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Rethinking Sexual Repression in Maoist China: Ideology, Structure and the Ownership of the Body

EVERETT YUEHONG ZHANG

In my anthropological fieldwork about the transformation in China over the past two decades, from Maoist socialism to post-Mao reform and consumer society, when many who had lived during the Maoist period (several decades prior to the 1980s) talked about their experience of the body and sex life, they recalled how people were *beiguandehenyuan* (controlled very tightly).¹ Questions arise immediately: is this another way of saying that they were 'sexually repressed'? Can we characterize the state control and regulation of sexual life in the Maoist period as 'sexual repression'?

The issue of sexual repression in the Maoist period is currently under debate. The major differences between the contrasting views are seen both at the level of fact and at the level of conceptualization. First, at the level of fact, the existence of a total repression of sexuality in China has been disputed, as new research shows the opposite, arguing for the diversity and complexity of sexuality in practice in the Maoist period. It is pointed out that the state regulation and control of sexuality varied from place to place and from period to period. It is necessary to make distinctions between urban areas and rural areas, between the

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1950s and the Cultural Revolution, between the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and the Cultural Revolution in the 1970s, between the more stable places and more chaotic places, between sedentary groups of people and the groups moving around, etc.² Yet, as any study of sexuality with a comparison between the current consumer culture and the Maoist period shows, it is hard to overlook the general tendency of the loosening up of state regulation on sexuality since the 1980s.³

Second, on the conceptual level, ‘repression’ itself is disputed in discussions primarily inspired by Foucault’s critique of the repressive hypothesis in the Victorian period in Europe. In this view, instead of achieving a total repression, the so-called repressive mechanism which was very much in the form of knowledge about sexual life enticed desire and constructed sexuality. Repression as a way the regulatory power operates in the libidinal economy already contains its opposite – the enticement of desire.

But questions with regard to the distinctive nature of sexual repression under Maoist socialism still do not go away. Does Foucault’s critique of the repressive hypothesis in Victorian Europe address the situation in the Maoist period? Is the thesis of sexual repression in the Maoist period a reconstruction of history based on memories heavily influenced by today’s desire-centered logic of consumer society in China? How does the debate on sexuality in the Maoist period in China contribute to our understanding of sexuality and the body in general? Those questions haunted me throughout my fieldwork. It became clear that what is at stake in rethinking ‘sexual repression’ in the Maoist period is how we understand the changing nature of the governing of the body from the Maoist period to the current period. It is necessary to pay special attention to the sovereign control of the sex life of the population in the context of socialist societies that are different from capitalist societies such as the US. Despite the increasingly nuanced discussions regarding whether or not there was sexual repression in the Maoist period in Chinese studies, it remains a challenge to sort out conceptually how the socialist state regulated sexuality and why. In general, studies of sexuality and the body in the social sciences have not offered much insight into the relationship between the state and sexual repression.

This article discusses the issues through an event that took place in 1978 at May First Technical School in Chongqing, a city that was in Sichuan Province at that time.⁴ I was a student at that school. Combining my fieldwork with my memory of the event, I wish to demonstrate the exciting historical moment when Maoist socialism began to be transformed. This combination of my own memory and my interviews accessing other people’s memories presented a re-examination of the experience of both the ethnographer and the interviewees, and a

reinterpretation of what has already been interpreted in other ways over some 20 years of dramatic change in Chinese history.

The No Dating Rule

May First Technical School prohibited dating among the students. Even though no rule of *buzhuntanlianai* (dating is not allowed) was officially documented, it was made clear verbally by the administrators that dating was discouraged. In practice, if anyone violated this rule, he or she would receive a warning, and the dating relationship had to end. Even though the warning might cite the dating student for not observing discipline, for example, missing classes, the message was clearly against dating which was blamed for corrupting school discipline. Ms Li, a 20-year-old female student, and Mr Gu, a 21-year-old male student, were caught violating this rule.⁵ They received a warning from the school administration and were asked to discontinue their relationship. However, they refused to end it. Because of their unyielding attitude, the school administration put the two students on probation for a year. The general branch of the Chinese Communist Youth League in the school also punished the two students (they were members of the Youth League) with probation within the organization, as well.⁶ Even though the probations came to an end and the two students were allowed to keep their membership of the Youth League, they paid a high price for their romance – they suffered from moral accusations against them, and were punished when they received their job assignments at graduation. There was no free job market at that time. Almost every graduate was assigned to a job by the school administration. These two students were deliberately assigned to job positions that were as far apart from each other as possible in the large metropolis.

