent some of the most common MOTSS struggles over the definition of *tongzhi* identity: once the system of the 'outside' is articulated, and the "outside' inside us' is designated, an intra-group antagonism becomes unavoidable. In the first case study (questioning whether gender liberation can be stretched to encompass sexual liberation), the supporters of the original borderline and detractors of the identity expansion are labelled as 'moralists', 'oppressors', 'heterosexual hegemony reproducers', i.e., the agents of the constitutive outside. Likewise, the antagonism between 'us' (the original

gays) and 'the Other in us' (the 'mainstream gays') is clearly defined in the second

case study. Both the theory of 'internal antagonism' and the legitimacy of a *tongzhi*

identity based on antagonism is contested and resisted, while the accused 'internal

outside' express anxiety for possible exclusion through the new definition ('Are you

claiming 'being womanish' is the original colour of *tongzhi*? Do I deserve the name of

oppressor for my preference for masculinity?' (22/12/1997, tw.bbs.soc.motss), 'Isn't it

another chauvinism to differentiate *tongzhi* by this logic?' (31/10/1997,

ntu.bbs.motss).

These scenarios somehow manifest the problems of 'pure particularism',

which Laclau tackles in his later works. A pure particularism – an identity project

imbedding a particular identity entirely in its differential relation with others – runs

the risk of sanctioning existing differential systems which underlie current social

antagonisms. In contrast, a radical, antagonistic opposition, instead of inversing the

oppressor/oppressed relationship (as pure particularism tends to), is aimed at turning

the form of oppression into a universal Other towards which the antagonism is

directed. Hence, the ultimate goal of a hegemonic project is not to reproduce the older

differential system marked by exclusion and subordination; rather, it aims to subvert

the system and meanwhile seeks for certain universal values that create a common

ground for the development of individual groups co-existing in a global community

(Laclau, 1995 & 1996: 20-35). The inside/outside struggles in MOTSS communities as depicted in the text are exactly a reproduction of the differential relations in which the antagonistic *tongzhi* identity is rooted. What may be beyond the foresight of Laclau and Mouffe is that an identity project initiated on the basis of antagonism, as the case study exemplifies, is not necessarily immune from the drawbacks of 'pure particularism'. Moreover, the antagonism may, as shown, end up bringing forth internal exclusions and thenceforth producing the 'outside' inside 'us'. This tendency, as far as this case is concerned, seems unavoidable: in countering heterosexual hegemony, a strategic essentialism that entails the domination of (and hence struggles over) the meaning seems to be the answer. Ergo, internal confrontations are perhaps a necessary agony in the current stage of the movement, which may or may not be progressing towards Laclau and Mouffe's radical democracy or the universalism envisaged by Laclau.

What can we expect from grassroots/dialogic articulatory practices?

The case studies demonstrate how MOTSS discussions are sucked into the spiral of the 'heterosexual hegemony' discourse and consequentially reconfigure the discourse. Via situational articulatory practices, new chains of equivalence, pivoting round the

nodal point 'heterosexual hegemony', are constructed. Based on these chains of equivalence, the frontiers of a collective identity are reconstructed: an amoral *Cooer-tongzhi* arises against normal sexualities, while an 'original, emancipated *tongzhi* body' poses against 'the straight-based view of male bodies'. The analyses also suggest that these articulatory practices tend to emerge in the confrontations of different viewpoints; these confrontations do not only render clear the crux of the problem but also facilitate the speech positions for elaborative discursive construction. Nevertheless, the new chains are not necessarily well embraced by the speech community; on the contrary, discontents surface with the turning of some 'insiders' into 'outsiders' because of this new articulation, a process that is viewed as antagonizing.

These case studies see MOTSS forums as spaces for discourse production at a grassroots level. The symmetric relationships and interactive mechanisms among participants permit the weaving of viewpoints into a discourse of collective identity, while a privileged voice or a predominant force is absent. However, the grassroots orientation does not guarantee their isolation from the influence of elite/activist discourses. As indicated, the forums have been distribution centres of mediated gender discourses via the animation of cultural intermediaries. The concept of 'heterosexual hegemony' is an academic import, as is the *Cooer*/queer discourse.

Some posts in the first case study appear as patchworks of the influential 1997 publication 'Queer Archipelago', the first Taiwanese book aimed at localizing queer studies. One *Cooer*/queer MOTSS advocate hints at her/his source of knowledge in advising the 'moralist' gays to 'update' their understanding of *tongzhi* issues by reading books or attending gender studies seminars. The 1997 CC gay discussion series is sparked off by a MOTSS participant's reflection over a *tongzhi* celebrity's comment on gay glossies, published in a major newspaper. These are signs that indicate a dialogic relationship between MOTSS/grassroots speech and elite discourses.

This intertextuality does not, however, imply a necessary hierarchical relationship between grassroots and elite discourses. Resistance to speeches of noted scholars or to fashionable academic thought is common in MOTSS forums. The 2000 incest discussion is a fine example of this resistance. Whereas the *Cooer*/queer speakers display familiarity with gender discourses and academic jargon (e.g. transgression, eros, subjectivity, etc), supporters of existing moralities distance themselves from the theory and emphasize practical social conditions. Some even indicate the 'power-knowledge-ness' in the Cooer/queer advocates' constant turning to academic sources. Apart from being critical, the local MOTSS discursive practices prove to be creative and go beyond merely reproducing existing discourses, as is

evidenced by the expansion of the 'heterosexual hegemony' discourse from sexuality to body issues.

Despite it being a major recruitment network of gay activism, the local MOTSS community is not explicitly affiliated to activism. The grassroots membership's proposal for an all-embracing sexual-minority-based *tongzhi* identity, represented by the *Cooer*-queer voice in the 2000 incest discussion, turned up long before activists promoted the same idea in the 2003/2004 parades. This, however, does not imply that MOTSS necessarily operates in the vanguard of hegemony formation. As a matter of fact, MOTSS participation has its reactionary side as well: the 'conservative'/'moralist' camp have been raising objections to an all-inclusive *tongzhi* identity, marked by a series of intense debates on the *Tongzhi* Civil Rights Movement events since 2000.

These attributes of MOTSS participation suggest its intermediary role in the hegemonic formation of *tongzhi* activism. On the one hand, it facilitates the popularisation and reconstruction of elite/activist discourses, via which a shared understanding of – if not a consensus on – the antagonistic collective identity is built-up on at the grassroots level. On the other hand, it is also implicated in intra-group confrontations, which has overshadowed the counter-hegemonic struggle

when an overall consensus of the *tongzhi* community is seen as essential among the membership.

A final reflection on the issue concerns the propriety of defining MOTSS forums as an absolute 'grassroots' discursive space. The current *tongzhi* activism thrives on campus, and so do MOTSS forums. A few leading activists in the field (e.g. the organizer of the Front for *Tongzhi* Citizenship) used to be early devotees of MOTSS participation; in some more 'elite-oriented' forums, participants may include postgraduates, cultural workers, and even semi-anonymous university teaching staff (Hung, 2000: 98). The inherent elite-orientation of MOTSS forums has prevented them from being radically grassroots, despite their accessibility and horizontal interaction patterns. At the end of the day we are looking at 'relatively grassroots' articulatory practices, which can hardly reach beyond the frame of elite/activist discourses.

V. *Tongzhi* in the movement: negotiating a public identity

The previous sections look into the ways in which MOTSS forums provide a space for networking an online gay community and an arena for identity performance. In the meantime, these forums give rise to contingent articulations that reconstruct the constitutive outside of *tongzhi* community, which is also implicated in the production of an 'internal Other' among the community. In this section, I place the focus of analysis upon the negotiated dimension of collective identity and examine MOTSS forums as *mediating space* for negotiations.

Enquiring into MOTSS participations in the field of identity negotiation, this section addresses the issue if internet-facilitated 'grassroots' participation may radically shape the interrelations between elite activists in *tongzhi* activism, those who they claim to represent, and the public identity that anchors the activism. In so doing, it aims to shed light on the Melucci thesis of the democratisation of everyday life by examining the 'democratising effect' of group-specific internet forums: if internet forums can serve to reduce the difference between the representative (the elite activists engaged in decision-making) and the represented (the 'grassroots' membership who are not directly involved with decision-making). The questions to answer include: How do MOTSS forums as 'mediating spaces' render visible

differences between and within groups and engage individuals in the process of negotiating the differences? How does identity negotiation intervene in the construction of the public/collective identity in a social movement? What sort of 'radical' democracy (in Melucci's sense) can we expect it to facilitate?

The close relationship between the internet (especially MOTSS forums) and *tongzhi* movement is indicated in Lin & Cheng's investigation of the local internet activism, which recognizes the movement as a successful case in terms of the making use of the new media (Lin & Cheng, 2001). Its instant and far-reaching message distributing system has facilitated mass festivals like 'the *Tongzhi* Civil Right Movement', campus events like 'GLAD (Lesbian and Gay Awakening Day)', and various protests against anti-homosexual forces. Being a powerful medium for social mobilizations in the collective actions, MOTSS forums on the other hand provide a channel for the 'grassroots' to express their opinions about or debate on the collective actions.

As part of the major resources of *tongzhi* movement, MOTSS voices are not to be overlooked by *tongzhi* community, including the elite activists. The phenomenon is observed in the case analysis of the discussions in response to the first 'The *Tongzhi* Civil Rights Movement' event, held in 2000. These discussions embody grassroots

participation in the constructing process of a collective identity: by reflecting on the constraints and opportunities of an identity-oriented activism, the 'grassroots' membership of gay community is developing a *dialogic* relationship between individual needs of the 'grassroots' members and the organised activism. This relationship, as examined in the following pages, has cast influences on the making of collective identity in the *tongzhi* movement. Apart from the dialogic relationship between individual needs and the activism, this section also looks into the interactions between elite activists in MOTSS forums, including the way in which the forums have facilitated argumentations about activist routes in the early stage of *tongzhi* movement, as well as its being an outlet for 'dissidence'.

For a start, I first give an overview of MOTSS negotiations concerning the field of *tongzhi* activism. This is followed by discourse analysis of a discussion thread initiated in the wake of the first *Tongzhi* Civil Right Movement, aimed at exploring the dialogic relationship between the represented and the representative. To continue, the section shifts the focus onto the interactions between elite activists and looks at a few instances of MOTSS discussions. The section finishes with a reflection on the democratising effect of MOTSS forums in relation to the digital divide issue – as indicated in the previous section, the 'grassroots-ness' of MOTSS forums shall be called into question for the elite orientation of the internet.

MOTSS as mediating space

The 'heterosexual hegemony' speech as shown in the previous section reflects the unsettled collective identity in the local gay movement. The same question underlies the resurgent MOTSS debates of the activist routes and strategies. At times, MOTSS debates concerning collective identity reflect the uneasy marriage between gay right activism and the *Cooer*/queer School. As I have observed, this kind of debate is mostly sparked when someone posts his/her doubts or worries about certain messages sent through a *tongzhi* event. Such a post can draw much attention from the discussion community and easily bring forth a series of follow-ups echoing or opposing the poster's point of views. The points at issue in early follow-ups may not go beyond those raised in the opening post. With the discussion extending, it may shift away from the messages per se and move into more fundamental questions, e.g. the routes or strategies of *tongzhi* activism. Confrontations arise when the discussion attracts discussants of opposing viewpoints. As confrontations turn sharper, some discussants would turn to theories to backup their arguments. A two-camp division ensues. Participants may align themselves with one of the camps, or try to mediate the conflict. The debate normally ends up with no confirmed agreements and simply withers away, awaiting its resurgence in another scenario.

Posts showing doubts or worries concerning practices of *tongzhi* activism, in

particular those circulated in the global board tw.bbs.soc.motss, are most likely from the 'grassroots' participants. They typically begin with the posters' sources of knowledge, such as 'I saw XXXX on television'. In engaging themselves in discussions concerning the 'public interests' of gay community, the participants may, in Habermas's term, be raising *rightness* claims that legitimate their roles of opinion givers on the basis of their community memberships. These claims are typically conveyed by utterances like 'as part of *tongzhi* community, I feel...' or 'I think...' that something may need to be reconsidered. The 'grassroots' footings of the participants may be further manifested in the utterances showing that the speakers were not directly involved in the organisation of the event, though hoping that the 'event organisers' would consider their needs or opinions. The individual needs/opinions followed by the utterances 'I think'/'I feel' are thus presented as 'grassroots'. The expression of the 'hopes' of change suggests the existence of difference between the grassroots and the elite-activists/event organisers, i.e. the decision-makers of *tongzhi* activism.

Being addressed by the 'grassroots', the (self-identified) event organisers may, though not necessarily, take responsive actions directly. In MOTSS practice, interactions between elite-activists and the 'grassroots' are not uncommon. Most of the time, *tongzhi* activists play the role of information/knowledge provider and await

responses from the community. Their roles shift, however, from *addressers* to the *addressed* when there are suggestions, questionings or criticisms aiming at their actions in specific events. The response of elite-activists (as the addressed) is sometimes embodied in posts explaining or defending the logic behind the actions. It is, as will be examined, also possibly manifested in a change of practice. The following case analysis reflects the impact of grassroots MOTSS debates on the public identity of *tongzhi* activism, which has been reshaped along with the series of debates.

Searching for the public identity of *tongzhi* activism

The MOTSS debates about 'The *Tongzhi* Civil Right Movement' events exemplify the local gay community's continual reflections on the 'opportunities and constraints' of the field of identity construction. The effect of these reflections is suggested in the shifting themes of the series of events, which have been reconciling the diverging activist routes and trying to accommodate the interests of both sides. Furthermore, the recurrent discussions in this regard also contribute to the building-up of the community's familiarity with the diverging but co-operating routes in *tongzhi* movement. This is reflected in the increasing shared knowledge manifested in the

series of discussions.

Exploring the effects of MOTSS debates on *tongzhi* activism and its public identity, the following pages focus on a particular discussion thread rising in response to the 2000 '*Tongzhi* Civil Right Movement' event. The aim of the event, as indicated in its official website, is to build 'a dialogue between gays and the rest of the citizens' in the capital city Taipei. The event included exhibitions and live performances in an outdoor fair, followed by an international forum. It became a high-profile event partially due to its being the first government-hosted gay event, and also partially due to an anti-festival petition led by the local mainstream church (including Baptist Convention, Christen Evangelistic Association, etc), against which the alternative church (*Tong-Kwan* Light House Presbyterian Church) initiated another petition in response. On the day the outdoor activities took place, a great number of reporters and cameras flooded the venue, especially from broadcasters who sought for sensational pictures and stories. The event and relevant controversies sparked vehement MOTSS discussions. According to my archival search in Openfind.com, during June to October 2000 there were 275 tw.bbs.motss posts discussing the event that took place on 2 September. Among the posts, 114 posts contributed to the debate on the social impacts of the event, in which the 'grassroots' differed in their evaluation of the event's social effects.

The storyline and negotiators

The debate is initiated by a participant who singles out the drag performance in the outdoor fair as a worry. Having drag performances in *tongzhi* events, according to the participant, may risk deepening the society's stereotyping the *tongzhi* as 'womanish' plus 'transvestites', which does not reflect the 'true face' of the *tongzhi* community. His worry is echoed. Follow-ups favouring representations of 'masculine' gays and 'healthy' images ensue. It is feared that *tongzhi* community is 'misrepresented' due to the media's focusing on drag. Meanwhile, opposing opinions in pluralist terms emerge. The suggested 'one true face' of *tongzhi* community is called into question. 'Rights of minorities' and 'multiple faces of *tongzhi*' are advocated instead. It is also argued that the drag performance is a way to transgress the gender borders as well as to present the plural gay cultures.

While the opinions are polarising, negative feelings and strong language are expressed in the discussion. Voices attempting to ease the confrontation also turn up, though their call for solidarity do not seem to work. Polarisation continues as the focus of discussion gradually shifts from 'drag or not' onto the choice of activism. On one side, a 'decent' public identity is expected, while social acceptability is at stake. On the other side, the rights of minority cultures are defended, while sexual transgression is taken as the means to the end. In the opening post of another thread

continuing the debate, it is indicated that the controversy indeed resulted from the lack

of a mutually accepted activist strategy that serves individual needs from both sides:

> ...I watched the news report with my (heterosexual) parents. I don't find it
> easy to explain to them the difference between transvestite, homosexuality,
> or 'manipulating sexuality' after the viewing...I am fine with the
> 'manipulating sexuality' thing, but wondering what approaches we should
> be taking: a radical one, or a moderate one? It would be so much less
> controversial if we can find a third way to reconcile the liberal and the
> conservative publics in the community ...

This remark suggests that the crux of the debate is rooted in the diverging

beliefs in activist routes and different preferences for collective identity. Despite the

active debate on activist routes, *dominating negotiators* are absent: the debate unfolds

without dominant voices attempting to pin down the theme of debate. The negotiators

spontaneously split into two camps: the anti-drag 'grassroots' and the pro-drag

'grassroots'. The anti-drag camp are mostly not directly involved with *tongzhi*

activism. Some of them admitted that they have not been to the event and only

obtained their knowledge about it from television reports. Despite their detachment

from the movement they justify the 'rightness' of giving opinions by identifying

themselves as 'part of the *tongzhi* community' (a common strategy among MOTSS

debaters, as indicated earlier). In expressing their expectation that future event

organisers will consider their points without showing any desire to participate in the

events, they position themselves as the 'represented' who try to influence decision-making by producing intra-group 'public opinions'. In contrast, pro-drag participants tend to align themselves with the event organisers. Some of them indicate their engagement in the event organisation or performance. For instance, one of the posts comes from a drag performer in the outdoor fair. However, none of them identify themselves as the leading organisers of the event (i.e. the elite-activists/decision-makers). This phenomenon makes this camp carry the character of the 'activist-grassroots', rather than a pure 'represented' as their counter-debaters.

