

Dialogicality: Mirror of Homosexual Cultural Identity Struggle in the Dispute over their Public Wedding Ceremony in Beijing, 2009

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Abstract: This paper studies homosexuals' cultural identity struggle in the dispute over their public wedding ceremony in Beijing, on Valentine's Day, 2009. By analysing related news reports, further readings and netizens' comments, we point out that, on the one hand, homosexuals struggle for their own identity mirrored by various dialogicalities in terms of openness to, acceptance of, recognition of and exploration of differences between the practitioners, proponents, opponents and mediators; on the other hand, homosexuals, as well as their proponents, have a long way to go for a more profound argumentation.

Keywords: Dialogicality, homosexual, cultural identity, struggle, argumentation

1. Introduction

In contemporary China, while numerous people strongly believe in the essentialist view that there are innate, essential differences between men and women and thus they should have their own distinct physiological functions and social status, many people no longer hold it as true but take a constructivist view. In this view, there is no clear dividing line between man and woman, so there should be no absolute frames for their sexual orientations and social roles.

According to *Spot: Gays' Story in China*, an electronic magazine, two homosexual couples took wedding photos publicly and sent off posters and invitations in Qianmen Street, Beijing on the St. Valentine's Day, 2009 – the very street to the south of Changan Street where Tiananmen Square is located (Xiaodong, 2009). Soon, this breaking news was adopted by NetEase and numerous websites, which aroused heated dispute over homosexuals' identity and social status between proponents (i.e., heterosexual advocates of a distinct social identity for homosexuals), opponents and mediators.

Identity, in fact, is such an important issue in the academic field that social identity, sexual identity and homosexual identity are often discussed philosophically, socio-psychologically and culturally. In English, "identity" refers to the status of a social being revealing a certain norm or a social role, a certain individual or collective identification; thus, it is both a relationship between similarity and difference and a socio-psychological process of assimilation and internalization, an internal power binding individuality to sociality (Theodorson & Theodorson, 1969, p. 85). In accordance with Tajfel and Turner's (1986, pp. 7–24) theory of social identity, people have an inbuilt tendency to categorize themselves into one or more "ingroups", building a part of their identity on the basis of membership of that group and enforcing boundaries with other groups; and people identify with groups in such a way as to maximize positive distinctiveness; groups offer both identity (they tell us who we are) and self-esteem (they make us feel good about ourselves).

Regarding sexual identity there are two main schools of ideas. Essentialists argue that sexual identity is only the process of self-discovering and self-acknowledging one's own sexual orientation, while Constructionists think that sexual identity is determined by the social and cultural factors affecting an individual, and is dynamic in the socio-cultural net where he or she lives (Liu & Zhang, 2009).

Homosexual identity, as one of the sexual identities, is a process of both self- and -social identification with some unique cultural perspective of beliefs, doctrines or creeds. The formation of homosexual identity (Cass, 1984) consists of six stages—identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride and identity synthesis. Following is a brief discussion of the first four stages, while the fifth and sixth stages will be discussed in sections 4.2 and 4.3.

According to Cass (1984), the first stage, Identity Confusion, begins with the person's first awareness of gay or lesbian thoughts, feelings, and attractions. The person typically feels confused and experiences turmoil. To the question "Who am I?", the answers can be acceptance, psychological self-denial and repression, or rejection. At the next stage of Identity Comparison, the person accepts the possibility of being gay or lesbian and examines the wider implications of that tentative commitment. "Maybe this does apply to me." The self-alienation becomes isolation. The task is to deal with the social alienation. In the third stage of Identity Tolerance, the person acknowledges they are likely gay or lesbian and seeks out other gay and lesbian people to combat feelings of isolation and increase commitment to being lesbian or gay. The task is to decrease social alienation by seeking out lesbians and gays. The fourth stage, Identity Acceptance, means the person accepts themselves. "I will be okay." The person attaches a positive connotation to their gay or lesbian identity and accepts rather than tolerates it. There is continuing and increased contact with the gay and lesbian culture. The task is to deal with inner tension of no longer subscribing to society's norm, to attempt to bring congruence between the private and public view of self.

To sum it up, homosexual identity is constructed as both physiological and socio-cultural, and is distinctive from the constructs of mainstream culture.

And this homosexual subculture, in our opinion, is largely reflected and reshaped by discourses involving various dialogicalities.

2. Theoretical Basis

2.1. From Identity to Dialogicality: Mirror of Discursive Identity Struggle

Generally, in the situation of cross-cultural communication, it is important to express oneself properly to win acknowledgement from others, because a certain discourse can build up a specific identity, and identity awareness can influence speakers' discourse choice in various dialogues (Fang & Lu, 2012, p. 87).