More than 20 years later, during my field trip, I found the male student in the same city. He was now the vice-head of a state-owned factory which was facing bankruptcy. He had a daughter who was attending junior high. Afraid of offending him, I avoided asking who his current wife was. Slowly sipping a glass of beer and sticking his chopsticks into the boiling spicy and oily juice of the ‘fire pot’ (also called ‘hot pot’, a meal in which one eats food being cooked in the boiling soup), he said that his wife could still remember me as her schoolmate – this was his way of telling me that his current wife was Ms Li, his lover of some 20 years before.

This couple’s story has long haunted me as a great puzzle in my understanding of sexuality and the state in the Maoist period. On the one hand, nothing could be more eloquent than this story of love and punishment in speaking of the sexual repression in the Maoist period. On the other hand, there has been a

lack of convincing explanations for this kind of stringent regulation under the socialist state. It is all too superficial to attribute this type of repression to what Marcuse discusses as ‘surplus-repression’ of sexual desire from the state. Marcuse makes the distinction between basic repression (‘the “modifications” of the instincts necessary for the perpetuation of the human race in civilization’) and surplus repression (‘the restrictions necessitated by social domination’) (1966: 35). As an alternative to the structure of Freudian theory, Marcuse emphasizes the exploitative nature of surplus repression and disagrees with the absoluteness of repression under civilization in Freudian theory, but he fails to explain historically why sexual repression is often part of social domination. In his discussion of sex and international relations, Dennis Altman summarizes several views on the relationship between sexual repression and the state apparatus (primarily in authoritarian regimes) (2001: 130–7). The first view is that sexual repression is a way not only of preventing sexual interests from creating a world of their own, outside the control of the state, but also to induce a privation of sexual desire which is hysterical, a desirable state that can be transformed into war-fever and leader-worship. The second view is that repression creates a need for sublimation of the libido, which strengthens group ties while displacing sexual feelings outside the group. The third view simply regards sexual repression as the roots of authoritarianism and violence. Wilhelm Reich represents the third view. He argues, ‘Man’s authoritarian structure . . . is basically produced by the embedding of sexual inhibitions and fear in the living substance of sexual impulses’ (1970: 30). In turn, sexual repression ‘changes the structure of economically suppressed man in such a way that he acts, feels, and thinks contrary to his own material interests’ (1970: 32). In other words, sexual repression creates the man who desires fascism. Most of the analyses above come close to speaking about the centrality of sexual repression to collectivism as a mode of subjectification under the state apparatus. They represent variations of the psychoanalytical tradition, emphasizing the process of desire, libidinal energy and its sublimation, as well as the impossibility of achieving complete sublimation. Again, those views do not give a historically specific framework explaining why sexual repression was an essential part of the state apparatus.

Provincializing the Freudian analysis of sexual repression, anthropologist Malinowski’s study of sex and repression in so-called ‘savage societies’ demonstrates how sexual repression as a cultural form organized kinship, family and marriage in a different way from that in Freudian analysis. Because of the central role played by the uncle in the matrilineal family, the repression of hostility toward the uncle instead of the father in certain island communities of north-western Melanesia was the best-known modification he made to the Freudian

Oedipus complex, which was based on the norm of the bourgeois nuclear family in Western industrial society. Malinowski interprets sexual repression as ‘a mental “by-product” of the creation of culture’ (1927: x), that helps maintain the coherence of society. Despite his failure to engage with sexual repression historically, we learn from him that sexual repression might take diverse forms in different contexts. For example, in the practice of arranged marriage, which was common in pre-1949 Chinese society before it was abolished under the Maoist socialism in the 1950s, it was the unequal gender structure in family and marriage that suppressed desire (particularly women’s) and obstructed the emergent, affection-based courtship, rather than the state’s intervention in courtship seen in this context in the 1970s. This shows the contradictory and complex nature of Maoist socialism in the long historical trajectory of Chinese sexuality.