The only participant taking a *mediator* footing is Wind Horse, whose performance makes her/him a typical case of MOTSS mediator. Wind Horse's footing is made explicit in his peace-making words like 'please don't get angry, everyone', aimed at buffering internal antagonism. In adding his suggestive speech acts like 'let us work on this together', he pleads for actions towards possible solutions. In adopting the indicator 'us' to name the addressed, s/he is also suggesting a certain tie between the negotiators, despite their different positions.

Given the absence of dominating negotiators, every negotiator in the thread, apart from Wind Horse the mediator and those who initiate the debate, is a collaborator on either side of the debate. The following discourse analysis of the

argumentative negotiation in the thread looks into the process of collaboration.

Negotiating for the identity: opportunities, constraints and orientations

As sketched in Chapter 5, an online negotiating talk is structured in speech acts, speech positions and adjacency pairs. To reach a shared understanding of the goals and means, as well as the constraints and opportunities of an identity project, the negotiators raise, criticise, or vindicate validity claims, carried out by corresponding speech acts. The process of argumentative negotiation surrounding the claims unfolds in the form of adjacent pairs, entailing a series of next positions primarily produced through the techniques of sequential positioning.

The anti-/pro-drag debate is underpinned by a number of thematised *truth claims* concerning the field of the constraints and opportunities in which *tongzhi* activism takes place: claim 1, having drag performances in *tongzhi* events serves to deepen current stereotypes of *tongzhi*; claim 2: the deepened stereotypes further prevent social acceptance of the *tongzhi* community; claim 3: drag performances draw the attention of the media, especially the television, to *tongzhi* events; claim4: an enlarged media coverage of *tongzhi* events increases social knowledge of the *tongzhi* community. Claims 1 & 2 suggest a theory of constraints, in which *social*

acceptability is the nodal point (the privileged signifier) of the discourse. Claims 3 & 4 imply a theory of opportunities, in which publicity is at stake. These claims are carried out in a number of 'statements' (as a type of *assertives/constatives*).

The identity negotiation begins with BJO's statement 'this (media representation of drag in the event) only deepens people's misunderstanding of *tongzhi* --- womanish + transvestite (statement 1)', followed by another statement in the same post: 'this kind of picture (drag performances) seems not to positively reflect the *true face* of *tongzhi* (statement 2; my emphasis)'. Flower, who quotes BJO's utterances to facilitate her/his 'next position' in the communicative event, collaborates on BJO's opinion. Affirming statement 1, Flower adds, 'why not let people know that there are handsome and muscular men among the *tongzhi* (question 1)?' The question can be seen as an act indirectly making the statement that handsome and muscular gays are more socially acceptable than drag queens. Statement 1 is constitutive of claim 1, while question 1 raises claim 2 in a less explicit way. Some of the follow-ups collaborating on the anti-drag position provide evidence for the validity of claims 1& 2. For instance, Earnest cites his parents' reaction to television coverage of the drag show: 'my dad said: ...these people don't look *normal* at all ...how can this (drag) helps to prove that *tongzhi* are as *normal* as other people...if you are to participate any *tongzhi* event, you are not allowed to do that (drag), you are only allowed to

march hand in hand with your boy friend… (my emphasis)'. Similarly, Sun cites his friend words asking him if he likes cross-dressing privately like the drag queens in the event.

The evidence for the claim about the social intolerance of drag-queen *tongzhi* by and large draws on personal experiences. Despite the resistance to anti-drag voices, the validity of such evidence is not questioned; neither is the claim that media representation of drag-queen *tongzhi* may reinforce the image of womanish/cross-dressing *tongzhi*. Nevertheless, the theory of constraints implied in the aforementioned statements is criticised, which is manifested in two types of responses to the anti-drag discourse. The first type of responses leads to claim 3 & 4, in which drag is not viewed as an obstacle to but rather a strategic action facilitating social acceptance of *tongzhi*. Beauty's post is a fine example: '…The event is successful in terms of making the presence of *tongzhi* felt…The story is covered by most mainstream (broadcasting) media…Of course the media is obsessed with sensationalism…What would be a better focus than the drag show?' These utterances altogether constitute the argument that media coverage is essential where publicity is concerned; drag is good for the publicity because of the media's obsession with sensationalism. In short, drag creates *opportunities* for making the presence of the *tongzhi* felt. The satisfactory media coverage of the event is the evidence.

The second type of response to anti-drag discourse asserts the multi-cultural side of the *tongzhi* community. An early follow-up made by Manson is an example. Relating his/her speech with BJO's 'true face' discourse (as in statement 2) by quoting his words (as the first pair part of an adjacent pair), Manson asks, 'what is the true face of *tongzhi*?' Another question ensues immediately: 'shouldn't we work on the social acceptance of drag queens, womanish men, and the sexually ambiguous? They are also discriminated by heterosexual hegemony!' These questions indirectly make the statement that the 'true face' of *tongzhi* includes 'drag queens, womanish men, and the sexually ambiguous' for their common 'outside' – heterosexual hegemony (see the previous section for more discussion of the 'constitutive outside'). Another example is a message posted by Cure, who discloses his participation in the event as one of the drag performers. Quoting a previous anti-drag utterance to create his 'next position' in the ongoing communicative event, Cure makes a series of statements:

> 'Drag is part of *tongzhi* culture. We can't deny its existence. The drag show is merely to present the multiplicity of *tongzhi* culture. Do you think the *tongzhi* community would enjoy better social acceptance if there weren't the drag show? My answer is negative. The *real point* is the social recognition of drag...What we should do is not to let people know that the *tongzhi* are more than drag queens..., but to present *us* as much as possible so that they can learn to accept *us* (my emphasis)'.

In saying 'Do you think the *tongzhi* community would enjoy better social

acceptance if there weren't the drag show? My answer is negative', Cure challenges

the thesis of claim 2, which sees the reinforced stereotypes as constraints. Indicating

the need to present drag (as well as other sexual minorities) as part of *us*, Manson and

Cure's utterances suggest that *tongzhi* activism should aim for a change of social

attitudes towards the multiple sexual culture in the *tongzhi* community. This suggests

that the current social acceptance of *difference* (i.e. 'abnormal' sexualities) should not

be taken as a constraint, but the object of activist actions. In contrast, the anti-drag

discourse is underpinned by the logic of 'sameness', expecting a higher social

acceptability of *tongzhi* community by showing the 'normalness' of the community. In

indicating the preferred activist strategy, the debate lifts the identity negotiation from

a 'descriptive' level (what the opportunities and constraints of *tongzhi* activism are) to

a normative level (what the orientations of *tongzhi* activism should be).

Mediating the difference

The case analysis demonstrates the way in which an online debate sparked by

a *tongzhi* event gives rise to a series of *truth claims* concerning the activistic aspect of

tongzhi identity. The claims emerge in a number of 'next positions' during the process

of 'grassroots' negotiation, unfolded in the form of adjacency pairs. Despite the

apparent disagreement between the negotiators, the contestation of each other's

opinions has not led the negotiation to an extensive argumentation. The evidence of

the social intolerance of abnormality (drawn from personal experiences) is quietly

admitted, since it is not questioned or objected. This is perhaps due to the fact that the

personal experiences are actually shared among the community membership, who

may have witnessed the intolerance in their daily life. The reality is, in other words,

self-evident. While being unable to directly test the validity of claims 1 & 2 (drag

reinforces current stereotypes and therefore decreases social acceptance of *tongzhi*),

the pro-drag negotiators raise claims 3 & 4 (drag is good for publicity and therefore

good for the social knowledge of *tongzhi*), which may be viewed as *counter claims*, as

I will term them. The counter claims are raised to interpret the social reality, while

some 'facts' in the reality cannot be denied: the low social tolerance of drag queen

tongzhi may be a fact; it is not necessarily a constraint of *tongzhi* activism. The

validity of claims 3 & 4 has not been seriously criticised nor vindicated in the

negotiation thread for the same reason: the effect of drag in terms of publicity may not

be denied, it is, however, not necessarily an opportunity ('Do you really think the

exposure of drag queen *tongzhi* can make people accept you?'). The absence of a

further contestation and vindication of the validity claims concerning the theory of

constraints and opportunities is perhaps due to the very short history of *tongzhi* events.

The theoretical argumentation in the case would need to be grounded on evidence

from experiences (e.g. an observable change of attitudes of the straight society towards *tongzhi* after the holding of a similar event). The shortage of practical experiences also suggests that the local *tongzhi* activism was yet to develop its grounded theory, be it based on 'grassroots' participation or not.

As shown in the case, a negotiated collective identity cannot be achieved in a single communicative event. Nevertheless, the online negotiation does manifest the fundamental *difference* of individual needs and expectations about the activism among the 'grassroots'. The difference resurfaced in MOTSS debates on the '*Tongzhi* Civil Right Movement' events and the 'Taiwan Pride' *tongzhi* parades in the following years. Along with the resurgence of the debate, the points at issue expanded from 'to drag or not' to the choice of activist route: if *tongzhi* activism should aim for better citizenship and show conformity to social norms, or place emphasis on sexual subjectivity and transgress existing boundaries of sexual divisions and moralities.

These 'grassroots' negotiations, while simultaneously addressing the event organisers, have developed a dialogic relationship with the *tongzhi* activism, reflected in the shifting themes of the aforementioned *tongzhi* events. The theme of the 2001 *Tongzhi* Civil Right Movement event 'Sunshine, Energy, Homosexuality' can be seen as a response to the call for a 'positive', 'normal' *tongzhi* image in the 2000 debate. The theme is embodied in the organising of sport games, which are advertised to be a

great opportunity to witness 'sportive' *tongzhi* bodies. Little debate on the event was produced in tw.bbs.soc.motss. The banner of 'sunshine' and 'energy', however, was not carried during the third event. Although drag performance was not listed in the programme, the invitation to the outdoor events on the official website encouraged participants to 'put on their most flamboyant outfits' for the party. In the 2003 event, *tongzhi* identity was defined as an amalgam of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender by the event organiser. The *tongzhi* parade (as part of the event in the year) went on the street of the capital city of Taiwan, with drag queens as part of the marchers. Unsurprisingly, a similar but larger debate on the representation of *tongzhi* identity in the parade once again arose in MOTSS space; one of the longest discussion threads on the topic collected nearly 400 posts.

The 2004 Taiwan Pride *tongzhi* parade is perhaps best seen as a reflection of the tug of war between the 'conservative' and the 'liberal' publics, or, the one between the routes of citizenship and sexual subjectivity. The theme of the event was marked by its incorporation of the discourses of pluralist democracy and sexual difference. In its official website it was announced that *tongzhi* is an umbrella identity for 'different'/marginalized sexual subjects (including sadomasochists), who aim to be 'dissident' citizens who share equal civil rights and political power with straight people. Meanwhile, invitations subtitled 'More than drag' were calling for

MOTSSers' participation in the event. In advocating an all-embracing *tongzhi* identity, the event seemed to seek for a balance between the diverging activist routes. This effort, however, did not prevent the event from 'grassroots' contestations (best embodied in a 167-post debate on the social impacts of the parade). The ongoing debates and the shifting routes of *tongzhi* events suggest an unsettled public identity, which may keep changing shapes along with the development of the dialogue between 'grassroots' negotiations and the organised activism. Meanwhile, the foci of negotiations may also shift with the change of the environment in the wake of future *tongzhi* activism, which has been pushing the boundary of social tolerance of difference since the very early stage.

Negotiations within the 'representative' circle

As part of the social spaces for the *tongzhi* community, the local MOTSS forums have been connecting individual members of similar interests who meet, interact and develop common understandings. Some of them have successfully brought together radicals who used the space to network and to reach consensuses with comrades, via which activist bodies and actions are constructed and practiced (Huang, 1997). In this sense MOTSS forums to some extent resemble Melucci's 'public spaces' where decisions about collective actions are made and voices representing the interests of

social groups are brought out. This is particularly true when it comes to private or elite-oriented forums whose operators are active members in the movement.

Some of the current elite activists or writers in this field have been enthusiastic MOTSSers in their early days. Their intensive interactions or negotiations for developing ideas or substantial actions concerning the collective interests of the *tongzhi* community have paved the way for the current activism and its practice. Nevertheless, consensuses that lead to collective actions do not always result from a single communicative event. Rather, they are more likely to be the results of repeated, continual processes of negotiated interactions. A 1995 discussion in tw.bbs.soc.motss, initiated on 18 July, exemplifies the early experience of elite activists' negotiation.

The discussion is marked by its argumentative negotiation aimed at pinning down the orientation of *tongzhi* activism.   It is initiated by one dominating negotiator who shows her/his objection to the linking up of homosexual emancipation and radical sexual liberation. This speech gives rise to the *truth claim* 'radicalism is the answer to *tongzhi* movement' and the *counter claim* 'radicalism is not the answer; moderatism is'. The negotiators present themselves in the footings of *principals*, which simultaneously contribute to the 'activist' fronts of the negotiators. These fronts are further affirmed in the using of the pronoun 'we' when referring to possible future collective actions (e.g. '*we* should actively *fight against* any suppression of sexual

minorities', my emphasis). In criticising/grounding the claims, the negotiators also present themselves as a small group in which the membership are familiar with each other to some extent. This is seen in the words like 'why don't you ring me so we can have a good talk', 'She always points out the crux of problem in our debates', or, 'are you still looking for boy friends? How many ones have you got?'

The debate ends without evidence of agreement. It is, nonetheless, constructive of a negotiated collective identity in its manifesting the difference within the group ('the radical'/'the moderate') and facilitating the shared understanding of the reasons that cause the difference. Without bringing forth an immediate consensus among the group, MOTSS forums are indeed the starting point for the integration of individual activist bodies who would move on towards the road to coalition in future actions concerning their shared interests.

A more recent example suggests that MOTSS forums could be the outlets of insiders' reflection on or dissidence in response to the decisions of activist groups. Nicky, who has been involved with the organisation of the 2003/2004 *tongzhi* parades, expressed his/her mixed feelings towards the events in a MOTSS forum after participating in a preparatory meeting for the 2004 event. S/he told the community s/he engaged her/himself in promoting the parades with an expectation that they would help the society to understand the *tongzhi* community's aspirations for equal

civil rights. To her/his disappointment, the first parade presented more 'feathered dresses' and 'male body builders' than serious messages of *tongzhi* citizenship, and this tendency seemed not to be changed in the second year. To conclude, the participant made clear her/his withdrawal from further engagement in the organisation or promotion of the same series of events. In another message from the same poster, the statement 'we are good' was announced with the revealing of a will to go to the parade 'as we are', without 'pretending merry, nor dressing up flamboyantly'. Aimed at the same event, a participant in a MOTSS board specific to *tongzhi* movement gave her/his warning to the campaign organiser who may overlook the distance between the decision-making centre and other members in the community, as the 'representative-ness' of the social group is commonly assumed among activist leaders.

Towards a radical democracy?

In his case study of an active segment of the 1960's-70's anti-war movement, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), Gitlin (1980) suggests that the young New Left foundered on failing to control the discrepancy between the movement leaders and its other constituents. The former were transformed into celebrities by the media and gradually isolated from the latter. As a result, the latter could only get to know their leadership and its performance through the mass media, while an effective mechanism

for controlling the leadership was absent. The movement eventually broke down as the elite level was too deviant from the supporters' expectations and could no longer retain its power from the bottom up.

Gitlin's analysis of the SDS experience echoes Melucci's argument of the importance of controlling the 'inevitable difference' between the representative and the represented in any project aiming for radical democracy. In a democratic political system, this sort of control is achieved by voting mechanism. In comparison, a similar mechanism seems to be missing when it comes to the politicisation of a broader realm of social life, i.e. the conduct of contemporary social movements. In the local experiences of social movements, campaign organizers are keen to build the dialogic relationship between 'the society' through the mass media (as SDS did), despite the lack of dialogic channels between the movement leadership and its supporters or the social group/interest it claimed to represent. It could be true that one would speak *for* a public without speaking *to* or listening to the public, since the structural element of examining the effectiveness of the representation is absent.

However, the advent of internet forums has pushed current social movements onto a new stage, whereby the absent structural space is filled in as the case study of the local MOTSS forums suggests. As we have witnessed, *tongzhi* as a collective identity that consolidates the lesbian/gay community and motivates participation in

collective actions cannot go without questioning from the community per se. The questioning is likely to result from the difference in the recognition of the constraints and opportunities of identity construction in the given environment. Such a difference may be generated at the elite level, between the elite and the 'grassroots', as well as among the 'grassroots'. Being publicly accessible to the *tongzhi* community, MOTSS forums serve to manifest the very difference and facilitate the subsequent negotiations aiming for shortening the distance. In so doing MOTSS forums are providing a *decentralised mediating space*, since the aforementioned process can be taking place spontaneously, at various levels and at different times. Furthermore, as the forums have facilitated grassroots participation in discursive productions, they seem to promise *devolution of discursive power* from the 'public spaces' (as formulated by Melucci) at elite levels to a greater totality.

Nonetheless, the provision of a mediating space does not guarantee an enlarging sphere of decision-making in the aforementioned domain. No matter how broad a public participation these forums may bring forth, it is up to the elite-leaders to decide what actions to take. What the MOTSS participants have been engaged in is not more than 'partial participation', in which individuals can at most work on its influence on decision-making (Pateman, 1970: 70). Moreover, it can also be naïve to believe a 'down to the very bottom' democracy is happening there. As pinpointed in

the previous section, the local MOTSSers tend to be students from higher education systems or young intellectuals from other social units. They belong to the generation that possesses better knowledge of social discourses and access to new information and communication technologies. When they are demonstrating their power in pushing further the boundary of democracy, what has been left out are the demands of older or less educated gays hanging around in gay bars, the dark side of parks, or public toilets. Their voices have never been, and, in a foreseeable future, will not be heard in the game of power-knowledge dominated by screens and keyboards. The MOTSS forums' contribution to democratising gay identities needs to be evaluated with discretion, as a large part of the community stays marginalized in the new social process.