Specifically, everyone, to whichever culture he or she may be attached, lives in the process of talking with himself/herself or with others, including family members and other members of society. Dialoguing with others constructs his or her own identity; as Emerson et al. (1990, p. 50) argue, "neither individuals nor any other social entities are locked within their boundaries.

They are extraterritorial, partially ‘located outside’ themselves.”

Dialogue, as an event that occurs inside a person or between people, is an abstract, intangible, relative force which directs existence outside of the self into a relational dependence. In this sense, it is quite natural to study identity struggles in terms of dialogue with a focus on the co-presence of the voices of particular individuals’ different orientations (Bakhtin, 1981; Ivanic, 1998; Wertsch 1991). Orientation to difference is fundamental to social interaction, and this social interaction as three fundamental levels: its constitution as “meaningful” entailing active and continual negotiation; its constitution as a moral order oriented to and interpreted differently by different social actors; and its constitution as the operations of power – the capability to secure outcomes where the realization of the outcomes depends on others’ total obedience (Giddens, 1993, p. 104).

These orientations entangled with stereotypes, openness and contradictions can be analyzed from the aspect of dialogicality (Kullasepp, 2007). Namely, a dialogical probe into the identity conflict in this paper can be based on Bakhtin’s dialogue theory against “semiotic totalitarianism” (Emerson et al., 1990, p. 50) and also on Fairclough’s (2003, pp. 41-42) concept of dialogicality, in which the former directs the way of our research while the latter locates concrete steps.

2.2. Dialogue and Dialogicality

The English terms dialogic and dialogism often refer to the concept used by the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin in his work of literary theory, *The Dialogic Imagination*. Bakhtin (1981) contrasts the dialogic and the “monologic” work of literature. The dialogic work carries on a continual dialogue with other works of literature and other authors. It does not merely answer, correct, silence, or extend a previous work, but informs and is continually informed by the previous work. Dialogic literature is in communication with multiple works. This is not merely a matter of influence, for the dialogue extends in both directions, and the previous work of literature is as altered by the dialogue as the present one is. The term ‘dialogic’, however, does not just apply to literature. For Bakhtin, all language – indeed, all thoughts – appeared dialogic. This means that everything anybody ever says always exists in response to things that have been said before and in anticipation of things that will be said in response. We never, in other words, speak in a vacuum. As a result, all language (and the ideas which language contains and communicates) is dynamic, relational and engaged in a process of endless redescrptions of the world.

If Bakhtin’s dialogism focuses on the intertextual constructiveness between different language users, Fairclough’s (2003, pp. 41-42,) dialogicality provides a new perspective on different dialogical contradictions, negotiations and commonalities, which is differentiated schematically into five scenarios according to various degrees of tolerance to differences:

- Scenario A:** an openness to, acceptance of, recognition of difference; an exploration of difference, as in ‘dialogue’ in the richest sense of the term;
- Scenario B:** an accentuation of difference, conflict, polemic, a struggle over meaning, norms, power;

Scenario C: an attempt to resolve or overcome difference;

Scenario D: a bracketing of difference, a focus on commonality, solidarity;

Scenario E: consensus, a normalisation and acceptance of differences of power which brackets or suppresses differences of meaning and norms (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 41-42).

To sum it up, people have different orientations to differences—holding total openness to or partial acceptance of difference, seeking commonality and bracketing differences, or practicing absolute suppression of differences.

3. Methodology

However important a discourse is to construct a cultural identity as mentioned above, it is hard to say exactly how much a discursive activity contributes to a cultural practice, for there are still other factors such as emotions, attitudes and behaviors. Moreover, it is difficult to say which approach, psychological, sociological or cultural, is more workable than others, for they are complementary to each other in studying homosexual identity as a subculture. Above all, we do not mean that the discourses involved in this dispute, or rather, the discursive data collected in this paper are the “script” for the participants to follow; rather, we mean that those typical discourses collected by the authors represent the nature of homosexuals’ discursive identity struggle in this dispute.

Our research aims to examine the homosexual discursive identity struggle mirrored by the dialogicalities between those in favor of homosexuals and those opposed, in the dispute over homosexual lovers’ high-sounding wedding photo-taking in Qianmen Street, Beijing, on St. Valentine’s Day, 2009. Therefore, we need to select some typical discourses uttered by proponents, including homosexual practitioners and non-practitioners, and by opponents and mediators.

In the process of data selection, the following items should be noted:

a) How should we identify speakers’ standings?

