THESIS

TRANSMEN AND TRANSWOMEN IN CHINA: DARKNESS AND RESILIENCE

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Spring 2021

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ABSTRACT

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Anthropologists have studied transgenderism in various cultures and societies; however, few of these studies investigate the topics of identity development, family lives, and transgender community engagement, and their interwoven relationships in a socialist society. In this research, I look at the lives of Chinese transgender people and aim to understand what roles the government, family and domestic transgender community institutions play in their identity development trajectory. I approach this main research question through a contextualized cultural perspective, analyze it within a critical-interpretive medical anthropological framework, and draw from both anthropological and non-anthropological literature that focus on these three themes. Research data is collected through a mixed qualitative methodology, including online and offline participant observation and semi-structured interviews of ten Chinese transwomen, ten Chinese transmen, and three key informants. Findings suggest that for Chinese transgender respondents, their trajectory of realizing, exploring, and living as their identified gender, which is different from their assigned sex/gender, is commonly repressed and stigmatized on an everyday basis within the cisgender male-female binary system in Chinese society. During these processes, acquiring family recognition and building community connection are respondents' vital sources of resilience, which not only consolidate their (trans)gender identification but also facilitate their transitions. Nevertheless, this is not to say that the family and community institutions are immune to the sexist ideology and cisgender prejudice circulating in Chinese society, which can generate distress mixed with their empowering influences on Chinese transgender respondents.

Therefore, throughout their identity development trajectory, respondents always have to resort to their own agency to protect and emancipate themselves from both structural discrimination and transnormative discipline that operate within the institutions which are commonly expected to enhance the resiliency of transgender people.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since at least the early 20th century, anthropologists have been persistently inquiring about the lives of people who embody a sex/gender identity that does not conform to the binary female-male sex/gender system. This thesis offers an ethnographic analysis of the lives of Chinese people living in China who have also embodied a sex/gender identity that does not conform to the normative binary female-male sex/gender system operating in Chinese culture. Nowadays, a well-known term on the international level to describe this population is "transgender." Pioneer gender theorist Susan Stryker conceptualized transgender as "an umbrella term that refers to all identities or practices that cross over, cut across, move between, or otherwise queer socially constructed sex/gender binaries." (1994, 251). Drawing on her description, in this research, I use the terms "transgender" and "trans" to refer to Chinese people I interviewed in China whose identified gender is different from their assigned sex/gender. Further, I analyze the specific experiences of female-to-male (FTM) Chinese transgender respondents who were assigned a female sex/gender at birth but self-identified as male, and of male-to-female (MTF) Chinese transgender respondents who were assigned a male sex/gender at birth but self-identified as female.

Although there is a diverse array of anthropological studies on transgender people in different cultures and societies, until today, this body of work lacks an understanding of Chinese transgender people and their lived experiences in contemporary Chinese society. This thesis aims to fill this gap by providing a nuanced, holistic account of their transgendered embodiment regarding their identity development trajectory, their family lives in transition, and their community engagement. Analysis in this thesis includes contemplation of a wide range of

questions. What stimuli awoke my Chinese respondents' initial awareness of the difference between their identified gender and assigned sex/gender? Could male-to-female and female-to-male trans respondents follow differently gendered pathways? What experiences consolidated their transgender identification? What did their lives look like after they started living as their identified sex/gender? How did a transgender identity disclosure in Chinese families affect parent-child relationships? Were male-to-female and female-to-male trans respondents treated differently after they came out? How did parental responses influence transgender respondents' health and well-being? In turn, how did transgender respondents resist those detrimental influences and negotiate with their parents for accommodation? What motivated them to access the domestic transgender community? What were the positive and negative influences of community engagement? What factors solidified and undermined their felt belongingness? How did they perceive domestic transgender politics and activism?

From May to August 2019, I conducted my fieldwork offline in Beijing and then expanded to online nationally. For data collection, I employed a combined qualitative method of participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Beijing is China's capital city where the central government is located. Beijing is a highly politicized and economically sensitive context in which one would expect everything to be under rigorous scrutiny. At the same time, this is also a city where transgender resources are concentrated. In Beijing, there is a good number of well-developed transgender organizations and one of the best medical resources for transgender hormonal therapy and sex reassignment surgeries. These features make Beijing a location in China where the transgender culture is relatively more visible, and the transgender movement is relatively more active. All these factors contribute to the attraction of this city for Chinese transgender people. Their lives here are a mix of tension and empowerment. On the one hand,

they struggle to survive through gender policing in multiple social and political institutions; on the other hand, they have the convenience to access relatively rich medical and community resources to add to their resilience. According to the 2017 "Chinese Transgender Population General Survey Report", Beijing was one of two cities that had the highest number of transgender people residing in them. Therefore, Beijing was a productive place to launch my offline participant observation and expand my networks in the transgender community for interviewee recruitment.

Anthropologists have been researching non-binary gender and sexual variations in different socio-cultural contexts, for example, the Indian *hijra*, Native American two-spirits, and Latin American *travestis*. However, there is a dearth of understanding of Chinese transgender people's lived experiences in a socialist political-economic landscape and a collectivist cultural setting in China. Among more recent anthropological literature, a relatively large body of work especially focuses on the topic of transition-related health of transgender people in Western societies. Nevertheless, the intertwined relationships among transgender people's identity development, family lives, and community engagement in a socialist society are not investigated in the mainstream anthropological transgender literature. One of this research's main tasks is to address these two academic gaps. Based on the findings, I argue that for Chinese transgender respondents, their families and the domestic transgender community play a significant role in affecting their resilience in their (trans)gender identity development trajectory. On the one hand, respondents' resilience against structural transgender discrimination is strengthened if their families and the domestic transgender community were tolerant and supportive of their gender identifications and diversified gender performances. And in this case, these two institutions facilitate Chinese transgender people exploring, transitioning to, and living as their identified

genders/sexes. On the other hand, respondents' resilience in living in a cisgenderism dominated social system is undermined if their families and the domestic transgender community were also rejective and disciplinary of their gender identifications and gender performances. And in this case, these two institutions, which are commonly expected to enhance the resiliency of transgender people, instead obstruct Chinese transgender people from proceeding on a trajectory that leads to their identified gendered/sexed embodiment and leave them to rely on their own agency.

This thesis explores the lives of transgender people living in China. In chapter two, to understand Chinese transgender respondents' bodily experiences and the cultural, social, and political processes reflective and productive of these experiences, I discuss my drawing from a critical-interpretive medical anthropological perspective. And I engage with the anthropological and non-anthropological transgender literature in which my research is situated and to which it contributes. In chapter three, I expand on the discussion of my research methods. And in chapter four, I examine relevant Chinese cultural processes that informed my interpretation of my Chinese respondents' transgendered embodiment.

In chapter five, I use a three-stage model to describe my Chinese transgender respondents' identity development trajectory. I begin by tracing the points of origin of their experiencing gender-sex difference before and after puberty. I then examine the barriers they faced in accessing and embracing a transgender identity and the processes they explored during their gender transition. At these first two stages, I consider the implications of Chinese masculine and feminine gender norms for shaping my female-to-male (FTM) and male-to-female (MTF) respondents' transgendered awareness at different times and through different avenues, and also for influencing them to follow different exploratory pathways. Finally, I discuss their

management of different social worlds as a part of their everyday experience after living their identified sex/gender. I also address their experience of struggles at each stage, which were interconnected in a way shaped by continuous social stigma against transgenderism.

In chapter six, I analyze Chinese parents' ambivalent responses to their adult children's transgender identity disclosure as a reflection of a unique Chinese parenting culture. And I examine Chinese parents' contradictory responses to female-to-male and male-to-female trans identification as a product of sexist norms and gender inequalities that are deeply embedded in the Chinese patriarchal social fabric. I then analyze the factors that made the Chinese family institution a primary gate-keeper of transition-related surgical resources. Besides discussing how my Chinese transgender respondents were influenced by their families, I also address their agency and resilience. I emphasize their negotiation of acceptance through contingent femininity/masculinity performance and strategic appeal to their changed socioeconomic status. And I explore their enactment of migration as everyday forms of resistance.

In chapter seven, I explore the social and emotional factors that led my Chinese transgender respondents to the domestic transgender community. Then I continue to examine the discourses of reciprocal friendship and gratitude that added to my respondents' felt attachment to the community and the dimensions of in-group conflicts that revoked their sense of belongingness. Although my respondents benefited from community membership empirically and emotionally, they were also subjected to judgment and harassment against their gender performance and transition choice. I try to show these conflicting influences through their narratives. Finally, I discuss liberal transgender politics in China, the nonassertive assimilation or assertive accommodation approach to transgender activism building taken up by transgender activists, and the precarity of transgender activism that the respondent group witnessed or experienced.

CHAPTER 2: THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

"The task of a critical-interpretive medical anthropology is, first, to describe the variety of metaphorical conceptions (conscious and unconscious) about the body and associated narratives and then to show the social, political, and individual uses to which these conceptions are applied in practice." (Lock and Scheper-Hughes 2013, 482)

For this research analysis, I have drawn on a critical-interpretive approach in medical anthropology as the cornerstone of my theoretical framework. Margret Lock and Nancy Scheper-Hughes proposed this theoretical approach in the 1990s to interpret the human body as a socio-cultural construct. It comprises three levels of analysis—the individual body, the social body, and the body politic. To better explain this three-bodies analytical framework, I have cited two representative ethnographic research examples in the following paragraphs. One example is Nancy Scheper-Hughes' investigation of the reproductive histories of seventy-two women of Alto do Cruzeiro, a shantytown whose conditions Scheper-Hughes deemed "pernicious" for weak infants and babies, located in northeast Brazil (Scheper-Hughes 1985, 292). And the second example is Sabina Faiz Rashid's examination of the experiences of white vaginal discharge of eighty-eight married adolescent women living in the Dhaka slum in Bangladesh (Rashid 2007).

At the first level of analysis is the individual body, wherein subjects' body image and body self-awareness, and their self-explanations of bodily symptoms, are investigated (Lock and Scheper-Hughes 2013). In other words, on this level of analysis, researchers examine how subjects feel about their bodies and their well-being, demonstrate how they express their feelings, and investigate how they make sense of their health and illness by reflecting on their everyday lived experiences. For example, when Alto infants rejected their mothers' breastmilk, Alto women explained it was because their milk was foul and innutritious. They perceived it as

signifying their own *fraqueza*—physical and moral fragilities—resulting from their continuous struggles against an impoverished and contaminated living environment (Scheper-Hughes 1985). Turning to Rashid's research, when young women in the Dhaka slum experienced white vaginal discharge, they interpreted it as a manifestation of their *durbolota* (weakness) and *chinta rog* (worry illness), which they explained were caused by their lived financial hardships, hunger anxiety, marital instability, and reproductive burdens (Rashid 2007). Women in both studies shared imagery of their bodies as weak and drew explanatory sources from their lived poverty and insecurity. They were also conscious of the associations between their bodily symptoms and their health status.

At the second level of analysis is the social body. At this level of analysis, subjects' bodies can be used representationally as a natural symbol to reflect on the macro socio-cultural context and political-economic landscape (Lock and Scheper-Hughes 2013). "The body in health offers a model of organic wholeness; the body in sickness offers a model of social disharmony, conflict, and disintegration" (2013, 483). In other words, the human body speaks metaphorically of the "health" and "sickness" of society. Nancy Scheper-Hughes noted that the Brazilian Northeast, including Alto do Cruzeiro as a shantytown inhabited by the unattached and despairing rural proletariat, was representative of the unequal power relations and economic inequality in Brazil (1985). The mortality rate of this region was high. These rural laborers had to fight for survival amidst food scarcity, polluted drinking water, numerous infectious diseases, over-occupied living space, and lack of hygiene utilities. And the local government provided little to no support to them. Alto mothers described their bodies as "wasted," their breasts "sucked dry" by their infants, and their breastmilk as "dirty," "diseased," "bitter," "sour" (Scheper-Hughes 1985, 292, 305). These metaphors which they drew on to describe their bodies and breastmilk reflected the

Alto society's precarious social, political, and economic situations. The metaphor of life as a *luta*, a struggle, was used by Alto women to explain why they needed to allow some of their severely ill children to die and express their struggles with other social forces. The concept of *a mingua,* drawn upon by shantytown residents to describe child death accompanied by mothers' indifference and neglect, spoke metaphorically of Alto mothers' economic deprivation and the Brazilian government's neglect of its responsibility to preserve the lives of these poor and sick children.

The body politic refers to the governing and surveillance of individual and collective bodies. As Margaret Lock and Nancy Scheper-Hughes argued, "the relationships between individual and social bodies concern more than metaphors and collective representations of the natural and the cultural. They are also about power and control" (2013, 493). At the third level of analysis of the body politic, scholars study subjects' bodily practices and experiences of health and illness as products of social control. For example, Rashid noted a surge of demand for vitamins and tonics among women of the Dhaka slum in the past few decades (2007). This occurred because local government and formal and informal health institutions promoted the messages that poor diet could lead to white vaginal discharge, and modern biomedicine could help replenish the calcium and nutrients lost from the discharge. Because nutritious foods were rarely affordable to Dhaka women, and without any government subsidies, they were left to resort to these cheaper and more convenient vitamin tablets and syrup, or tonics. Because white vaginal discharge could lead to weakness and abnormal thinness, by encouraging Dhaka women to consume biomedical products, local political and medical institutions attempted to reproduce healthier women's bodies that could be more productive for society. This biomedical approach to white discharge could lead to the risk of the medicalization of local women's bodies. Furthermore, institutions'

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health propaganda may also misdirect women's perception of the causes of their white discharge, away from the social, economic, and political causes to biological ones, and mislead the women by encouraging them to engage in inappropriate health-seeking behaviors (Rashid 2007). In other words, the Bangladesh government not only attempted to produce its desired healthy bodies, but it also endeavored to control how such bodies should be produced.

The critical-interpretive medical anthropology theoretical approach is essential for my research. It helps to illustrate the lives and personal experiences of transgender people in China, to investigate the systems of power and inequalities operating in the society, especially those involving gender and sexuality, and to hold multiple institutions accountable for regulating their social lives and sex/gender transitions. The individual body level of analysis provides a means to understand how my respondents develop a transgender identity, how they perceive their family relationships and body in transition, and how they negotiate their best interests within the domestic transgender community. The social body level of analysis offers a model to measure how my respondents' lived experiences and metaphors associated with their body-selves manifest the socio-cultural, political, and economic biases against gender and sexual minority people in a society dominated by cisgenderist and heteronormative values. The body politic level of analysis is useful for decrypting the structural determinants of Chinese transgender people's health during and following their transition to a new identity. In China, the medical and legal institutions control who can be recognized legitimately as their identified sex/gender and what requirements they need to fulfill to access the biomedical interventions for their desired physiological status. And interweaving with this theoretical framework, I also draw on other theoretical concepts for my analysis, such as Judith Butler's gender performative theory, Jim Scott's everyday forms of resistance, and Michel Foucault's technologies of the self.

Anthropological research on transgenderism and the transgender population has been done in both Western settings and non-Western settings. Anthropologists, including psychological anthropologists, have studied variation in gender and sexual identity in societies cross-culturally, sometimes identifying culturally accepted non-binary gender positions, alternative to men or women, as "Third genders". This has included anthropological studies of groups such as the *hijra* in India, native American groups in the U.S. and Canada, and *travestis* in Latin American countries, such as Brazil and Bolivia (Callender and Lee 1983; Heckert 2019; Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1997; Kulick 1997; Mascia-Lees 2010; Mascia-Lees and Black 2016; Nanda 1990).

In terms of the recent anthropological literature that I have identified, the geographic distribution of research efforts is imbalanced. The Western anthropological transgender studies are mainly located in U.S. society (Valentine 2002; 2003; 2007; Plemons 2014; 2015; 2017a; 2017b; 2018; 2019a; 2019b). The non-Western body of anthropological work mainly, but not exclusively, focuses on the Southeast Asian region, particularly Thailand and Indonesia (Aizura 2009; 2010; 2018; Blackwood 2005; 2009; 2011; Boellstorff 2004; Toomistu 2019a; 2019b); South Asia, in India (Nanda 1990); and Latin America (Kulick 1997). The most recent U.S. studies are devoted to mainly two areas. One area has involved analyzing the reasons for the "transgender" category rapidly gaining momentum in the U.S. society and its influences (Valentine 2002; 2003; 2007); and the other area has involved examining the challenges and barriers in realizing efficient and therapeutic transition-related surgical care on both institutional and individual levels (Plemons 2014; 2015; 2017a; 2017b; 2018; 2019a; 2019b). The recent Southeast Asian studies also involve mainly two areas of concentration. One area has been the investigation of the biomedical touristic flow from Global North to Southeast Asian countries, such as Thailand, for genital reconstruction surgery (GRS), and its entanglement with

neocolonialism, capitalism, and racial inequalities (Aizura 2009; 2010; 2018); and the second area has involved addressing the performance of (contingent) masculinity/femininity in Indonesian societies for purposes beyond making a living (Blackwood 2005; 2009; 2011; Boellstorff 2004; Toomistu 2019a; 2019b).

David Valentine finds that in the late 20th century, the "transgender" category was adopted with little resistance by various social institutions and academic disciplines (2007). He suggests part of it was because when the transgender identity came into existence, a seemingly neat dimorphic paradigm was generated, in which gender and sexuality could represent distinct binary experiences—femininity/masculinity and heterosexuality/homosexuality (Valentine 2003; 2002; 2007). Valentine agrees that the separation of gender and sexuality as different categories prompts theoretical and ethnographic discussions of their contextualization and institutionalization in varied socio-cultural and political-economic environments (2002). At the same time, he points out that for transgender people, in their everyday expressions of who they are and what they desire, the dualistic gender-sexuality paradigm may not be as commonly applied and accepted as assumed. For example, when his male-to-female respondents described themselves as having been gay and a woman all their lives, they resisted using the transgender identity but attempted to unify themselves under the gay identity. According to Valentine's observation, at the beginning of the 21st century, such seemingly contradictory gender and sexual representations of self by transgender people were not yet adequately understood in mainstream lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) activism (2003; 2007).

Eric Plemons points out that since 2014, affected by the expansion of public and private insurance coverage for transgender surgical needs, the sex reassignment procedures have become more affordable to transgender people in the U.S., which has led to a rapid increase of the

demands. However, Plemons finds, due to the lack of trained surgeons and efficient

administrative systems, and the growth of the number of Catholic hospitals, the realization of

transgender health care has far lagged behind its demand (Plemons 2018; 2019a). The limited

subsidies and bureaucratic supports for transgender healthcare in the U.S. hospital system has not

only caused doctors to be short of funding, time, and opportunities to develop corresponding

surgical skills but has also obscured the timely upgrade of hospitals' administrative systems to

integrate sex reassignment surgeries (SRS) into their existing medical care and insurance

processes (Plemons 2019a). Also, protected under the "freedom of conscience" legislation based

on their religious beliefs, Catholic hospitals can reject providing transgender healthcare without

risk of being legally punished. Therefore, the expansion of Catholic ownership in the U.S.

hospital market can negatively impact the delivery of transgender healthcare (Plemons 2018).

Plemons' other studies of U.S. transgender people's embodied experiences of SRS mainly

relate to male-to-female facial feminization surgery (FFS) and GRS. In the stream that concerns

GRS, Plemons notes that "sex reassignment surgery is not a self-evident practice organized by a

singular conception of genital anatomy" (2014, 15), but, instead, surgeons collaborate with their

transgender patients by listening to their inputs before and after the surgery (2014). Nevertheless,

there are exceptions wherein some surgeons reject transgender patients' inputs as unrealistic

expectations and unreasonable comments, based on their bias against patients' lack of technical

expertise and embodiment of female genitalia (Plemons 2015). Plemons refers to this kind of

biased rejection as epistemological exclusion. He suggests its enactment is also affected by

whether or not transgender people's inputs are favorable and conform to surgeons' opinions.

When they are, they are taken as confirmation for surgical success and patients' competence;

when they are not, they are dismissed and taken as evidence against patients' credibility (Plemons 2015).