Chapter 7

Building National Identities in Political Forums

I. Engaging in politics online

The Taiwanese mediascape in its 'post-deregulation' age is saturated with a multiplicity of grassroots-oriented 'public forums'. The culture of 'phone-in' discussion programmes has spread from 'underground' radio stations to legal television channels, marked by the first televised phone-in political discussion programme, '2100: All People Open Talk' (2100 *Chuan-Min-Kai-Chiang*), since August 1994. In 2002, the number of phone-in political discussion programmes reached as many as eight, though the number has shrunk to two in 2005. In print media, nation-wide newspapers, including China Times and the United News, started to include 'public opinion' pages in the early 1990s, welcoming contributions from 'ordinary' people who do not have journalistic or professional background.

Along with the increasing non-elitist voices in traditional media, a less institutionalised form of grassroots participation in the public sphere has started to take shape on the internet. Online forums dedicated to domestic politics first emerged in the early years of BBS culture and began to spread to all sorts of online spaces in the 1990s. They range from discussion boards on official sites of governmental

organisations, online outlets of traditional media (e.g. ChinaTimes.com), university-based BBSs, commercial portals (e.g. Yahoo! Kimo) to individual forums (e.g. twpolitics.com). The newsgroup tw.bbs.soc.politics is one of the most popular local political forums, attracting an average of 15,000 posts in a month. A few ethnic-group-oriented forums (e.g. tw.bbs.soc.hakka) in the same newsgroup system are also major producers of political discussions. As noted in Chapter 4, apart from domestically based discussions sites, there are some other 'global' forums specific to Taiwanese politics, including soc.culture.taiwan, the political discussion board at Yahoo! Chinese, and the 'cross-strait' forums at ETtoday.com.

Compared with the speech opportunities provided by traditional media, online political forums allow more space for grassroots participation. Moderation is usually minimally kept; the length of messages is virtually unlimited (as one can always cut a long post into a number of 'instalments'); topics of discussion are open to personal choice; furthermore, a participant can always create one's floor in the conversation, be it an answer to a question, a defence against an attack, or simply an update. In other words, it is the participants, rather than the moderators, that dominate the discursive production. Besides, online forums differ from the 'public forums' of traditional media in facilitating direct interactions between grassroots participants. In a typical phone-in political discussion programme, phone-in speakers predominantly address

the presenter or guest speakers. In online forums, grassroots speakers address 'the public' and interact with each other as part of 'the public'. Moreover, online public forums may cross over geographical boundaries or 'border controls' (in particular those between Taiwan and China) and allow opportunities for developing dialogues between 'the publics' of different political regions.

These attributes of online political discussions seem to promise a spontaneous, trans-bordered 'grassroots' public sphere of minimal moderation and extensive speech space. However, as criticised in a collective announcement of local scholars, online forums do not always live up to the expectation: along with their broadcasting counterparts (e.g. phone-in programmes, and other outlets of political comments in mainstream media), the local political forums have become the major producers of hostile speeches that provoke new conflicts or recycle old ones between ethnic groups and political camps (Peacetime Foundation of Taiwan, 2002). These critiques do indicate some of the common problems of Taiwanese-based online political forums. As will be examined, online political speeches, both in local and global forums, are saturated with open hostility in relation to domestic political struggles and the Taiwan-China relationship, in particular when ethnic/national identity is concerned. Nevertheless, to brush aside online forums for the 'downside', as pinpointed in the aforementioned announcement, may risk losing sight of their possible

'constructiveness' in other domains of cultural-political life. To interpret the performance of online political forums in relation to the question of national identity, this chapter explores the field by shifting research interests concerning political Net forums from the usual focus – the public sphere – to other aspects that they may be implicated in. To throw new light on the cultural implications of the Taiwanese-based online political forums, this chapter extends the analytic framework developed earlier to the context of national identity. First, it looks at the aspect of 'performative identity': online participation in this regard is not to be evaluated by its production of 'good' opinions; rather, they are seen as arenas of performative acts representing participants' sentiments and aspirations as well as their rooted beliefs concerning their existence in national space. Accordingly, even hostile speeches matter. Secondly, the chapter examines the discursive construction of 'antagonistic identity' in online speech performance. Antagonising speeches in political internet forums are to be examined in their capacity for disclosing the frontiers (in the Laclau/Mouffe sense) of Taiwanese identities. In doing so, I focus on the construction of the 'constitutive outside' by examining the formation of a specific signifier and its articulation with other discursive elements. Finally, the chapter looks into the interactions in these forums in terms of 'negotiated identity' in Melucci's sense. Similar to the British experience (Lax, 2004), the political online forums in Taiwan fail to draw the

attention of policy makers, not to mention to have explicit links to decision making.

Therefore, in this case we do not expect to see a public-sphere-like mediating space,

as seen in the MOTSS experience. Instead of emphasising the observable influences

on decision-making, the stress of the section is laid on the process of validating truth

claims about the opportunities and constraints, as well as the legitimacy of a projected

national identity. Meanwhile, the chapter also looks at the maintenance of

'constructive' interactions, especially, between ROC and PRC discussants. To

facilitate further exploration of these issues, the following pages provide background

knowledge concerning the question of national identity in Taiwan, including the major

identity projects, related discourses, and the political situation.

II. One island, two nationalisms: Projects and identities

The unsolved question of national identity in Taiwan is the legacy of the Second

World War and the Chinese civil war. The first one made Taiwan a peripheral territory

of the Nationalist China; the second one made Taiwan the central territory of the

Nationalist regime and home to some one million refugees from China. The refugees

were known as the post-war settlers, or, 'the mainlanders'.

As noted in Chapter 4, prior to the settlement of the post-war settlers'

community, there has been a majority 'Han-Chinese' society and some minority indigenous communities. The pre-war Han-Chinese community, generally known as the Hoklo, started to identify themselves as the 'native Taiwanese', in contrast to the 'mainlanders'. It is a popular argument among the pro-independence camp (as constantly seen in the pro-independence Liberty Times) that the pre-war Han Chinese are indeed mixed-bloods due to the common practice of mixed marriages between male Han settlers and indigenous females in the earlier settlement; it is also argued that a great number of earlier 'Han-Chinese' were originally indigenous, forced to assimilate into the Chinese society under the Chinese ruling.

No matter what history or ethnicity they originally had, the pre-war Taiwanese residents were all turned into part of the ROC nationals after the 1945 takeover. To make them proper 'Chinese' nationals, a series of 'Chinification' movements have been launched (Yang, 1993). The 'Chinese' identity was first in crisis in the early 1970s when the UN recognised the Chinese Communist as the legitimate ruling power of China. This forced the ROC to leave the UN and hence became a country without the recognition of the international society. The loss of a legitimate Chinese identity has paved the way for an emergent Taiwanese identity. It first arose in resistance to the hegemonic Chinese identity; since the emergence of a native-Taiwanese-based nationalist movement, it has progressively replaced the

Chinese identity and become mainstream in terms of national identity (Shih, 2000).

Supporters of the new national identity are by and large limited to the pre-war settlers'

community, especially the Hoklo. For the post-war settlers' community, in particular

the older generation, China is still the one and only homeland and Taiwan should be

unified with China sooner or later. Fearing that China would resort to force in reaction

to any move towards toward Taiwanese independence, a majority of Taiwanese

residents are inclined to maintain the status quo, that is, to keep off the issue of

independence-unification and focus on other aspects of national developments.

According to a recent survey, some 60% of Taiwanese would choose to avoid any

change of the political status for another fifty years of peace (AP, 22 July 2004).

The question of national identity in Taiwan is therefore involved with three

major strands of discourses: Chinese Nationalism, Taiwanese Nationalism, and the

discourse of the realpolitik. These discourses underlie the ideological conflicts

between major ethnic communities, influence people's political choices and shape the

political landscape of the island. Not surprisingly, they also dominate political

discussions in online forums. To advance our understanding of online practices in this

respect, an overview of the aforementioned discourses is given in the following pages.

Discourse of 'the Chinese' and the invention of a new nation

Chinese Nationalism claims a five-thousand-year Chinese civilization, originating

from the river basins of the Yellow River and the Yang-Zi River. The term

'*Chung-kou-jen*' (中國人) is the name of the people who share the cultural legacy of

the Chinese civilisation marked by the Han culture and Confucianism (Sun, 1928). In

a fundamentalist discourse, the referent of '*Chung-kou-jen*' is not limited to the

citizenship of China but all the 'Chinese' communities, including those in Taiwan,

Hong Kong, and even Singapore. Overall *Chung-kou-jen* are considered as an

undifferentiated totality of a unified history, despite the racial multiplicity and the

shifting territorial borderlines of China, and the fact that the term *Chung-kou-jen* is

indeed a rather recent invention. '*Chung-kou*', the middle kingdom, in its historical

sense is a geographical signifier vaguely referring to the middle part of the old empire,

where the majority of residents are Han descendents. It has never been the name of a

specific country or dynasty until the turn of the twentieth century (Lin, 1994: 6-7). In

1911, the republican revolutionaries (led by the Nationalist Party, or, Kuo-Ming-Tang,

KMT) toppled the *Ching* Dynasty. Modelled after the western 'one nation, one state'

formula, a new nation-state '*Chung-Hua-Min-Guo*' (the Republic of China) was built

and a new nation '*Chung-kou-jen*' thus came into being.

The meaning of *Chung-kou-jen* evolved with articulation of new elements. According to historians, the post-revolution KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek tried to reconstruct the category *Chung-kou-jen* as a means to stabilise his leadership in the chaotic post-revolutionary era. An idealised *Chung-kou-jen*, as constructed by Chiang, is a loyal national, submissive to Chiang's regime, marked by Leninist 'party-state' and Confucian patriarchy (Bao, 1999: 143-163). The launch of the New Life Movement in 1934 is a landmark of Chiang's project for promoting 'native morality', initiated as a counter force against the rise of Chinese Enlightenment that plead for western democracy and denounced the residue of feudalism (Schwarcz, 1986: 215; Bao, 1999: 163).

The project of Chinese Nationalism entered its second stage at the end of the Chinese civil war. Post-colonial Taiwan (as the only de facto territory of the ROC) was reconfigured into 'Free China'. A series of campaigns serving this purpose were set forth in the 1950s and the 1960s, including the promotion of Mandarin as 'the national language' and the influential 'Regeneration of Chinese Culture' movement, which affirmed Confucianism as the centre of Chinese culture and Taiwan as its orthodox inheritor (Yang, 1993: 147-9).

In line with the project of Chinification, the ethnic, historical, and geographical connections between China and Taiwan have been accentuated. Taiwan

is said to be an inseparable part of China, destined to unify with its homeland, as held

in Chiang's discourse of 'the doomed history of the Great China' (Chou & Chou,

1995, 102-3). This discourse was inculcated through media and educational systems,

while the phrase 'same culture, same blood' has been publicised as a popular slogan

(Chu, 1998: 35).

The enforcement of official nationalism is also seen in the promotion of

so-called 'Chinese Music', 'Chinese Opera', or, 'Chinese clothing'. The concept of

'Chung-kou-jen' has been further affirmed in both popular and academic discourses.

This is seen in book titles marked by their interests in 'the Chinese'. The subjects of

publications in this vein range from 'Chinese' psychology, worldviews, human

relationships, emotional life, wisdom, personality, beliefs, philosophy, humour, even

to bodily functions. It seems that there is indeed a special species of human beings

called 'Chung-kou-jen' as such, who are homogenous in mind and body, in social

practices and living experiences.

The primordialism of Chinese Nationalism, the emphasis on blood and origin,

on common culture and past, has become the departure point for Taiwanese

Nationalism. In aiming for a sovereign state, the new nationalism calls for a civic

model: Taiwan is said to be a new nation-state defined by the common will of people,

rather than the 'shared origin and blood'. Nevertheless, the priomordialist aspect of

the Taiwanese-based nationalism remains significant, while emphases are also placed

upon the common history and culture of the emerging nation-state.

The rise and mainstreaming of 'Taiwanese' identity

The quest for a Taiwanese nation-state dates back to the time of the Japanese

colonization, when the early Taiwanese nationalism took form in the 1920s (Lee &

Liu, 1994: 144). The advocacy for independence reappeared in the early KMT regime

due to the asymmetric relationship between the pre-war settlers' community and the

post-war settlers' community in both the fields of politics and cultural leadership (Lee,

1987). However, the plea for Taiwanese subjectivity had not won the local

intellectuals' support until the occurrence of the 1970's diplomatic crises, when the

ROC was forced to leave the UN. The local elites were forced to acknowledge the

political reality and started to reconsider their historical position. In the aftermath of

the diplomatic crisis the locale of 'the imagined community' has gradually shifted

from China to Taiwan, though the Chinese identity has remained privileged among the

post-war settlers' community, especially its first generation (Yin, 1988: 107-9). Public

advocacy of 'nation building' based on the Taiwanese subjectivity first appeared in the

1983 general election, in which questions of sovereignty and the concept of

'self-determination' were raised (Yin, 1988: 42). A full-blown Taiwanese Nationalism developed during the late 1990s to the early 2000s, when ruling power was gradually transferred from the Nationalist Party to the Hoklo-based Diplomatic Progress Party. Consequently, Taiwanese Nationalism becomes the dominant ideology and the Taiwanese identity the mainstream.

Current Taiwanese Nationalism aims for the international community's recognition of its sovereignty and a de jure independence (from China). Accordingly, regaining membership of the UN as an independent new country is on the primary agenda. In the nationalist discourse, the 'Taiwanese' are a new people with four-hundred-year history, who have built their own political and economic systems and created their unique culture and spirit. Despite the connections with Mainland China in its earlier stage of development, Taiwan has been in effect separated from China since the Japanese colonisation. In discarding its relations with China and claiming cultural independence, Taiwanese Nationalists have been searching for their own 'idols of the tribe' (Chang, 1993: 257), i.e., the cultural symbols that make up the basic group identity through 'history, mythology, folklore, art, literature, religious beliefs and practices' (Isaacs, 1975: 33). The urge for idols of the tribe gave rise to the renaissance of Taiwanese history, literature, folk arts, and languages dated back to the 1980s. Historical studies and academic works on the local 'collective memories' have

thrived (e.g. Hsiau, 1997 &1999; Chen, 1993& 1996; Chu, 1996); deconstructing the 'mythic' Chinese Nationalism has been the mission of pro-independence academics (e.g. Chuang, 1996; Shih, 2000; Cheng, 1989a & 1989b). Meanwhile, the character of 'the Taiwanese' as a people has been under construction through media representations. A series of soap operas portraying the 'good Taiwanese men' and the 'good Taiwanese women' have been produced. The good men are typically portrayed as humble, honest, and hardworking. The good women, especially the 'Taiwanese mothers', are virtuous and persevering despite poverty and hardships. The earthy image of the 'Taiwanese' reflects the socio-economic status of the pre-war settlers' community, whose membership traditionally constitutes the major workforce in agriculture and manufacture.

To counter the 'same culture, same blood' discourse of the Chinese Nationalism, some Taiwanese Nationalists embrace the logically possible but practically unrecorded indigenous blood in the 'native Taiwanese' and argue about the 'hybridity' of the 'Taiwanese nation'. Some even try to prove that the pre-war immigrants were not Han descendents. These discourses are generally known as part of the 'de-Chinification' movement (Chuang, 1996: 98), a series of actions that aim for cutting off the cultural ties between Taiwan and the Han-Chinese dominated China, despite the fact that Taiwan remains a 'Chinese' society in many aspects, in terms of

language and cultural practices.

Despite its significance in the nation-building movement, the definition of the 'Taiwanese' remains controversial. Theoretically it covers all the residents in Taiwan, though, as indicated, a great number of its residents, mainly the 'mainlanders', see themselves more as the 'Chinese' who live in Taiwan. In practice, the name 'the Taiwanese' is more or less monopolised by the so-called 'native Taiwanese' (i.e., the Hoklo), who have historically felt an antagonism towards the mainlanders due to the asymmetry of early cultural-political relationship. The sentiment persists despite the fact that 'the native Taiwanese' have been dominating the political sphere in the recent decade and the mainlanders are currently the minority both in population and symbolic power.

The inherent exclusiveness and hostility in 'the native Taiwanese' discourse has left little room for the expansion of the 'Taiwanese' identity as an all-embracive collective identity. It marginalizes the younger generations of the post-war settlers' community; some of them may identify themselves as Taiwanese rather than Chinese when it comes to political identity. It also excludes the Hakka people and the indigenous people. The former is the minority pre-war settlers' community and the latter are indeed the first nations of Taiwan. In the mid 1990s the Taiwanese identity

had its first reconfiguration, when the discourse of 'the new Taiwanese' was promoted. In this new formulation, whoever respects her/his Taiwanese citizenship is qualified as a 'new Taiwanese', be s/he Hoklo, Hakka, indigenous, or a mainlander. The emphasis on citizenship reflects the civic aspect of the nationalism as well as its strategic turn to a 'hegemonic' collective identity in a new scenario. The old antagonism towards the mainlanders, which underlies the early Taiwanese Nationalism, is replaced by the new one towards China. Against the new Other, a new Taiwanese nation (as a hegemonic formation articulating all ethnic groups) is called into existence. This strategic turn is further advanced in the later advocacy of 'the Four Great Ethnic Groups', in that the Hoklo, the mainlanders, the Hakka, and the indigenous are considered as equally important constituents of the new nation, while multiculturalism is the principle (Chen, 1997: 15, 84).

The political discourses of 'the new Taiwanese' and 'the Four Great Ethnic Groups' have gradually turned obsolete after the late 1990s. A well-recognised all-embracing (as in the 'new Taiwanese' discourse) or multicultural (as in 'the Four Great Ethnic Groups' discourse) Taiwanese identity is still absent. As examined later in the chapter, the old antagonistic relationship between the 'native Taiwanese' and the 'Chinese in Taiwan' persists; in the fundamentalist discourse the old antagonism is articulated with the new one, via which a hard-line Taiwanese identity is reinforced.