Since this is not an interview, it is only possible to classify those participants in the dispute according to their verbal stands over homosexual behavior instead of medical sexual orientation. Perhaps, this is the limitation of our research.

b) Do we need to select only verbal discourses?

Discourses mainly refer to the verbal (both written and spoken) dimension, but they do not exclude non-verbal items as long as these help to provide the circumstances, and conditions such as date, time and place, and characteristics of participants (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 69).

c) How typical are those discursive data?

Most relevant discursive data are collected from websites such as NetEase, Sohu, Sina, or electronic magazines such as “*Point: Chinese Gay’s Story*”, which are popular either among common netizens or homosexuals.

In order to have a vivid view, we made a contrastive analysis of each party's discourse on the same topic to discover their respective stands.

d) How will those collected discursive data be analysed?

In this paper, we chiefly focus on verbal actions (comments of the netizens on the news report, different types of attached picture-notes, different ways of reporters' signing their names.) and non-verbal actions (behaviors, pictures).

Roughly, the dialogicality of each party is mainly analysed from their lexical options and syntactic models such as "because..., ...", "there was/wereas it was/were", "it is(not) right/wrong..., so he or she should/must(not) perform homosexualities", **which play a cognitive or ethical role in conducting each addresser's verbal or nonverbal behaviors.**

By models, we refer to the basic frames for believers to follow. By cognitive model, we mean that the participants get these schemas in the process of cognizing the world. By **ethical model**, we mean that the participants follow right-or-wrong criteria to balance personal freedom and social responsibility. Most people in the growth from infants, children to adults, for instance, acquire and follow the model of being a male and a female, model of the relation between males and females, models of the balance between personal freedom and social responsibility.

4. Dialogicalities in the Identity Conflict

4.1. Dialogicality of Practitioners

Dialogically looking at the first four stages of homosexual identity briefly discussed in the Introduction, the discourses are typically intra-dialogical. That is, the dialogues at the first four stages of homosexual identity occur inside either the homosexual himself/herself or the homosexual community itself. On the contrary, the dialogues with the outsiders (heterosexuals) at the fifth and sixth stages, identity pride and identity synthesis, are inter-dialogical.

Identity Pride

In the Identity Pride stage (Cass, 1984, pp. 143-167), sometimes the coming out of the closet arrives, and the main thinking is "I've got to let people know who I am!". The person **divides** the world into heterosexuals and homosexuals, and is immersed in gay and lesbian culture while minimizing contact with heterosexuals. Us-them is their basic political/social viewpoint. The task is to deal with the incongruent views of heterosexuals.

Radical homosexuals, for example, demean heterosexuals as "*you zhichuang de*" (guys with hemorrhoids) or simply "*zhiren*" (straight guys) (Cai, 2007). **Such kind of aversive dialogicality** can be found in an over-confident lesbian's typical argument with so many question and exclamation marks and rhetorical questions, which indicates how indignant and despising the speaker is toward heterosexual's prejudice and how proud she is of her own identity.

We are lesbians, and why not? Who says that the same sex could not live together?
 God? Jesus? Nobody!
 I don't like males; I am a les in favor of les and gays.
 Love is the same; (our) love is not guilty!
 Do not think that your (heterosexual's) love is pure. Actually our love is more pure
 than yours for we live together purely for true love while a male heterosexual only
 cherishes a woman's body! How boring! (Chen, 2009)
 哪個說的同性不能在一起？上帝？耶穌？沒有嘛！
 我就是不喜歡男人！
 我就是les 也支持les 包括gay
 愛不分 愛沒罪！
 不要以為你們很純潔了，其實你們的愛還沒我們的愛來的乾淨，我們在一起是
 真的 相愛了，不像男的，他只是為了女人的身體！沒意思。(CFP, 2009)

Thus, we can say that radicals follow Scenario B of Fairclough's (2003) classification of dialogicality (see Section 2.2 above), i.e., "an accentuation of difference, conflict, polemic, a struggle over the meaning, norms, power of their existential style" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 41). That is, radical homosexuals defy heterosexual behaviours while glorifying their own.

Identity Synthesis

The last stage in Cass' model (1984, pp. 143-167) is Identity Synthesis: The person integrates their sexual identity with all other aspects of self, and sexual orientation becomes **only one aspect** of self rather than the entire identity.

Possible responses from gays and lesbians can be continuing to be angry at heterosexism, but with decreased intensity, or allowing trust of others to increase and build. Gay and lesbian identity is integrated with all aspects of "self". A gay or a lesbian feels "all right" to move out into their own communities and not simply define space according to sexual orientation.