This epistemological exclusion of transgender patients' authority also exists in FFS (Plemons, 2017a). Nevertheless, Plemons argues that U.S. transgender people's FFS pursuits reflect a vital expansion of Americans' understanding of the construction and interpretation of sex, which depend on individuals' primary and secondary sex characteristics and are biological and social projects simultaneously (2017b; 2017a). In terms of the provision of FFS, its therapeutics have also proliferated. Rooted in physical anthropology of human skull and craniofacial and orthodontic research, the early FFS in the late 20th century aimed to turn statistical science into measurable male and female facial distinctiveness (Plemons, 2014). Following an illness-cure medical model, the early FFS was committed to making transgender patients "normal" again. Later FFS allowed for more personalized intervention plans and adopted a philosophy that aimed to help transgender patients achieve self-optimization (Plemons 2017b; 2017a). However, Plemons finds that in U.S. FFS clinics, for non-Whites and people who do not come from a European background, their racial facial characteristics are associated with their maleness and are erased altogether. Therefore, he argues that FFS in the U.S. is a type of surgical intervention that involves both femininizing and whitening the face of transgender people (Plemons 2019b).

According to Aren Aizura, medical travel to Thailand to have FFS and GRS is very popular, particularly among MTF transgender people from the Global North. Every year, hundreds of them from the U.S., Canada, and Europe pay visits to Thai SRS clinics to have their desired physical transition (Aizura 2010). With Thailand's rise to a transgender surgical center in the early 21st century, Aizura argues, on the one hand, transgender people are provided with a new model of obtaining SRS, in which they are recognized as consumers of surgical interventions as

priced products. Unlike the gatekeeper model prevalent in the Global North, transgender people do not need to plead for psychiatrists' and surgeons'—the gatekeepers—approval to have surgeries in this new entrepreneurial consumer framework. In anthropological studies of transgenderism, the obligatory psychotherapy sessions and rigid evaluation criteria for medical interventions have been criticized (Baker and Beagan 2014; Zengin 2014). Moreover, their expressed desire towards surgical capacities, their authority to comment on post-operative results, and their demand for emotional labor are more respected by Thai medical professionals involved in this model (Aizura 2018). On the other hand, Aizura notes that the pre- and post-operative friendliness, affirmation, and comfort provided by Thai clinics are only available to people who can afford the services. In Aizura's studies, they are mostly White MTFs from a higher social class and more privileged nationality. Incorporating critical race theories, Aizura substantively analyzes the (im)mobility and (in)capability of transformation among transgender customers in Thai SRS clinics that differentiated their services for transgender patients based on their racial and national status (2009; 2010; 2018). Aizura also finds his White MTF respondents resort to traditional Thai femininity and Theravada Buddhist beliefs to affirm their sex transition, which he marks as neocolonial touristic appropriations of a non-Western culture (2010; 2018).

In Indonesia, transwomen are referred to as *banci* or *waria*, and the most recognized term for transmen is *tomboi* (Blackwood 2005). The earliest Indonesian transgender record can be traced back to early modern times. *Bissu*, "male-bodied individuals who dressed in female attire while performing certain rituals associated with royal regalia, births, weddings, and key phases of agricultural cycles," who were also identified as "transgendered ritual specialist(s)" (Peletz 2006, 312). The imposition of Islamic doctrines by local rulers since the 17th century and the Dutch colonialization, beginning in the 19th century, created a gradually intensified process of cultural

and judicial cleansing against Indonesian transgendered *bissu*. In order to convert Indonesia to Islamic and Catholic religions, develop capitalist economies, achieve industrialization, urbanization, and modernization. The local government and the colonizers deemed it necessary to suppress and eliminate the continued reproduction of rituals that involve women and transgendered persons. The rituals were discredited as backward; transgender specialists in charge of performing these rituals were also pathologized as perverse and delegitimated as criminals (Blackwood 2005; Peletz 2006).

In her research of Indonesian *tombois'* everyday gender performance, Blackwood finds that they would act with particular restraint at home and in community spaces (2009; 2011). Among her *tomboi* respondents, not only did they avoid certain masculine behaviors, such as smoking, in these spaces, but they also spoke, dressed, and postured in ways that were readable as feminine. Blackwood notes that such gender performance by *tombois* serves to express their love and respect toward their families and maintain harmonious family relationships. In Indonesia, family ties are an essential source of emotional and material support that individuals rely on throughout their lives. Because *tombois* in Blackwood's studies perform their masculinity accord to particular interpersonal relationships and spaces, rather than in fixed ways, Blackwood uses the word "contingent" to capture the relationality of *tombois'* gender performance (2009, 2011). It is found that *warias* too can enact contingent femininity with forms of masculine behaviors and speech if the occasions demand, such as when facing threats and insults in public (Boellstorff 2004). Toomistu notes, for *warias*, working in salons and attending beauty pageant contests are not only about earning money, titles and awards (2019b). More importantly, by engaging in, building networks through, and drawing resources from these activities, *warias* seek belongingness to both the national and international transgender community (Toomistu 2019b).

And the meanings of doing sex work in their nightlife are not limited to making a living, but through flirtatious and sexual interactions with men, their female sense of self is affirmed (Toomistu 2019a).

This body of anthropological work on transgenderism provides a source of inspiration to my research, especially in terms of the more recent ones conducted in the 21st century. David Valentine's work points to the importance of paying attention to how the intersection of sex, gender, and sexuality—female/male, femininity/masculinity, homosexuality/heterosexuality — affects Chinese transgender people's subjectivities and expressions of desires. Eric Plemons's work inspires me to examine the structural determinants of the availability of transition-related surgical interventions to Chinese transgender people. Aren Aizura emphasizes the effects of differences between socio-cultural contexts in his analysis of transgender people's transnational medical tourism. This reminds me that transgender people across the globe comprise socially and culturally heterogeneous groups. In my analysis, I also try to illustrate how Chinese transgender people's experiences may differ from those from other societies and cultural backgrounds. And I draw on Evelyn Blackwood's concept of contingent gender performance in my analysis of Chinese transgender people's negotiation with their families. However, their literature also leaves some gaps. The primary one concerns the lack of understanding of Chinese transgender people's experiences. Another gap relates to the lack of diversity in covered topics. Discussions about transgender people's identity development, family relations, community engagements in a socialist society are absent. I purposively designed my research to address these gaps by examining Chinese transgender people's lives in a relatively more holistic way and investigating how various aspects of their lives are affected by cultural and structural factors in Chinese society.

The existing non-anthropological literature on mainland Chinese transgender people mainly consists of HIV research and mental health research. The epidemiologic body of work found that the HIV test rates were low among this population; furthermore, there was limited information sharing between national health institutions and local LGBT organizations to facilitate the prevention and treatment of HIV infection within the domestic transgender community (Best et al. 2015; Tang et al. 2016). Some research suggested that part of the reason why Chinese transgender women had relatively higher HIV infection rates compared to the general population could be attributed to their engagements in commercial sex and inconsistent condom use during intercourse (Cai et al. 2016; Shan et al. 2018; Yan et al. 2019). Another body of work noted that Chinese transgender people's mental quality of life (QOL) was generally low. Researchers found this population experienced a high level of anxiety and high rates of suicide attempts, which could be attributed to bullying from friends, classmates, or school teachers, as well as negligence and abuse from parents and partners (Chen et al. 2019; Peng et al. 2019; Yang et al. 2016a). Their research certainly adds to Chinese transgender literature. However, they have not investigated in any significant ways how power inequalities and institutional discrimination shape Chinese transgender people's experiences of health and illness. Instead, they attribute explanations to individual behaviors and interpersonal relationships. I try to avoid this problem in my analysis. Furthermore, this body of work generally uses a quantitative research methodology. By taking a qualitative approach for my own research on Chinese transgender people, I try to capture the nuanced descriptions in ethnographic data that may be missed in quantitative statistics.

In this chapter, I discuss the anthropological and non-anthropological theories that I drew on for my analysis, and I examine the anthropological and non-anthropological transgender studies

that have informed my research and to which my research has contributed. In the next chapter, I will illustrate the research setting, research sampling, and two ethnographic methods—participant observation and semi-structured interviews—applied in this study of Chinese transgender people.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

From May to August 2019, I spent three months in Beijing, China engaging in the local

transgender community and recruiting transgender respondents and key informants through two

sampling methods—purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Key informants are people who

can "report on various aspects of the social system in which they perform role functions"

(Houston and Sudman 1975, 151). Eventually, I recruited ten transmen and ten transwomen, and

three key informants—a lawyer, a psychiatrist, and a social worker. The data eliciting

approaches used in this research include participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

Among the twenty interviews with transgender respondents, eleven were conducted online

through WeChat video/audio calls, and nine were conducted offline in Beijing. All three key

informants were interviewed online through WeChat audio calls.

3.1 Research Setting and Respondents

"WeChat is China's most popular messaging app with a monthly user base of more than 1

billion people" (Kharpal 2019). It allows users to text, send hold-to-talk voice messages, post

blogs, have digital transactions, and make voice calls and video calls in both one-to-one and

group communications. Furthermore, individual users and companies can register their public

accounts on Wechat to feed subscribers with regular updates, usually in the form of articles, and

interact with subscribers through question-and-answer ("WeChat" 2020). In this research,

WeChat was not only the location where part of my participant observation happened, but I also

used it as a tool to conduct online interviews or make appointments with interviewees about

where and when to meet offline. I also followed transgender-related public accounts on WeChat,

including those owned by transgender organizations located in Beijing. By doing so, I learned

their activity schedules and signed up for participation. The reasons I chose WeChat as my online research setting were that it not only allowed me to observe, to participate, and to interview simultaneously, but it also directed me to additional resources where I could unfold my research to a larger scale and engage with my research subjects in more depth.

Beijing LGBT Center (the Center), Common Language (CL), and the Voice of Transgender are all nonprofit, community-based queer organizations in Beijing. By attending their activities, I collected observation data and searched for potential research participants. The Center was established in 2008 and the CL organization in 2005. According to interviewees from these two organizations, their transgender departments were formed at a similar time, around 2017. Both of them provide legal and psychological counseling services to transgender people. Such services cover various areas, including but not limited to identity formation, domestic violence and intimate partner violence, employment discrimination, and changing sex status on legal documents. In addition, both of them have their focuses on public education, community construction, and rights advocacy. Despite the similarities, there are also some differences between them. The weekly Transgender Night held at the Center's office is open to both transmen and transwomen. Although, based on my observation, MTF participants often outnumbered FTM participants, or there were only MTFs. On the other hand, the trans-socialization activity that is regularly held by the CL is called Zhenzhen Fraternity. As its name suggests, it is only open to FTMs and/or their partners most of the time. During my three months of fieldwork, I had only attended one CL organized transgender activity, partly because most of its events were FTM oriented while my female sex identity disqualified me from attending. Although both the CL and the Center have a working office, the Center makes its address visible on its website and uses it for many of its activities and counseling services. At the same time, the

CL purposefully omits this information, provides most of its services through online avenues, and holds events at places other than their office. The Voice of Transgender was created in 2019. Although it does not have an office in Beijing, this has not undermined its capability to serve the transgender community. Through its public account on WeChat, the Voice invites transgender people to share their life stories, struggles, and positive experiences and provides updated information about its ongoing activities.

Among the twenty transgender respondents in this research, half were born in the 1980s and half in the 1990s. At the time of interviews, nine of them lived in Beijing, and the remaining eleven lived across the nation. Many did not want to disclose their date of birth and their hometown, and some who provided such information were clear that they did not want it to be revealed in this paper. To be fair to all respondents, I will not provide details about any respondents' demographics, except their identified sex/gender. And because the three key informants' demographics do not play an essential role in the analysis, I will not disclose their personal information either, including their sex/gender, age, and hometown. All of the respondents and key informants used their net names throughout our interactions. Some of them permitted me to mention their net names in this paper, while others expressed their concerns. In the domestic transgender community, it is common that preferred net names are used both online and offline, with both strangers and close friends. To some extent, transgender people's net names become their 'real names' and represent their identities in the community. Due to this reason, the net name loses its original function to disguise a subject's identity. Respondents who did not want to be recognized in this project asked me to use other names to refer to them. To be fair to all respondents, the names used in this paper were neither their real names nor their net names, but, instead, the author's fabrications.

3.2 Research Sampling Approaches

In this section, I will discuss the approaches to sampling that I used as I conducted my research in China. "Sampling is the process of selecting a subset of items from a larger population for inclusion into a study" (Guest 2014, 215). Seven of the twenty transgender respondents were located through purposive sampling in the offline transgender activities, and the rest were selected through the snowball sampling method. While using these approaches to sampling, my objective was to locate ten transmen and ten transwomen for formal semi-structured interviews.

"The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling." (Patton 2002, 230). My research involved an ethnographic analysis of Chinese transgender people, a hard-to-find population in China due to the relatively small size, dispersive distribution, and vulnerabilities of this community. Therefore, I had identified purposive sampling as an important first step to acquaint myself with the insiders, especially the network-rich informants, of the Chinese transgender community and to pave the way for further snowball sampling recruitments. After a life-story telling event organized by the Voice of Transgender, I introduced myself and my research project to the three transgender storytellers. I asked if they were interested in accepting an interview, and all three of them agreed. On the site, we exchanged our WeChat numbers and befriended each other. Among the rest of my directly recruited respondents, one worked as a transgender coordinator at the Center, two I met in the Saturday trivia night held by the Center, and one I got in touch with through a workshop organized by the Common Language. In this workshop and other social gathering activities that I attended, everyone was invited to

introduce themselves at the beginning of the events. During the events, I had further conversations with participants who were curious about my presence and/or interested in my research. Among these participants, some agreed to be interviewed and became respondents in this project.

Snowball sampling is a chain referral method. Through this method, researchers "get handed from informant to informant and the sampling frame grows with each interview" (Bernard 2017, 150). It is also an effective sampling method for locating reclusive and stigmatized minority members scattered over a broad region (Bernard, Wutich, and Ryan 2016). The formal approach of snowball sampling is to ask every respondent to name whomever they think should also be in this bracket until there is no new name being mentioned. The less formal one is "to start with one or two seeds, interview them, and then, at the end of those interviews, ask the person to suggest additional people with whom you might speak" (Bernard, Wutich, and Ryan 2016, 53). In this research, I used the less formal approach of snowball sampling, and all the snowball introductions happened on WeChat. When the "seed informants" agreed to pass information about my research on to others, they would inquire with the individuals they thought of first. If the contacted person/s were willing to accept an interview, the "seed informants" would then send me their WeChat contacts, and I then sent my friend requests.

The first three recruited transgender respondents were well-known figures with rich connections in the domestic trans community—two are transwomen and one is a transman. After the interview, I asked the FTM respondent if he could pass information about my research on to others he thought may be interested in sharing their experiences with me. As one of the well-recognized leaders in the FTM community, he was concerned that by doing so, others might question his ability to protect community members' privacy and best interests. Therefore, he

declined to introduce others to me directly. But he helped me get into contact with another quite active member in the FTM community, who then recommended to me three other FTM respondents. In my interviews with the other two MTFs, both of them mentioned a MTF whom they commented was "providing me important life guidance," "a pioneer of domestic transgender community construction," and "a great person who selflessly helped many people." Out of curiosity, I asked if they felt comfortable to let me know her name, and I found out they were talking about the same person. So, I asked one of them to introduce us. All my remaining transgender respondents, both MTFs and FTMs, were introduced by her. And all three key informants were introduced by another transgender respondent who had good connections with these experts due to her work in an LGBT organization.

3.3 Participant Observation

As a methodology for collecting ethnographic data, participant observation involves observing, experiencing, and immersing into study subjects' lives in particular socio-cultural settings, so that researchers can decode and conceptualize subjects' lived experiences (Bernard, Wutich, and Ryan 2016). In this research, participant observation took place both online on WeChat and offline in Beijing.

I joined two chat groups on WeChat. One was called MTF&FTM Anti-domestic Violence and Anti-employment Discrimination (MTF&FTM) with 285 members, and another was called Twilight Moon & Gentle Fairy (TMGF) with 90 members. On WeChat, the chat groups cannot be searched; instead, users have to be invited by a group member to join the group. I was first invited by one of my transgender respondents to join the MTF&FTM. Because the creator and administrator of TMGF also happened to be in this group, she then invited me, a newcomer, to her chat group. Besides the difference in size, MTF&FTM has no entrance limitation—FTMs,

MTFs, parents of transgender people, doctors, lawyers, social workers, journalists—anyone who is trans-friendly and respectful would be welcomed. At the same time, TMGF has some preconditions for membership: only male-to-female cross-dressers and transgender people, trans-friendly lesbians, and cisgender females would be accepted. Furthermore, among cross-dressers, TMGF only recognizes those who have over one-year of cross-dressing experience; and among MTFs, TMGF only admits those who have at least one type of sex reassignment surgery— anyone who fails this condition and has stopped using hormones for six months would be deemed as a man. Because of my female sex identity, I could not find any FTM-only chat group willing to accommodate my presence.

In both chat groups, members' initial responses were enthusiastic and welcoming until I formally made my introduction as a cisgender female researcher. There was a long silence at first, then some just seemed no longer interested in me, and some warned me not to do my recruitment there—I was told that I should not attempt to "trick these naïve (trans) 'kids'" into my research. I understood the awkwardness of my presence. First, I am not a transgender; second, I am a researcher, not a doctor or lawyer who is usually perceived by community members as helpful. The combination of these made me an "evil" outsider that raised their vigilance and resulted in rejection. In other words, I was probably not seen as a contributor but a looter who would "run away" with their knowledge and experiences. To avoid further aggravating the tenseness, I took a strategy of keeping a low-profile and initially made passive observations. Passive observation means reducing the researcher's sense of presence and keeping the researcher's interactions with study subjects at a minimum (Bernard, Wutich, and Ryan 2016).

In the first two weeks, I avoided asking any data-eliciting questions. Most of the time, I read their conversations but did not comment. The few times I participated were chit chats, for

example, when other group members talked about clothes or makeup brands. From the third week, when I sensed that members seemed to be used to my presence or "forgot" who I was, I started conversations related to my research questions or probed to get further explanations when someone talked about their experiences. In general, the MTF&FTM group had a gentler and smoother atmosphere than TMGF. TMGF's membership requirements mean that there may be more censorship and criticisms of members' different gender expressions and/or transition choices, which could lead to intense arguments. When a group member declared that she planned to suspend hormone therapy for personal reasons, this sparked hot debates regarding the "righteousness" of her decision and whether she should step down from TMGF's administrator position since she no longer met the minimum membership standards. The next day, I saw her being deprived of the administrator title and removed from the TMGF group.

For offline participant observation, I attended some workshops and symposiums organized by the Beijing LGBT Center, the Voice of Transgender, and the Common Language. I also regularly participated in the transgender trivia nights held at the Center. Not all the activities set by these organizations were held in an inclusive form. Some were only opened to transgender people or exclusively to MTFs or FTMs. In those cases, my researcher identity did not give me an exemption for accommodation but became a primary factor for exclusion. However, in those activities that welcomed both cisgender and transgender people and both MTFs and FTMs, the attendance ratio was imbalanced. Based on my observations, there were usually more cisgender participants than transgender participants, more MTFs than FTMs, more transgender people's significant others—partners and parents—than transgender people themselves. Considering the transgender population's vulnerabilities and how cautious they were about privacy, I would assume that discussions about their lives in some of the events I attended may have been less

detailed and less intimate than others that I was excluded from, depending on the composition of attendance.

However, it sometimes became awkward when I was the only cisgender outsider who participated in a transgender activity. I always remembered the workshop organized by the Common Language that I attended. Although there were other cisgender females, they were either the facilitators or the FTM participants' partners. Despite the fact that I formally registered and passed the screening, at the site, I perceived my existence to be intrusive. I felt a sense of guilt throughout the workshop, and I was unsettled and could not concentrate. I would not say my participant observation at this event was very productive, though I did recruit one of my FTM interviewees through it. The transgender trivia night held every Saturday at the Center has a social gathering nature, where participants did things like watched movies and had dinners together. Although there were times that I was the only cisgender female in the group, however, probably because most of the transgender attendees were MTFs, I felt the atmosphere was less rejective, and there was less staring.

Despite the differences in contents and forms, all of these activities provided me valuable opportunities to interact with transgender people in Beijing. By listening to the questions they raised, I discovered what empirical issues they were struggling with; by observing their presence, I studied how they behaved around other transgender people; and by talking to them, I learned how they wanted to be presented and interpreted by a cisgender outsider.