The politics and the realpolitik

The coming-to-power of the Hoklo community is marked by the following events: the launch of the Hoklo-based Democratic Progress Party (DPP) in 1987; the elections of President Lee (a former Hoklo KMT) in 1992 and 1996; the elections of the DPP President Chen in 2000 and 2004. In losing its early privileged status, the Nationalist Party (KMT) has gone through major transformations. The New Party, the People First Party (PFP), and Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) were established in 1993, 2000, and 2001, respectively. Most of their high-ranking memberships are former KMT. Among them the New Party is mainlander-oriented, holding the most enthusiastic advocates of unification. The People First Party and the current KMT are in the 'middle of the road' on the unification-independence spectrum and inclined to maintain the status quo in the coming decades. Due to their political affinities, the New Party, the People's Party and the KMT have formed a coalition known as the 'pan-blue', or the 'blue camp', named after the colour of the party flag of the KMT. The Hoklo-based TSU, led by former President Lee, is in contrast a radical advocate of independence and has been a political ally of the DPP. The TSU-DPP coalition is known as the 'pan-green', or, the 'green camp', named after the colour of the party flag of the DPP. The coalitional relationships are evolving; in 2005, the PFP has

separated from the 'blue camp' and formed the 'orange camp'.

Along with the reshaping of domestic politics, the relationship between Taiwan and China is also experiencing a major change. The mainstreaming of Taiwanese Nationalism implies the end of the 'free-China-against-communist-China' era; the new opposition between 'the democratic Taiwan' against 'the authoritarian China' has arisen instead. Nevertheless, the declaration of an independent Taiwanese state is hushed and a tense Taipei-Beijing relationship is prevented by the international community: while China threatens to launch attacks to stop any 'separatism', the major world powers, including the US, UK, Japan, Germany, Russia, and France, have been brushing aside the Taiwanese Nationalist plea for fears of offending the increasingly strong China (Maguire, 1998: 109-110). The US has on various occasions made clear its acknowledgement of the 'One China' policy. For instance, the former US state secretary Powell reasserted this policy in his public speech in Beijing in 2004 (Su, 10 October 2004). Meanwhile, the military actions of China are closely watched by the US. During the 1996 Taiwan Strait military crisis (when China held a large-scale military exercise in the strait), the US played the role of a guardian of the regional peace by sending naval forces to support Taiwan. As shown in a recent survey, there is some optimism among the Taiwanese that the US will protect Taiwan and prevent it from being invaded by China, though nearly half of

the Taiwanese do not hold the same opinion. The same survey shows that over 50 percent of the Taiwanese did not believe in the country's ability of self-defence, while half of those surveyed opposed waging war to maintain Taiwan's democracy and independence (AP, 22/07/2004). It also indicates that that 63% of the Taiwan residents favours a 50-year peace project that delays any further development of the independence/unification agenda (CNA, 22/07/2004). The figures somewhat make explicit the mixed attitudes towards the national future: although the islanders are not entirely pessimistic about the independence movement, the fear of China's military actions seems to be the major constraint of Taiwanese Nationalism.

Chinese Nationalism is also facing a new situation. The KMT's claim that it would regain the lost territory from Chinese Communists proved to be an illusion, since China has grown into a much stronger rival. Given the discrepancy between China and Taiwan in size and military capacity, Taiwan is highly likely to be part of a communist regime if unification is achieved. Instead of appealing to an immediate change of the status quo, moderate Unionists call for a 'delayed' unification, i.e., leaving it to the future and waiting for the moment when China has transformed itself into a democratic polity.

The complexity of oppositional national identities has dominated the socio-political field on the island. It influences language and cultural policies,

educational systems, diplomatic decisions, and even the economic development. Due to the uncertainty of the cross-strait relationship, more and more local entrepreneurs chose to move out of Taiwan, which has had a serious impact on the labour market. Unavoidably, the complexity also shapes the speech in online political forums. We will look at this in the following analytic sections.

III. Presenting the self as a nationalist

Chapter 5 sketches the ways in which internet forums work as arenas of identity performance. The textual elements of a post, including the nickname of the post sender, her/his signature, utterances in the message body, and even the alias of the email address, are part of performative acts. These performative elements have been well explored by online nationalists in Taiwanese-based forums. The following analysis starts from the making of nicknames/aliases and signatures – the most detectable aspect of the 'front' and continues with the examination of the practice of code-switching, a relatively common performative act that discloses one's ethnic origin and political affinity. Lastly, we look at the performativity of name-calling and labelling. In looking into 'nationalistic' performance, we focus on the way in which online speech acts bring the participants' aspirations to visibility. Whereas the

physical difference between oppositional nationalists is limited (due to their ethnic affinity) and the arena of national identity performance in everyday life is scarce (e.g. no representative sport teams to cheer for), textual-based online forums prove to be efficient spaces for performative practices, where identities are built in words, and sentiments are transformed into speech acts.

Nicknaming and signature

'Established fronts' in Goffman's sense refer to somewhat stereotyped collective images (in relation to a particular social role) that have been well established in time (Goffman, 1959: 37-8). In the online arena of national identity performance, the selection of established fronts may be seen in the participants' adoption of particular lexicons in nicknaming. For instance, one who names her/himself 'Pilgrimage to Motherland' (祖國江山萬里行 *Tsu-kuo-chiang-shan-wang-li-hsing*) is probably a Chinese Unionist, since the term 'Motherland' is synonymous to China in Chinese Nationalist discourse. Likewise, the nickname 'the Great Han nation' (大漢民族 *Ta-han-min-tsu*) presents a similar nationalist sentiment for its emphasis on the Han origin. The nationalist sentiments residing in the lexicons make them convenient ingredients of nationalist fronts, which are self-explanatory due to their relation to

existing ideologies or discursive practices. This makes them rather common choices

among online discussants with strong political stances.

Sometimes, a nationalist front presented by a nickname is only discernible

when put together with the participant's utterances or other performative/discursive

elements, e.g., the alias of email address. For instance, the Chinese Nationalist front

of the participant nicknamed 'the Patriot' (愛國者 *Ai-kuo-che*) could look ambiguous

without being juxtaposed with her/his alias 'cn' (short for China in Internet language).

A nickname-based front can also be situational. A fine example is the long nickname

'Cheer for Campaign for Rectifying the Name of Taiwan' (爲台灣正名加油

Wei-Taiwan-cheng-ming-chia-yiu), displaying the participant's support for the

pro-independence collective action (one that promotes the name of Taiwan as the

official country name). Occasionally, a nickname takes the form of statement, such as

'Taiwan, a country of independent sovereignty' (台灣主權國 *Taiwan-tsu-chuen-kuo*).

This has, however, proved to be a more common practice in signatures, for they

provide a much more spacious arena for performing assertives/constatives.

Signatures involved in *assertives/constatives* range from one's belief in the

'right track' of national future, criticisms of rival camps, to campaigning for certain

projects. They may take the form of a short phrase like 'Peace, the road to a

Taiwanese nation', or come up as verses, such as '...Flowers of freedom bloom at our

hearts, the light of democracy glows in our hands, let the democratic Taiwan shine up

the road for the great China forever...' They may appear as a declaration like 'the

unification of the great homeland China is following the unavoidable historical trend,

we demand that the leader of Taiwan should follow the trend and give up

separatism...' Sometimes, they are taken as free advertising space for promoting

political agendas, such as the one in the following:

> 'The two China (PROC and ROC) should follow the same constitution; the
> two countries should hold two separate seats in the UN; ...The two
> countries sign up for building a confederacy in fifty years. To ensure peace
> for the coming fifty years, please support the one-China confederacy' (12/
> 12/2002, tw.bbs.soc.politics)

Having spread a 'good' message in the form of a signature as above, the

participant built a *missionary*-like personal front. The front will take a clearer form if

s/he frequents the forum and further spells out the agenda in her/his utterances. In

contrast with the 'good' signature, some participants see signatures as outlets for

expressing hostility. For instance, a tw.bbs.soc.politics participant has her/his

hardliner Taiwanese Nationalist position manifested in accusing the 'shameless'

pro-unification media and politicians of being 'the two origins of the current turmoil

in Taiwan' in her/his signature. In this case, the signature owner kept her/himself a

front of a detractor.

To create a personal front through constatives is to align oneself with a particular story line or discourse. For instance, the signature saying 'the democratic Taiwan shining up the road for the great China' reflects the pro-unification vision that calls for a unified, democratic China based on the 'Taiwanese experience'. Likewise, the signature speaking of unification as 'the unavoidable historical trend' and accusing Taiwanese independence of 'separatism' is reproducing the rhetoric of the Chinese authorities. The speech of the 'shameless pro-unification media and politicians', on the other hand, is reminiscent of the commentaries and editorials of The Liberty Times, the leading pro-independence newspaper. In aligning oneself with an existing discourse, one is producing a front that takes on its full meaning when it is understood 'intercontextually'. In other words, in echoing an existing, well-known discourse, one is suggesting one's membership of a collective position in the manner of shaping the meaning of one's speech acts in reference to the 'members' resources'.

Code-switching

In her ethnographical study of the language use in Taiwan-based internet forums, Su finds that 'stylised Taiwanese-accented Mandarin', 'stylised Taiwanese', and 'stylised Hakka-accented Mandarin' are commonly adopted by internet-forum participants as part of the performance of local (Taiwanese/Hakka) personae. The term 'stylised' refers to the representation of dialects in Mandarin-based Chinese characters by mimicking the sounds of the dialects (Su, 2003).

This finding coincides with my observation of online performance of national identity in language use. Taiwanese (also known as Hoklo) and Hakka (dialects) were highly suppressed during the earlier KMT era, especially from the early 1970s to the late 1980s, when Chiang Kai-shek's 'Regeneration of Chinese Culture' movement took place (Su, 1993: 261-3). Speaking dialects was forbidden in schools, public places and governmental offices (Huang, 1996: 37-8). Until 1993, the percentage of dialect television programmes was kept below 30 percent by regulations (Chu, 1998: 33). These policies have turned Taiwanese/Hakka and hence Taiwanese or Hakka-accented Mandarin the 'marked', i.e. the secondary/inferior category, subordinate to standard-accented Mandarin (as being promoted at school), the principal/superior language in Taiwan (see the discussion on 'the marked' in Laclau,

1990: 32-33). The accents are not only the code-markers of ethnicity but also those of cultural hierarchy. Ironically, the negative meanings of the code-markers have been turned into positive ones along with the advent and mainstreaming of the 'Taiwanese subjectivity'. It is not uncommon to see pro-independence intellectuals speaking Taiwanese on television as badge of honour. As movements aiming for the renaissance of 'mother tongues' arose in the 1980s (Huang, 1996: 38), a variety of the writing systems of Taiwanese dialects (including the indigenous languages) are also developing.

To interpret the discourse of 'stylised Taiwanese' or 'stylised Taiwanese-accented Mandarin' as speech acts constituting nationalist fronts, however, one needs to look into its meaning, again, intercontexually. The Old Fellow, an active critic of the orthodox Chinese culture in 'News Dialogues' forum (attached to chinatimes.com), always writes 'I' (我 wo) in its stylised Taiwanese-accented Mandarin counterpart (偶 o) among his other utterances written in proper Mandarin-based Chinese characters. If not for his negative attitudes towards Chinese Nationalism manifested in his speeches, the practice of code-switching may not be taken as a nationalist act. The nationalist sentiment is more distinguishable when one writes in proper Taiwanese writing systems. During my fieldwork I have observed the practice of switching between Mandarin-based Chinese characters and Taiwanese

writing systems during in pro-independence postings. Sometimes, switching between

Mandarin and stylised dialects or dialect-accented Mandarin is done for displaying the

affinity between community members. In tw.bbs.soc.hakka, a newsgroup dedicated to

the Hakka community, switching between Hakka (in the proper Hakka writing system)

and Mandarin is a fairly common practice.

Among pro-unification participants, who tend to be members of the post-war

settlers' community and standard Mandarin speakers, 'code-switching' is practiced in

a very different way. The Chinese characters currently adopted in China are

simplified Chinese characters, a new invention of the Chinese communists. In Taiwan,

Chinese users read and write in traditional characters and are indeed the only Chinese

speakers in the world who still practice the system. Via computing software, a text

encoded in simplified Chinese characters can be easily switched/decoded to one in

traditional   counterparts,   and   vice   versa.   In   other   words,   a

traditional-Chinese-character-user can easily compose a post in the simplified

characters with little effort. This has facilitated the creation of a front of a

pro-unification hardliner (and indeed it is not uncommonly practiced), as using

simplified characters may signal an abandonment of one's Taiwanese membership, as

it has been so interpreted by forum participants. The performativity of this kind of

practice also needs to be interpreted contextually. In cross-strait or global Chinese

forums, it is common to see China-based participants writes in simplified Chinese characters. Since this practice is the norm in China, it may not qualify as a performative act in the Butler/Goffman sense. Usually, perfect local knowledge, disclosure of personal local experiences and an email address exclusive for Taiwanese users, e.g. those provided by university servers, are trails that reveal one's Taiwanese nationality. Owing to the strained China-Taiwan relationship, a participant who shows those attributes is unlikely to be a PRC national.

Name-calling and labelling

Nicknaming, signature making, and code-switching, as shown in the above, are speech acts of self-positioning, which work as part of one's nationalist or ethnic front. Apart from the presentation of the 'self', identity performance may also take place through the presentation of the 'Other'. I.e., in naming the Other, one is implying who s/he is not and thenceforth who s/he is. However, simply calling someone 'pro-unification' does not necessarily suggest one's pro-independence position. Without showing antagonism, the us/them differentiation cannot be rendered clear: to name someone 'pro-unification' may not be an act of self-positioning (as a Taiwanese Nationalist); to articulate the naming with negative terms, such as calling one

'Unionist pig' (統豬 *tung-chu*), is certainly one. In the local political forums, name-calling or labelling the 'Other' is part of the subculture. These names and labels are by and large historical. The term 'Chinese pig' (中國豬 *chung-kuo-chu*) is an old dysphemism for the post-war settlers. 'Pan-blue Chinese pig' (泛藍中國豬 *fan-lan-chung-kuo-chu*) is a combination of a historical Other (the Chinese pig) an the current one (the pan-blue political camp). Labels such as 'Han the alien tribe' (漢人異族) and 'the Han chauvinist' (漢人沙文主義) are related to the radical Taiwanese Nationalist discourse that denounces the Han legacy of the pre-war settlers' community. A pro-unification participant may call the pro-independence 'pro-independence bitch' (台獨賤狗 *tai-du-chien-kou*) or the 'Hoklo chauvinist' (referring to Hoklo-centric nationalists). As the names and labels are imbedded within historical experiences or discourses, in name-calling/labelling someone, one is also engaging oneself in the experiences or discourses. Accordingly, one is displaying one's acknowledgement of and alignment with radical Taiwanese Nationalism in naming a pro-unification participant 'the Han chauvinist'. The historical experiences behind these names and labels provide the ground for 'communicative presumptions'. By virtue of the presumptions, the informed receivers can unmistakably decode the implications of the Other-naming. By the same token, name-callings as *expressives* are transformed into part of identity performance.

The practice of other-naming/labelling in relation to historical-discursive formations, e.g. the Taiwanese/Chinese Nationalism, suggests the function of antagonism in the field of national identity in the Taiwanese context. To further explore the aspect of antagonistic identity, the following section gives an extensive examination into the online lexicon 'Chi-na' (支那), the best-known label for naming Chinese Nationalists as the Other. We will see how an other-defined category takes form in online political forums over time and reshapes itself through contingent articulations.

IV. Constructing the constitutive outside: the case of 'Chi-na-jen'

In looking into the antagonistic aspect of national identity in the Taiwanese context, I follow the theoretical framework based on Laclau's and Mouffe's formulation of social antagonism and lay stress on the construction of the 'constitutive outside' of Taiwanese identity. In the previous chapter on gay identities, we have explored the way in which the *elements* 'moralist gay'/'masculine gay' are turned into differential *moments* of the discursive formation of 'heterosexual hegemony' – the 'constitutive outside' of *tongzhi* identity, and how the articulatory practices take place within online contestations. In the following section, we will first look at the construction of the

element 'Chi-na', one of the most original yet controversial online formations. As examined in the following pages, the term 'Chi-na' has become the most 'inference-rich' category in nationalistic online discussions. This 'inference-richness' is the work of antagonism, emerging within the impossibility of building an internationally recognized nation-state of Taiwan. Owing to their provision of anonymous and uncensored discursive space, domestic political forums serve to facilitate the growth and affirmation of the antagonism towards China, embodied in the formation of the 'constitutive outside' pivoting on the signifier 'Chi-na'. To further investigate how the inference of the constitutive outside shifts, I look at the articulatory practices that bring forth the formation of the system of 'Chi-na-jen' (支那人), within which a series of elements are turned into part of the 'constitutive outside' of Taiwanese identity. The section finishes in addressing the question of the 'intertextuality' between elite discourses and grassroots speech; which helps examine the issue of evolution of discursive power as well as the role that the formation of an online 'constitutive outside' plays in the configuration of a nationalistic Taiwanese identity.

'Chi-na-jen' as a stigmatised category

In Chapter 5 I have taken the terminology of 'Chi-na' as an example of language

subculture of the local online forums. '*Chi-na*', '*Chi-na-jen*' and '*Chi-na-mei*' (支那妹) are a series of dysphemisms substituting for China, the Chinese, and Chinese women, respectively. '*Chi-na* trash' (支那人渣 *Chi-na-jen-cha*) is another example of the *Chi-na* lexicon. '*Chi-na-jen*', '*Chi-na-mei*', and '*Chi-na* trash' are circulated mainly online: they are rarely heard in everyday conversations and never adopted by the mainstream media. Nevertheless, *Chi-na* as the matrix of this series of dysphemisms is a historical term. The epistemology of *Chi-na* is one of the best-explored subjects in the local online forums. As noted in Chapter 5, the term has been circulated as a discriminative term among Japanese right-wing militants during the Second World War. The historical memory carried by the word underlies the significatory turn from a neutral geographical term into a dysphemism in current online speech.