That is to say, at this stage, homosexuals no longer hold it true that heterosexuals are always viewed negatively and homosexuals viewed positively. The individual's personal and public sexual identities become synthesized into one identity, and the individual is able to integrate his or her sexual identity with all other aspects of Self. As far as dialogicality is concerned, moderate homosexuals attempt to strengthen themselves by bold exposure to the public, claiming their legal rights with new appellatives (identifying words by which someone or something is called and classified or distinguished from others), while radicals protect the Self by verbal attack against heterosexuals.

During the special wedding ceremony in Qianmen Street, Beijing on the St. Valentine's Day, 2009, homosexual practitioners made various discursive struggles for their identity, which is well demonstrated in the news report *Today, we choose bravery* (Xiaodong 2009).

Table 1. Picture Titles from *Today, we choose bravery* (Xiaodong 2009)

No. of Pictures	Titles
Picture 1	“ Hey , shall we hurry to make a pose? Look! Those bridegrooms are doing that.”
Picture 3	“ Look! How great attention we have drawn! This public favor to us.”
Picture 4	“ Wow , how beautiful the brides are!”
Picture 5	Aunt Laowai , no hurry. Take pictures one by one! Have you ever seen such <i>lala</i> brides?
Picture 12	We ’are holding our wedding ceremony. Would you like to drink our happiness?
Picture 14	All shall be well, Jack shall have Jill.
Picture 15	No! For shame!
Picture 16	We are answering all the questions with a smile.
Picture 17	Honey , let us kiss each other
Picture 19	Surely we will go to attend your wedding banquet.
Picture 20	We respect the children’s choice. The society should be more tolerant.

First, they made pure linguistic struggles:

a) Syntactically, “We” is most frequently mentioned (“we” is only omitted in imperative sentences) to show the same identity; and a lot of appellatives, modal verbs (**shall**, **should**), imperative and exclamatory sentences are used either to draw readers’ attention to the homosexuals’ public image, or to appeal to sympathy from readers, or to enjoy themselves;

b) Lexically, many words and phrases showing commonalities with heterosexuals such as *bravery, true affection, seeking for happiness, self-confidence, equality, love, promoting social progress, being blessed* were sought rather than verbal attacks against the heterosexuals ; and above all,

c) Pragmatically, the homosexuals made their special declaration with the pink flowery italicized Chinese character of *hong shuang xi* “囍” (double crossed happiness, Figure 1), something similar to that of traditional bright red one usually posted in a heterosexual wedding ceremony.

The invitation card backgrounded with the pink character “囍” (double happiness) reads loud their identity declaration:

Happy St. Valentine’s Day
 Man is born to be equal
 Love should have been boundless
 We are homosexuals
 We also want to receive other’s blessings
 Want to have the marriage protected by the law
 Please advocate all those who love each other
 Advocate Chinese homosexuals’ action for equal rights
 May all be well, Jack shall have Jack and Jill shall have Jill!



Figure 1. The Card of Invitation and Declaration (Xiaodong, 2009)

This declaration consisting of nine lines without any punctuation except for the last exclamation mark, seems to suggest their persistent struggle for equal rights and true blessing. It is rhythmized with temporary pauses and their long-cherished wish symbolized by the Chinese character “九” (nine) connoting “久” (permanence, forever love).

It is clear that moderate homosexuals hold the paradigm “a bracketing of difference, a focus on commonality, and solidarity in case of Scenario D of Fairclough’s (2003) classification of dialogicality, namely, “of direct conflict with heterosexuals” (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 41-42).

Such a dialogicality is closely related to its context, in which cognitive, social, ethical and historical models of proponents (those heterosexuals in favor of others’ homosexual behaviors), mediators (those who neither support nor oppose homosexual activities but respect homosexual legal rights) and above all, that of opponents (those who oppose homosexuals completely) are quite significant to each party’s discourse. These are discussed below.

4.2. Dialogicality of Proponents’ Discourse

Proponents, in spite of being heterosexuals, follow the same model as practitioners to argue for the homosexuals’ existence historically, legally and ethically.