3.4 Semi-structured Interviews

As a qualitative methodology of elicitation, interviewing involves asking questions and obtaining answers—a process that allows researchers to collect data from their study subjects. Interviewing can take three forms: unstructured, semi-structured, and structured (Bernard,

Wutich, and Ryan 2016). In this research, I used a semi-structured interviewing approach. A semi-structured interview is based on "an interview guide or protocol—a list of questions and topics that have to be covered," and it is "flexible in that the interviewer can modify the order and details of how topics are covered" (Bernard, Wutich, and Ryan 2016, 76).

The employed interview protocol was developed out of the research interests surrounding Chinese transgender people, including identity development, family, medical/surgical transition, and community. And it had two basic directions—struggles and resilience. In the field, every interview was customized towards the specific interviewee. The sequence of questions was altered; the addition and omission of questions were made. The way I phrased specific questions was also adjusted based on the background information I learned about the respondents. For example, I often had some chitchats with my respondents to help them relax in the beginning. I would ask, "how are you doing recently" or "what does your life look like currently." If they particularly mentioned that they were struggling with family relationships, I would first move forward to the family-related questions. With some respondents, because I already knew they were activists or volunteered in a transgender organization, I would not ask if they had contacts with local LGBT organizations. Sexuality-related questions were initially not in my protocol. However, when an MTF respondent spontaneously mentioned that she began to be attracted to men recently, I added questions like "what do you think caused this change" or "how did you used to think of intimacy between men."

Besides my interview structure being flexible, I also tailored my interviews to be person-centered. Person-centered interviews engage interviewees as both informants and respondents, who can teach researchers about a particular culture and address their lived experiences in that context (Levy and Hollan 2014). With interviewees who were senior in the transgender

community, I asked them questions like, "how has the term that refers to Chinese transgender people changed over the past two decades?", "what do you know about the developments of the Chinese transgender community?", and "how do you perceive these changes?". To appeal to interviewees as respondents, I asked questions such as, "why are you not taking hormone therapy/why do you not have a plan for SRS?". To appeal to interviewees as informants, I asked questions like, "why do transgender people want to have hormone therapy/SRS?".

With the nine transgender respondents I interviewed offline in Beijing, I let them decide where they wanted to meet. Three chose where they worked, and six chose local coffee shops. With the eleven transgender respondents I interviewed through WeChat, I let them decide if they wanted to talk through text, audio, or video call. Only one chose the video call, and all the rest chose the audio call. All three key informants chose the audio call. Before the interviews, I explained my research goals to my respondents, informed them of their right not to answer a question, or withdraw their interviews afterward, described how their anonymity would be protected, and obtained their verbal consent for recording. For respondents who did not want to be recorded, I obtained their consent to take quick notes. Among the twenty transgender interviews, seventeen lasted one and half hours to two hours, and three were finished within one hour. Among the three key informant interviews, all continued for a half to one hour.

All interviews were recorded using an Android cell phone. Afterward, all the recording files were transferred to an encrypted folder on my computer. All the files were transcribed using QuickTime Player, a multimedia player, and all the transcriptions were transmitted into MAXQDA for coding. This research's codebook was developed through combined deductive and inductive methods. Inductive coding allows codes to emerge from close study of interview transcriptions and observation notes, and deductive coding starts with research hypotheses or

research themes (Bernard 2017). First, I built the framework with three basic codes —

transgender identity development trajectory, family lives, and domestic transgender community

engagement. Then, I added secondary codes to each of these three primary codes based on a

thorough examination of my ethnographic data. MAXQDA is a software for managing and

analyzing qualitative data ("MAXQDA" 2019). Through MAXQDA, data entries can be coded

with colors and linked to associated catalogs. By repeating such efforts, the "qualitative data can

be classified and transformed into quantitative data" (Kuckartz 2010, 6). In the first round of

inductive coding, I used descriptive phrases or short sentences to code every interview

transcription. In the second round of inductive coding, I combined codes with similar

descriptions, refined codes' names, and categorized them into the three basic codes mentioned

above. The differently colored coding schemas I built on MAXQDA facilitated transforming my

qualitative data into quasi-quantitative evidence, which helped support the in-depth information I

collected through the interviews.

In this chapter, I address in detail my research data collection and analysis methods. In the

next chapter, I draw on both literature and ethnography to review Chinese sex/gender and sexual

ideologies, traditional masculine and feminine norms, the conceptualization of family, LGBT

politics, and transgender history in China. These are themes that facilitate an understanding of

my analysis of Chinese transgender people.

3.5 Study Limitations

Several factors limit the representativeness of this research. First, since my research was

conducted for a Master's degree, the sample size is relatively smaller than I may have chosen for

a more extensive research project. Second, the data collection and analysis processes entirely

depended on a qualitative methodology. Combining qualitative and quantitative techniques may

yield more comprehensive findings. Third, as a cisgender female researcher, my cis-gender identity and my female sex identity imposed different degrees of limitations on the depth and range of the transgender activities that I could attend. For example, as a female, I could not enter an activity or online WeChat group that was exclusively for transmen. A collaboration with a cisgender or transgender male researcher or a transgender female researcher in future research may facilitate increased accessibility to the Chinese transgender community. Fourth, a three-month fieldwork duration may have been relatively short. A more extended research period in the future may help the researcher strengthen their rapport with their research respondents and develop better understandings of Chinese transgender respondents. Fifth, this research reports on a particularly binary aspect of Chinese transgenderism and a comparatively more privileged Chinese transgender group that emerges in a large urban area in Beijing or connects to transgender networks in Beijing. It is important to acknowledge that there may be other ways in which transgenderism is embodied and played out in other parts of China. In other words, there may be people who are less or not identified with binary male-to-female or female-to-male transition. There also may be transgender people living in a less developed urban or more conservative rural area of China whose daily lived experiences of marginalization and discrimination are greater than those experienced by transgender people living in Beijing.

CHAPTER 4: GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN CHINA HISTORICALLY

4.1 Cultural Understandings of Humanity and Sex/Gender in China

In Chinese culture, humanity is achieved through interpersonal relationality. Confucianism defines five fundamental human relations: ruler-ruled, parent-child, husband-wife, siblings, and friends. And there are five virtues embedded correspondingly in these relations—*Ren* 仁(altruistic), *Qin* 親 (affective), *Bie* 別 (differentiated), *Yi* 義 (appropriate), *Xin* 信 (promise-keeping). By behaving properly in each relationship, one's existence becomes socially recognizable. The interconnections among humanity, propriety, and relationality are also demonstrated by the multifold meanings assigned to the word "*Ren*" 仁. Mencius states, "*Ren Zhe Ren Ye*" 仁者人也—the reason we are humans is that we embody altruistic virtue. And in the Chinese language, *Ren* (altruism) 仁 is not only homophonic with *Ren* (human) 人, but they are also spelled alphabetically the same way. It further supports that the concept of "human" is traditionally an ethical concept in Chinese society, rather than a biological one (Rosenlee 2012).

Furthermore, in traditional Chinese culture, there used to be no distinction between sex and gender. A sexed being was recognized primarily by the family roles and responsibilities she or he fulfilled. According to the book *Jiaonu yigui* (Inherited Guide for Educating Women), "when persons (women) of rank are in the *Jia* (family, lineage unit) they are *nu* (daughters); when they marry they are *fu* (wives); and when they bear children they are *mu* (mothers)" (Rosenlee 2012, 48). In accordance, unmarried men are *Nan* 男(sons or brothers), married men are *Fu* 夫 (husbands) to their wives and *Fu* 父 (fathers) to their children. In other words, the norm of referring to one's sex based on his/her gender roles within the family institution suggested the interwovenness of sex and gender in Chinese traditions. It also demonstrated that an individual was engendered through family connections. The following discussions of Chinese femininities

and masculinities are especially related to Chinese transgender respondents' identity formation trajectory and their engagement in the domestic transgender community.

4.2 The Development of Chinese Femininities

The dynamics of femininities throughout Chinese history can be divided into four crucial periods: the dynastic times (207BCE-1912), the Republican era (1912-1949), the Maoist era (1949-1976), and the post-Maoist era (1976-).

There were two realms of feminine beauty in traditional Chinese culture: *Nu De* 女德(virtuous dispositions) and *Nu Se* 女色(visual appeal) (Man 2016). In the song "A Splendid Woman" created in the Wei dynasty (386-534AD), beautiful women have "fingers like the blades of the young white-grass, skin like lard, neck long and white as the tree-grub, teeth like melon seed " (手如柔荑，肤如凝脂) (Man 2016, 50). The appreciation of *Nu Se* 女色—literally, women's color— was about valuing her white and smooth skin, shapely body, the charm of her voice, and the elegance of her dresses and makeup. The words that were often used to praise female internal beauty in classical poems and songs include "*Rou* 柔(gentleness)," "*Ruan* 软(softness)," and "*Zhi* 稚(innocence)"(Man 2016, 119). Confucianism stressed that outstanding femininities were embedded in women's modesty and fidelity to the patriarchal values (Man 2016). Before the end of the dynastic era (1912), Chinese women were officially banned from producing literature and participating in politics (Song 2004). Instead, men steadfastly controlled the production and reproduction of restrictive social discourse against women's autonomy in their gender expressions. Women in Chinese feudal societies were forced to shape their body images according to men's desires and internalize the gender norms that best served men's interests.

In the Republican era (1919-1949), the government and revolutionary intellectuals promoted transforming Chinese femininities, especially in terms of the culture of women's external beauty.

In contrast to the excessively refined and delicate female bodies in dynastic times, women in the Republican era were expected to have "fit physiques and healthy skin" through "exercise, diet and natural therapy" (Man 2016, 143). It was argued that although the Republican era represented the enlightenment of Chinese femininities, their transformation nonetheless meant to serve the government's political agendas of strengthening the nation-state and saving China from Western colonization (Man 2016). In other words, this new women's image—healthy and exercised—was produced to represent the modernized and civilized status of the Republican era.

The Maoist era (1949-1976) was viewed as a period of degenderization of Chinese women. A glorified feminine role model was called the Iron Women, who were asexual and genderless and could devote themselves, not to their families, but to the country's industrialization and the Communist Party's agendas (Liu 2014; Man 2016). Women who endeavored to refine their appearance could be accused of being bourgeois traitors (Liu 2014). Instead, nationwide, most women wore only blue, green, or gray uniforms and had either a short-cut or neatly tied-up hairstyle (Man 2016). One of the most famous slogans in the Maoist society was that "women hold up half the sky (婦女能顶半边天)," which meant that women could be as tough, productive, and heroic as men were. The suppression of external feminine beauty and the erasure of individual feminine characteristics in Maoist China originated from its socio-political appreciation of masculine women. In the Maoist period, the structural advocacy for working women empowered Chinese women with raised socioeconomic status and contributed to gender equality. However, at the same time, the institutional homogenization of Chinese femininities, discouraging, even criminalizing, other forms of femininities other than the masculine one, manifested the continuing social control of Chinese women's bodies.

Chinese economic reform that started in 1978 promoted the trend of regenderization of Chinese women. First, the forms of gentle, compliant, and unassertive classical femininities were re-emphasized (Andrews and Shen 2002; Hung, Li, and Belk 2007). Second, women were prompted to give up their work and go back to their families to faithfully play the roles of virtuous wives and good mothers (贤妻良母). Third, women were encouraged to consume Western cosmetics and fashions (Liu 2014; Man 2016). The institutional encouragement of women dressing up was emancipating in that more diverse femininities became socially and politically acceptable in China. However, contrary to the Maoist period, scholars worried this social movement to "regender" Chinese women could subvert women's achieved equal rights. By having them resume the docile feminine norms and retake the full-time housewife role, these social changes could undermine Chinese women's political-economic power to negotiate their best interests in the contemporary family and social structures (Liu 2014; Man 2016). The one-child policy (1980-2015) further deprived Chinese women of their control over their reproductive processes and their bodies by regulating the number of births they were allowed to have: one for urban households and two for rural households if the first child was a daughter. Its eventual abolishment in 2015 was not necessarily implemented to allow Chinese women to regain control of their bodies but, rather, to prevent the pressures associated with an aging Chinese society.

Liu found that many young girls in the 21st century in China not only expressed a desire to become *Shuai Nusheng* (handsome girls) who are decisive, confident, eloquent, and competitive, but they also showed a preference for an androgynous or somewhat boyish outlook (2014). *Shuai* means "commander-in-chief" as a noun and "to command (the army)" as a verb in the Chinese language. Because in the dynastic times, only men had access to military governance, this word

was traditionally assigned to men rather than women. It was also found that these young girls' gender performative preferences were not in conflict with those of their parents. Parents also wished their daughters to cultivate some masculine qualities, such as being bold and ambitious, which they believed could help their daughters survive and succeed in a competitive Chinese society that is generally dominated by men (Liu 2006).

4.3 The Development of Chinese Masculinities

The dynamics of masculinities throughout Chinese history can also be divided into four periods: the dynastic times (207BCE-1912), the Republican era (1912-1949), the Maoist era (1949-1976), and the post-Maoist era (1976-).

Classical Chinese masculinity was divided into *Wen* and *Wu* paradigms. *Wen* signified cultural attainments, and *Wu* represented military force (Louie 2002). Men with *Wen* masculinity referred to individuals who showed an assemblage of poetic, knowledgeable, magnanimous, and courteous qualities. Corresponding to these soft dispositions, the physiques of men who embodied *Wen* masculinity were characterized with feminine male beauty, including "rosy lips, sparkling white teeth, jasper-like face" (唇红齿白，面如冠玉) or bodies that were "sleek and shining as the willow in the months of spring" (濯濯如春日柳) (Song 2004, 126, 145). Men of this kind were usually called *Junzi* (men of ethic君子) or *Caizi* (men of talent才子) (2004). On the other hand, men with *Wu* masculinity were often called *Yingxiong* (men of heroism 英雄) or *Haohan* (good fellow 好汉). They were not only physically strong and could fight fearlessly for righteous calls, but they also avoided abusing power (Louie 2002). In many dynasties, soft *Wen* masculinity was honored over martial *Wu* masculinity. A man would not be perceived as superiorly masculine because he was bulky and muscular, nor would his masculinity be questioned because he had a feminine appearance.

By the end of the Qing dynasty (1912), China was semi-colonized by Western imperialist countries, which formed a turning point for Chinese masculinity. In the Republican era (1912-1949), traditional soft masculinity was fiercely condemned by revolutionaries. It was seen as not only associated with the humiliating image of "Sick Men of East Asia" 亚洲病夫 that was assigned by Westerners to represent Chinese people, but also contributing to the degradation of the nation-state (Song and Hird 2013). At the same time, the notions of Western masculinity, of being tough and sexually virile, infiltrated Republican society and became the masculine ideals (Mann 2011; Song and Hird 2013). The masculine icon was no longer a man who climbed up the social rank through the examination system, but rather, a man who could defend and revitalize his country.

Under the leadership of Chairman Mao (1949-1976), industrialization and class struggles were prioritized in Chinese society. The Communist Party produced and promulgated three representative socialist masculine icons—farmers, workers, and soldiers—who were stoic and selfless and proud to be useful in constructing a modernized and industrialized China (Louie 2002). Masculine models in this era had muscular and healthy bodies, and in general, their physical attributes were not so much different from those of the female icons—Iron Women (2002). That is to say, men in the Maoist area were masculine in a genderless and asexual way.

Liu's research found that men in the modern, 21st century Chinese society have been expected to display masculine subjectivities that are competitive, eloquent, determined, ambitious, and extroverted (2006). Furthermore, affected by the economic reform started in 1979, the Western masculine image of the "globally traveling businessmen" became widely accepted among Chinese men along with the Western individualistic and consumerist culture. And they have struggled to compete for their masculine status by consuming products and showing off wealth

(Song and Hird 2013). Luo noted in a popular Chinese dating show, If You Are the One (*Fei Cheng Wu Rao*), bachelor guests performed their masculinities by presenting the estates they own, their annual salary, and their professions (2017).

Anti-emasculation is another trait of 21st-century Chinese masculinity. Effeminate men who dressed up and sounded like women or acted more femininely than biological women were called *Wei Niang* (fake women). This alternative masculinity that "deviated" from the mainstream masculine culture in China was fiercely criticized as a disaster to the nation-state (*Guo Nan Lin Tou* 国难临头) (Zheng 2015). Affected by the traditional theatre culture, where effeminate men played female characters and engaged in homosexual relationships with the elite male audience, emasculation was associated with homosexuality (Hinsch 1990; Song 2004). And both were thought to be responsible for China's semi-colonization in the early 20th century (1912-1949) (Mann 2011). Almost a century has passed, yet this metaphorical association between effeminate/homosexual men and a threatened nation-state still appeared to be influential in Chinese culture. During the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the one-child policy (1979-2015) made a boy more valuable in Chinese urban families, who would be considered the only heir to family wealth and the only hope for elderly care. And many Chinese parents believed that effeminate characteristics in boys would greatly diminish their chances to succeed in both business and marriage markets, which they could not allow to happen (Liu 2006; 2019). Therefore, the family institutions also devalued emasculation.

4.4 Homosexuality in China

In dynastic times, there was no equivalent word for heterosexuality nor homosexuality in the Chinese language, and the distinction between the two barely existed. Same-sexed desires and practices were referred to as one's habits, tastes, or *Pi* 癖(favoritism) (Hinsch 1990; Song 2004).

Neither male nor female homosexuality caused much social criticism. It was believed that male homosexuality did not disrupt the *yin* (feminine)-*yang* (masculine) harmony. The socially powerful one was often the sexually dominant one and occupied the position of *yang*; meanwhile, the socially subordinate one was often the sexually receptive one and took the position of *yin* (Hinsch 1990; Song 2004). In terms of female homosexuality, research suggested because it did not involve penetration, for ancient Chinese people, it may have been even less threatening than male homosexuality (Mann 2011).

The intrusion of Western psychological science and sexology in the Republic era (1912-1949) overturned Chinese sociocultural discourse regarding homoeroticism. It marked the beginning of pathologizing homoeroticism as a mental illness and produced prejudice against homoeroticism as sexual deviance (Fang and Zhang 2013; Hinsch 1990). In the socialist society (1949-), homosexuality was criminalized until 1997 and pathologized in the Chinese Classification of Mental Disorder (CCMD) until 2001. And for a long time, it was politically promulgated as a capitalist disease and an evil legacy of Chinese feudal societies (Jeffreys and Yu 2015; Mann 2011).

The pathologized, criminalized, and stigmatized histories of homosexuality in China after the end of dynastic times (207BCE-1912) are still influencing the discursive formation and social institutions' treatments of Chinese people with a homosexual orientation. It takes a toll on Chinese transgender respondents who struggle a lot to recognize and renegotiate their sexualities before and after embracing a transgender identity. There are both FTM and MTF respondents who have had a hard time reconciling their internalized stigma towards their own homosexual attractions and building intimate relationships. Because their families and the transgender community also hold prejudice in favor of heterosexual transgenderism over homosexual

transgenderism, their acceptance-marginalization within these institutions is affected by their sexuality.

4.5 Gender Inequality in China

Chinese women's historically subordinate status could be attributed to the convergence of patrilineal and patrilocal traditions and *Nei-Wai* (private-public) divisions (Johnson 1985; Rosenlee 2012). In Chinese traditional culture, male descendants were the only legitimate heirs of the family's bloodline and performers of ancestor worship. The status of women descendants in her natal family and family-in-law was marginalized and utilitarian. A daughter was seen as a future stranger as she was doomed to be married off, and a daughter-in-law, a perceived intruder until she gave birth to a male heir (Johnson 1985; Rosenlee 2012). And regulated by the patrilocal rules, a married woman was separated geographically and socially from her natal social networks by moving to her husband's family (Johnson 1985). In Chinese culture, a person deprived of social relations was incomplete and vulnerable. The private-public divisions confined Chinese women to household arrangements and prevented them from joining the military and participating in politics. This sex-based labor and social segregation not only deprived women of opportunities to obtain prestige and material rewards as men did, but it also contributed to the biased discourse of essentialist sex differences between men's and women's capabilities in public achievements (Rosenlee 2012).