The early appearance of the term '*Chi-na*' in online forums can be traced back to 1994, when it was first mentioned in the newsgroup tw.bbs.soc.politics, one of the major outlets of local political discussions. During the whole year, it was only referred to fifteen times. However, references to the term started to thrive in the next year, coinciding with the initiation of the pro-independence 'Farewell to China' movement. Two-hundred-and-forty-five messages containing the term are recorded in the newsgroup's archive; for most of the time it was adopted as a substitute for

'*Chung-kou*' (中國), the usual name for China in Chinese. In 1996, there were 569 messages carrying the term; in 1997, 813; in 1998, 930; in 1999, 3361; in 2000, 5704; in 2001, 6654; in 2002, 12956. Up to March 2005, there are in total 25, 961 searchable messages containing the term in the tw.bbs.soc.politics archive. Meanwhile, the aforementioned '*Chi-na*' lexicon, including '*Chi-na-jen*', '*Chi-na-mei*', '*Chi-na* trash', and '*Chi-ke*' (支客, a variation of *Chi-na-jen*), also emerged with the increasing popularity of the term '*Chi-na*'.

Being part of the most historical online anti-Chinese register, the connotations of '*Chi-na*' and its derivatives have been constantly expanded by enthusiastic '*Chi-na*' critics. The signature of an earlier online discussant nicknamed 'Independent Taiwan' exemplifies one of these attempts:

> The wickedness of *Chi-na* exists in its relentless militarisms against its neighbours, …The *Chi-na* government is essentially wicked, the leader of evilness; without its eradication there will never be real peace in the Far East…(tw.bbs.soc.politics)

In a more updated post one discussant displayed her/his resentment towards *Chi-na*/China without reservation. In naming the Chinese government as 'the *Chi-na* communist bandits' and pro-unification post-war settlers' community '*Chi-na-jen*' and 'Chinese dwarf' (中國侏 *Chung-kou-chu*), s/he prescribes a series of attributes of 'the Chinese' as below:

What would first come up in your mind whenever you see a Chinese?

SARS = Chinese pneumonia

Smuggling for prostitution = Chinese women born to be sluts and prostitutes...

Dictatorship and massacre committer = mashing university students with tanks (in *Tien-an-men* Square; the researcher's note) ...

Chinese- *Chi-na-jen,* the subspecies of human beings...

The shame of all mankind, peril to the whole world...(tw.bbs.soc.politics, 17/04/2005)

The two examples reveal different dimensions of anti-China/Chinese sentiments in Taiwan. The first example is taken from a 1996 post, when the Chinese government's militant threat to Taiwan started to heighten. The 'wicked *Chi-na'* discourse echoes the islanders' fears and resentment of Chinese militarism; these feelings have helped consolidated Taiwanese Nationalism, seen in the overwhelming election of the pro-independence President Lee. The 2005 post reflects a range of common stereotypes and allegations about the Chinese and China. Speech in this vein accentuates the 'backwardness' and 'brutality' of China, which is viewed as a generator and spreader of diseases (e.g. the deadly bird flu and the SARS epidemic), an exporter of prostitutes (as Chinese prostitutes smuggling to Taiwan is not uncommon), and an enforcer of totalitarianism and dictatorship.

The signified of *'Chi-na-jen'* is not limited to the Chinese in PRC; in online forums, a *'Chi-na-jen'* can also be a pro-unification Taiwanese resident who

regards himself as 'Chung-kou-jen' (the Chinese) and denies Taiwanese subjectivity.

'Chi-na-jen' in the second signification is described as the inheritor of the legacy of

Chang Kai-shek's dictatorial, corrupted regime as well as the 'agents' of Chinese

Communists who block the sovereignty of Taiwan. Sometimes, the first and second

significations are mingled into one, creating a third signification: 'Chi-na-jen' in this

sense are uncivilised and barbarian, militant and totalitarian, profiteers of KMT

corruptions, as well as traitors of Taiwan (in being the mouthpiece of China). A post

entitled 'the Biography of Chi-ke' represents this line of speech:

> ...Chi-ke are those who...go to toilet without closing the door (because
> there's no toilet doors in China)...grab money in Taiwan, masturbate in
> China, and emigrate to the US...launch missiles against you and accuse
> you of trouble making if you don't surrender immediately...force you
> to be part of China and accuse you of provocation if you dare to
> disagree...(tw.bbs.soc.politics, 04/04/2003)

Discourse that builds up the connotation of Chi-na-jen as described has

made it more than a dysphemism; rather, it works as a stigmatised, metaphorical, and

evolving inference-rich category in Sacks' sense (defined in Chapter 5). The term

Chi-na-jen is 'inference-rich', since it is to be identified with a set of prescribed

knowledge and facts as above; whoever is identified with the term is presumably part

of the category and carrying all sorts of the prescribed qualities. It is stigmatised,

since the 'knowledge and facts' about the category all point to a negative image. It is

metaphorical, as it carries a number of symbolisms and thus functions as more than a name of a specific human group; this is especially true in its third signification, inasmuch as the substantial existence of a hybridised '*Chi-na-jen*' as so described is absent in reality. As constructed in online discourse, the meaning of '*Chi-na-jen*' is not to be fixed once for all; it is constantly reconstructed with new 'evidence', e.g., the epidemic of SARS in 2003 that confirms its identity of generator and spreader of disease.

Due to its inference-richness, the category '*Chi-na-jen*' has become a convenient tool for downgrading its signified. To call a Chinese '*Chi-na-jen*', an obsolete Japanese term, instead of '*Chung-kou-jen*' (the 'Chinese'), is to deliberately 'misidentify' her/him with a stigmatised category. Intentional 'misidentification' (Sacks, 1995: 425) as the downgrading act takes place with the undercutting of the position of the category, which, in this case, is seen in the multiple stigmatisation of the category as depicted above; in fact, owing to the constant practice of undercutting its position, identifying someone as *Chi-na-jen* is sometimes taken as more an act of name-calling than misnaming among online participants.

In the foregoing analysis of name-calling/labelling, we have seen how such a speech act can work as part of identity performance: in identifying its Other, one is suggesting one's positioning in a set of relational identities. Ergo, the naming of the

Other is in effect an act of constructing the self. If the case of the *Chi-na-jen* speech

fits in this logic, the establishment and adoption of this category are involved with the

construction of its counter identity, namely, the 'Taiwanese'. This means that the

category *Chi-na-jen* is constructed as the 'constitutive outside' of an antagonistic

Taiwanese identity in the Laclau/Mouffe sense. A 'constitutive outside', as noted

earlier in Chapter 2, is an antagonising force that blocks the full identity of another

force; accordingly, *Chi-na-jen* can only be seen as a constitutive outside when the

antagonistic relationship is temporarily settled. Discourse of *Chi-na-jen* as shown in

the above may be a manifestation of the antagonism; however, it is through

articulatory practices that a contingent antagonistic relation is constructed. This

process of articulation is to be further examined in the following pages.

'*Chi-na-jen*' as a 'moment' of the discourse of the 'outside'

To construct the category of '*Chi-na-jen* ' as a substitute for '*Chung-kou-jen*' is in

effect not merely to downgrade but also to *negate* the full identity of the referred

object: the identity of '*Chung-kou-jen*' as a great nation (as portrayed in Chinese

Nationalism) is denied since its existence is not even recognised. The negated identity

of *Chung-kou-jen,* as will be further expounded, is the counterpart of an antagonised

Taiwanese   identity   in   current   nationalistic   struggles.   Literally,   the   term

'*Chung-kou-jen*' refers to people of *Chung-kou* – referring either to the historical Middle Kingdom or Midland, or to a metaphorical China, or, more commonly, to the political entity, the People's Republic of China. The cultural implications of the *Chung-kou-jen* identity have been spelt out in the second section of the chapter. In short, '*Chung-kou*' is said to be a country of five-thousand-year civilisation and greatest cultural legacies, and '*Chung-kou-jen*' as a people are the inheritors of the civilisation and legacies. This discourse is, as depicted earlier, rejected by pro-independence hardliners. In addressing ones' PRC rival, a Taiwanese online epistemologist of *Chi-na* declared, 'this is how I know about *Chi-na*. Like it or not…You are *Chi-na*, not the 'central country' or *Chung-kou* in world geography…In fact, the central power of the world is the US, not you *Chi-na-jen*, the people of 200 million illiterates. You don't deserve the name of *Chung-kou* (tw.bbs.soc.politics, 2003/05/25; the underlined words are written in English in the original text)'.

The rejection of the *Chung-kou/Chung-kou-jen* discourses is related to the denial of the cultural identity of *Chung-kou-jen* among radical Taiwanese Nationalists, who consider it to be imposed. In fact, to eradicate this identity and fill in its space with a Taiwanese-based national identity is on the primary agenda of Taiwanese Nationalists. The 'Taiwanese' is said to be ethnically or even racially distinct from 'the Han-Chinese'. To discard the 'false' Chinese, or, *Chung-kou-jen,* identity, it is

essential to cut off the residual 'Han-Chinese culture', marked by the 'Han chauvinism' (or, the Han ethnocentrism) that prevents 'the Taiwanese' from building an independent modern nation-state. This ideology, along with Chinese Unionism, is identified by pro-independence elites as the force that has for centuries marginalized and forcibly integrated other races or ethnicities into the 'one-and-unified great Chinese nation', dominated by the Han-centric 'Midland culture' (e.g. Chuang, 1996; She, 2000; Cheng, 1989a & 1989b). According to this line of discourse, the long history of Han chauvinism is embodied in the expansion of the Chinese Empire, marked by brutality, annexations, slavery, and political struggles. The imperial legacy is reflected in the former Nationalist regime and the current Chinese Communists; both of them claim the 'Great Unionism' and deny the cultural independence of Taiwan. It is the chauvinism that prevents Taiwan from building an identity as an independent nation-state. It is, to be short, the very antagonising force that blocks Taiwan's full identity.

The discourse of Han chauvinism has been well received among online discussants. One pro-independence tw.bbs.soc.politics participant maintained, '...the so-called the Great Chinese Nation is nothing but a slogan based on Han chauvinism. The Tibetan, the Mongolian, and the Uigur are not part of the Han-Chinese population and therefore ought to enjoy autonomy. If you sympathise with the Palestinians for

their situation, you should also feel for the Tibetans and the Uigurs' aspirations for autonomy, and support the idea that the Taiwanese should have the right to decide their own future...(01/10/2001)'. At times, the discourse of Han chauvinism and that of *Chi-na* converge in anti-unification online speech. A 2001 post entitled 'Please don't call us Han-people' represents a typical case:

> *We* are half-*Pin-pu* descendents. *We* are genetically very different from *the Han people* that (the people of) *Mainland Chi-na* claim to be and force us to be...*We* don't want to be named as *the Han people* or *the Han population*...as these names are full of the residue of *the Han chauvinism*. If *they Chi-na* want to call themselves as such, go ahead. *We* need not be a follower...*We* are in fact all *victims* of the *Han chauvinism* practiced by the *KMT regime*, which has done so much harm to the development of Taiwan and the historical feelings among all ethnicities here (tw.bbs.soc.tayal, 01/03/2001. Italic mine)

In adopting the *indicators* (Sacks, 1992, Vol. I: 333) 'we' and 'they' and juxtaposing them antagonistically, a clear-cut differentiation between two categories is drawn in this message. The referent of the indicator 'they' is made clear in the speaker's phrasing 'they *Chi-na*'. The equivalence between 'the*y Chi-na*' and 'the Han chauvinists' is implied in utterances that suggest 'the*y Chi-na*' favours the chauvinistic self-identity 'Han people/population' ('*If* they *Chi-na* want to call themselves as such...'). By naming 'the KMT regime' as the enforcer of 'Han chauvinism', 'they *Chi-na*' and 'the KMT regime' are related as equivalent (inasmuch as the two are both the enforcers of the ideology), which makes the latter part of

'them'. In contrast, the indicator 'we' refers to a group of people who distance themselves from Han chauvinism and Han identity. The referent of the indicator 'we', though unnamed, is inferable by virtue of 'member's resources': in naming 'we' as 'half-*Pin-pu* descendents', the speaker is implying her/his 'native Taiwanese' identity, since the discourse suggesting that the 'native Taiwanese' are half *Pin-pu* (one of the indigenous tribes in Taiwan) is a well-known Taiwanese Nationalist argument. The antagonistic relation between we/they, the 'native Taiwanese'/*Chi-na*-the-Nationalist is further implied in the speaker's identifying 'we' as the 'victims' of Han chauvinism, an ideology pertaining to *Chi-na*/the-Nationalist.

The convergence of the speech of Han chauvinism and that of *Chi-na* as shown in the above exemplifies the way in which contingent articulatory practices redefine the boundaries of the 'constitutive outside'. In being articulated as equivalent with other discursive elements (the Nationalist regime and the Han chauvinism) in a discourse of the 'outside' (or, 'they'), the signifier *Chi-na* is turned into a *moment* (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 105) of a chain of equivalence (the Han chauvinist-they *Chi-na*-the Nationalist regime); its significance as an Other, or, 'outside', does not reside in its relation to the 'uncivilised state' or 'disease spreading' (as noted earlier) but in its damage to the 'development of Taiwan and the historical feelings among all ethnicities', i.e., the opportunity for the Taiwanese to build a nation-state free of the

ideology of the Han chauvinism.

To look into the articulatory aspect of *Chi-na* speech helps expound the animosity that underlies the development of the categories *Chi-na/Chi-na-jen*, which deny the full identities of *Chung-guo/Chung-kou-jen* as a great country/nation. The negation of these identities comes as a reaction to the current situation of Taiwan: the antagonism towards *Chi-na/Chi-na-jen* would not arise if the identity of Taiwan as an independent nation-state has never been prevented. The antagonism is, in short, mutual. '*Chi-na*-the-Han-chauvinist' in this context functions as the 'constitutive outside' of Taiwanese identity. It is an 'outside' since it plays an antagonising force that blocks Taiwanese identity (as nationals of a sovereign country); it is nevertheless 'constitutive' of the identity, as it renders clear the frontiers of a Taiwanese identity while showing its limits. This 'constitutive-ness' is to be examined in the discourse of the 'inside', the 'Taiwanese'.

'*Chi-na-jen*' as the 'constitutive outside'

In an earlier contribution to a local forum, a pro-independence participant expresses a shared anxiety over the ambiguous national identity of the Taiwanese:

Are we *Chi-na-jen* or Taiwan-*jen* (the Taiwanese)? Without the question properly answered, the Taiwanese Nationalism can never sustain... We can't accept an answer like 'We are both *Chi-na-jen* and Taiwan-*jen*'...as it is to recognise they (China) as the Motherland...No matter what the past (relation between Taiwan and China) is, I am Taiwanese, ...I am not *Chi-na-jen*...(tw.bbs.soc.politics, 07/02/1997)'

The demand for an unambiguous differentiation between the 'Chinese' and the 'Taiwanese' reflects the ultimate goal of radical Taiwanese Nationalism. In the past two decades, the movement has been focusing on the construction of the subjectivity of Taiwan, in terms of culture, history, ethnicity and its unique 'national character'. For radicals, the Taiwanese subjectivity can only sustain when the ties between Taiwan and China are cut. This line of discourse can be seen as a counter-force against the aforementioned 'Chinese Unionism'/'Han chauvinism', which denies the legitimacy of a Taiwanese nation-state, regarding Taiwan as historically part of China and the Taiwanese as ethnically part of the 'Han-Chinese' – both of them have been and will always be inseparable from the great China. According to this logic, a Taiwanese nation-state can only be legitimated when the Taiwanese are not part of the 'Chinese'. This is exactly the point where the 'constitutive-ness' of the category '*Chi-na*' as well as Han chauvinist/Chinese Unionism resides. Being the outside that denies the identity of the 'Taiwanese nation-state', '*Chi-na*' (or China), is 'constitutive' in the sense of its pointing out the limit of the identity (the impossibility

of being an independent nation-state for its historical relations with China) while showing the frontier of the identity construction (dislocating Taiwan from Chinese history and constructing a unique nationality against China).

This constitutive-ness is embodied in the dualism of the 'Taiwanese' and '*Chi-na-jen*' as well as that of 'Taiwan' and '*Chi-na*' in local online discourse. As indicated earlier, '*Chi-na-jen*' has a double identity. As the antagonised/antagonising force, the image of the 'Taiwanese' is also double-faced. In domestic forums, the category 'the Taiwanese' is usually juxtaposed as an opposition against the '*Chi-na-jen* in Taiwan'. A 2003 tw.bbs.soc.politics post highlighting the difference between the 'Taiwanese' and the '*Chi-na-jen* in Taiwan' represents a typical case. In the post the '*Chi-na-jen* in Taiwan' is defined as 'the anti-Taiwan', 'the historical suppressor of local identities', 'embracers of outdated Chinese cultural legacies', 'inculcators of the Chinese identity', and 'allies of the communist China'. In comparison, the 'Taiwanese' are said to be 'pro-Taiwan', 'the sufferers of the Chinese Nationalist cultural hegemony', and 'embracers of the Taiwanese subjectivity' (tw.bbs.soc.politics, 24/03/2003). The other face of the 'Taiwanese' is contrasted with '*Chi-na-jen* of PRC'. In this case, the difference that distinguishes one from the other is less about the pro-Taiwan/pro-China complex, but more about the practice of modern values and the progress towards democracy. '*Chi-na*' in this line of discourse

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is synonymous with autocracy and imperialism, whereas 'Taiwan' represents a new democracy worshipping modern values and progressivism. *'Chi-na-jen* of PRC' are described as 'nationals of dictatorship who know nothing about democracy and modern values, narrow-minded nationalists against the trend of world development' (tw.bbs.soc.politics, 25/05/2003), or 'supporters of militant government which constantly threatens Taiwan with missiles' (tw.bbs.soc.politics, 03/06/2004). In contrast, the 'Taiwanese' embrace democracy and pluralism and detest the militarism of China (tw.bbs.soc.politics, 03/06/2004).