Some proponents make a long list of homosexual celebrities in Chinese and Western history, which, besides many contemporary Western big stars, includes six kings in the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC), one emperor in the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC), ten emperors in the Han Dynasty (207 BC - AD 220), and eleven more emperors in the following dynasties before the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911/12), and dozens of lettermen (Zhang 2009, p.38) They argue, historically and philosophically, that there were/existed so many people with such a natural sexual inclination and it is no wonder that there still exist some nowadays. Some proponents even go for extreme illogical claims with plausible historical facts between which no necessary connection exists:

The earth rotates without anybody. However, without Dante (GAY), there would not have been the earlier befalling of Renaissance; without the earlier befalling of Renaissance, there would not have been Da Vinci (GAY), Michelangelo (GAY), Raphael, Dürer, Muret (GAY), Marlowe (GAY), Bacon...of course, there would not have been another gay Newton! (Baidu, 2009, n.d.)

地球離了誰都轉。可是，沒有但丁（曾是GAY），就沒有文藝復興的提前來臨。沒有文藝復興，就沒有達芬奇（GAY）、米開朗琪羅（GAY）、拉斐爾、丟勒、米雷（GAY）、馬婁（GAY）、培根（史疑GAY）、彌爾頓、莎士比亞、薄伽丘.....；就沒有哥白尼、伽裡略、布魯諾、哈威、維薩里、開普勒.....；當然就沒有牛頓。（GAY）(CFP, 2009)

In the proponents' eyes, moreover, homosexual activities are a matter of "privacy" instead of "immoral" behavior; thus nobody, legally and ethically, has a legal right to "interfere with homosexuals" or an ethical right to condemn them (CFP, 2009).

In brief, the proponents cherish the paradigm of Fairclough's (2003, pp. 41-42) Scenario D, i.e., "a bracketing of difference, a focus on commonality, solidarity."

4.3. Dialogicality of Opponents' Discourse

Opponents, firstly, follow the Essentialist model that everything must not go against nature, in which a person is born to be either a male or a female with heterosexual orientation. Some opponents claim that homosexual activities are against nature, thus against human moral standards, thus physically "ill-shaped", mentally "filthy", "disgusting", "horrible", morally "degraded", "corrupt", and socially "irresponsible", and thus should be, either legally or ethically, "punished", "forbidden", or "spurned" (CFP, 2009). For example,

Homosexual's disgusting human beings is not so terrifying as disgusting the people;
Should it be forgivable for them to disgust the people,
It is not for them to demoralize our younger generation;
Should it be forgivable for them to demoralize our younger generation,
It is not for them to debase our whole nation (CFP, 2009).

噁心人並不可怕，可怕的是出來噁心人民
噁心人民還可原諒，不可原諒的是帶壞了下一代
帶壞下一代還可饒恕的話，最不可饒恕的是敗壞了一個民族。（CFP, 2009）

In this condemnation, the speaker employs parallelism mixed with semi-palindrome to foreground his idea to its zenith with the intervals of various verbs (*disgust*, *demoralize*, *debase*), adjectives (*terrifying*, *forgivable*) and victim objects (*human beings*, *the people*, *younger generation*, *whole nation*), which strongly indicates that homosexual activities are harmful to human beings in any sense.

Secondly, some opponents argue that it is the social responsibility for any societal members not to go beyond social convention, which includes the balance between personal freedom and social responsibilities.

Everybody must be clear: As long as you are a social being, all your personal matters cannot go beyond social responsibility and social convention...nobody should ignore the bottom line of public morals for the sake of his/her so-called "love" or anything private. It is forbidden. (CFP, 2009)

請大家一定要弄清楚一點：只要你是個社會人，那麼你個人任何私人事物是不可能超越社會責任和社會公約的，也是絕對不被允許的，要不然你想怎麼樣就怎麼樣，現在大家試著想想看，你可以為了你自己的愛情或什麼其他的私人問題，而可以無視社會大眾的道德底線以及你本來就應該承擔的社會責任，你覺得那可能嗎？？？(CFP, 2009)

Moreover, some opponents make euphemistic or sarcastic remarks on homosexual marriage. In their eyes, it is nothing different from that of a eunuch for both of them are barren in bearing a baby, which is the ultimate happiness of traditional marriage in the physical, mental, social and at last moral sense. For example, "Being a homosexual" is satirized as "that boundary" in one of the netizens' comments with 26,182 supportive clicks accompanied by 1,393 disfavours. Another is a citation of a traditional sardonic anecdote:

Once upon a time, a eunuch stopped Ji Xiaolan (a renowned talented and dissolute scholar in the Qing Dynasty) and demanded him to tell a joke.

"Long long ago, there was a man." Finished Ji, and then he kept a long silence.

"What followed?" Asked the eunuch eagerly.

"Nothing."

"Why?"

"No children" (CFP, 2009).