Although gender equality has been promoted legally and culturally in contemporary Chinese society since the Maoist era, and the norms of patrilocal residence, patrilineal inheritance, and private-public divisions have weakened, unfairness against women in all aspects of their lives, such as in education and career attainments, have still remained (Ji et al. 2017; Liu, Li, and Yang 2016). This is because, historically, Chinese women have rarely been viewed and treated as

equally valuable as men by the family institution and the nation-state. In this research, it is found that in this gender context, compared with female-to-male transgender identification, the male-to-female transition is less readily accepted by many Chinese families.

4.6 Family for Individuals and the Nation-state

In Chinese culture, family plays a significant role throughout an individual's life course. As Rosenlee put it, "learning to be human is to learn to be true to one's familial roles by building a reciprocal bond with one's parents and by caring for them and serving them as well" (2012, 41). Data has suggested that, nowadays, the average family size in China has shrunk, and young people have more freedom and mobility to move away from their natal families, giving the appearance of individuals becoming more detached from their parents (Choi and Luo 2016; Li 2011; Meng 2008). Nevertheless, other research has argued that, essentially, family as a lifeboat has become even more valuable for its members in modern Chinese society (Xu et al. 2007; Xu and Xia 2014). Affected by the neoliberal economic and political reforms in the late 20th century, not only has the public welfare system that supported child-rearing and elderly care declined, but the old job and housing allocation system was also replaced by fierce market competition. It has been argued that because it became increasingly difficult for individuals to be self-sufficient with the social reforms, Chinese people needed physical, financial, and emotional supports from their families more than ever, which strengthened the interdependent parent-child relations in China (Xu et al. 2007; Xu and Xia 2014).

In Chinese culture, the nation was seen as integrated with the state and family as the basic composite for the nation-state alliance. Mencius stressed, "the world (nation) was rooted in the state, and the state was rooted in the family" (天下之本在国，国之本在家). In the Great Learning, it was articulated that "well-educated individual selves were the basis for well-

regulated families, well-regulated families were the basis for a well-governed state, a well-governed state was the basis for a prosperous nation"

(身修而后家齐，家齐而后国治，国治而后天下平). In China, the nation-state has been metaphorically compared to the big family and the ruling authority compared to the father figure—due to the tightly knit relationships between nation and state and between the nation-state and individual families (Ren 1992). In the post-dynastic times, in response to Western imperialist and capitalist colonization attempts, both the Republican government (1912-1949) and the Communist Party (1949-) emphasized that a strong government was needed for China's survival and renaissance and propagated the importance of individual families to the nation-state (Glosser 2003).

The mutually supportive and responsible relations between individuals and their families, that are embedded in Chinese people's ethics and behavioral codes, are influential to my Chinese transgender respondents. Their autonomy in gender expression and sex transition is limited by the disciplinary power the family institution has over them. And its powerful status is consolidated by the nation-state through legislation. For example, in China, without parents' consent, transgender people cannot have sex reassignment surgeries.

4.7 LGBT Politics in China

The transition of the political regime from former president Hu (2005-2013) to current president Xi (2013-) led to heightened state control over public speech and collective movements (Chia 2019; King, Pan, and Roberts 2013; Tai 2014). In this political context, the Chinese transgender community has been vulnerable to the use and abuse of power by the state surveillance system.

The Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) required all Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to have people or an independent department in charge of their internal censorship. The providers who fail to comply could face a financial penalty, temporary close down, permanent license withdrawal, or, even worse, criminal charges (MacKinnon 2009). Under this political pressure, ISPs have engaged in intensified self-censorship in recent years. As a result, gender and sexual minority cultures have been at heightened risks for content erasure and publishing restriction on various social platforms (Moreno-Tabarez et al. 2014). In this new Internet era, the consolidation of LGBT visibility has depended on online exposure. My respondents worried that biased state influenced self-censorship—sexist and heteronormative—may undermine the recent sustainable developments of Chinese LGBT communities.

Offline, The Charity Law and The Overseas NGO Law introduced in 2016 greatly influenced the Chinese LGBT civil society. The Charity Law regulates domestic NGOs' registrations and activities. Many LGBT NGOs found it was challenging to register through this new policy due to the limited registerable areas. Disaster relief, environmental protection, and promotion of education, science, public health, poverty alleviation, and care for the disabled and elders were recognized as primary public interests and the registration of NGOs promoting these interests was welcomed (Chia 2019). Transgender NGOs who could not register were disqualified from applying for government funding and benefiting from public fund-raising activities (Chia 2019). They have had to sustain themselves in a self-sufficient way, which may affect their growth in the long term. The Overseas NGO Law has meticulous requirements for overseas NGOs' registration in China and imposes heavy surveillance over their activities (Feng 2017). Since 2017, few overseas NGOs have registered in the LGBT area or built partnerships with domestic LGBT NGOs (Chia 2019). Furthermore, under this legislation, overseas NGOs must disclose all

the details of their funding to Chinese NGO recipients to the Chinese public security bureau (Feng 2017; Han 2018). As a result, not only has it became almost impossible for unregistered domestic transgender NGOs to obtain any transnational financial support, but it has also become harder for registered NGOs to hold onto the money that has flowed in from these overseas NGOs without worrying about being visited by supervising institutions. The loss of funding sources may affect unregistered and registered transgender NGOs' survival and unsettle their working agendas. Both are closely associated with the well-being of Chinese transgender people.

4.8 History of Transgenderism in China

In the dynastic times (207BCE-1912), transgenderism covered basically three groups of people. First, it referred to castrated eunuchs 阉人 or intersexed/hermaphroditic people, also called *Er Xing* 二形 or *Er Yizi* 二仪子, the early records of which could be found in the Book of Jin (*Jin Shu* 晋书 265-420AD), the Collection of Difficult Lawsuit Cases (*Yiyu Ji*疑狱集 936-947AD), and the Protocols on Generating Many Heirs (*Guangxi Jiyao* 广嗣纪要 1573 AD) (Chiang 2018; Xie 2015). Second, transgenderism included cross-dressing bodies. Hua Mulan was one such representative figure in traditional Chinese literature. As a biological woman herself, she dressed as a man to replace her disabled father's military service during wartime (Kile 2013). Third, transgenderism was used to describe transformed bodies (Xie 2015). A man transformed morphologically into a woman was called *Nan Hua Nü* 男化女, whose penis and testes shrank until disappeared, but grew functional ovaries and a uterus and could get pregnant. A woman transformed morphologically into a man was called *Nü Hua Nan* 女化男, whose vagina narrowed and ovaries shrank until disappeared, but developed functional penis and testes and could make others pregnant. The earliest records of the transformed bodies existed in the

Book of Han (*Han Shu* 汉书 206BCE-23CE) (Xie 2015). According to Kile (2013) and Xie (2015), there were three possible explanations for such transformations. First, it could be attributed to supernatural forces or wills. Second, especially for *Nan Hua Nü* 男化女, it could be explained by the homoerotic orientation, that is a man's morphological features feminized correspondingly to his sexual practices. Third, especially for *Nü Hua Nan* 女化男, a girl's transformation could be the reification of parents' obsession with having a boy to pass on the family's bloodline.

The earliest information that I could find concerning mainland transgender people was in a news article published on people.com.cn in 2000 by Shao Ning. In this article, transgender people were referred to as "*Xingbie Jixing Zhe*/性别畸形者" (people with sex dysmorphia). In the following years, until 2014, online news reports consistently used the term "*Bianxing Ren*/变性人" (transsexual people) to refer to transgender people. Based on my research, I found that it was in a blog posted in 2012 on douban.com that the term "*Kua Xingbie*/跨性别" (transgender) first appeared in the public view. The title of the blog was "The Eldest Transgender Person in China—84 Years Old Sister Yiling: A Collection of the Related News Reports 中国最年长的跨性别人士，84的伊铃大姐相关报道." The coming out of Li Yinhe's[1] female-to-male partner in 2014 made the term "transgender" and transgender people more widely known in Chinese society.

Anqi (MTF), a senior experienced interviewee in this research, told me that for a long time, "CD" and "TS" were the most commonly used terms within the mainland transgender

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[1] Li Yinhe is a sociologist, sexologist, and activist for LGBT rights in the People's Republic of China ("Li Yinhe" 2021).

community. "CD" was the abbreviation for cross-dresser (*Yizhuang Pi*/异装癖) and "TS" was the

abbreviation for transsexual (*Bianxing Ren*/变性人). Anqi suggested these terms were imported

from the international LGBT community when the Great Firewall[2] did not exist and information

from abroad was more accessible. Using abbreviations was convenient since they were short.

However, according to Anqi, there were two other reasons people did not use the full names of

CD and TS. First, the abbreviations obscured the meanings of these two terms so that the public

would not easily detect the populations and cultures they represented. Second, by using these two

abbreviations, people could avoid referring to themselves as *Yizhuang Pi*/异装癖 or *Bianxing*

Ren/变性人, which they thought were shameful and stigmatizing in Chinese sociocultural

discourse. Anqi explained the term *Kua Xingbie*/跨性别 was translated from transgender in

2002-2003. Later, community members turned to using this term because transsexual sex

workers and cross-dressing people who sold sex were exposed in the media. As a result, CD and

TS were imprinted with the stigma of prostitution. As a word that was inclusive and yet

unblemished, transgender or *Kua Xingbie*/跨性别 became a good alternative for the mainland

transgender community.

Chinese sex/gender and sexual norms have been produced and reproduced in the patriarchal

social structure and shaped by political-economic changes of the nation-state. Evolving,

adapting, and accumulating throughout Chinese history, these cultural norms regarding sex and

sexuality affect how social institutions in contemporary Chinese society view and treat various

gender identifications and performances and sexed bodies. For example, they authenticate

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[2] The Great Firewall is a sophisticated Internet censorship system introduced by the state in 2008 in China that controls online cross-border traffic and blocks foreign websites ("Great Firewall" 2021).

cisgenderism over transgenderism, heterosexuality over homosexuality, interrelationality over individuality, male (FTM) over female (MTF), and conforming bodies over transformative bodies. And these biases shape daily-life inequalities and precarity experienced by Chinese transgender people. In the next chapter, I discuss three identity developmental stages experienced by most of my Chinese transgender respondents and their struggles in each stage.

CHAPTER 5: TRANSGENDER TRAJECTORY

In the transgender literature, there is a vibrant body of scholarly work in Western societies that tries to conceptualize transgender and transsexual people's identity development stages. Aaron Devor developed a fourteen-stage model based on Canadian transsexual people's experiences (2004), Arlene Lev built a sex-stage model based on U.S. transgender people's embodiment (2006), Walter Bockting and Eli Coleman constructed a five-stage model oriented toward the pre- and post-coming out experiences of U.S. transgender people (2016), and Ekins had the most simplified three-stage model rooted in British MTF respondents' descriptions (2002). These studies provided me great insights about how I could approach my respondents' identity formation experiences.

Henry Rubin described a "transsexual trajectory" as the process of people learning about, formulating, and consolidating their transsexual identity (2003). In this research, my respondents referred to themselves as transgender rather than transsexual. Therefore, I made a terminological adaption from the transsexual trajectory to the transgender trajectory. And based on the culturally and socially influenced common experiences that Chinese transgender people shared, I classified them into three stages of identity development. These stages are, first, experiencing a gender identity different from their assigned sex/gender; second, exploring a transgender identity and gender transitions; and third, living lives as their identified sex/gender. I then further divided the first stage into two substages: before and after puberty. I also discussed the struggles they confronted at each stage, for example, extreme body anxieties during puberty, job discrimination at the exploration stage, and unsatisfactory life quality at the third stage. And these hardships they experienced were not isolated from one another but interconnected.

5.1 Experiencing the Differences

For Chinese transgender respondents, the differences they experienced referred to not only their embodied gender-sex incongruence, and the discrepancies between what they desired and what their families desired from them, but also the feeling that they were not as "normal" as their peers. The two substages they underwent include times before puberty and a more physiologically and psychosocially agonized period with the onset of puberty.

5.1.1 Before Puberty

At this substage, through the individual body level of analysis, I find that gendered embodiment and sexual embodiment were stimuli for Chinese transwomen and transmen respondents respectively to become aware of their differences from other people. Embodiment or body knowledge are concepts used to describe "physical sensations, such as calmness, happiness, pleasure, discomfort, anxiety or fear, that are produced and felt in the body through social interactions, which become evidence for a sense of self" (Blackwood 2011, 210). Embodiment also encompasses culturally influenced patterns of behavior enacted by people (Strathern and Stewart 2011). The experiences of gendered embodiment differences were relatively more apparent among my MTF respondents. For example, an MTF respondent Hanxiao recalled, "When I was a kid, I envied other girls and thought 'they were lucky to be born as girls, and I wanted to be one of them.' But then I reminded myself that 'I was a boy, how I could ever become a girl unless there was magic.' Later, I started wearing my mom's clothing." Among my MTF respondents, there was only one who suggested that during 'his' childhood, besides the feminine ways 'he' talked and behaved, 'he' was also disturbed by 'his' sexual attraction to other boys. Comparatively, sexual embodiment stimulus was more frequently mentioned by FTM respondents. Luhao (FTM) said, "when I was in the sixth grade, I realized I was different (from

other girls) that I liked our female class leader." Besides him, three other FTM respondents disclosed that their same-sex attraction aroused their initial feelings of being different.

Before puberty, MTF respondents' gender awareness resided more on girl's clothing they preferred to wear, girls they preferred to play with, as well as their feminizing fantasies. In contrast, FTM respondents focused more on their 'homosexual' orientation. They started to embody a sense of uneasiness when they realized they were not interested in boys like their female peers. With these findings, two questions arose: first, why gendered embodiment was not the primary stimulus for both MTFs' and FTMs' awakening of transgender awareness; and second, why the primary stimuli for MTF and FTM respondents were different.

One possible explanation for the first question was that FTM respondents did not particularly feel discomfort with their bodily sex due to the relative undifferentiation of boys' and girls' sex characteristics when they were children in Chinese society. This was also supported by Rubin's research on U.S. FTM transsexual people, which found that the "relative lack of sex markings on the bodies of children" made it possible for FTM respondents to "convince themselves and others that they were, or at least, were like boys." (2003, 96). When the sexed bodies were relatively invisible to transgender people themselves and to others before puberty, the bodies played less of a role in triggering their feelings of gender-sex incongruency.

In order to answer the second question, it is important to understand that effeminate men and masculine women were evaluated in divergent ways in Chinese society due to historical reasons, as we have discussed in the cultural background chapter (Man 2016; Mann 2011; Song and Hird 2013). In other words, we need to find reasons through an analysis at the level of the social body. Men's emasculation was stigmatized and forbidden, while women's masculinization was permitted, sometimes even promoted and praised (Liu 2006; 2019). Affected by such disparities,

MTF respondents who practiced and fantasized about feminizing may feel more insecure and

stressed than FTM respondents. These sensations inscribed on their bodies made MTFs prioritize

gender embodiment as a stimulus for their early transgender awareness than FTM did. This was

illustrated in the words of my respondents:

> "I had been very cautious when I wore my sister's or my mom's clothes. I would remember the order of every hanger and which clothes belonged to which hangers, and how the clothes were folded if they were not hanged. So that I could put them back when I was done." Enci (MTF)

> "Since I was a child, I always dressed up as a boy, and others would call me a tomboy. My cousins and brothers in the neighborhood would take me to game centers." Luhao (FTM)

While Enci (MTF) had to hide her cross-dressing behaviors, Luhao (FTM) felt safe to cross-

dress publicly and let others notice his nascent gender non-conformity, which was misrecognized

and tolerated as tomboyish-ness. While Luhao was accepted by and got along well with the boy's

group, Wanting (MTF) was verbally abused by her classmates as Er Yizi—ladyboy, sissy—

because they found it was "abnormal" for a male-sexed child to be as feminine as 'he' was. The

responses to and experiences of gender non-conformity were different for MTFs and FTMs

before their puberty. Many of my MTF respondents experienced humiliations and feelings of

shame and anguish, or had the instinct or impulse to hide their non-conforming behaviors. These

experiences were not necessarily shared by FTM respondents, who often felt less gender

scrutiny. They, on the other hand, tended to confuse sexuality and gender identifications, since

they did not realize they were attracted to other girls as a boy rather than a girl. While the

majority of their peers expressed romantic interest in the opposite sex, their supposed

"homosexual orientation" marked them as "heretics." Their self-awareness of being different,

which was associated with sexuality, left a deeper impression on them. In other words, for FTM

respondents, when their gender performance was relatively unchallenged by social institutions, at

the level of the body politic, they were less likely to take gendered embodiment as the stimulus for their initial transgender awareness as MTF respondents do. Instead, they prioritized sexual embodiment as the more relevant experiences.

5.1.2 The Onset of Puberty

During puberty, androgen and estrogen hormones sexualized the bodies of Chinese transgender respondents. The development of their secondary sex characteristics marked them as men (MTF) and women (FTM), no longer boys and girls. At this substage, through an analysis at the level of the individual body, I find body anxiety was the stimulus that engendered both MTFs and FTMs in a volatile way and provoked a much stronger sense of incongruency. Another specific stimulus for FTM respondents was a lack of belongingness to the lesbian community. This made them realize that lesbian was probably not the right identity for them.

Some respondents described their pubertal body anxiety in a general way. They mentioned, "I started to really hate my body" or "I felt very uncomfortable to look at myself in front of the mirror." At the same time, other respondents were more specific about this. Among these respondents, Shijia (MTF) talked about her strong aversion to the masculinization of her voice, Zeyu (FTM) mentioned his horrifying first menses experience, and Hanbo (FTM) said he was extremely annoyed by 'her' breasts. By taking a close look, it is easy to find that the different focuses these three respondents had on their pubertal body anxiety pointed to biological distinctions made between maleness and femaleness. In other words, menses and breasts were particularly loathed by Chinese FTM respondents because they signified female sex, which they subconsciously did not identify with. This phenomenon was also affirmed in a European transgender study that found transgender people may have different areas of dissatisfaction with their bodies. They were affected by how particular body parts were valued in their personal and

societal masculine/feminine standards, such as whether it would be challenging to have them modified or disguised through techniques (e.g., make-up, surgery, or medicine) (van de Grift et al. 2016).

During puberty, affected by the hormones, Chinese transgender respondents did not develop the secondary sex characteristics they identified with, which alienated them from the sex group they thought they belonged to. Meanwhile, the strong aversion they had to their developed sex features distinguished them from their same-sexed peers who did not share the same feelings. Under such situations, the body became the essential cue in awakening their transgender consciousness. For MTF respondents, pubertal body anxiety further validated their felt gender-sex incongruence before puberty. For FTM respondents, their embodied agony drew their attention from the previously supposed "homosexuality" issue to the issue of their gender identification. Rubin suggested the feelings of being betrayed by their bodies play an important role in prompting people to explore a transgender identity (2003).

Some FTM respondents who used to identify themselves as lesbians suggested that when they had more chances to engage with the domestic lesbian community during this period, they found they were "heterodox" in this group in one way or another. Luhao found himself holding contradictory perspectives from other lesbians on many matters. He said, "they (other lesbians) thought marriage was stupid, and they had very negative impressions about men, but I was not like that." Hanbo explained he felt different because the tomboy lesbians he talked to never thought of having a mastectomy as he did; instead, they were satisfied with just binding their breasts. Yuanze started reflecting on his gender identity after being rejected twice by girls. He recalled, "after the second time the girl I confessed to said she was not interested in a lesbian relationship, I realized I never thought of myself as a girl." For Chinese FTM respondents, there

were various factors that could make them feel the lesbian identity did not capture who they truly were. And this lack of attachment to the lesbian identity drove them to explore another identity to which they may belong.

5.1.3 Struggles During Puberty

There were three types of struggles frequently reported by Chinese transgender respondents: inconvenience in accessing their school's restroom or bathroom, social withdrawal, and poor educational attainment. An FTM respondent recalled these experiences:

> "For most of the time in middle school, I tried not to go to the restroom, and for that, I drank very little water. I felt uncomfortable every day […] I was also unsociable and had no friends. I felt awkward when I played with girls, but boys never recognized or treated me as one of them. So, I did not want to and could not be with either group." Zeyu (FTM)

Due to the embodiment of gender-sex incongruence triggered by pubertal body anxiety, Chinese transgender respondents started to feel uncomfortable using the restroom or bathroom of their assigned sex/gender. But most schools in China, if not all, had no third-gender restroom nor single-user restroom. This reflected the Chinese education system's inadequate recognition of the existence and needs of Chinese transgender students. When my respondents were students, they confronted great challenges to solving their basic excretion needs, which not only led to hygiene issues but, additionally, controlling their needs could also indirectly cause dehydration and skin diseases. For some of them, these struggles led to long-term psychological traumas.