In a nutshell, against the double identity of *'Chi-na-jen'*, the identity of Taiwan as a modern, democratic, and anti-militarist nation-state and the identity of the 'Taiwanese' as patriotic nationals of the country are constructed. These speeches are in a dialogic relationship with some of the pro-independence discourses extensively circulated in mainstream media since 1990s. The division of the 'anti-Taiwan *Chi-na-jen* in Taiwan' and the 'pro-Taiwan Taiwanese' mirrors the discourse of 'the Traitor Bloc of Taiwan' (賣台集團 *mai-tai-chi-twan*). The term refers to the New Party, KMT and the People First Party, who were accused of being 'traitors' of Taiwan for their pro-unification position. Against the accused, the accusers (namely, some pro-independence politicians) constructed their self-images as Taiwanese patriots, or, 'those who love Taiwan'. The *Chi-na*/Taiwan division is, in a similar vein,

reminiscent of the PRC/Taiwan dualism in radical Taiwanese Nationalism. A series of 2002 articles published in the pro-independence paper the Liberty Times represent this line of discourse in radical Taiwanese Nationalism. PRC, as the 'threat to the Taiwanese people', is defined as 'feudalist', 'empiricist', 'militant', and, 'the last stronghold of oriental dictatorship and state terrorism'. In contrast, Taiwan is 'a modern country that has been an active member of the international society with its great success in economy, democracy, and plural liberalism' (Taiwan Advocates, 22/ 02/2002, the Liberty Times). The 'democratic Taiwan against the evil communist China' discourse is reminiscent of the 'Free China against the evil communist China' discourse in the early KMT era (Wachman, 1994: 76); the antagonistic Taiwan-China relationship is, as shown, historical.

The local political forums, given their performance as shown in the above, seem to promise little as an alternative discursive space, at least on the question of national identity. Grassroots discourses concerning the antagonistic Taiwanese identity fails to produce alternative views going beyond the dominant ones (e.g. those of local politicians) represented in mainstream media; indeed it amplifies and strengthens the antagonism underlying current political struggles in Taiwan. In creating and adopting the stigmatised *Chi-na/Chi-na-jen* categories, local online participants demonstrate an unambiguous antagonism that denies the identities of

Chung-kou/Chung-kou-jen (as the 'central' country/nation). Once the 'inference-richness' of the categories is well established, the use of the signifiers permits little misunderstanding – those who speak of China or the Chinese in the terms of *Chi-na/Chi-na-jen* are unmistakably announcing their position in the unification-independence spectrum. The register thus becomes a marker of one's identity as a hardliner Taiwanese Nationalist who would allow little chance for negotiation of the boundary of the identity. Moreover, while the antagonistic speech is by and large 'grassroots' and spontaneous, it works more as a 'presentation' of antagonism that the speaker has internalised as her/his own, than as a reproduction of 'represented antagonism' (via mainstream media). On one hand, by virtue of antagonistic online discursive practices, the popular antagonism underlying current political struggles is deepened down to the grassroots; on the other hand, this grassroots antagonism is only rendered fully visible when it takes form in online speech, in which the least disguised emotions and sentiments are allowed to be presented. My argument of the 'constructiveness' of online practices in terms of national identity is, nevertheless, by no means made in a celebratory mood. In strengthening the antagonism against a social group or a people (i.e. *Chi-na-jen* in the first and second sense) and in articulating the social group/people as equivalent to the power systems that underpin the antagonism (i.e. Chinese Unionism/militarism),

grassroots participation may facilitate the consolidation of a national identity based on popular antagonism; it, however, can end up deepening both the domestic and cross-strait animosity, which may become an impediment to a peaceful solution to the situation of Taiwan.

In the following section, I shift my focus from the aspect of antagonistic identity to that of negotiated identity. The constructing nature of online forums in this dimension is to be examined in its provision of a mediating space that facilitates discursive negotiations for identity-oriented national projects. We are thus to see more efforts that aim for the diminution rather than the creation of difference, and consequentially more interactions aimed at reducing rather than strengthening animosity and opposition.

V. Negotiating identity with the inside and the outside

Despite the constant presence of animosity in Taiwanese-based political forums as examined in the above, interactions that aim for shared understandings, instead of struggles, are not uncommon in the same space. At times they touch upon issues concerning national futures and projects. Some of them somewhat reflect the

Meluccian negotiations in the manner that they look at the question of national identity in relation to the environment and conditions of current nationalisms, including the cross-strait relationship and international politics.

These practices allow us to advance the enquiry into internet-forum performance involving 'negotiated' national identity. The MOTSS case suggests the contribution of grassroots forums to the devolution of symbolic/political power in a minority movement, where online negotiations have substantially influenced the shaping of the public identity. Nevertheless, we are facing a very different scenario where the question of national identity is concerned. In the MOTSS case, the online forums have been playing an active mediating space role between the 'grassroots' and the elite activists. In the case of nationalism, the Net forums have never been the recruitment networks of major collective actions, nor the major 'construction site' of ideologies. The movement of Taiwanese Nationalism started long before the advent of the internet. The earlier construction of the nationalist discourse largely depended on then 'dissident' media, including illegally distributed video tapes, underground radio stations, and alternative newspapers, e.g. the Independent Evening Post (Huang, 1997). The task was taken over by mainstream media since the mid 1990s, when the first Opposition-based terrestrial television channel Formosa Television was launched and the Liberty Times grew into a well-circulated pro-independence paper. Likewise,

the 'intermediate level' of the movement, the social space where the elite activists

negotiate over the conceptual and motivational framework for collective actions, i.e.,

collective identity (Melucci, 1989: 31), is beyond the reach of internet participants. It

takes place at the level of party politics dominated by political elites. It is, in short, by

no means devolved.

Under these circumstances, there seems to be little space permitted for online

participation in the field of negotiated national identity. The realm of identity

construction in this regard is in the hands of the political elites. What is given to the

'people' is merely the choice between identifying with the elite-constructed identity

or not. If such is the case, what is the need for a further investigation into the aspect of

online negotiation in political forums? What has been left to online negotiators in

terms of national identity?

Again, I lay stress on the 'mediation of difference', an issue that underlies the

earlier discussion of the negotiated *tongzhi* identity. In the previous chapter, I start

from Melucci's argument of the need for diminishing the difference between the

representative and the represented in a radical democratic project; in elaborating this

argument, I look at both the difference between the representative and the represented

as well as that between the represented themselves. In this chapter I will only focus on

the second level of difference mediation: as noted earlier, local online forums have yet

to draw due attention of political elites; therefore, I do not expect to discover considerable interactions/negotiations between the representative (political elites) and the represented (the 'people'). Given the common practice of cross-strait or 'global' participation regarding the question of Taiwan's future, I extend the analysis from the negotiations between the 'inside' (domestic/ROC-born participants) to those between the 'inside' and the 'outside' (PRC-born participants).

In examining the twofold grassroots negotiations, the case analysis is done with an expectation that domestic participants who are concerned about the question of national identity can somewhat go beyond the current popular struggles based on primordialism. A similar expectation is cast on the 'global' grassroots negotiations: whereas 'cross-strait' negotiations at official/elite level are far beyond the watch, not to mention the reach, of the grassroots, global internet forums may still have opened up opportunities for developing dialogues between the 'publics' (of Taiwan and China), whose understanding of each other would be otherwise subject to the official stories. Bearing these expectations in mind, the aim of this section is not to evaluate the 'effects'; rather, it aims to explore the possibilities as well as the *processes* of online negotiations that may eventually lead to changes of attitudes towards the national future and projects. To look at the dimension of domestic participation, an instance of tw.bbs.soc.politics discussion is drawn on, while a thread from the Usenet

newsgroup soc.culture.taiwan is taken as an example of 'global' negotiation. The focus of the study is placed on the argumentations that aim for reaching a shared understanding of an activism-based Taiwanese identity. A lion's share of the following pages are concerned with the tw.bbs.soc.politics case, since my emphasis is placed on the activistic aspect of collective identity, which is more about the shared definition among the social actors 'inside' the collectivity. The soc.culture.taiwan case is, nevertheless, of interest for its contribution to the understanding of the field of cross-border grassroots online interaction when a highly-strained political relationship across the border exists, and, as is true in the case of Taiwan, when the mutual understanding of the peoples is impeded by this strained relationship.

Opportunities and constraints of a Taiwanese identity: the case of the 'R.O.C. Confederacy'

September 2003 witnessed a series of political actions aimed at reshaping the identity of Taiwan. The pro-independence force, led by the Taiwan Solidarity Union, initiated the 'Campaign for Rectifying the Name of Taiwan' with a 10,000-people march. The campaign advocated discarding 'the Republic of China' as the country name of Taiwan for its failure to be internationally recognised. Due to the 'invalid' identity,

Taiwan has been rejected by the United Nations and other international organisations; to rejoin the international society, Taiwan must be properly renamed. Against the movement, the pro-unification force took to the street to safeguard the ROC. Meanwhile, the leaders of KMT and the People First Party reasserted their principle of realpolitik that stressed the economic development and left aside the identity issue.

These political actions reflect three major political orientations towards the future of Taiwan: returning to the international society in the name of Taiwan (as an independent nation-state); aiming for the future unification with PRC; and, arguably the most popular one, maintaining the ambiguous identity for the sake of peace and economic growth. Along with these orientations, there are political discourses arguing about the advantages and disadvantages of current projects concerning the issue. In Melucci's term, these discourses aim to answer the question of the constraints and opportunities of an identity project in the current environment.

In online space, similar struggles between different political orientations take place on a daily basis. Some of them are not more than squabbles between fundamentalists. However, counter examples exist. It is not uncommon to see discussions taking form in negotiating talks regarding alternative solutions to the future. The following example demonstrates one of the experiences in which alternatives, rather than fundamentalisms, are at stake. The discussion took place in

the aftermath of the 'Rectifying Name' campaign. Among the usual fundamentalist confrontations, a few moderates turned their gaze to the project of ROC Confederation, an earlier proposal of KMT leader Lien. The thread was initiated on 14 September 2003 in tw.bbs.soc.politics and died away on 9 October in the same year. 853 posts in total were contributed. To look at its negotiated aspect, the case analysis employs the analytic framework mapped out in Chapter 3 and elaborated in Chapter 5. It first gives an overview of the discussion thread and moves on to the aspects of negotiators' footings, the process of negotiation and the speech acts that manifest the productivity of online negotiation in this domain.

The storyline

The thread begins with a post by a participant nicknamed 'Cheer for Campaign for Rectifying the Name of Taiwan', who argues that it will be easier for Taiwan to re-enter the UN if it can change the current country name 'the ROC' into a new name containing the term Taiwan. The thread is continued by a few follow-ups showing concerns about China's negative response towards the rectifying name campaign. It then turns into a series of exchanges between participants Gema and Leo, after the latter sets out to advocate the ROC Confederacy project. Leo urges Gema and other pro-independence participants to seriously consider an alternative to the

national future, as any actions that aim for changing Taiwan from a de facto

independent state to a de jure one will certainly provoke military attacks from China

and eventually lead Taiwan to its destruction. In contrast, the alternative project of the

'ROC Confederation' is said to be of higher feasibility in terms of maintaining the

sovereignty of Taiwan while keeping off the threat of war. The theory is that Taiwan

may remain an independent state without fears of war in the new framework, because

China, accepting the proposal or not, will have no excuse to wage the war, since the

confederacy does not go against the policy of a unified China and no independence is

declared. In response to Leo's proposal, Gema first shows a relaxed attitude; however,

he maintains his insistence on his preference for an independent Taiwanese state and

brushes aside the discourse of independence-leading-to-destruction.

The dialogue between Gema and Leo later develops into a tug of war. Leo

persistently persuades Gema to accept his offer (the 'ROC Confederation' proposal as

an alternative to 'Independence'), whereas Gema repetitively indicates his preference

for Independence and shows his doubts over the feasibility of the confederacy

proposal. The two-party tug of war turns into a multiple-party dialogue when a few

new participants in this discussion line turn up, while some others develop other

storylines (thematised discussions) regarding the legal aspect of Taiwanese

independence. The latecomers in the 'confederacy' storyline differ from each other in

their understanding of the opportunities and constraints of Independence, which by and large overlap Leo's and Gema's. After having deliberated their points, Gema and Leo leave the thread a few days before it dies away. The thread ends with a return to the starting point, the opportunity of Taiwan's re-entering the UN with a new name. No clear-cut conclusion is reached.

Negotiators

Participants Gema and Leo in this storyline are the 'dominating negotiators', who determine the theme and the point at issue. As dominating negotiators typically do, they both speak in the footings of *principals*, marked by their commitment to certain beliefs in their speech (e.g. Leo's belief in the feasibility of a confederation, or, Gema's belief in the significance of the Taiwanese subjectivity). In the meantime, they maintain negotiable stances. In terms of political spectrum, Leo is nearer to the pole of pro-unification, while Gema is nearer to that of pro-independence; however, neither of them performs her/himself as a hardliner or a fundamentalist. Gema speaks of Taiwanese Independence but shows no objection to less favourable choices, e.g. a confederation. Leo promotes the idea of a unified China in the form of confederacy, without, unlike typical pro-unification supporters, denying Taiwanese subjectivity.

In general the latecomers who contribute to the negotiation play collaborators. Participants collaborating with Leo form the majority group in the discussion, frowning over the unavoidability of war affairs likely provoked by the declaration of Independence. Those who show alignment with Gema, minor in number, are primarily pro-independence hardliners, though Gema her/himself keeps a negotiable attitude towards the issue of the national future. Collaborators are not necessarily staying in an unchanging role throughout the thread, since their footings may shift at times. For instance, pro-independence hardliner Force is a challenger to the validity of Leo's proposal; meanwhile, he plays a dominant participant in other storylines of the thread that are off the confederacy/war-affairs issue. The performance of Force as collaborator also manifests one of the most significant functions of the footing: it does not only contribute to the progression of negotiation in the sense of enlarging its scale (from two-party to multi-party), but also in the sense of facilitating the deliberation of viewpoints by pushing dominant negotiators to further explain their ideas or validate their claims. In this case, Leo is pushed to produce a long message giving an extensive account of his vision of ROC confederacy, after Force repetitively interrogates him about his knowledge of the theory and practice of confederacy.

Mediators in this case are few and play no significant roles in changing the trajectory of negotiation (which is common in local political discussions). Blue Sea is

one of the few who have made efforts to prevent the discussion from falling into a two-camp struggle, which is frequently the case in local political Net forums. Self-positioned as a 'neutralist' in the political spectrum, Blue Sea demands Gema to drop the pro-independence/pro-unification dualism, which tends to push the supporters of 'maintaining-the-status-quo', i.e., the 'neutralists', into the category of 'pro-unification', and hence strengthens current popular struggles. Similar to the case of collaborator, the footing of mediator can be temporary. After his plea for dropping the dualist differentiation, Blue Sea shifts his footing to a collaborator of Leo in echoing the latter's pacifism for the 'interest of people'.

Apart from showing the instability of footings, the thread also manifests the need for intensive 'dialogues' to develop a dominant participation: the footing of a dominant negotiator is determined by his/her intensive give and take between him/her and another dominant negotiator. The aforementioned participant Force tries to develop a conversation between her/himself and Leo by persistently interrogating him about his knowledge of confederacy. These attempts are, however, mostly ignored, as Leo shows more interest in negotiating with Gema. Without receiving desired responses, Force stays as a 'side player' throughout the storyline. In contrast, the interactions between Gema and Leo are vigorous, while responses to each other may come up within minutes and hardly a question is overlooked. Though both Gema and

Leo have once discontinued their discussion, they come back eventually with efforts

to reassert and confirm their beliefs.

Developing an identity negotiation

As shown in Chapter 6, internet forums make possible spontaneous,

multi-party argumentative negotiations aimed at a consensual understanding of an

identity-oriented social activism. The open, non-hierarchical mediating space permits

the raising, criticising, and vindicating of *claims* via the process of negotiation,

constituted in *adjacency pairs* and *next positions*.

A similar scenario is seen in the national identity case. The negotiation is

mainly constituted by argumentations over a few thematised truth claims surrounding

the question if ROC confederacy is a safer and more feasible project for the national

future in comparison with Independence. These claims include: claim 1, The

declaration of Independence leads to war (raised by Leo); claim 2, a Sino-Taiwanese

war will lead Taiwan to destruction (raised by Leo); claim 3, Independence does not

necessarily lead to war (raised by Gema); claim 4, a confederacy will ensure Taiwan

maintain the status quo (raised by Leo); claim 5, a confederacy is feasible because it

does not violate the one-China policy; claim 6, a confederacy cannot ensure

Taiwanese subjectivity; Independence can. Claims 1 & 2 suggest the constraints of

Independence; claim 3 is the denial of the constraints; claim 4 is concerned with the

goal of the confederacy project (maintaining the status quo), while claim 5 asserts its

opportunity; claim 6 suggests the goal of Independence (ensuring Taiwanese

subjectivity), while no relevant claim about its opportunities is raised.

These claims are substantiated progressively during the course of the

negotiation, opened by Leo's *summons* hailing Gema. S/he first addresses Gema in

identifying her/him as 'you (plural) the pan-green' (see previous discussion of the

pan-green/pan-blue camps) and asks her/him to drop the pro-independence position

and consider accepting the confederacy project. The summons is furthered by her/his

later post demanding Gema's answer to the questions that 'have you (plural) thought

of the possible war crisis (question 1), …isn't it clear enough that it (Independence)

will only bring disasters rather happiness to people (question 2)?'