有一回，太監攔下紀曉嵐，要求他講個笑話。紀曉嵐應要求說："從前、從前有一個人。"（沈默了許久）這個太監耐不住地問說："下面呢?" 紀曉嵐答道："下面沒有了啊!" 太監問："為甚麼?" 紀曉嵐答："沒孩子。"(CFP, 2009)

From the above, we have discovered that opponents' orientation to difference belong to Fairclough's "an accentuation of difference, conflict, polemic, a normalisation suppressing differences of meaning and norms."

4.4. Dialogicality of Mediators' Discourse

Despite sharing the same cognitive model as those practioners and proponents, mediators make rather neutral discourses characterized by multilateral respect for practioners, proponents and opponents. Look at the following comment:

Dear friends, Hello! Let's not make a hasty judgment about who is right. First, a question should be answered: Have you respected others? Everybody has different orientations including sexual ones, which should be decided by the person himself. Unless a person violates the law, damnifies the society, don't hurt him or her, for respect is the essential moral quality to be a man.

Dear friends, if he/she lives and contributes to the society, please welcome him or her to the big social family. To tolerate and accept everybody is a man's highest principle (CFP, 2009).

各位朋友你們好：看了大家對同性戀的評論，暫不論誰對誰非。首先確定一個問題，你尊重別人了嗎？每個人的愛好不同，性取向也不同，這由自己所定。在一個人不違反法律，不損害社會的同時，請不要傷害她（他）。尊重一個人這是最起碼的做人的道德。你說是吧？朋友們，在一個人為社會、為人類的進步生活著、貢獻著時，就讓他加入社會這個大家庭中來吧！接納每一個人、寬容每一個人，是做人最良好的品德。(CFP, 2009)

For the friendly articulator, it is the social responsibility to be tolerant between you, me and him or her because “everybody has different orientations... which should be decided by the person himself”; what's more, they may be harmless but beneficial to the whole society.

This stance discussed above determines mediators' orientation to difference which follows Fairclough's Scenario A, i.e., “an openness to, acceptance of, recognition of difference; an exploration of difference, as in ‘dialogue’ in the richest sense of the term” (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 41-42).

5. Discussion

For Michel Foucault (1972) – who as a gay died of an illness related to AIDS – discourse constructs the topic, defines and produces the objects of knowledge, governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully reasoned about, defines an acceptable and intelligible way to talk or write about the topic, and restricts other ways of talking and writing about it. Foucault (1972, p. 151) further maintains that “discourse is the path from one contradiction to another” with two levels in “the history of ideas”: appearance and foundation. Contradictions at the former level are resolved mainly in the “profound unity” in discourse, while those at the latter level give rise to discourse itself.

In this Discussion section, therefore, we attempt to find the root of the conflicting discourses and the frailty in Chinese homosexuals' process of identity struggle.

5.1. Root

The root of conflicting discourses can be traced to the dynamic beliefs of Confucianism by the mainstream opponents.

Looking back, there is a long recorded history of existence of homosexuals in Chinese civilization (in most cases, gays). According to Ji Yun's (a scholar in the Qing Dynasty) *Yuewei Caotang Biji* 《閱微草堂筆記》(2001), gays could be traced back to the early Emperor Huang living four thousands years ago, which implies that being homosexual is natural, or even holy. The earliest written record of *bi wan tong* 比頑童(gays) was found in *Shangshu Yixun* (*The Book of History* composed by Confucius), *Zhan Guo Ce* (*Intrigues of the Warring States* authored by Liu Xiang in the West Han Dynasty), *Yanzi Chunqiu*, *Han Shu* (*The History of Han Dynasty* by Ban Gu), *Shishuo Xinyu* (*History of Wei and Jin Dynasties* by Liu Yiqing et al.) and

other literary and historical books, from which we can see ancient Chinese's attitude towards homosexuals have the following features:

Firstly, except for Ruan Ji's (210–263AD) hymn for his own gay activities influenced by Taoism, neither proponents nor opponents are strictly religious. Instead, people condemn or uphold it more politically. For example, the saying “meinan pozhi” (“King's indulgence in handsome boys is doomed to destroy his state”) is a long-standing lesson for emperors to bear in mind, that playing with handsome boys spoils their will to govern the whole state (*Shangshu Yixun* 《尚书·伊训》).