Having difficulty in developing intimate relationships and friendships was another issue mentioned by many Chinese transgender respondents. Based on their interviews, I found their social withdrawal could be attributed to the following reasons that relate to body politic. First, their felt gender-sex difference caused confusion and a sense of awkwardness about how they should interact with others, who were inclined to interpret their sex based on their primary and secondary sex characteristics and enact social codes as such. Because of this misrecognition,

respondents felt they were cheating when playing with same-sex classmates; and due to the denial of recognition, respondents were agitated and frustrated when interacting with opposite-sex classmates. Both cases put them off from socializing. Second, some respondents did not see themselves as loveable or "qualified" to love because they were confused about their sex/gender identity. Mengxue (MTF) said, "I did not know 'who I am' and 'what I am,' and I felt I had no right to fall in love with anyone." Furthermore, this was also related to the disciplinary discourse in China on adolescent romance. Parents and schools worried that romance might distract students from their most important task—studying. And compared to heterosexual romance, "homosexual" romance was more taboo. The reason I placed the term homosexual in quotes here was that oftentimes transgender respondents were not perceived as their identified sex/gender by the same-sex peers they confessed their love to, nor by others.

Finally, some Chinese transgender respondents suggested they regretted not being able to achieve their full potential in education during puberty, which also affected their current career attainment. The psychiatrist I interviewed acknowledged that he knew many transgender youth who dropped out of school very early. Some dropped out because they wanted to make money for sex reassignment surgeries as soon as possible; and others, who experienced domestic violence and were abandoned by their families, could not afford to go to school anymore. He relayed to me, "for these youth, studying was no longer important, and they saw no meanings in it." A famous Chinese proverb says "studying exceeds all other pursuits (万般皆下品，惟有读书高)." At the level of the social body, studying has been accorded profound value in Chinese culture. Since the dynastic times, standing out in the examination system through hard-study was an essential task for Chinese youths. This discourse may also contribute to Chinese transgender respondents' negative feelings toward their relatively poor educational achievements.

5.2 Exploring Transgender Identity

The identity formation trajectory of Chinese transgender respondents was not a tightly knit linear process. Being aware of their gender-sex incongruency did not necessarily lead them to explore a transgender identity. The discrepancy between being aware of their gender-sex incongruency and not exploring a transgender identity has been called a period of undifferentiation towards transgenderism by Richard Ekins (2002). By "undifferentiation" he meant consciously or unconsciously denying the occurrence of untoward incidents and precluding certain possibilities (2002). In this section, I first discuss what obstructed Chinese respondents from accessing transgenderism through analysis at the level of the social body; then I go on to address what identity exploration at this stage meant respectively for MTF and FTM respondents through analysis at the level of the individual body; finally, I analyze the discriminations and struggles they confronted during this period through an analysis of the body politic.

5.2.1 Repression and Self-repression

Chinese respondents' undifferentiation towards transgenderism could be attributed to three factors. First, the social structure that demanded cisgender conformity sabotaged their mental and physical well-being and obstructed them from facing what they perceived to be their true selves. Second, some respondents were put off by negative/stereotypical misinformation about transgenderism. Third, transgender culture was relatively invisible in China at the beginning of the 21st century.

Enci (MTF) recalled, "during high school and college, I tried so hard to hide my feminine qualities and create a normative heterosexual cisgender male image in front of others that I had no vitality for anything else." Entrapped by feelings of self-loathing and shame about their

embodied gender-sex difference, and burdened by performing the sex/gender they did not identify with, many Chinese transgender respondents complained they hardly had the stamina to learn about transgenderism. Zeyu (FTM) said, "I used to believe transgender people were like Thailand ladyboys 人妖 and would end up dying in the sex-changing surgeries." Resonating with these ideas, Enci (MTF) thought being a transgender predicted a future of working in the sex industry, living at the bottom of society, and dying by his/her 40s. These stereotypical impressions about transgenderism that were disseminated on social media and dominated public discourse took a toll on some respondents. Internalizing the prejudice and believing that they would lose everything and live miserable lives if they become a transman or transwoman discouraged them from identifying themselves with a transgender identity. As I have introduced in the cultural background chapter, the term *Kua Xingbie* (transgender) and transgender culture were not popularized until 2014. Among the twenty Chinese transgender respondents in my research, half were born in the 1990s, and the other half in the 1980s. When they were still in high school or college, which would be 6-7 years or even 15-20 years ago, transgenderism was far more a foreign idea in Chinese society. To a certain degree, the obscurity of transgender culture in early 21st century China also obstructed some respondents from accessing a transgender identity.

5.2.2 Transgender Identity Exploration for Male-to-Females (MTFs)

Most of my MTF respondents explored what it meant to live their identified gender through cross-dressing. According to them, cross-dressing encompassed more than what they wore. They not only tried on women's pajamas, underwear, shoes, stud earrings, and hairpieces, but they also endeavored to sound like women, grow long hair, and build their skincare routines. For them, cross-dressing represented a package of doing things more than dressing. This was, in part,

because they were afraid that missing any details may damage their feminine image and expose their male biological sex. For example, when they sounded feminine, their dress and appearance suggested otherwise; and vice versa, when they wore feminine dress but still spoke with a masculine voice, others may have perceived their male biological sex.

According to Ekins's British MTF transgender research, there were four ways of doing femaling (cross-dressing): solitary doing, cross-dressing alone in a private space; solo doing, cross-dressing in a private space with other MTFs; dyadic doing, cross-dressing in a public space without other MTF's company; and group doing, cross-dressing in a public space together with other MTFs (2002). In my research, Chinese MTF respondents also embodied different ways of cross-dressing in a gradually developing form. All but one respondent suggested they started cross-dressing solitarily, some by wearing women's underwear and in-door clothes, others by trying gender-neutral clothes, jewelry, hairstyle, and hair length. When they became more experienced and confident about cross-dressing, they proceeded from solitary doing to dyadic and group doings. Hanxiao (MTF) recalled, "for the first time, I bought myself a two-piece dress, and I only wore in my room. Later, I wore it outside during the nights. When I noticed that I could be perceived as a woman fairly well, I started buying women's clothing more often. I dressed up and went shopping and hung out with friends any time I wanted."

Many MTF respondents reported it validated their transgender identification when they appeared in public while cross-dressing and surrounding people greeted them as ladies or at least did not stare at them. This kind of encounter also encouraged them to engage in a deeper level of doing their identified gender. In contrast, when some of them only cross-dressed in an ambiguously feminine manner—"having longer hair" or "wearing simple silver/black earring studs"—but were still scolded by surrounding people, they started to feel insecure and drew back

from further explorations. In this case, although they anticipated that their audience might challenge their gender performances based on certain cisgender stereotypes, their confidence in living as their identified gender still could be greatly reduced when facing this kind of rejection.

Most Chinese transgender respondents reported that exploring gender transition through cross-dressing elicited a sense of peacefulness and helped to relieve their body anxiety. However, among those who could not proceed from the cross-dressing stage after many years due to various external obstructions, their initial affirmative embodiment obtained from this practice turned into ambivalent feelings. For example, Zihan (MTF), who started cross-dressing in her early 20s and was now in her late 30s, put it this way, "when I looked at myself in the mirror, what I saw was still a 'man' with a buzz cut wearing women's pajamas, and I began to feel so embarrassed."

5.2.3 Transgender Identity Exploration for Female-to-Males (FTMs)

Most of my FTM respondents did not perceive wearing breast binding and men's clothing as cross-dressing. Based on their shared experiences, I argue this was due to the fact that publicly dressing in a masculine style had been their daily norm, especially for those who used to self-identify as tomboy lesbians. The change of their gender identification from cisgender female to transgender male did not necessarily alter how they would define their dress behaviors. Instead, they explored gender transition by building intimate relationships with women as men. Some respondents who did not embody male physical characteristics through medical interventions had a harder time convincing females they pursued as partners that they would have a heterosexual relationship. For respondents who did develop masculine features through medical interventions, it was not a trouble-free journey either. For example, Luhao put it this way, "before you had hormonal therapy and a mastectomy, you could say you were a tomboy lesbian. It was easier to

approach girls who would not guard against you. But now, since they recognized you as a man, they become more challenging to approach because they would take more precautions when you were around."

The clitoral enlargement that some respondents felt as an effect of using hormones brought them sexual orgasms that they thought were similar to those experienced with penetration with the penis. Among those who were not using hormones, some engaged in platonic relationships, and some resorted to tools, like an artificial dildo, to achieve sexual pleasure with their partners. For most FTM respondents, they could not attain the same kind of sexual life as biological males. They were often seized by a sense of failure and regret when they thought of their inability to attain a complete male body and intact male sexuality. Nevertheless, at this exploration stage, they felt they relived their adolescence as their identified sex/gender, in terms of experiencing the processes of falling in love, courting, being in a relationship, and breaking up with a girl. As Gaoxiang (FTM) explained, "during adolescence, I felt a sense of emptiness when I could not pursue girls as other boys did. Now I try to reacquire those times I lost." In other words, for them, this was a process of compensating for the grief they had over their incomplete adolescence. Furthermore, they suggested these experiences essentially consolidated their male sex/gender identification, which was aligned with similar findings of the affirmative influences of engaging in heterosexual relationships for FTMs in Western societies (Rowniak and Chesla 2013; Schilt and Windsor 2014; Williams, Weinberg, and Rosenberger 2013).

5.2.4 Struggles and Discriminations

During the processes of exploring a transgender identity and gender transitions, Chinese transgender respondents were at risk of having multifold losses, including employment

opportunities, families, friends, and religious affiliation. This was illustrated in the words of

three respondents:

> "I always wanted to attend volunteer teaching programs, but there were many times I was rejected after the interviews when the interviewers noticed the incongruence between my citizen ID, which suggested I was a woman, and my masculine dressing and behavioral patterns." Baiyu (FTM)

> "I had a playmate with whom I befriended since kindergarten age, but ever since he noticed my (transgender) situation, he barely talked to me anymore." Zihan (MTF)

> "When my mom noticed my (male-to-female) changes, she asked me to leave the house [...] the church also rejected me when they saw me in women's clothing." Mengxue (MTF)

Social institutions exerted power over the bodies of Chinese transgender people by punishing

their gender non-conformity through forms of social violence—preventing them from

participating in certain social activities and depriving them of their social networks. Respondents

who were marginalized and discriminated against in their social lives faced the dilemma of

whether or not to adhere to their transgender subjectivities.

5.3 Living with a New Gender Identity

In the following discussions, I first emphasize Chinese transgender people's lived experiences

of sexual and social transitions, at the analytical level of the individual body. Among those who

start living as their identified sex/gender, some respondents retain their sexual orientation to the

sex/gender they were attracted to during the second exploration stage but experience a change of

the definition of their sexuality; some respondents change their sexual orientation but how their

sexuality is defined remains unchanged. For example, some FTM respondents retain their sexual

orientation to women, but how their sexuality is perceived changes from homosexual to

heterosexual; and some MTF respondents retain their sexual orientation to women, but how their

sexuality is perceived changes from heterosexual to homosexual. There are also exceptions.

Some FTM respondents alter their sexual orientation from women to men, but they are deemed as homosexual before and after living as their identified male sex. And some MTF respondents alter their sexual orientation from women to men, but they are deemed as heterosexual before and after living as their identified female sex. There are also respondents who are less binary with their sexual orientation before and after they start living their identified sex/gender. For example, Yuanze, one of my FTM respondents, suggests he had been attracted to both cisgender males and females before his transition, and now he feels flexible to build relationships with both cisgender and transgender females and males. Because of the entwined relationships between sexuality, sexual orientation, and the identified sex/gender of involved parties, many Chinese transgender respondents are still in the process of figuring out who they are as sexual beings.

And Chinese transgender respondents who are currently living as their identified sex/gender have at least three social worlds. One I refer to as their past cisgender social circle, when they were recognized as their assigned sex/gender; another is the transgender community; and the third is their contemporary cisgender social circle. Managing the relations between these social worlds is one of their major tasks at this last stage of their transgender trajectory, and many have decided to separate themselves from the first two worlds. In the following text, I discuss why they made such a decision at the analytic level of the body politic.

Luhao (FTM, in his mid-20s) suggested that he had no face-to-face contact with his old classmates ever since he graduated from college, had sex reassignment surgeries, and started his current job as a man. "They have no idea what I look like now. I might consider disclosing a little bit about my current situation to someone whom I thought was trans-friendly, could keep things classified, and would not cause any threats to my career. But I would never be detailed about my transitions nor where I was working now." Xingyu (FTM) expressed his concern over

the potential threats that came from the transgender community. "Some community members when they were not happy with what you said or what you did, they would try to destroy your life by finding out who you are and exposing your transgender identity to people around you." For Chinese respondents who have started new lives, they wanted to make sure that members of their cisgender social circle knew nothing about their transgender history. However, their past cisgender social circle knew their assigned sex, and the transgender community knew their transgendered status. While in the past, their assigned sex and transgender identity provided them a position in the Chinese social system, this was no longer the case after they had stabilized their relationships in their post-transitioned cisgender social circle. It was understandable that some Chinese transgender respondents separated from past social worlds to prevent their past identities from interfering with their contemporary lives.

Once they started living as their identified sex/gender, some Chinese transgender respondents found that their new lives were not as satisfying as they had previously envisioned they would be. This was, in part, because members of their social circle refused to recognize them as their identified sex/gender or misrecognized them for other identities. This was illustrated in the words of my respondents:

> "My colleagues often mistook me for a lesbian, and I got confused about where my social place was between my female and male colleagues. In the end, it became difficult for me to build connections with either group." Gaoxiang (FTM)

> "I asked my colleagues many times to refer to me as "he/him/his" and to treat me as a man, but none of them took me seriously." Heyuan (FTM)

And Tiantian (MTF), who completed her physical transition through surgical interventions, was frustrated that she was still the target of discrimination in the employment market and at her part-time job workplace. She thought she heard her colleagues called her a "monster" behind her back. And her daily gendered embodiment became a repetition of her past school bullying

traumas. In contemporary Chinese society, there is a lack of popularization of transgender knowledge. Because of this, respondents often had disturbing encounters wherein people confused transgenderism with homosexuality and misinterpreted their identities as gay or lesbian. In the worst cases, they met people who blatantly discriminated against them by, for example, refusing to use their preferred pronouns/names, unfairly discharging them from their jobs, or attacking their post-transitioned appearance. At the analytic level of the body politic, their experiences reflected the Chinese transgender community's need for more specific legislation and effective law enforcement to prevent and punish transgender discrimination in social institutions.

As Tiantian also suggested, it appeared that many challenges Chinese transgender respondents experienced at this stage had continued from their previous struggles at the first and second stages of their transgender trajectory. Some of them still tried to find hope for a better future through self-improvements: "Maybe after I had hormonal therapy or sex reassignment surgeries," "maybe after I developed more masculine/ feminine qualities," or "maybe after I changed a job or moved to another place." I admired their resilience in pursuing better lives. However, I want to acknowledge that the cause of their being unable to achieve materially more prosperous lives should be largely attributed to structural determinants, including those we discussed in previous sections.

5.4 Summary

In this chapter, I discuss my Chinese respondents' transgender identity development trajectory. Before puberty, most MTF respondents experienced the difference between their identified gender and assigned sex/gender through their feminine behavioral tendencies and their feminizing fantasies. And I found FTM respondents could be gendered later, as their primary

focus was on their supposed homosexual attraction to girls, and their initial gender non-conforming qualities and behaviors were often not punished. During puberty, body anxiety reaffirmed MTF's initial transgender awareness and made FTMs realize their gender-sex incongruence. At the second stage, MTF respondents explore taking on a transgender identity through cross-dressing and FTM respondents through developing intimate relationships. At the last stage, among respondents who are currently living as their identified sex/gender, one of their main concerns is to renegotiate the social relations they have with cisgender people who know their assigned sex and transgender people who know their transgendered status.

The experiences of my twenty Chinese transgender respondents cannot be generalized to represent the Chinese transgender population. There is rich internal diversity even within this small group of respondents. Instead, this research aims to show readers the intricacy of becoming one's identified sex/gender in Chinese society by investigating both individual agency and structural determinants. Bockting and Coleman suggested that, among U.S. transgender people, only in the final identity integration stage, "being transgender is no longer the most important signifier of one's identity but, rather, one of several" (Bockting and Coleman, 2016:153). However, for my Chinese respondents, being transgendered has never been the first and foremost aspect of their life course. They are trans-identified, but simultaneously, they also embody other social identities. They are someone's children, students, boyfriends/girlfriends, and parents. These identities intertwine with their transgender identity and they take them to be as important as their transgender identity, if not more so sometimes. This is the result of a combination of individual choices and cultural regulations. As I have discussed through the cultural background chapter, in traditional Chinese culture, the proprieties and responsibilities a person fulfills in specific social relations based on her or his sex are the primary criteria for social recognition,

rather than the biological sex of a person itself. My Chinese transgender respondents' lives are unique because of their embodiment of gender and sex difference. But they also share with other Chinese people that, throughout their lives, they put endless effort into achieving successes and meeting expectations, to contribute to their families, and to love and be loved.

In the next chapter, I address parental responses to my Chinese transgender respondents' identity disclosure and examine how, after coming-out, Chinese transgender people influence and are influenced by their family structures and family relationships.

CHAPTER 6: TRANSGENDERS' FAMILY LIVES

Based on several studies on U.S. transgender people who have come out to their parents, parents' initial responses range from negligent to violent. Among 55 transgender youths in New York, 59% reported their parents were disappointed when they came out (Grossman et al. 2005). Among another 20 transgender women of color in New York, the majority experienced parental verbal and physical abuse after they came out, in addition to which some were repudiated by their parents (Koken, Bimbi, and Parsons 2009).

The current literature, the majority of which involves research conducted in the U.S., demonstrates that family can be a source of both harm and resilience for transgender people who have come out. On the one hand, they are at heightened risks for physical, psychological, and verbal abuses by their families after identity disclosure (Nuttbrock et al. 2010; 2014). As a consequence, these forms of abuse not only led to transgender people's anxiety and depression but also were related to their unsafe sexual practices, substance addiction, and suicidality (Clements-Nolle, Marx, and Katz 2006; Hardt 2005; Nemoto, Bödeker, and Iwamoto 2011). On the other hand, feelings of shame and stress that are associated with transgender identification and transitions were ameliorated for transgender people who got their families' acceptance and support (Bockting et al. 2013; Budge, Adelson, and Howard 2013; Grant, Motter, and Tanis 2011).

The Chinese transgender research found that among 209 MTFs in Shenyang, 70.5% encountered discrimination within their families (Yang et al. 2016b); and the intense conflict transgender children had with their parents contributed to their suicidality (Chen et al. 2019). According to the "Chinese Transgender Population General Survey Report", among 835

respondents who have come out to their parents, 38.9% experienced complete rejection, and the complete acceptance rate was only 10% (2017). And compared with FTM participants, MTF participants reported a higher domestic violence rate and a lower family support rate. Among the total 1,640 respondents, only six did not encounter any forms of violence from their parents.

In this chapter, I systematically examine Chinese transgender people's family lives in transition after they came out to their parents. In the first section, I examine their parents' responses, address how and why FTM and MTF respondents' coming out was treated differently, and discuss how parents might influence their transition-related health. In the second section, I investigate how transgender people negotiated with their parents for acceptance and analyze their migration as a form of resistance.

6.1 Parents' Reactions to Transgender Coming Out

Among my ten MTF respondents, right have come out to their parents, and among whom, three disclosed that they initially encountered verbal and physical violence. All ten FTM respondents have come out to their parents, and none of them reported their parents' use of violence. Enci was one of the three MTF respondents who experienced domestic violence when she came out. In response, she ran away from home and had not talked to her parents nor visited them for a year. However, even during what was the worst time of their parent-child relationship, her parents still supported her financially by transferring money to her bank account. She said, "back then, I had an internship, but my salary was barely enough to pay my rent, and I was indebted. It was my parents who helped me to pay back this money." Xingyu (FTM) also disclosed, "my parents could not understand why I wanted to be a man and have (sex-changing) surgeries. But I believed they still loved me. They would give me some money when I did not earn enough; they offered to find me a job back home if I wanted; they also worried that I might

feel lonely to live out of my hometown." Heyuan (FTM), whose parents still attempted to persuade him to abandon being a transgender after four years of knowing about his identity, relayed "we were not close emotionally, but they would help me if I am indebted."