Gema's *answer* to the summons arrives in a few minutes. In response to

Leo's persistent hailing, Gema waves back in a rather relaxed gesture: 'yes, the

pan-green can consider the possibility of ROC confederation'. In saying 'yes, *the*

pan-green can (my emphasis)', s/he speaks in the footing of a representative of the

political camp. This footing is actually pre-defined by Leo, who hails Gema as 'you

the pan-green', i.e., Gema's position as a speaker of the second pair part of an

adjacency pair is orientated to at the moment when Leo delivers the first pair part. The pre-definition and acceptance of the footing turns a dialogue between two individuals into one between two political fronts, namely, 'the pro-confederacy' and 'the pan-green'. In positioning her/himself as a representative of the pan-green and saying 'yes, the pan-green *can consider* (my emphasis)', Gema is also making explicit her/his footing as a negotiator by showing the willingness to consider Leo's proposal.

Opening the negotiation by sending summons to Gema, Leo reiterates claim 2 (indicating the constraints that inhibit seeking Independence), which first appears in a few statements (as *constatives*) in his earliest contribution to the thread: 'Once the war begins ... Taiwan will be doomed (statement 1). Taiwan will suffer what the East Timor has gone through – losing one fifth of population in war (statement 2)...' The claims to the constraints of Independence are further substantiated in a series of statements made in a later post: 'The declaration of Independence will give China an excuse to take military actions for its violation of the 'One-China policy (statement 3)', 'In this case the US may find it very difficult to render military support to Taiwan, as it is Taiwan who *provokes* China into the war (statement 4; my emphasis). The discourse of provocation in statement 4 is stressed with the question (in an ensuing follow-up) addressing Gema: 'why being so rash in provoking China and putting us into troubles (question 3)?'

Statements 3 & 4 and question 3 orient Gema to the next position in which

s/he is expected to respond to the theory of constraint. In quoting these utterances in

her/his follow-up (a common technique of sequential positioning in internet-forums),

Gema replies with a statement making explicit claim 3 (Independence does not equal

to war): 'China can't afford waging a war now, though it is advantaged in weaponry

(statement 5).' This claim is fortified indirectly in the question 'aren't there some

always trying to *frighten* our people in echoing China' military threats (question 4;

my emphasis)?' In selecting the term 'frighten', Gema is suggesting that the threats

are nothing more than threats. The register is typically a pro-independence one.

Gema's adoption of the register reflects the 'members' resources' (the shared

background knowledge) of the pro-independence as well as her/his alignment with the

political camp. Statement 5 is soon challenged by Leo's comment (as the second pair

part adjacent to statement 5): 'wishful thinking!' The comment is followed

immediately by the questions 'do you think Tibet and other autonomous regions in

China will not follow Taiwan's example once Taiwanese Independence succeeded?

Do you think China will allow itself to be blamed for the breaking-up of the country?

Do you expect China not to attack Taiwan when it has the support of people who long

for the unification of historical China?' These questions come up as an indirect way to

substantiate claim 1: The declaration of Independence leads to war. In substantiating

claim 1, Leo reinforces his theory of constraint, which Gema fails to challenge in the later development of negotiation.

Another major point at issue in the negotiation is Leo's theory of opportunity in relation to the ROC confederacy, manifested in claim 5 (a confederacy is feasible because it doesn't violate the one-China policy). The theory is asserted in his follow-up in response to Gema's precious utterances suggesting that a confederacy is not feasible, since 'China has shown its rejection of the proposal'. The opportunity of a confederacy as a pacific project, Leo argues, resides in the fact that it does not, unlike Independence, violate the one-China policy and hence will not provoke China into military actions: 'although China does not accept a confederacy now, it cannot present a strong objection to it, since it is another form of unification (statement 6)...It cannot be possibly starting a war because of Taiwan's insistence in unification in the form of a confederacy (statement 7)'. Grounding his argument that a confederacy is a peaceful solution to Taiwan's future by making statements 6 & 7, Leo discloses the real goal of promoting a confederacy project: maintaining the status quo. In the same post, Leo argues that a confederacy will facilitate Taiwan to 'strategically' maintain the status quo (claim 5) just because 'China doesn't accept it, though it cannot attack Taiwan for it, either (the reason for claim 5)'. The disclosure of the goal and the assertion of the opportunity come as a result of Leo's effort to

dispel Gema's earlier doubts about the feasibility of confederacy. In other words, it is Gema's earlier questioning that creates the next position for Leo to develop claims 4 & 5.

In response to statements underpinning claims 4 & 5, Gema on the one hand doubts the validity of claim 5 (asserting the opportunity of a confederacy) and on the other hand questions the legitimacy of the goal of the confederacy project. In so doing, he questions Leo 'what makes you believe China will not attack Taiwan for its choice of confederacy?' and comments on Leo's reiteration of statement 7 as 'groundless'. To vindicate claim 5, Leo provides his evidence in saying 'my arguments are grounded in some Chinese intellectuals' observation of Chinese government and the public opinion among Chinese people'. The evidence is, however, not accepted as satisfactory. In reaction to Leo's effort to vindicate the claim, Gema furthers the argumentation by asking Leo 'who the Chinese intellectuals are'. When Leo admits these intellectuals are indeed his 'friends' acquainted in internet forums, Gema replies with 'oh, really, are your friends Mr Wen or Mr Hu (referring to current Chinese leaders)?'

In the meantime, the difference in the goals of the two national projects starts to come clear. Gema returns to his early point that he will only consider a confederacy when it can ensure the subjectivity of Taiwan. He then rejects taking 'maintaining the

status quo' as the ultimate goal of a national project, which, according to him, should be oriented to either unification or independence. This is then followed by his claim that Leo's proposal cannot sustain the subjectivity of Taiwan, which can only be ensured in Independence (claim 6), i.e. in raising this claim Gema is suggesting how he considers the ultimate goal of a national project should be. These actions also embody Gema's changing of footing from an identity negotiator (who would consider an offer if the counter negotiator can provide good reasons) to a pro-independence advocate (who entirely rejects the offer). The quitting of the negotiator's footing is made explicit in one of his last few posts: 'Let's say no more, since we can't change each other's position no matter how we have deliberated our ideas'.

The emergence and formation of viewpoints in speech acts and adjacent pairs shows the 'productive' and 'constructive' sides of online negotiation. The process of raising, challenging and vindicating truth claims about the opportunities and constraints of identity-oriented national projects, as shown in this case, leads to the construction of shared knowledge about the questions among the co-participants of the communicative event. The production of shared knowledge embodies a possible function of grassroots participation in constructing a negotiated, activism-oriented national identity. Despite the failure in reaching agreement, the grassroots mediation contributes to the question at issue in at least creating certain mutual understanding

among the forum participants who acknowledge their difference in orientations. Nevertheless, the failure in mediating the differences manifests some significant questions concerning grassroots participation in decision-making (i.e. national identity construction) and the negotiability of national identity, respectively. Leo fails to make valid his claim to the opportunity of the confederacy project for he cannot provide better evidence other than 'the observation of a few Chinese internet discussants' he has talked to. The limited accessibility to valid information is indeed the major impediment to grassroots participation in decision-making. In the MOTSS case, the mutual recognition of the environment of collective actions is not difficult to achieve, since there are not too many secrets involved. In contrast, debaters of national identity can hardly validate their truth claims concerning the 'opportunities and constraints' of national projects, especially Independence, while the validation entails the knowledge of national defence, international politics and the cross-strait relationship, which can be highly classified and hence beyond the watch of the public.

This phenomenon suggests that the accessibility of information and the acquisition of knowledge essential for producing grounded argumentations reside at the heart of democratic participation. Without holding these resources, any engagement in political conversations oriented to decision-making will end up being something similar to What Verba (1961) has termed 'pseudo participation', in which

only a feeling, rather than a situation of participation is created (cited in Carpentier, 2003: 110).

The other question brought to light in the case analysis is concerned with the process of constructing national identity. Owing to online negotiations, the crucial difference between 'grassroots' pacifists (e.g. Leo and his collaborators) and idealists (e.g. Gema and his collaborators) is rendered clear. Gema, in the end of negotiation, rejects the confederacy project and favours Independence for the sake of the subjectivity of Taiwan, although he cannot deny the constraint of the Independence project in the current environment. The accomplishment of a shared understanding of the activist aspect of an identity-oriented project (Independence) does not necessarily lead to the change of attitudes in this regard. Gema's deliberate disregard of the constraint of Independence is not an isolated case in online discussions. It is in fact more common to see pro- independence participants refuse to open argumentative negotiations about the feasibility of Independence. For many, national identity is above all primordial, despite the constructed-ness of the primordialism. This phenomenon brings to light the question whether national identities can be constructed in the same way as other activism-oriented collective identities, i.e. if they can be 'negotiated' in the Melucci sense. The questions that require further investigations are: how 'negotiable' a national identity can be in a 'country' (e.g.

Taiwan) where the nodal point of nationalist discourses is 'blood and soil', rather than 'opportunity and constraint'? While, as seen in the previous section, elite discourses prove to be predominant, how much can we expect the grassroots to think out of the box?

These questions show the limits of grassroots negotiation for an activism-oriented national identity, despite all the possibilities it has opened. In the case of global forums we are looking at different possibilities, in which online negotiation may not only shorten physical distances between people but also ideological differences, especially those that bring about antagonisms between the people.

Crossing borders, closing distances?

The analyses of domestic participation in online political discussions manifest the utopian and dystopian aspects of internet communication. On the one hand, it strengthens the existing conflicts and popular struggles by facilitating the discursive construction of the 'constitutive outside', as we have witnessed in the case of '*Chi-na-jen*' discourse. On the other hand, in providing the space for grassroots negotiations, it contributes to the construction of negotiated identities in the field of

national space in its provision of a mediating space for differences, despite the aforementioned limits concerning the change of attitudes.

The double face of online political discussions also exists at the level of global participation, where issues regarding Taiwan's political status or its future are concerned. Similar to the case of domestic forums, hostility saturates global 'Chinese'-based forums. The political board on Yahoo! Chinese represents a typical case. Whereas it is dedicated to 'the Chinese' and 'politics', the 'Taiwan issue' is in fact the most-discussed one; discussions related to which constitute some of the forum's longest threads, including the four-year-old thread 'Viva Independence'. Apart from occasional contributions of a few moderates, the forum is saturated with squabbles and bitter exchanges between rivals and negotiating interactions are certainly not the norm. A case in point is the exchanges between regular TWzen, a pro-independence fundamentalist, and pro-China participants, originating mostly from Hong Kong and China. In his persistent participation TWzen insists on independence as the only solution to Taiwan's future and permits no alternatives. In the meantime, s/he presents her/his animosity towards China without reservation. Speaking in a tone of a hardliner, s/he however fails to validate her/his arguments with convincing evidence. And unsurprisingly her/his interactions with others usually end up reproducing hostility that has permeated the global 'Chinese' forum.

Nevertheless, some global forums do show a potential for facilitating grassroots negotiations across national borders. The sixteen-year-old Usenet newsgroup soc.culture.taiwan is marked by occasional instances of cross-bordered interactions aimed at mediating, rather than strengthening, differences. To explore the utopian side of global Net forums, as well as to expand the foregoing argument of the constructiveness of online negotiations over the question of national identity, the following case analysis examines an actual instance of cross-strait grassroots negotiation in soc.culture.taiwan. The focus of analysis is not placed on the argumentation about the feasibility of a national project between the 'inside' (i.e. the Taiwanese); instead, it looks into the initiation and maintenance of negotiation between the 'inside' and its supposed 'outside' (the China-born Chinese). In so doing it lays stress on the speech acts that make explicit the footing of a negotiator, the turning of an antagonistic debater into a negotiator, as well as the truthfulness claims contributing to the maintenance of the negotiation.

The storyline and negotiators

The discussion thread dated back to 11 March 2003 is a rather short conversation (49 posts) between a few regulars of soc.culture.taiwan. The multi-party

dialogue is initiated when the PRC-Chinese Lee makes a truth claim to the current status of the ROC (Taiwan). Her/His definition of the ROC as 'one side of a yet unfinished civil war' sparks off exchanges between her/himself and the other dominating negotiator Eric, a Taiwanese-born regular, who determinedly rejects Lee's reiteration of her/his (and arguably China's) understanding of the legal status of the ROC. The focus of the discussion shifts from the definition of the current status of the ROC on to the search for a 'win-win solution' to the problematic status of Taiwan, after the mediator Tang joins the thread. It comes to an end when both the pro-China and pro-Taiwan sides arrive at the point that a more sophisticated and peace-oriented approach is in need for a solution to the problem.

Lee positions her/himself as a 'rational negotiator' from the beginning in being keen to produce and demand 'evidence' for every truth claim made in the discussion. Pressing her/his arguments, s/he avoids strong language throughout the thread. Her/his front of a negotiator is affirmed by her/his repeatedly raising the *truthfulness claim* about her/his intention to see a peaceful solution to the strained Sino-Taiwan relationship. The claim is embodied in her/his *avowals* that s/he does not wish to see the war but instead looks forwards to the proposal of a project satisfying both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Eric, though endeavouring to show evidence for her/his claims, cannot avoid occasional bitter words, such as 'The issue is caused by PRC anal

retentive hang-up [sic]'. The antagonism is dropped when s/he repositions her/his footing after Tang's mediation. Tang's performance in the thread manifests the importance of a mediator who may turn the discussion to a new direction by creating crucial 'next positions'. In this case, the creation of a turning point is achieved via his negotiation with Eric, who eventually shows her/his willingness to discuss a 'win-win' solution to the Taiwan with her/his co-participants.

Negotiating for a win-win solution to the Taiwan problem

The initial stage of the 'identity negotiation' between Lee and Eric is about 'what Taiwan *is*' rather than 'what Taiwan *can be*'. It takes form in a train of statements surrounding Lee's truth claim that Taiwan is one side of a yet unfinished civil war, which is persistently challenged by Eric. To ground her/his claim, Lee maintains that the condition of the unfinished civil war is reflected in the internationally recognised One China principle. The reason is refuted. Rejecting the relation between the two issues, Eric holds that the PRC will be condemned by the world if it tries to 'restart the "unfinished civil war"'. To further vindicate her/his claim, Lee makes a series of statements about the 'basic facts' concerning the illegitimate status and disadvantaged situation of the ROC in the unfinished civil war.

Keeping continually refuting the reasons provided by Lee, Eric responds to Lee's speech with her/his statement of the 'basic facts' about the irrelevance of the civil war issue, since most of the Taiwanese residents have nothing to do with the war.

The discussion shifts from a debate of 'what the reality is' to a negotiation about 'how the reality can be changed' after Tang steps in. In his long post addressing Eric, Tang first calls for dropping irrelevant arguments and reflecting on the real stumbling point of China's unification project; which is followed by her/his acknowledgement that the pro-independence force is successful in rendering clear the advantage of independence, whereas China, in comparison, fails to sell 'unification' as it cannot articulate any benefits from this choice (save the lifting of the threat of the war). It is really a matter of 'not selling it well' rather than a matter of trust. Tang's speech of 'not a matter of trust' facilitates the next speaking position of Eric, the addressed recipient of this speech. Objecting to Tang's argument, Eric states that it is exactly the tiny trust the Taiwanese people have in China that prevents them from accepting the unification project; the mistrust is strengthened when Chinese people such as Lee seem to collaborate with the Chinese government in 'threatening' the pro-independence with war crisis discourse. In naming Lee as someone who is responsible for the little trust, Eric is in effect orienting Lee to the next position of speech. Taking the floor opened by Eric, Lee reasserts her/his *truthfulness claim* to be

a pacifist by *vowing* 'I have no objection to an independent Taiwan if they can suggest a win-win solution regarding the Taiwan issue' In quoting Lee's 'win-win solution' speech, Eric demands Lee to explain what a 'win' solution would be for the PRC. The questioning is followed by Eric's utterances showing her/his quitting of the footing of an antagonistic debater and turning into a negotiator for a future project. This is suggested in the utterance demanding Lee to propose alternatives: 'If you cannot accept independence for Taiwan, think about what is the best solution for all without independence.' The demand opens up the next stage of negotiation. In providing their opinions about the solution, Lee and Eric take the footings of the representatives of China and Taiwan. For instance, in response to Lee's speech that the Chinese are ill-treated in Taiwan, Eric answers, 'if PRC would renounce the use of force against Taiwan, then *Taiwan* can allow PRC nationals to travel freely to Taiwan (my emphasis)'. The discussion continues with the expressions of Lee and Eric's views of necessary steps leading to a peaceful solution to the Independence/unification question. In her/his later concluding remarks Eric notes that 'we' should work on the change of attitudes for now if an immediate solution is yet to come.

As shown in the above, Tang's mediation comes as the turning point of the negotiation. Eric, the pro-Taiwan representative, starts to present a more relaxed, or, negotiable attitude after Tang's intervention. In response to this, Lee redefines her/his

position shifting from a negotiator aiming to define the reality (the current status of Taiwan) to one aiming to define the field of actions concerning the change of reality. In other words, Tang's addressing Eric initiates a series of next positions in which the negotiators readjust their footings. Apart from manifesting the function of effective mediation, the case brings to light a few other key points that make an online negotiation work.

First, none of the participants are fundamentalist nationalists or hardliners, though each of them holds a position of her/his own. Rejecting Lee's claim about the status of Taiwan, Eric makes clear in the later stage of negotiation that s/he does not advocate an immediate Independence. It is also essential that the negotiators try to make explicit their willingness to consider the interests of both sides. This is seen in Lee's repeated assertion of her/his truthfulness claim about her/his pacifism. For instance, in indicating the Taiwanese leaders are eager to show the world that the Taiwanese are not Chinese, s/he comments with '*I hope* they don't succeed. The day they succeed will be the day of war.' The utterance 'I hope' expresses Lee's subjective feelings; and, the feelings, as suggested in the later part of the utterance, are towards the avoidance of war. No clear-cut 'us-them' boundary is drawn in the discussion. In fact, Eric uses the indicator 'we' in her/his later call for change of attitudes towards the issue at hand, which can be understood as a gesture of showing her/his alignment

with her/his co-participants. Furthermore, Tang's performance in the thread suggests that *mediators* may play a critical role in a goal-achieving discussion when they are able to produce persuasive arguments to bring the discussion back to the right track.