Secondly, because those gays were either powerful kings, emperors or men of letters, most terms for gays were metonymically euphemized, such as *wantong* (urchins), *luanlong* (catamite), *jiaotong* (crafty boy), *kuanglong* (wild boy), *kuangqie* (crazy boy), *weiyu erren* (solely tied couples), *fentao* (sharing the same peach), *duanxiu* (broken sleeve), *anling* (Lord Anling), *longyang* (Lord Longyang), in which the last five could be traced back to their origins in historical records. In folklore, however, gays used to be ironized as *xianggong* (sterile hubby), *tuzi* (rabbit), *tuer ye* (Lord Rabbit), *xianggu* (barren auntie), *xiaochang* (little entertainer), *xianghuo xiongdi* (aromatic brothers), *qi xiongdi* (contracted brothers), *qi fuzi* (contracted father and son), *hanlu yinyuan* (drought marriage fate), *guadu shusheng* (lonely bachelor), *while qiruo jinlan* (the extreme-friendly), *caihu duishi* (originally referred to as marriage between eunuch and maid in an imperial palace) particularly referred to lesbians (Liu & Lu, 2005). All the satirical dubnames shared the same commonality that homosexuals deviated from the “normal”.

However, no record of how homosexuals addressed heterosexuals has been found to date, which indicates that there was no dialogue but authoritative monologue between those two parties quite alert to each other. And this historical gap serves as the cultural sediment for contemporary Chinese to treat homosexuals in a paradoxical way.

Things have changed from the 1980s to the 21st century; homosexuals' voice in China has grown louder and louder for their equal rights, while the public atmosphere has become less and less disadvantageous. More and more public or personal communications occur between homosexuals amongst themselves, between homosexuals and heterosexuals, and between homosexuals and researchers, which is beneficial to eliminate the public's mysterious misunderstanding of homosexuals biologically, psychologically, socially and culturally (Liu & Lu, 2005). Official documents of the Ministry of Health have changed the wording from “homosexual patient” into “homosexuals” in the 1990s; official media are more likely to use neutral, unbiased words; above all, some digital pro-homosexual magazines have sprouted here and there in recent years.

Heterosexual proponents as well as homosexual practitioners and mediators take a socio-constructivist approach that anything has its fluidity and contingency. They admit that differences of sex orientation exist among human beings, which is natural both for heterosexuals and homosexuals. Therefore, it is reasonable that homosexuals are biologically normal, psychologically and physiologically healthy, morally and sociologically acceptable, and that homosexuals should have their equal social rights as heterosexuals do to enjoy intimacy and marriage.

Despite these hospitable changes above, many a person holds a strong prejudice against homosexuals. In the opponents' eyes, besides those ideas discussed in Section 4, homosexuals

go against the backbone of Confucianism. Namely, being responsible for the family, ensuring sustainable growth of the family, and ultimately being responsible for the sustainability of whole society. Therefore, homosexuals are completely “authored” (Strathern, 1988, p. 323) as Other, who should be punished, forbidden, castrated and spurned. In such a case, no dialogicality can be found in opponents’ absolute and authoritative discourse.

The undialogical discourse reminds us of the idea that gender is the product of discursive practice (Collier & Yanagisako, 1987), and of the “causal principle” of sex (Foucault, 1984):

The notion of “sex” made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures and it enables one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning: sex was thus able to function as a unique signifier and as universal signifier (p. 154).

It is this concept functioning “as unique signifier and as universal signifier” that determines the opponents’ essentialist view: the sex identity is fixed and trans-historical.

5.2. Frailty

There is a long way for the homosexuals (as a subculture) to go to be as normal as other Chinese (mainstream culture) because social prejudice and their own inner vulnerability, lacking deeper thinking over cultural identity, construct a great obstacle. Namely, it seems that contemporary Chinese homosexuals indulge themselves in frequently crying out simple slogans and actions instead of conducting systematic mediations and research from other perspectives, as Westerners do.

Influenced by the descriptions of homosexuals in the Bible and enjoying a relatively free atmosphere to express themselves on various platforms, Western homosexuals devote themselves to constructing their social identity not only legally, historically-culturally and ethically, but also **religiously and politically-spiritually**.

It is well-known, religiously, that Christians have a long discursive conflict over homosexuals in the Bible in that both conservative and liberal Christian theologians have their own discursive interpretations (Robinson, 2012). To be more specific, many Christians share different interpretations on rights or wrongs of Ruth’s (daughter-in-law) cleaving upon Naomi (mother-in-law) (*v 14 – 17*), the love surpassing that of women between David and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:26), and the favor and tender love between Daniel and Ashpenaz, the chief of the court officials of Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, (Daniel 1:9)

Conservative Christian theologians (Robinson, 2012) tend to accept English translations of the Bible, and accept the inerrancy of the Bible. Whenever possible, they would interpret passages literally, unless there is a good reason not to. They consider all Bible passages as instructive in today’s society. For example, homosexuality is a chosen, unnatural, abnormal, changeable, and perverted lifestyle, which is hated by God. “If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them.” (Leviticus 20:13)