Based on the parental acceptance-rejection theory (PAR), which is primarily rooted in the U.S. sample, parents' psychological states can be classified into four categories and correspond to four classes of behaviors: "warmth-affection, hostility-aggression, indifference-neglect, and undifferentiated rejection" (Rohner, Khaleque, and Cournoyer 2005, 301). Based on Chinese transgender respondents' narratives, some of their parents' attitudes could be categorized into the warmth-affection domain. For example, Hanxiao (MTF) and Yuanze (FTM) suggested their parents did not overreact when they came out. There was no shouting, argument, or beating. Hanxiao's parents acquiesced to the women's clothing in 'his' room and permitted 'his' cross-dressing behaviors without judgment. She also said, "even though my parents could not understand transgenderism, they still tried to console me by saying that I could change to a more feminine name and that I did not need to pressure myself to get married." At the same time, Yuanze's parents showed support for his transgender identification by allowing him to have a mastectomy and helping him cover the cost. In their daily lives, they also made efforts to transform how they thought and treated Yuanze—as a boy and as their son.

However, it is not easy to classify the rest of the respondents' parents' attitudes-responses to their coming out into PAR's four domains. On the one hand, Enci's (MTF) parents did use violence, Xingyu's (FTM) parents refused to fund him for transition-related surgeries, and Heyuan's (FTM) parents denied his male sex/gender identification and his needs for emotional comfort. Despite this, their parents continued to support them in other vital aspects of their lives. In other words, although their parents' reactions ranged from hostile-aggression to indifference-

neglect, they did not entirely dismiss their transgender adult children's material needs in that they kept taking care of them financially and physically, or at least financially. Through engaging with the analytic level of the social body, I suggest that these seemingly contradictory parental responses partly reflect Chinese parenting culture's uniqueness. In the Chinese language, parenting can be translated as *guan*管. On the one hand, the word "*guan*" emphasizes parents' firm control and strict discipline of their children's bodies and behaviors; on the other hand, it symbolizes parental obligations to care and provide for their children in every aspect (Chao 1994; Wu 2013). Influenced by which, for parents of transgender people, being punitive and controlling against their transgender expressions and being attentive to other aspects of their lives may not be empirically conflicted. And there can be two additional reasons to explain why Chinese parents continue to support their children despite their disapproval of their transgender identification. One is that in Chinese reciprocal interdependent family structure, attending to their children's material needs at their adolescence or even early adulthood may be seen by parents as a necessary investment to their elderly care. Although there are also public and private facilities to take care of older people, ideologically, many Chinese people still prefer to have their children taken care of them when they get old. Therefore, although parents have conflicts with my respondents over their sex/gender identification, such conflicts may not change their perception that they will need my respondents to care for them one day. And parents continue investing in their transgender children now to ensure that they are willing to perform, and materially capable of performing, their elderly care responsibilities in the future. Second, parents may also feel shame in front of their relatives and other social networks if their transgender children are on the edge of bankruptcy or live low-quality lives. Since individual performance is seen as representative of family quality in Chinese culture, children's impoverished lives can be

seen as parents' failure to cultivate their children and inability to support them, therefore, shaming to parents as well.

I suggest, to study Chinese transgender people's family lives, we need to recognize that the standardized and normative rationale of domestic violence on the international level sometimes is not applicable on the national level in China. Transgender people here are living with more complicated and non-generalizable cultural and ethical realities. Nevertheless, we should not dismiss our obligation to hold Chinese parents accountable for causing physical and emotional harm to their transgender children. Nor should we let the uniqueness of Chinese family culture blur what is abusive.

6.2 Sexed/Gendered Disparities in Family's Recognition

As we have discussed in the cultural background chapter, historically, sons were viewed as superior and more valuable than daughters in the Chinese family institution, affected by the traditions of patrilineal kinship, patrilineal inheritance, patrilocal residence, and private-public divisions (Johnson 1985; Rosenlee 2012). Through engaging with the analytic level of the social body, Chinese transgender respondents' experiences affirmed that many Chinese families still hold such prejudicial gender beliefs.

Liwen (FTM) recalled, "when my parents knew that I was a transman, not a lesbian, they were relieved. They thought it was better to have a boy in the family than a lesbian." For his parents, his male sex/gender identification overshadowed his transgendered essence. The fact that 'she' wanted to be the son in the family made his parents selectively ignore his gender nonconformity. It also appeared that for Liwen's parents, sexual nonconformity for a 'girl' (lesbianism) was more stigmatizing than gender nonconformity (FTM), which explained why they felt relieved when they found out Liwen was not a homosexual. However, the question remained whether his

parents' disparate attitudes toward homosexuality and transgenderism were affected by Liwen's sex/gender and sexuality before his female-to-male transition. In other words, if Liwen was a gay man (instead of a lesbian woman) and he transitioned to a heterosexual male-to-female transgender (instead of a heterosexual female-to-male transgender), would his parents still think sexual "deviance" was worse than gender "deviance"? As Liwen's transgender status conforms to the patrilineal kinship system, the sex/gender diversity he performs is more acceptable to his parents.

To a certain degree, this question was answered by Wanting's experiences, a respondent whose self-recognition transformed from a gay man to a heterosexual transgender woman. In contrast to Liwen's parents' relatively positive responses, Wanting (MTF), as 'his' parents' only 'son,' disclosed that her parents consistently condemned her transgender identification. They would blame her for bringing negative karma to the family, especially when something unfortunate happens—such as the death of a family member or an investment failure. In Buddhism, karma represents an ideology that "any moral act, good or bad, brings about a correspondingly positive or negative result, either in this or in a future lifetime" (Desjarlais 2016, 13). And for Wanting's parents, Wanting's decision to abandon 'his' assigned socio-familial status—as a male in the society and a son in the family—was a 'bad' karmic act. In their view, it was a cause/deed that would lead to detrimental karmic consequences on this family. Besides their discrimination against gender nonconformity, I argue that Wanting's parents were so condemnatory of her because of the direction of her sex/gender transition. Contrary to Liwen (FTM), Wanting changed her sex/gender identification from male to female. The sexist norm produced through Chinese sociocultural conventions and internalized by Wanting's parents shaped how they judge

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her male-to-female transgender identity—as a degradation on the individual level and face-losing for her family.

In sum, I argue Liwen's and Wanting's experiences configure the gendered effects of family recognition disparities of male-to-female's and female-to-male's transgenderism. It can be easier for Chinese FTMs to acquire parental acceptance because it leads to increased male heirs/sons to the family, while more challenging for Chinese MTFs because it leads to decreased male heirs/sons to the family. And sons are more desired by Chinese families. In traditional Chinese culture, a son was deemed as the only legitimate performer of ancestor worship, the only heir to the family's bloodline — as newborns would commonly take their father's surname — and the only actor to expand a family's wealth and fame — as only men were allowed the honor of public service. And such traditions still exert intense influences on how sons and daughters are valued by the family institution in contemporary Chinese society. It is important to point out that patriarchal devaluation of the male-to-female transition is not only found in China. Other societies influenced by their patriarchal social structure, like the U.S., also hold more hostilities against the MTF population than the FTM population. Nevertheless, as illustrated in the above discussions, the ways such devaluation of MTF transgenderism is structured in Chinese families culturally may be different from elsewhere.

6.3 Family as an Influence on Transition-related Health

Among twenty Chinese transgender respondents, 60% (n=12) have not had any sex reassignment surgeries (SRS), despite their desire for them. And the family institution was identified as a primary barrier by both respondents who had some surgical interventions and those who had not. There are two main reasons. First, according to Chinese SRS regulation, transgender candidates have to acquire parental informed consent to be qualified for the

surgeries, regardless of whether they reach the age of majority (18 years old in China) or not (The National Health and Family Planning Commission 2017). Furthermore, due to SRS's expensive costs and the lack of public and private insurance coverage, it is difficult, if not impossible, for Chinese transgender people to access surgical resources without their family's financial support.

Some respondents suggested they did not dare to ask for their parents' consent on SRS application forms because they worried about being battered, disowned, locked up, or sent to have conversion therapy by their parents. Others relayed to me that they postponed talking to their parents because they did not want to disappoint them. And they were concerned that their request might deter their parents' mental and physical health. Hanxiao (MTF) said, "my parents were so good to me that they never hit me or scolded me for being a trans, and I wanted them to be happy. Even if this meant I had to make some sacrifices, like not to have surgeries. If I did something (surgeries), I probably would feel guilty towards them." Several years ago, Zihan (MTF, now in her late-30s) had her orchiectomy without her parents knowing it. She found a licensed surgeon from a small hospital through her transgender networks, and he agreed to exempt her from the required parental consent because she was introduced to him by another transwoman who knew him personally. Zihan's mother had severe kidney failure back then, and Zihan did not want to risk aggravating her illness by coming out to her and asking her permission to have surgeries.

At the analytic level of the body politic, I suggest the legal requirement for parental consent on SRS makes the family institution the gate-keeper of transition-related surgical resources and by whom Chinese transgender people's transitioning processes are surveilled and controlled. As a result of this state regulation, health disparities can be produced between transgender people who

can acquire parental consent and those who cannot. In relation to the "International Bill of Gender Rights" (1995), Chinese transgender people's right to control and change their bodies surgically is deprived by this legislation. However, I am hesitant to suggest that creating inequalities and deprivations is the Chinese government's purpose. Instead, I would like to offer the possibility of interpreting this requirement through the Chinese cultural lens. At the intersection of Chinese medical-legal systems, an individual who requests SRS is viewed not only as a transman or transwoman, based on their sex/gender identity, but also as someone's daughter (FTM) or son (MTF) at one point, based on their household membership. As we have discussed in the cultural background chapter, the family institution has profound meanings for individuals and the nation-state in Chinese culture (Rosenlee 2021; Xu and Xia 2014; Glosser 2003). On the individual level, children's personal pursuits are inseparable from their obligations to be truthful and caring to their parents. And it is not easy to separate parents' obligations to love and cultivate their children from parents' rights to know about and regulate their lives. On the national level, the family institution's stability is deemed inseparable from the nation-state's prosperity. Based on these cultural considerations, I suggest how the Chinese government handles Chinese transgender people's desire for SRS reflects how it prioritizes their family identity over their sex/gender identity, emphasizes the family structure's solidity over individual members' interests, and intends to maintain the traditional parent-child relations.

To illustrate the expensiveness of sex reassignment surgeries in China, I drew the following estimated costs from doctor Pan's homepage on haodf.com[3]. Doctor Pan is one of the most trusted surgeons in the domestic transgender community. The price for male-to-female genital reconstruction surgery (GRS) was about 50,000-60,000 RMB≈$7,050-8,460 USD, and for

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[3] haodf.com is one of the most popular telemedicine platforms established in 2006 in China ("Haodaifu Online" 2019).

female-to-male GRS was close to 130,000 RMB≈$18,330 USD; comparatively, FTM's and

MTF's breast/chest reconstruction surgeries were cheaper—30,000-40,000 RMB≈$4,230-5,640

USD, nonetheless, not cheap (Pan 2018a; 2018b). Besides the expensive costs, my respondents

also suggested they could not find any public or private insurance coverage for these surgeries.

This situation further aggravated their financial hardships to obtain surgical resources

independently. It thereby led to their greater reliance on their families' funding. Both MTF

respondents who completed GRS were supported by their families, as well as the two FTM

respondents who had a mastectomy. Through analysis at the individual body level, I noticed that

especially for individuals in their 20s who usually did not have much savings, their parents'

promised medical bill coverage was crucial. Xingyu (FTM, in his early-30s now) told me that

when he was still a college student, he already wanted to undergo GRS and change his legal sex.

He tried to persuade his parents to support him procedurally and financially, but his parents only

agreed to consent to his surgeries while they rejected funding them. Due to the lack of his

parents' financial support, Xingyu could not have GRS and lost the chance to alter the sex

identification on his college documents before graduation. After he graduated, he started living

as a man. However, because his appearance and identified sex were inconsistent with his college

diploma (which still showed 'female' in the sex column), he could only work low-earning blue-

collar jobs, and his degree was nearly wasted. This disadvantage further impeded his progress in

saving money to have surgeries on his own. At the level of the body politic, my respondents'

experiences reflect that the Chinese government's current welfare infrastructure is deficient for

its transgender citizens who need to access these lifesaving but expensive surgeries. This

structural deficiency forces the family institution to step up and fill the vacuum. Because of this,

for Chinese transgender people, acquiring parental consent on SRS becomes not only procedurally necessary but also financially indispensable.

6.4 Negotiating for Parents' Acceptance

Three MTF and five FTM respondents reported an alteration of their parents' attitudes toward their transgender identity. One FTM and one MTF suggested their parents were supportive now; the rest felt their parents changed from strong objection to passive tolerance. Engaging with analysis at the level of the individual body, I found three factors intersected and led to such a change: respondents' ongoing negotiation, their performance of contingent masculinity/femininity, and their financial independence. For example, Shijia (MTF) recalled, "my parents did not take me seriously when I first came out until I started cross-dressing. They were so upset with me that they would curse or smack me. It took a year for us to reach an agreement that I could live as a female, but I would not have SRS for now […] But, still, when they introduced me to others, they would not say that 'this is my daughter' but that 'this is my son, and he is a little special.'"

As Bockting and Coleman noted, "when acceptance does not immediately follow disclosure, (transgender) clients may be tempted to discontinue communication with their families; however, keeping the lines of communication open will facilitate the family's coming-out process and lead it toward eventual acceptance." (2016,142). Shijia's parents were so critical initially that they would swear at her on WeChat even after she had moved out of their home, and shout at her when she came home to visit. Even so, Shijia did not resort to verbal violence against her parents' use of violence. Instead, she changed her parents' attitudes from hostile repudiation to passive tolerance partly through continuous persuasion and showing her determination by consistently cross-dressing.

Furthermore, Shijia's contingent femininity performance also contributed to altering her parents' attitudes. According to Judith Butler, gender performance refers to the habitual repetition of acts and gestures in certain styles that carry a set of sexualized meanings that is historically established and collectively agreed upon (1999; 2009). And as we have discussed in the literature review, Evelyn Blackwood proposed the idea that transgender people's gender performance could be contingent in her studies of tombois (transmen) in West Sumatra, Indonesia. And by "contingent," she meant experiencing and constructing a sense of gendered self in relation to others (Blackwood 2009). In Chinese sociocultural contexts, Chinese transgender respondents performed contingent masculinity/femininity to appease their parents and protect the "face" of the family in front of others. The effects of their contingent gender performance played a critical role in facilitating their parents' (passive) acceptance of their transgender identity. Reasons for that need to be found in the social body level of analysis. "The Chinese concept holds the family to be inseparable from individual behavior. This concept sees the individual's behavior as representing the collective qualities of the family. If one family member accomplishes some extraordinary achievement or demonstrates virtuous behavior, then the whole family gains face (you lian). If one member fails or shows unacceptable, deviant behavior, the whole family loses face (diu lian) […] The family members are judged as one by the larger society, and this collective presentation of the family to the outsider-face-is a shared quality." (Hsu 1985, 99-100). For Shijia's parents, accepting or rejecting her was associated with not only their own sex/gender beliefs but also whether they were prepared to be held accountable for their acceptance of Shjia or even protect her from surrounding critiques. And to change her parents' minds, Shijia knew it was crucial to meet her obligation to protect her parents' respectability in front of outsiders. The agreement reached between Shijia and her parents was

built upon their willingness to share each other's burdens and protect their family's face together. As a result, Shijia's parents stopped behaving aggressively to convert her MTF identification, passively accepted her will to live as a transgender female, and accommodated her as their daughter, under the prerequisite that there was no outsider's presence. In turn, Shijia agreed not to wear women's clothing but to fit herself into the image of a "special son" in front of outsiders when she visited home. This meant the rights Shijia carved out for herself in her family were liminal in that she would have to repress her transgender expressions every time she visited home. Furthermore, we need to consider that the compromises she had to make to change her parents' attitudes and the efforts she had to put into protecting her family's face might aggravate her mental stress. Nevertheless, this is not to say that there was no benefit for her in reaching an agreement with her parents. At least on the surface, the family's peace was restored, and she still had a family to count on. More importantly, communication channels were opened so that she could further soften her parents' stances in the future.

Baiyu is a transman in his mid-30s, and he is currently staying in the same city as his parents, but they are not living together. He said, "it was hard to communicate with your parents. Even now, we still have arguments on my transgender issue, but they no longer have the upper hand over me. I was stronger in that I no longer depended on their money nor their social networks. Meanwhile, my parents had their own considerations that they wanted me to stay with them. They needed to change their attitudes because they knew if they pushed me too hard as they used to, I might move to somewhere else, and they could do nothing about it." I suggest understandings of Baiyu's parents' alteration of attitudes need to be culturally contextualized through the body politic level of analysis. As we have discussed in the cultural background chapter, the Chinese family institution is known for having an interdependent structure such that

parents and children rely on and provide for each other with physical, emotional, and financial care. Despite this, it was argued that parents' firm control of financial and social resources during children's adolescence and early adulthood gave them leverage to elicit conformity from their children (Choi and Luo 2016, 270). Although Baiyu has devoted time and energy to negotiating with his parents, he claimed that his financial independence played a decisive role in changing their attitudes. Baiyu's parents wanted him by their side as they grew old. However, for Baiyu himself, being financially independent now meant he could make his own decision to migrate without having to have his parents' permission or material supports. In other words, Baiyu's financial independence led to his raised family status and expanded individual freedom. Chinese parents of financially independent children realized they could no longer use financial leverage to elicit their adult children's compliance. Affected by their concerns toward elderly care, they might choose to compromise their stance on whatever conflicts they have with their children to maintain their emotional ties with them. This is exemplified by Baiyu's parents, who adjusted their ways of treating his gender nonconformity — from aggressive to moderate — and tolerated his decision to live as a transman.

6.5 Migration as an Everyday Form of Resistance

Research in China suggested it is not uncommon that "unmarried adult children continue to live on their parents. Married young couples expect the groom's parents to buy them an apartment" (Xu and Xia 2014, 40-41). Nevertheless, the majority of Chinese transgender respondents migrated away from their hometowns. Among ten MTF respondents, 60% (n=6) are currently living in another state; and among ten FTM respondents, 50% (n=5) are doing the same. Through analysis at the individual body level, I find parents and relatives—these two

social forces and their influence—can be the factors that tie Chinese transgender respondents to their hometown or pressure them to migrate.

Qiwen (FTM) said, "I have never lived outside of my kinship networks. Especially since I have been helping my parents do family business, and most people I dealt with every day were my relatives, it became more and more difficult for me to move away." For somebody like Qiwen, who has been working with and for his family, his parents and relatives were not only his significant others but also his bosses and his clients, on whom his livelihood depended. Because this working pattern was the one that he was familiar with and skilled at, his primary concern about migrating lay in making a living in a new environment without the social networks that he was used to employing. Qiwen used the adjective "stuck" to describe his current situation. Although he acknowledged that his immediate and extended families limited the possibilities of his transgender expressions, in his early 40s, he felt insecure to think about moving away and living without them. As he implied, he passed the age for adventures. In other words, by carefully calculating the costs and benefits of an alternative to his current living environment, for Qiwen, the convenience and reliability of his family networks outweighed the uncertainty and risk of migration. Eventually, he chose or was forced to stay, a path that prioritized maintaining his current living standard, while "acceptable" transgender performance was explored within his family structure.