Both the case analyses of domestic and global online negotiations suggest the strength of the negotiated approach to the question of Taiwan's identity. Instead of struggling for prescribing the definition of Taiwan, the 'grassroots' negotiators work on diminishing differences and searching for feasible solutions to the future of the country. Efforts aiming for mutual understanding between people of different or even oppositional positions are made, which is at least a start for the construction of the shared definition of a project-based Taiwanese identity. Despite the constructive potential, the limits of grassroots negotiation in the field of national identity are shown. The negotiability of national identity is a question, while the capacity of the participants to form a valid negotiation is another. Moreover, unlike the MOTSS case, a 'visible' influence of online negotiation on decision-making is absent. Political-forum negotiators fail to present the power of the 'public', when there is little evidence proving that it is taken seriously by the local political elites. This, nevertheless, by no means suggests that participation in online political forums is insignificant. It may function as a process of mediation that facilitates the change of

attitudes among the grassroots, within or across national borders. It is perhaps also too soon to draw a conclusion about the possible impacts of online political forums, given their short history in the field of politics. To further address the question, we may need to stretch the time span of the research line, awaiting further influences of 'grassroots' democratic participation in cyberspace, when the new media have become part of the 'old media'.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

The research project began with the question: what new insights can a case study of collective identities on/via the internet produce when it looks beyond the fields of identity play and virtual community? To answer the question, I went through identity theories in current social research and cultural studies, building my discursive-constructivist approach by drawing on Goffman, Butler, Laclau & Mouffe, and Melucci. Based on this approach, I focused on the problems of gay identity and national identity in Taiwan, studying the performance of the local MOTSS forums and Taiwanese-based political forums in the performative, antagonistic and negotiated dimensions of identity construction. In so doing, the case study combined an ethnographical fieldwork with an archival research, tracing data back to 1995. For a systematic analysis of internet-forum performance, I deployed a wealth of insights from linguistics and micro sociology, with an aim to connect macro socio-cultural theories with micro cultural analysis.

The field-crossing theoretical framework of the research allows us to examine more than one single dimension of identity practices in multifaceted internet forums. Laclau's and Mouffe's theory works particularly well in analysing the trajectories of

the two identity projects as well as the actual discursive practices in online forums. This is especially true in the case of *tongzhi* identity, in which the logic of equivalence is precisely presented in the strategy of current *tongzhi* activism. Their concept of nodal point also proved to be fruitful in accounting for the significances of key terms (*tongzhi*, heterosexual hegemony, and *Chi-na*) throughout the thesis. Moreover, the attempt to combine Melucci's negotiated identity and Habermas's discursive negotiation is distinctive and original. It indicates a possible direction of incorporating Habermas's theory into other paradigms; in my case study, the marriage of Habermas and Melucci adequately explains the process of identity negotiation that has not been properly addressed in Melucci's work. The analytic framework may look like a patchwork at the first sight; nevertheless, it serves to substantiate and make applicable the theoretical framework. Goffman's footing and the theory of speech acts, which function well in both performative and negotiated identity sections, are in particular productive among the analytic tools adopted.

Although the theories drawn upon in the thesis come from different research traditions, they are unified by a shared philosophy that sees identity formation as constructed via discursive practices. However, my choice of a rather unified approach implies that some identity-related online performances, which are not compatible to the approach, may be overlooked. For instance, utterances that focus on the

'sameness' among the membership of a community are underplayed, since the approach deals with the question of antagonism rather than solidarity.

Both the theoretical and analytic approaches, though developed contextually, can also be applied to other cases without necessarily being reproduced in their entirety. The three identity-constructing dimensions can be adopted separately; the readers may find some dimension insignificant or not existing in their societies. Furthermore, the analytic framework can be partially adopted or modified for answering different research questions. For instance, the presentations of footings and performative speech acts in online discourse are not limited to identity formation; they can be widely applied to various types of practices, such as those in hate groups or friend-making places. Likewise, online discursive negotiation can take place in any field. The analytic strategy designed for examining identity construction may also be useful for looking at other realms of activities, such as the public sphere. The combination of Goffman's footing and Habermas's validity claims should facilitate the researchers to observe the relationship of individuals interacting in the sphere and the process in which public opinions are generated.

Overall, the case study through the theoretical and analytical approaches effectively facilitates my exploration of the Taiwanese collective identity questions. The case analyses of gay identity and national identity demonstrated the

performativity of the internet forum in the realm of collective identity. The experiences of the local MOTSS forums exemplified the ways in which the internet forum gives rise to a networked online community of a social minority, bringing its ontology to visibility. The participation of the MOTSS forums does not only facilitate individual gays to come out virtually, but also to come out with gestures and poses, showing their positions in the spectrum of gayness, gay/*tongzhi* activism, and sexual morality. In the case of national identity, we saw how the nationalist front could be furnished with the expression of swearwords and Other-labelling, demarcating *us* from *them* in animosity. Both cases showed that the choice of codes might work as a way of subject-positioning.

As discursive spaces, the local MOTSS forums and political forums permitted the reconstruction of the constitutive outsides of *tongzhi* and Taiwanese identity in different ways. The signifier 'heterosexual hegemony' as the traditional Other of *tongzhi* identity shifted its meaning in cyberspace. The mechanism of intra-group debates in MOTSS forums facilitated contingent articulatory practices that link up the signifier with other discursive elements, namely, the 'mainstream morality' and the 'preference for a masculine male body'. The articulation redefined the constitutive outside of *tongzhi* identity and in the meantime created new frontiers of that identity. Ironically, the new frontiers also led to the creation of an internal Other, leaving those

who privilege the mainstream values bearing the criticism of heterosexual hegemony. In the local political forums, the historical term *Chi-na* was turned into a stigmatising category. The inferences of the category were built up in anti-China online discourse, along with the shifting focus of anti-China sentiments and the articulation of other elements such as Han-chauvinism or Great Unionism. The construction of the new category reinforces the identity of fundamental Taiwanese Nationalists, at the expense of pushing to extremes the antagonistic relationship between Taiwanese Nationalists and Chinese Nationalists in the island.

Both of the *tongzhi* activism and Taiwanese Nationalism experiences suggest that the internet forum may work as mediating space for negotiating activism-oriented collective identities. The MOTSS negotiations occurred as efforts for shortening the differences between elite-activists of *tongzhi* activism and the grassroots of the gay community, as well as those between members of the grassroots. Besides, the forums worked as channels for dissidence coming from the circle of elite-activists. The analysis of MOTSS mediations showed that the negotiated interactions actually fed into the *tongzhi* activism and cast influences on the shape of its public identity in the past few years. By contrast, online negotiations about national identities failed to produce valid arguments due to the participants' limited resources, which, along with other reasons, had hindered internet political forums from mediating the differences

between local political elites and grassroots people. Nonetheless, the experience of global Taiwanese-based forums suggests that the internet forum may facilitate cross-strait dialogues to take place at the grassroots level, paving the way for negotiated interactions between Chinese and Taiwanese online participants who seek to find common ground about Taiwan's future.

In exploring the constructed nature of the internet forum in the field of collective identity, the case study also brings to light a few crucial issues concerning early assumptions about the nature, if there is any, of internet communication. Both the cases of gay identity and national identity suggest that the internet does not always *connect* people together. In facilitating discursive articulation and identity consolidation, internet forums also create the environment for antagonistic speech to arise; the emergence of social antagonism online may serve to disunite community memberships by either creating new differences (as in the case of the internal Other in MOTSS) or deepening existing animosity (as seen in the *Chi-na* discourse). It is imperative to understand how the internet can be implicated in the construction of new psychological walls, when it is breaking or transcending old boundaries.

Interactivity, another much-celebrated feature of the internet, underpins the meaning production of internet forums as shown in the case study. Negotiated

interactions take place between grassroots participants, between the grassroots and elite-activists of *tongzhi* community, between different national project supporters, as well as across the Taiwan Strait. Via these interactions, new chains of signifiers are articulated and discursive negotiations take form. The discursive negotiations online may lead to the intervention of decision-making, when the interactions between the online forums and the decision-makers exist (as in the case of the *tongzhi* movement). In this case, it is *who* are engaging in the interactions that matter. In other words, in evaluating the socio-cultural impacts of the interactivity of the internet forum, what we may need to bring into concern is not only how interactive the forums are, but also who can be drawn into the interactions.

. Between grassroots and elite discourses there resides another level of interaction. The 'heterosexual hegemony' and '*Chi-na/Chi-na-jen*' discourses reflect those of academic and political elites, respectively. In the first case, we see resistance to pro-academic discourses arising at times; however, the resistance is yet to present any potential in influencing the direction of academic discourses in this domain. Furthermore, the resistant discourses are indeed rooted in mainstream morality; in subverting one dominant discourse it is in the meantime subjected to another. In the second case, we see how online discourses were launched into the orbit of historical/mainstream discourses, reproducing the latter's words and logics; the

cultural flow seems to run in one direction only, despite the new media's promising to provide alternative discursive spaces. The different degrees of resistance in the two cases show that the alternativeness of online discourse is contextual: in an emerging social movement (e.g. the *tongzhi* activism) where the mainstream ideologies are under construction, we may expect more alternative or counter-hegemonic speeches to come; however, when the mainstream ideologies of the movements are solid, such as the nationalisms in Taiwan, we may not witness too much alternativeness in the corresponding online speeches. What we should bear in mind is that the counter-hegemonic discourses may be related to another hegemonic force, which might be greater than the local 'mainstream' ideologies.

These phenomena seem to suggest that the effect of the internet forum on decision making, if any, is contingent and incomplete; furthermore, the dialogic relationship between online/grassroots and mainstream discourses is asymmetric, although the former may show resistance to the latter in some cases. At the end of Chapter 2 I highlighted the question of empowerment in proposing that the internet forum may, though not necessarily, provide a space for the co-construction of collective identity from the bottom up. The answer to the question now seems to be mixed.

In a sense, the internet plays an equaliser of both discursive/symbolic and 'political' (in Melucci's sense) power. The individual acts of performing identity in MOTSS and political forums shape the collective images of gay and Taiwanese/Chinese identities. In other words, every individual act is a building block of the collective images, which cannot be fixed by any single force, such as an institution or an elite group. The devolution of discursive/symbolic power from institutions/elites to individuals/the grassroots seems to advance in the forum discussants' participation in the Other-Self discourses, which are initiated and oriented by the discussants spontaneously. The influence of MOTSS forums on *tongzhi* activism suggests another level of power devolution: the grassroots community members as the 'represented' flex their muscles in intervening in the decision-making of a social movement, which is traditionally in the hands of the elite-activists/the 'representatives'.

Nevertheless, the equalising effects, as indicated earlier, are precarious and limited. Institutional/elite voices may not be directly heard in the grassroots-oriented discursive spaces; still, their influences are present in, if not dominating, grassroots speech. The inequality in political power between the representatives and the represented of a social project does not fade away. The MOTSS case presents an optimistic picture of the internet's potential in altering the power imbalance to a

certain extent; this would not be achieved if the internet were not viewed as the major

tool for community integration and recruitment network for collective actions. The

case of the local political forums, on the other hand, makes explicit that the internet

forum as alternative public forum may never shake the performance of mainstream

politics, when political elites are indifferent to the voices from these spaces. Moreover,

however powerful the forums can be, they are not free from the influences of

mainstream discourses, which are by and large controlled by social/cultural/political

elites.

Reflecting on the problem of empowerment, we are facing a new question:

how alternative the internet forum should remain. In comparing the cases of MOTSS

forums and the local political forums, we may come to a conclusion that a higher

degree of mainstreaming of the internet forum may promise a better equalising effect

from the medium in terms of political power. If such is the case, we should welcome

the incorporation of the internet into the mechanism of democratic participation both

in social movements and in electoral politics. The risk of mainstreaming is if the

mainstreamed internet forums may fall under the manipulation of political/economic

elites and hence lose their potential in playing counter-hegemonic forces. Studies that

look into the public sphere in the internet, as discussed in Chapter 2, suggest that the

internet facilitate a multiplicity of micro, issue-based, counter-hegemonic public

spheres. What we may be looking at is how the internet can retain its heterogeneity and decentred nature so that it can keep, spark and accommodate alternative voices and practices, when, if possible, internet forums oriented to vertical interactions (between social/political elites and the grassroots) or institutionalised online public forums become a popular choice.

No matter how big the equalising effect is or it can be, one fact stands out. The internet forum does encourage people's engagement in defining and changing the social/political reality via discursive/interactive practices in various contexts. This kind of engagement, as noted in Chapter 2 and shown in the case study, has been and can be further directed into a variety of social projects as well as different levels of political life. In doing so, the internet forum may, to follow Dahlgren's argument, facilitate the development of 'civic culture' that underpins people's democratic participation across traditional and new politics (Dahlgren, 2003). In the meantime, the internet forum may keep giving rise to conflicts and confrontations, rendering visible the differences between individuals, between communities or groups, and between 'people' and decision-makers. Some of the conflicts and confrontations may, as the research project has revealed, become part of the processes of progressive/radical democracy. They may, however, simply strengthen negative sentiments in reference to the differences, or, as pinpointed in Chapter 6, create more

antagonistic boundaries without leading to any shared grounds or universal values. These are the multiple possibilities that the internet promises. We can join the outmoded utopian-dystopian debate, celebrating or criticising the evolving 'new' media. Or, we can work on understanding the patterns, forces, relations, and mechanisms behind the words and deeds in the ever-developing cyberspace, and bring the late 20th century invention onto the tracks we desire, be it leading to change or continuity in the 'real world'.

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Wikipedia China, http://zh.wikipedia.org
Wikipedia Japan, http://ja.wikipedia.org
Yam.com, http://www.yam.com

Appendix: sources of empirical data

Cited Forums:

1. Tw.bbs.soc.politics: 'fly-on-the-wall' observation from October 2002 to September 2005; archival search of ten-year data (dating from April 1995).
2. Tw.bbs.soc.motss: 'fly-on-the-wall' observation from December 2002 to September 2005; archival search of ten-year data (dating from July 1995).
3. Tw.bbs.soc.hakka: 'fly-on-the-wall' observation in November 2002; archival search of ten-year data (dating from September 1995).
4. Other tw.bbs.* newsgroups: archival search of ten-year data (dating from 1995).
5. Soc.culture.taiwan: 'fly-on-the-wall' observation from April 2003 to July 2003; archival search of fifteen-year data (dating from September 1989).
6. Ntu.bbs.motss: archival search of the 'Classic Debates' (dating from September 1997).
7. Yahoo! Kimo BBS: 'fly-on-the-wall' observation from Dec 2002 to January 2003.
8. Yahoo! Chinese Politics Talk Board: 'fly-on-the-wall' observation from November 2002 to March 2005.
9. Let's Talk (at Chinatimes.com.tw): 'fly-on-the-wall' observation from July 2003 to September 2003.
10. Talk.politics.china: occasional visits.
11. News Discussion (at Chinatimes.com.tw): occasional visits.
12. The 'Mainland' board at ETtoday.com: occasional visits.

Cited discussion threads:

1. '*Sexual liberation and gay liberation* (性解放與同性戀解放)' at tw.bbs.soc.motss, from 18 July 1995 to 25 July 1995, 33 posts in total, cited in p.163 (as an example of footing) & p.253 (as an example of identity negotiation).
2. '*What are the positive social effects of Tongzhi parade* (同志大遊行能為社會帶來什麼正面的東西) ?' at tw.bbs.soc.motss, from 4 October 2004 to 14 October 2004, 167 posts in total, cited in p.203 (as an example of identity performance) & p. 252 (as an example of the MOTSS grassroots negotiation).
3. ' *The social impacts of tongzhi parade* (同志遊行的社會效果)' at tw.bbs.soc.motss, from 2 November 2003 to 3 November 2003, 379 posts in total, cited in p. 203 (as an example of identity performance) and p. 252 (as an example

of the MOTSS grassroots negotiation).

4. '*Is sleeping with your own brother an act of incest (和自己弟弟在一起是亂倫嗎)?*' at tw.bbs.soc.motss, from 16 December 2000 to 24 December 2000, 126 posts in total, cited in pp.219-222 (s an example of the 'heterosexual hegemony' discourse)

5. '*Something that you have to think about: the reflection of Lin Yi Hwa (您一定要的思考：來自林奕華的一番體認)*' at ntu.bbs.motss, from 30 October 1997 to 1 November 1997, 9 posts in total, cited in pp. 223-8 (as an example of the 'heterosexual hegemony' discourse)

6. '*About the fears of mainstream gays (關於主流 gay 的恐懼及其它)*' at tw.bbs.soc.motss, from 22 December 1997 to 22 December 1997, 6 posts in total, cited in p.225-8 (as an example of the 'heterosexual hegemony' discourse).

7. The 'CC' debates at ntu.bbs.motss in December 1997, 98 posts in total, cited in Chapter 6 (for the general discussion of the 'sissy/masculine' debates in MOTSS communities).

8. '*Show Time for "Taipei Gay for Fun"(台北同玩節歡樂登場)* ' at tw.bbs.soc.motss, from 02 September 2000 to 04 September 2000, 114 posts in total, cited in pp.241-8 (as an example of identity negotiation).

9. The '*Chi-na*' discussions at tw.bbs.soc.politics in April 1995, July 1996, February 1997, October 1996, April-June 2003, 123 posts in total, cited in Chapter 7 (for the discussion of '*Chi-na-jen*' discourse).

10. '*Is it really impossible to join the UN in the name of Taiwan (用台灣的名字真的進不了聯合國嗎)?*' at tw.bbs.soc.politics, from 14 September 2003 to 9 October 2003, 853 posts in total, cited in pp.311-25 (as an example of identity negotiation).

11. '*The current status of the ROC* (in English) ' at soc.culture.taiwan, from 11 March 2003 to 19 March 2003, 49 posts in total, cited in pp.327-332 (as an example of identity negotiation).