On the contrary, liberal Christian theologians (Robinson, 2012) tend to follow a wider

variety of translations, and are more concerned with instances of copying errors in the original Hebrew or Greek, of forgery, and of biases among the translators. They consider some passages (e.g., those referring to slavery, burning some prostitutes alive, raping female prisoners of war, etc.) as not being valid today, as immoral, and against the will of God. They differentiate among various homosexual and heterosexual sex practices, treating some (rape, prostitution, temple sex rituals) as immoral and some (within committed relationships) as positive. Homosexual orientation and behavior are seen as a normal human sexual expression among a minority of adults. It is a permanent characteristic, rather than being changeable or chosen. Like all sexual behavior, it can be a sin if it is exploitive or manipulative or not carried out safely within a committed relationship.

Contemporary Western homosexuals (or their proponents) attempt to solidify their legal rights by redefining the concept of marriage politically and spiritually. As Udis-Kessler (2010, p. 4) claims,

Same-sex couples who want to get married, or who support marriage equality as a political matter, argue that love is love and marriage is marriage. LGBT/queer-identified people who want to see all types of relationships equally valued claim that marriage itself is the problem; they want marriage off its pedestal and every form of coupling (or tripling or ...) held up as equivalent.

For Udis-Kessler, same-sex marriage is not just a matter of equal rights: as long as we live in a society that treats marriage as a matter of state interest and prioritizes it above other types of relationships, same-sex couples must be allowed to marry for spiritual reasons. Same-sex marriage is a spiritual matter for the couples involved and for society as a whole. Spirituality here is not opposed to politics, but is of a piece with it.

Furthermore, if politics are to be spiritually informed, they must support human flourishing at all levels:

... every kind of romantic/sexual relationship, as well as singleness, can be turned into a venue of self-healing and world-healing, depending on the honesty and integrity with which it is undertaken.

... In marriage, the trust between the couple is also a trust between the couple and society, and as such marriage (when at its best) makes certain demands that can be part of its spiritual component (Udis-Kessler, 2010, p. 4).

A couple, supported by the legal, social, and cultural elements of marriage, can work to cultivate the “fruits of the spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23) in their lives and their relationship and then extend these blessings – “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23) as individuals, as a pair, and as activists in the world. Here in particular, politics needs spirituality as much as spirituality needs politics. Finally, people who are more whole lead to a planet that is more whole.

Michaelson (2010) shares similar ideas:

Evolutionarily ... homosexual individuals, who presumably do not procreate, care for the good of the group. Socially, LGBT people have often taken roles as artists, healers, and shamans, in forms both profound and absurd ... Spiritually, some in the gay community have sought particularly gay modes of relating to spirituality as liminal.... And intellectually, we have every reason to expect that the liberation of sexual minorities will add as much to our cultural life as did the liberation of women—more perspectives, more questions, more complications, and thus more life (p. 34).

Compared with those in the West, contemporary Chinese homosexuals need a broader vision, a stronger voice, a higher platform, a deeper mediation, and a more convincing expression.

6. Implications

To enhance the dialogicality in the identity struggle demands redefining the concept of marriage and relocating its position with all other relationships considered fairly because, as Rabbi Michael Lerner (2010) argues,

Peace can only come through a fundamental transformation of consciousness, so that the people on each side begin to abandon the worldview that teaches that their own security depends on dominating the other side, construed as the “evil other.” Only an open-hearted reconciliation based on faith that the other side will be able to see its former enemies as real human beings sharing similar needs for peace, security, dignity, and recognition as created in the image of God will produce lasting peace (Lerner, 2010, p. 9).

Coincidentally, we notice that main stream media with loud official tones such as People’s Daily, Guangming Daily, CCTV(China Central Television) did not take part in this Valentine’s Day dispute over homosexuals’ cultural identity and socio-ethical status. Their absence may indicate that Chinese government will take a let-it-be attitude towards these kinds of events in non-political-economic affairs. All of this may betoken one of significant steps from the Age of Essentialism/Objectivism to the Age of Non-Essentialism/Constructivism in contemporary China. In fact, more and more Chinese have began to abandon the essentialist or objectivist belief that there must be an absolute, unchanged stereotype for a certain thing, for example, the stereotype of being a male/female. Instead, they take a constructive view that any modes are appropriate, and thus, should be permitted and even encouraged on the condition that such behaviors are not harmful to others. In sum, there would be more choices in contemporary Chinese living style.

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