On the other hand, through analysis of the body politic, it is found that the transnormative standard imposed on some Chinese transgender respondents by their parents and relatives made their hometowns unbearable places to live. Wanting (MTF) complained that her parents insinuated that 'he' was a loser by comparing 'him' with one of 'his' male cousins and praising how that cousin has achieved a successful career and a fulfilling marriage. They also accused

'him' of not being filial because 'he' was not taking care of them financially and physically as 'his' cousin did for his parents. "I was always the one who lost my tongue in front of my parents. If you made me go back and live there permanently, I would fall into a very depressed status immediately." In China, filial piety is deeply rooted in its cultural ideology and social fabric. It is taught as the essential virtue every Chinese should possess and is imprinted in their ethical consciousness. In a filial model, children should take care of their parents by attending to their material needs and accompanying them; and make them proud by having a good job, getting married, and having descendants to continue the family's bloodline, particularly for sons as keys members of patrilineages. (Rosenlee 2012). Drawing from the concept of transnormativity, I argue the paradigm of filial piety is framed as the transnormative standard in the Chinese family discourse. It not only had detrimental influences on my transgender respondents' mental health and happiness, but it also restricted their capability to negotiate with their families. Originally applied to medical discourse, transnormativity was coined by Johnson as "a hegemonic ideology that structures transgender experience, identification, and narratives into a hierarchy of legitimacy that is dependent upon a binary medical model and its accompanying standards, regardless of individual transgender people's interest in or intention to undertake medical pathways to transition" (2016, 466). In other words, transnormativity describes how transgender people are restrained by a set of normative standards in multiple social institutions, regardless of their willingness and capabilities to meet those standards (Gupta 2019; Vipond 2015). In Wanting's case, her parents reprimanded her "failure" to fulfill filial obligations compared to her cisgender cousin. Wanting's parents seemed to be oblivious to her structural marginalization in a cis-hegemonic society, which deterred her from obtaining comparable attainments as her cousin. Instead, they attributed her "lower" socioeconomic status to the self-inflicted effects of her

transgender identification. Accountable to the transnormative filial piety, many Chinese transgender respondents like Wanting were classified into the rigid binary between "good filial" and "'bad unfilial" children as families define how transgender children must behave, even as adults.

Although Wanting was depressed by her parents' attitudes, she still felt restrained about speaking up against them. And she was not the only respondent in my research who suggested so. Despite embodying the detrimental implications family had for their health outcomes, many felt they were discursively powerless to overthrow the authority held by their senior family members and openly challenge their discrimination. I suggest that Chinese respondents' discursive powerlessness is shaped by the cultural norms that define age stratification of power within the family structure and regulate children's propriety to parents. In culturally virtuous family interactions in China, junior family members are expected to always hold respectful and modest attitudes when socializing with senior family members, beyond which, in parent-child relations, children are expected to always comply with their parents.

For Chinese transgender respondents who had a hard time openly rebelling against their families, I argue they enacted migration as an everyday form of resistance. According to Scott (1986), everyday forms of resistance refer to self-assertions that are quiet and quotidian but vital to resist one or many forms of domination. Engaging in everyday forms of resistance, resisters often leave the status quo standing in name but have the potential to dismantle them through their practices or possible future organized resistance. As they migrate, on the surface, Chinese transgender respondents left their natal parent-kin hegemony intact at their sending contexts. In their daily lives at the receiving contexts, however, they thwarted their cisgenderist disciplines and revoked their gender-conforming expectations. Respondents also believed that their

migration could be beneficial to both themselves and their immediate families. They reported it promoted their (trans) gendered embodiment. As they were out of the control of and surveillance from their parent-kin networks, they felt emancipated to live authentically as their identified sex/gender. Enci (MTF) put it this way, "my relatives had a large social network at my hometown who would know whatever I did and wherever I went. While here (in Beijing), they could not check on me." And some other respondents suggested, by decreasing the number of their appearances in front of their relatives and neighbors, their migration protected their parents from surrounding gossip and pressures.

6.6 Summary

In this research, disclosing their transgendered status has been proved to be a non-normative stressor for Chinese transgender respondents and their families. It often resulted in family conflicts and damaged their parent-child relationships. After coming out, respondents' family lives could be quite challenging due to the pressures and hostilities that came from their parents. However, I want to acknowledge that parents' imposed domestic violence rate found among my respondents in this research is much lower than the number indicated in the "2017 Chinese Transgender Population General Survey Report". In this research, only three of my twenty respondents reported being verbally or physically abused by their parents when they found out their transgender identification. In contrast, in the 2017 national survey report, only six in 1,640 respondents had never experienced domestic violence at their parents' hands (Beijing LGBT Center and Peking University's Sociology Department 2017). There can be at least three reasons for this discrepancy. First, the sample size of this study is much smaller than the national survey. Second, members who suffer forms of violence from their parents are more secluded in the domestic transgender community. Therefore, they may not have been reached through the

snowball referral method I used in this research. Compared with abused members of the transgender community, respondents I interviewed are relatively privileged in that they have their parents' passive tolerance, or their transitions are supported by their parents, and their parents are financially capable of supporting them. Third, some respondents I interviewed may not have revealed their experiences of domestic violence out of some legitimate concerns.

My findings suggest that facing their children's gender nonconformity, Chinese parents' responses, even negative, are not onefold but ambivalent. Chinese parents can be simultaneously punitive to my respondents' transgender identification but attentive to their financial and material needs. This research also found that, first, compared with the male-to-female transition, Chinese parents are more susceptible to tolerate or accept female-to-male transition, as they are affected by the sexist evaluation of sons and daughters in the Chinese family structure. Second, parents affect the accessibility of SRS to my Chinese transgender respondents due to the institutional requirement for parental consent and the lack of sources to cover the cost of these surgeries other than parental financial support. Although Chinese transgender respondents' capabilities to negotiate with their families for acceptance are limited by Chinese cultural norms that regulate children's/junior's proprieties to their parents/seniors, they are not passive subjects within the family institution. Instead, they employ contingent masculinity/femininity performance and take advantage of their growing socioeconomic independence to promote their parents' recognition. Some of them also enact migration as a way to resist the surveillance and discrimination from their families.

In the next chapter, I discuss Chinese transgender respondents' experiences of engaging with the domestic transgender community, and their perspectives on domestic transgender politics and activism.

CHAPTER 7: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Resilience indicates a subject's capability to cope with adversities and make corresponding life adaptions, and it plays a role in protecting the subject from the harms brought by such adversities (Meyer 2015). Western transgender studies have shown that connections to the transgender community protected transgender people from societal discriminations and internalized transphobia, decreased their suicidal behaviors and increased their self-esteem, and contributed to their general physical and mental well-being (Austin and Goodman 2017; Barr, Budge, and Adelson 2016; Pflum et al. 2015; Singh 2013; Testa, Jimenez, and Rankin 2014). Online locations such as Facebook and Susan's Place were put under the spotlight to study how Italian and U.S. transgender people benefited from community membership (Cavalcante 2016; Cipolletta, Votadoro, and Faccio 2017). There is little understanding about how community connection serves as a factor to enhance resiliency among Chinese transgender people, however. This chapter aims to fill this vacuum.

In my research, I first examined the factors that motivated Chinese transgender respondents to approach the domestic transgender community. Respondents in this research were from communities throughout the nation; however, due to the geographically imbalanced distribution of community resources, not every respondent had the opportunity to engage with offline transgender organizations. Therefore, my analysis of community influences mainly focused on the online transgender community on WeChat. In this last chapter, based on my respondents' narratives and my observations, I discuss my respondents' relationships with transgender communities in China, as well as Chinese transgender activism, since activism was also a part of my respondents' community lives and exerted influences on their well-being.

7.1 Elements that Lead to Community

By engaging with analysis at the individual body level, I found, among my twenty Chinese transgender respondents, not everyone had known about transgenderism or had identified themselves as transgender people when they found the transgender community. Approximately half of the respondents had, and half had not. Among the respondents who already embodied a transgender identity and related knowledge, needing information on transition-related medical and surgical interventions and longing for friendships were two main elements that drove them to approach the community. For example, Hanbo (FTM) put it this way, "when I first tried to connect with the community, I wanted to learn from people who had experience with having a mastectomy." And Gaosxiang (FTM) said, "I genuinely just wanted to make some friends who were also transgendered." Some respondents were motivated by both elements, while some mostly by either element, like Gaosxiang, who did not have a plan for bodily transitions. Among the respondents who did not embody a transgender identity and related knowledge at first, most encountered the community by chance instead of approaching it. For example, Shijia (MTF) recalled that she wanted to practice feminizing her voice during high school, and in a voice-training chat group, she met with people who claimed to be transgendered. And Tiantian (MTF) suggested that she started cross-dressing privately during college and first heard of transgenderism at a place in her hometown where cosplayers[4] usually gathered. In essence, respondents like Shijia and Tiantian were led by their responses to their felt gender-sex difference to the transgender community. But unlike some other respondents, for them, a transgender identification was the result of community engagement instead of the beginning of it.

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[4] "Cosplay" is a portmanteau of costume play. It is a form of performance art where participants wear costumes that represent a specific character from an anime, cartoon, comic book, video game ("Cosplay" 2020).

They started to identify themselves as transmen or transwomen after encountering the transgender community and learning about transgenderism.

In contemporary Chinese society, voice feminization/masculinization and male-to-female/female-to-male cross-dressing are not necessarily associated with transgender culture but rather with Anime, Comics, and Games (ACG) culture. There are some overlaps between them, though. But the transgender community has been much less visible than the ACG community, partly due to the stricter censorship and cultural stigma against transgenderism. At the level of social body, the relationship between these two communities explains why some Chinese respondents could be exposed to the transgender culture through the ACG community. And based on their experiences, the ACG community could be one of the readily accessible locations to disseminate transgender knowledge and help more Chinese people understand the point of the origin of their feminizing/masculinizing desires and practices.

7.2 Online Community Involvement as a Source of Strength

By engaging with analysis at the individual body level, I found the transgender community on WeChat played a role in empowering my Chinese transgender respondents to consolidate their transgender identification, facilitate their medical and surgical transitions, and provide them special emotional comforts. And these were also the factors that added to the respondents' sense of community belongingness. For example, Luhao (FTM) recalled, "in transgender chat groups on WeChat, people talked about their experiences of gradually recognizing themselves (as trans). Reading their stories, I became more certain about myself (as a transman) […] I also learned about the sources that were reliable in quality and reasonable in price to obtain hormonal drugs and how to use them, and the information that it was difficult to change the sex identification on your diploma after college graduation."

At the level of the social body, most times, stories of becoming a self-identified transman or transwoman were unacceptable in Chinese mainstream cisgender society. The transgender community on WeChat provided a relatively secured environment to form a discourse where such stories became predominant and legitimized. This discourse allowed Chinese respondents to apply technologies of the self to affirm their transgender identification. Based on Michel Foucault's definition, technologies of the self "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault 1988, 18). By resonating with and drawing upon others' stories of recognizing their gender and sex difference and embodying a transgender identity, the Chinese transgender respondents reflected on the experiences they shared and acquired confidence in claiming a transgender identity themselves.

Furthermore, the online community supported Chinese transgender respondents' bodily transitions by first providing a platform where the related sources could be concentrated, compared, and evaluated in a timely and convenient way. These sources included, but were not limited to, the providers they could contact or avenues they could take to obtain gender-affirming hormone pills and injections, the advantages and disadvantages of different brands and types of these medicines, the techniques of different surgeons who could perform sex reassignment surgeries (SRS), and their attitudes toward transgender patients. My respondents reported sometimes it could be difficult to obtain these diverse resources outside the community. Taking the hormonal therapy that was also available in some hospitals as an example, endocrinologists usually could not prescribe cyproterone, a type of anti-androgen drug for MTFs, because it was not registered in the Chinese medication system. Endocrinologists also resisted prescribing

androgen injections for FTMs unless the conditions allowed patients to get the treatment from licensed nurses. And some endocrinologists refused to provide them hormone therapy out of their ignorance about or discrimination against transgenderism. The community connections the Chinese transgender respondents had helped them lift these structural barriers and made medical resources they needed or desired more accessible.

The online community also supported Chinese transgender respondents by providing them vital information to adjust their transition plans. Luhao (FTM) underwent SRS and corrected the sex identification on his college diploma before graduation because he learned from the community that it could be complicated to do so after graduating. In contrast, this information was not available from the school institution since most colleges would not discuss this matter with their transgender students and remind them to accomplish this change to their diploma before graduation. By engaging with the body politic level of analysis, I suggest it reflects Chinese education system's lack of acknowledgement of students who live with a transgender identity and their best interests. Discussions in chat groups about side effects and discouraging results of trans medicine and surgeries played a warning role in making respondents more cautious about bodily transitions. Gaoxiang (FTM) said, "I learned that there were all sorts of risks in taking hormone therapy and eight in ten FTMs who had genital surgeries had urine leakage issue. I probably would wait until they became more developed and safer to undertake."

The ethics of care practiced within the online transgender community also benefited Chinese transgender respondents emotionally. Virginia Held described the ethics of care as being built upon the essential truth of human interdependency and characterized by the mutually attentive and responsive relations between involved parties (2006). Zeyu (FTM) relayed, "I was happy whenever my mom called me 'my son,' but I could not share this happiness with my colleagues

who did not know I was a trans. They would probably think I was crazy. But I could share this good news in chat groups, and people would congratulate me because they understand this recognition from parents was valuable." Many of the Chinese transgender respondents said their sex/gender transitions extended to their daily lives after SRS. One such extension would be reaffirming their male or female identity with their parents; in other words, experiencing the transition of their relational identity in the familial domain from a daughter to a son (FTM) or from a son to a daughter (MTF). They could not seek and obtain empathy about such transitions from their current cisgender social network because it would expose their transgender identity and because people in this network lack knowledge about transgender persons to understand their happiness. When the transgender respondents were worn out by the issues or had positive moments related to their transgender identity, the transgender community became the main, if not the only, place they could seek and obtain emotional comfort.

Some respondents chose to repay their gratitude to the community by attending to its needs. Shiajia (MTF) and Heyuan (FTM) donated small amounts of money to the transgender organizations they knew. Anqi (MTF) and Luhao (FTM) provided consultation and links for online resources to community members who needed help with issues like domestic violence, employment discrimination, and changing their legal sex. Liwen (FTM) served as a full-time transgender NGO worker and Mengxue (MTF) as an independent activist, both of whom endeavored to develop Chinese transgender activism. Their reproduction of care in response to the supports they received complemented the reciprocally supportive essence of the ethics of care found among the members of the Chinese transgender communities. The transformation of their role in the community from a beneficiary to a contributor also enhanced their sense of community belongingness.

7.3 Online Community Involvement as a Source of Stress

By engaging with analysis at the level of the individual body, I found that the negative

emotions (负面情绪) and negative energies (负能量) generated from complaints, conflicts, and

discriminations within the online transgender community distressed the Chinese transgender

respondents and impaired their sense of community belongingness. Close to half of the twenty

respondents either completely withdrew from the online community or limited their online

participation to few small chat groups composed of close friends and acquaintances. As Heyuan

(FTM) questioned, "I was already the discriminated minority in this society, why should I have

to experience discrimination even within this minority group?"

Enci (MTF) disclosed, "there were times I had ambivalent feelings toward this space when I

read people constantly wept about their poor lives and when I saw frequent comparisons and

attacks. I would say sometimes it was not comfortable to be in such an environment filled with

jealousy, fear, and other negative emotions."

For some Chinese transgender respondents, it was burdensome when the group discussions

were always or mostly about quotidian problems or despair and hardships, like "who made me

unhappy today" or "I was depressed because I could not have hormonal therapy/SRS." In some

cases, it was because they had long had similar issues in their own lives, and they could not

resolve them. While they sought temporary escape from the online community, these complaints

kept bringing them back to their unresolvable realities. In other cases, it was because they did not

have these concerns, or they were at the next stage where other concerns preoccupied them. As

someone who did not have hormone therapy and SRS plans, Gaoxiang (FTM) was more

concerned with making money to live a better life. And as individuals who already had

orchiectomy as a part of SRS, Anqi (MTF) and Zihan (MTF) were preoccupied with handling its

consequences rather than how they could access the surgical resources. Anqi explained, "I loved my wife and my kid, and they were traumatized by my decision. How should I help my wife and face my kid? What social organizations could provide them supports?" And Zihan addressed, "I swore to my deceased mother-in-law that I was going to take care of my wife and my father-in-law for a lifetime. How should I keep my promise now?"

The Chinese transgender respondents also reported being emotionally and mentally exhausted by witnessing in-group conflicts and/or being targets of discrimination. Based on my observation and the respondents' narratives, the contentions could surround two issues—the authenticity of one's transgender identity and the appropriateness of one's masculine/feminine performance. Respondents who did not have hormone therapy and SRS were in a more vulnerable position to be judged and criticized for claiming a transgender identity, compared with respondents who had either or both interventions. Qiwen (FTM) put his experience this way, "in other members' views, I was not a trans, or I was the kind of 'fake' trans who deserved to be discriminated against." And in the online community, MTF and FTM groups not only surveilled and disciplined each other's gender performance, but their respective group members also competed to meet and raise in-group standards. Hanxiao (MTF) recalled, "FTMs thought it was disgusting for men (MTFs) who had not shaved their body hair cleanly to wear women's clothing, while MTFs criticized the aggressiveness of FTMs and mocked it was nothing but a wild goose chase for women 'pretending' to be men." Enci (MTF) commented on the beauty pageant within the MTF online community, saying that people competed with each other by posting their selfies. She said it increased her anxiety level and made her feel pressured to consume cosmetic products and medical interventions to catch up with those beauty norms.

The two realms of contention over the Chinese respondents' transgender identification and gender performance reflected a change of sex/gender ideology in Chinese society and the internalization of cisgender masculine/feminine norms by the transgender community in civil society. Affected by Western biological notions of sex as a result of colonization, globalization, and modernization, the establishment and evaluation of a subject as a sexed being has become primarily based on his/her physical characteristics in Chinese society. The relational nature of sex/gender identity is less emphasized today than it had been in China historically. Also, the term *Kua Xingbie*/跨性别 did not originate in Chinese linguistic and cultural contexts but was translated from the Western transgender community in the early 21st century. This concept might have also carried with it the biomedical and surgical conceptualization of transgenderism predominant in the Western transgender community at that time. In other words, the introduction of transgender terminology may have led to the internalization of a Western ideology of transgenderism by the Chinese transgender community during the period of its establishment, that is, how people would think of what it means to become their identified gender/sex from the beginning. The respondents who transitioned physically and embodied male/female sex and gender features were prioritized for recognition in the online transgender community, while respondents who did not were criticized for their transgender identification. And the internalization of cisgender masculine/feminine norms generated power inequalities within the transgender community, with members who could or were willing to conform occupying higher status and having greater discursive control and leaving others marginalized and silenced. The attacks against one another's transgender identification and gender performance threatened the emotional and empirical benefits brought about by the practices of an ethics of care within the

online transgender community. They also made Chinese transgender respondents reconsider if this was a healthy space for their well-being.

7.4 Liberal Transgender Politics in China

> "I disagreed with slogans like 'I was a trans and I was proud,' that was not me. I did not feel special being who I was, nor did I want others to treat me like I was special." Zeyu (FTM)

Drawing on Katrina Roen's description of radical politics and liberal politics in the trans community (2002), I suggest most Chinese transgender respondents in this research embraced liberal transgender politics. Although both forms of trans politics were rooted in human rights ideology, they have different goals and prioritized different agendas. Supporters of radical politics seek societal acceptance of gender ambiguity and value disruptive and rebellious crossing movements to challenge the hegemonic binary sex/gender system. Supporters of liberal politics do not proclaim as lifelong trans but gradually move into former trans and eventually women or men (Roen 2002). My respondents accepted that being transgendered was a part of their lives. However, as people who simultaneously embodied multiple social identities, they did not see this identity represent who they were nor did they want to be recognized through this identity. They sought final integration into the binary sex/gender society. As it was illustrated in Xingyu's (FTM) words, "I wanted to be a normal man and lived a normal life." On the individual level, they envisioned there would be an end to this transgender path, where they could take off this transgender label and live as ordinary men (FTMs) and women (MTFs) who could take care of their families and make them proud. On a societal level, they advocated for greater acceptance of transgenderism and better acknowledgment of gender pluralism in Chinese society but did not necessarily agree with abolishing dualistic male-female division. Some respondents thought it was dangerous that individual community members purposefully tried subversive trans-gender

performances to challenge the dominant dualistic sex/gender structure. They believed everyone

in the transgender community should be cautious about how there might be backlash against

transgenderism from members of Chinese society because of certain "inappropriate" or

"untimely" individual behaviors.

7.5 Building a Liberal Transgender Activism in China

Drawing on Mark Orbe's co-cultural communication theory (1998), I suggest the Chinese

transgender community built liberal transgender activism through the assertive accommodation

approach. This approach entails promoting the transgender community's activist goals by

integrating them into the political agendas of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and phrasing

the goals to fit the CPC's political rhetoric.

Mark Orbe notes that underrepresented social groups communicate with dominant social

groups through different approaches—nonassertive, assertive, aggressive—and aim to achieve

different outcomes—assimilation, accommodation, separation. By taking an assertive

accommodation stance, underrepresented social groups act upon their perspectives and needs in

an assertive way to make favorable social changes. But in this process, they also cooperate with

dominant social groups and consider their stances (Orbe 1998). Through the assertive

accommodation approach, the Chinese transgender community aligned their rights advocacy

goals with the CPC's political agendas on the harmonious family, health equity, and social

justice. Anqi (MTF) asserted, "theoretically, there should be no conflict of interest between the

government and us." In Chinese LGBT activism history, the Chinese gay community also tried

to address its HIV/AIDS infection issue by situating it into the state's pandemic control agenda

(Hildebrandt 2013), and the Chinese lesbian community tried to address its domestic violence

(DV) issue by integrating it into the anti-domestic violence campaign of the All-China Women's

Federation (ACWF)[5] (Hou 2016). Based on the narratives of Anqi and other respondents who played an activist role in the community, their appeal to increase the accessibility of transition-related medical and surgical resources was consistent with President Xi's emphasis on "public health for all."[6] And their campaign to protect Chinese transgender people from domestic violence corresponded with President Xi's speeches on family—"harmonious families were the cornerstone of a harmonious society."[7] Furthermore, their active intervention into social institutions' discrimination against transgender people conformed with President Xi's statements on social justice—"advancing social justice was the starting point and the goal of Chinese socialist reform."[8] By referring to the CPC's socialist reforms agenda, the Chinese transgender community sought to prove the rationale and legitimacy of their activist schemes and pave the way for their activist practices.

Although Chinese people were endowed with the right to protest and parade through legislation, such practices were not encouraged in the LGBT communities. As respondents suggested, "more things got done behind closed doors in Chinese culture," which meant it was more effective to keep a low-profile publicly and "quietly" negotiate with the authorities. At the analytic level of the body politic, their experiences reflected that transgender activism could be

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[5] Founded in 1949, ACWF is the oldest and most authoritative women's rights organization in China. It has been cooperating with the CPC and working within the political structure of the Chinese government ("All-China Women's Federation" 2020).

[6] In 2013, President Xi (2013-) stressed that public health was the essence of constructing a well-off society. In 2014, when he inspected Zhenjiang, Jiangsu, he emphasized again that if there were no universal health for all, there would be no universal prosperity ("Public Health Is the Foundation to Make China Great Again—A Report on President Xi and CPC Accelerate the Construction of Public Health in China" 2017).

[7] President Xi made this statement during the first Representatives of the National Civilized Family Ceremony ("The Importance of Family, Family Teachings, Family Rules, so Said President Xi" 2017)

[8] First proposed in the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the CPC in 2013 ("President Xi Discusses Social Justice" 2017).

performed differently in a collectivistic culture promoted by the current communist-led government that did not overtly provide support for transgender rights. "In the West, for example, where philosophical and ethical systems recognized the absolute value of the individual and individual rights, feminist fought for their rights by arguing that women, like men, were human and individuals and, therefore, deserved absolute equality. In China, however, because the nationalist cause overrode the rights of both male and female individuals, no such avenue existed for advancing the interests of any group independent of state or societal demands" (Glosser 2003, 20).

7.6 The Precarity of Transgender Activism in China

Although the Chinese transgender community in general embraced liberal politics and an assertive accommodation stance to build transgender activism in China, both the community and activism were precarious. Butler describes precarity as "politically induced condition(s) of maximized vulnerability and exposure for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence and to other forms of aggression that are not enacted by states and against which states do not offer adequate protection." (2009, ii).

Offline, their precarity lay in transgender NGOs not having enough financial support and government recognition, which impeded them from developing their expertise and expanding their services. And when holding activities, organizations had to be prepared for police raids and other uncertainties, which resulted from the imposition of power by social institutions. As I have discussed in an earlier chapter, when the Charity Law and the Overseas NGO Law was implemented in 2016, it became increasingly difficult for sexual and gender minority organizations to register with a government system and obtain funding from domestic and foreign charities. Based on the narratives of my respondents who were part-time or full-time

NGO workers, transgender organizations also confronted these challenges. With reduced

funding, registered transgender organizations that had an office to serve their clients were

burdened with paying rent, employees' salaries, and other daily expenses. Unregistered

organizations faced even more struggles to maintain the quality and quantity of their services

with little to no funding. And transgender organizations followed tacit "rules" when they planned

for activities. Yuanze (FTM) said, "we usually started accepting reservations early, but only

informed participants about the exact place and time one day before. We would either text or call

them, and more cautious organizers would do it after 6 pm. This was the time we assumed the

surveillance from the police or other institutions became loose." They also avoided revealing any

detailed information about their upcoming activities on their online publicity posters because

they were afraid of being reported to the government by people who were prejudiced against the

transgender community and then forced to cancel or postpone their activities, which happened

frequently.

And online, the erasure of transgender-related contents and the imposition of power against

transgenderism was another issue that affected the development of the Chinese transgender

community and activism. For example, Anqi (MTF) reported that since the transgender Tieba[9]

discussion forum was built in 2003, it had faced temporary closedown orders multiple times by

Baidu Tieba's administration group, until it was deleted entirely in 2019. As one of the hosts of

this Tieba, her account was invalidated too. And in 2018, over 600 posts she made on the Zhihu[10]

question-and-answer website were deleted by Zhihu's administration group overnight, and her

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[9] Baidu Tieba, established in 2003, is the most used Chinese communication platform, hosted by the Chinese web services company Baidu. Every user could create their individual Tieba—keyword discussion forum ("Baidu Tieba" 2021).

[10] Zhihu, launched in 2011, is one of the biggest question-and-answer websites in China ("Zhihu" 2020). It is similar to Quora.

account was invalidated again. Zeyu (FTM) observed that the number of transgender-related

videos on the Bilibili[11] video sharing and streaming website decreased a lot in recent years. He

suggested this was not only because new videos could not be uploaded due to Bilibili's

aggressive censorship of "inappropriate" content, but also because of the deletion of old videos

by Bilibili's administration group. Through analysis at the level of the individual body, I find

such biased erasure of transgender-related contents has detrimental influences on both group and

individual levels. On the group level, the erasure of transgender culture online could impair the

transgender community's visibility and compromise transgender activism's sustainable

development. On the individual level, the erasure could take a toll on transgender people,

especially the newcomers, who struggled to locate informational and emotional support from the

community. For senior community members, their sense of loss and disorientation could be

mitigated by their resilience, including past exposure to transgender culture erasure and their

having substantial community networks. As someone who usually played a role in producing

knowledge about transgenderism and helping other transgender people build connections, Anqi

(MTF) suggested she could just create new accounts or move to other platforms and start over

again.

7.7 Summary

In this research, I found that not every Chinese respondent embraced a transgender identity

and possessed transgender-related knowledge when they started engaging with the transgender

community. Some respondents approached the transgender community motivated by their need

for medical/surgical transition-related information and resources and transgender friendships.

Some "accidentally" encountered the transgender community due to other needs triggered by

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[11] Bilibili, created in 2010, is one of the most popular video sharing and streaming websites in China ("Bilibili" 2020). It is similar to YouTube.

their embodied gender-sex difference, such as wanting to feminize (MTF)/masculinize (FTM) their voice and dress as women (MTF)/men (FTM). Once engaged with the transgender community, on the one hand, the online transgender community on WeChat practiced an ethics of care and played an essential role in affirming my respondents' transgender experiences, contributing to their physical transitions, and providing them emotional support. And these empowering influences added to the respondents' sense of community belongingness. On the other hand, the online transgender community could also be a source of the respondents' mental stress. This was partly due to conflicts surrounding who was a "real" transgender and who was a "fake" transgender—judging by one's physical transitions—and to discrimination against certain forms of gender performance. And respondents could also be emotionally burdened by either overlaps with or discrepancies between their struggles/hardships and other community members'. Among the respondents who had something to say about their perspectives on and experiences in building Chinese transgender activism, they agreed that the main task was not to subvert the binary sex/gender structure but to acquire social acceptance, social justice, and health equality for Chinese transgender people. And in Chinese sociocultural contexts, an assertive accommodation approach to integrate transgender activist goals into the CPC's socialist reform agenda was more often taken by the transgender community. Although Chinese transgender activism was as unconfrontational as possible, its sustainable development was still inevitably inhibited by structural barriers, including disadvantageous NGO regulations, policing and censorship against transgender culture.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Geographically, the contemporary anthropological transgender literature mainly focuses on U.S., Latin American, and Asian societies, but not on China. And despite that anthropologists strive to examine diverse topics related to transgender people, one of the main ongoing academic discussions today is on the gate-keeper model, involving psychiatrists and surgeons' control of transgender patients' access to transition-related medical/surgical resources, which is prevalent in the Global North and affects transgender people's experiences of health and illness. Research with a thematic focus on the intersecting associations between transgender people's identity development, family lives, and community engagement, and with a geographic focus on the Chinese society, is absent from the mainstream anthropological transgender literature. One of my research goals was to offer a nuanced account of Chinese transgender respondents' lives in these three areas to fill epistemological gaps in the anthropological scholarship. In turn, I hope to raise both academic and activist recognition of Chinese transgender people's lived experiences and struggles. By doing so, I hope more scholars can be attracted to unveiling the structural determinants and the cultural, political, and economic processes that lie underneath the precarity and inequality experienced by Chinese transgender people. And more overseas LGBT NGOs can be encouraged to build partnerships and provide supports to Chinese transgender organizations. I hope combined academic and activist endeavors can contribute to Chinese transgender people's well-being and the development of Chinese transgender activism.

Based on the research findings, I make the following arguments. In the tripartite stages of their transgender identity development trajectory, Chinese transgender people confront multifold and interconnected struggles and discriminations, such as internalized stigma and body anxiety

related to the difference between their identified gender and assigned sex/gender, school bullying and employment discrimination against their gender nonconformity. Nevertheless, their families and the domestic transgender community serve as essential institutions for them that enhance their resiliency along this trajectory. Because Chinese SRS regulations require parental informed consent and the public and private insurance systems provide no coverage for SRS related expenses, the family institution becomes both a procedural and financial necessity for Chinese transgender people to achieve bodily transitions. In other words, respondents with their families' supports have greater advantages in addressing their body anxiety and gender-sex incongruency. Meanwhile, by producing and reproducing an affirmative discourse towards transgender experiences and offering a platform where transition-related resources and information circulate, the domestic transgender community empowers Chinese transgender respondents in three aspects, (trans) gender identity consolidation, emotional comforts against mundane disruptions, and decision-making on bodily transitions. However, findings suggest respondents' families and the domestic transgender community can be other discriminatory sources that aggravate their mental and physical stresses. For example, discrimination is experienced when families reject and punish respondents' transgender identification based on the hegemonic male-female sex/gender structure; when families treat male-to-female and female-to-male transition differently because of the sexist ideology that asserts that boys/sons (FTM) are more valuable than girls/daughters (MTF); or when the domestic transgender community promotes certain transgender experiences and performances while marginalizing others based on the biological notion of sex and transnormative standards. In such cases, additional inequalities and power hierarchies are experienced by Chinese transgender people. Chinese transgender respondents enact their agency in their negotiations with their families for acceptance and in their exploration

of the domestic transgender community for support. They draw resilience from these two institutions to withstand structural transgender discrimination in Chinese society. At the same time, Chinese transgender respondents also strategize to protect themselves from these two institutions when they "betray" their reliance. For example, they migrate to another state away from their natal family networks or withdraw from the transgender groups they perceive as toxic.

Based on the findings in each chapter, I want to make the following policy recommendations. First, I believe it is important to implement resident community-based projects and educate parents about transgenderism. The purposes of these are to provide parents with basic knowledge about transgenderism, for example, what is embodied gender-sex difference, or why transgender people may need sex reassignment surgeries, and to encourage parents to be more open-minded about gender and sexual pluralism. Educating parents may decrease the chances of harm when parents find out their (adult) children are transgendered and increase the chances of their providing emotional and material support to their children. And with family support, Chinese people may suffer less mentally from their transgender identification and have an easier time with sex/gender transitions. Furthermore, I think it is necessary to train the police and social workers to effectively intervene in domestic violence that involves parental discrimination against (adult) children's gender non-conformity. Second, the government should consider including transition-related medical and surgical interventions into public insurance coverage and encouraging private insurance companies to cover these interventions too. These changes not only can promote health equality for Chinese transgender people, but it also can take off some financial burdens from the family institution on which they depend. Furthermore, the government should make parental consent an optional, instead of an obligatory, requirement for having SRS, or at least make it more flexible by allowing for conditional exemptions. Third, the

government should clarify the policy and simplify the procedure for Chinese transgender people who need to alter the sex identification on their college diploma after graduation. Until now, it has been a great problem widely reported by this population. Last but not least, the government should have more strict and applicable legislation or regulation on school bullying and employment discrimination against transgender people.

Here are some future research questions can be developed based on the findings of this thesis. For example, researchers should explore Chinese transgender people's national or transnational migration/diaspora. Where do they migrate to, and what pathways do they follow? How does their presence affect a receiving context in terms of, for example, the developments of its transgender civil society and transition-related healthcare provision? And how does their migration affect their family-of-origin? What are their vulnerabilities in incorporating into a receiving context? There is also potential in investigating how Chinese transgender people's previous family induced experiences, such as being sent to have conversion therapy, being forced to postpone or suspend their medical/surgical transitions, or being pressured to get married with their assigned sex, are associated with their contemporary sociodemographic outcomes (e.g., personal and marital health, educational and/or career attainments). And in terms of the developments of Chinese transgenderism and transgender activism, we learn that they benefit ideologically and financially from connections to international transgender communities and organizations. However, it remains to be explored how such links affect the forms of assistance Chinese transgender organizations provide to Chinese transgender people. In essence, the goal of future research should be to draw meaningful attention to Chinese transgender people, a population who are often silent and invisible in both domestic and international gender and sexuality studies.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TRANSGENDER PEOPLE

My research aims to explore Chinese transgender people's lived experiences of struggles and resilience. I am particularly interested in understanding what kinds of roles your family, the domestic transgender community, and the government play in your transgender identity development trajectory. Our interview will continue from one and a half to two hours. You have the right to refuse to answer any question and stop participating in this research at any time. Your privacy and the confidentiality of this interview will be protected by the following measures. Your real name and net name will not be mentioned anywhere in this research. Interview records and transcriptions will be saved on my password-protected computer, and only I can access them.

Before starting the interview
1. Can I have your verbal consent for taking this interview?
2. Do you have any questions for me before we start our interview?
3. May I record this interview for transcription?
4. (If no) May I take notes of this interview?

Demographic questions
1. How old are you?
2. How would you describe yourself in terms of your gender identity?

Gendered embodiment and struggles
1. Can you briefly describe your process of figuring out your gender identity?
2. How would you describe the feelings you have when you dress up (speak or behave) in a way that conforms to the gender identity you deeply hold?
3. What are your biggest concerns or the greatest problems you face regarding being or behaving as a trans woman (or man)?
4. To the extent that you are comfortable, can you talk about your experiences with violence, discrimination, or harassment, if you have experienced, or you are experiencing, any?
5. How have these experiences affected you?
6. Have you tried to seek help from your family, the police, or any related departments?
7. Do you feel comfortable seeking help from these groups? Why?
8. Have you ever undergone or are you currently accepting any hormone therapies or surgeries?
   (If yes) To the extent that you are comfortable, please briefly discuss your experiences.
   Would you say there are also downsides or challenges to acquiring hormone therapies or surgeries?
   (If no) Do you wish to have these medical interventions?
   What do you find appealing or unsettling about these medical interventions?
9. Have you told anyone, especially your parents, about your transgender identity?
   (If yes) What were their reactions?
   How did you feel about that?
   (If no) Why is that?
   How do you imagine they would react if you told them about your transgender identity?

How would you prepare to respond to their reactions if you decided to tell them about your transgender identity?

10. Is this place that you are currently living and working your hometown?
    (If yes) What is your sense of the environment here for transgender people?
    (If no) How long ago did you move here? And what influenced you to move here?
    (For both) Are you satisfied with your life here? How so?

Resilience and coping strategies

1. The word "resilience" is used to describe the ability to recover from or adjust to misfortune. What specifically contributes to the increase or decrease of your sense of resilience?

2. Are you or have you been a member of any WeChat chat groups for transgender people?
   (If yes) Can you describe any positive experiences you have had and how those experiences affected the problem you faced?
   Did you have any negative experiences when interacting with the domestic transgender community on WeChat? How those experiences affected you?
   (If no) Can you discuss why you have not had or why you are not engaging with any WeChat chat group for transgender people?

3. Have you ever engaged with any local transgender organizations?
   (If yes) Have these connections ever helped you cope with the emotional distress or trauma you may experience?
   Was it ever stressful for you to try to approach them? What were your concerns?
   (If no) Why is that?

4. How often do you take part in offline events organized by local transgender organizations?

Closing questions

1. Is there anything you believe that I should know about your experiences that might be important to what we have discussed?

2. Do you have any concerns regarding your participation in this interview?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR KEY INFORMANTS

This interview aims to explore what kinds of roles the social institutions play in Chinese transgender people's lived experiences of struggles and resilience. Our interview will last within one hour. You have the right to refuse to answer any question and stop participating in this research at any time. Your privacy and the confidentiality of this interview will be protected by the following measures. Your real name and net name will not be mentioned anywhere in this research. Interview records and transcriptions will be saved on my password-protected computer, and only I can access them.

Before starting the interview
    5. Can I have your verbal consent for taking this interview?
    6. Do you have any questions for me before we start our interview?
    7. May I record this interview for transcription?
    8. (If no) May I take notes of this interview?
Demographic questions
    1. What is your employment?
    2. Can you briefly describe your daily job duties?
    3. How long you have been working with transgender people?
Main questions
    1. When was the first time you provided services to transgender people?
    2. Did he or she approach you directly, or were you introduced to each other by a third party?
    3. Did you have certain understandings of transgender identity before your first interaction with transgender people?
       (If yes) Can you tell me where your understandings came from?
    4. Can you talk about your experiences in providing services to transgender people?
    5. Among the cases you have dealt with, do you find the needs of transgender people and the ways you use your expertise to address their needs are different from or similar to the needs of non-transgender people and your work with them?
    6. Speaking from your professional expertise, what are the pressing issues that many Chinese transgender people struggle with?
    7. What struggles or obstacles your institution confronts in the process of promoting rights, equality, and justice for Chinese transgender people?
    8. Why do you want to provide assistance and services to transgender people?
    9. How do these experiences affect you?
Closing questions
    1. Is there anything you believe that I should know that might be important to what we have discussed?
    2. Do you have any concerns regarding your participation in this interview?

APPENDIX C: CODES

Transgender Identity Development (deductive code)
Inductive codes:
- Resisting assigned sex/gender
- Playing with girls (MTF)
- Wearing girls' clothing (MTF)
- Being attracted to boys (MTF)
- Playing with boys (FTM)
- Wearing boys' clothing (FTM)
- Being attracted to girls (FTM)
- Being attracted to both female and male (MTF and FTM)
- Body anxiety
- Bathroom/restroom issues
- Not making friends
- Grades/study
- Avoiding exploring transgenderism
- Wearing men's (FTM)/women's (MTF) clothing and meanings
- Other exploratory attempts and meanings
- Confronting discriminations when exploring
- Ambiguity/transition of sexuality and sexual attraction
- Organizing social networks
- Continuing struggles/discriminations

Family lives (deductive code)
Inductive codes:
- Parents' reactions to coming out
- Preparations/negotiations/changes
- Recognition disparity between FTM and MTF
- Parents' attitudes to SRS needs and influences
- Moving to another city/state

Domestic transgender community engagement (deductive code)
Inductive codes:
- Why/how found the community
- Empowering influences/increasing belongingness
- Distressing/undermining belongingness
- Not proud being transgendered
- Priorities in activism and advocacy
- Referring to government's policies/agendas
- Reduced funding
- Police raids
- Online erasure/censorship