On the other hand, it is too simplistic to cite Foucault’s critique of the repressive hypothesis in Victorian Europe and argue that the state repression of sexuality in the Maoist period is an exaggeration.⁷ As a matter of fact, Foucault did not deny sexual repression when disputing the hypothesis of sexual repression. He explains:

[I]t is not a question of denying the existence of repression. It is one of showing that repression is always a part of a much more complex political strategy regarding sexuality. Things are not merely repressed. . . . The way in which sexuality in the nineteenth century was both repressed but also put in [the] light, underlined, analyzed through techniques like psychology and psychiatry shows very well that it was not simply a question of repression. (1997: 126)

Foucault’s critique of the repressive hypothesis in the context of Victorian sexuality aims to correct the blindness of such a hypothesis to the other side of the repressive power: the enticing and constructing of sexual desire through scientific knowledge in discourse. Moreover, Foucault’s critique of the repressive hypothesis emphasizes the role of knowledge and the mode of subjectification, two of the three dimensions of sexuality (knowledge about sex, regulations and subjectification) in his view. In my view, what Foucault did not emphasize in his critique of the repressive hypothesis – regulations, or ‘the systems of power that regulate its practice’ (Foucault, 1990: 4) – must be emphasized in any analysis of Chinese sexuality in the Maoist period. This is also a way of doing justice to Foucault’s study of the history of sexuality and its limits.⁸

The Ownership of the Body

To a large degree, the socialist state’s regulations on sexuality, just like those of the technical school, did not take the form of knowledge and science but the form of regulatory protocols with a direct effect as a brute control of the body. There

was a strong sovereign claim on individual bodies from the center of power, calling our attention back to the issue of how crucial the juridical, legal and often brutal force of sovereignty still is in shaping the body, even under modernity.⁹ The sovereign force radiating from the socialist state could be seen in the everyday language of the Maoist period. For example, ‘My life belongs to the Party (我的生命是属于党的)’ was a common slogan. Another slogan of this type is ‘My mother only gives my body, but the glory of the Party shines through my heart (母亲只生了我的身, 党的光辉照我心)’. The point is that the biological body resulting from reproduction is acknowledged, but is under the control of the heart. The heart is showered with the Party’s glory, which symbolizes a total subjection of the body to the Party, through the ambiguous category of the heart. Here the privileged position of the ‘heart’ in relation to the body ironically resembles the privileged position of the mind over the body in the dichotomous mode of reasoning in the modern West. The difference between the privileging of the heart over the body and the privileging of the mind over the body lies in the concentration of power and ownership in the hands of the ultimate authority – the Party and Chairman Mao. The whole discourse of sacrificing one’s life for the revolutionary cause, or for the realization of communism, is based on the rationale that a revolutionary does not own his or her body.

One’s ownership of the body is a rather modern notion, which falls under the bourgeois discourse of individual rights and autonomy (Tierney, 1999). Yet this ownership is a more complex and intrinsically contradictory notion than it appears at first glance. First, according to Alan Hyde, the notion of ownership of the body invokes the notion of the body as property. The body as property constructed through law may either naturalize others’ domination of it according to Aristotle, or reinforce one’s freedom and autonomy according to Locke, depending on what theoretical perspective is used (Hyde, 1997). A classical Marxist view tends to be critical of the thesis of ownership of the body as evidence of freedom and individual autonomy, because the capitalist relationship of production legalizes individual ownership of the body only to leave the worker with no choice but to sell his body ‘freely’, as the physical foundation of a laborer, to the process of capitalist production. This view presumes a better use of the body in a communist society as a foundation for fully and comprehensively developed human nature, but it turns out to be rather feeble in that it oversimplifies the relation of capitalist production as an exploitative one, particularly since the Second World War, while romanticizing the practice of socialism in its treatment of individual bodies.¹⁰ For one thing, the state’s sovereign claim on the body in the Maoist period differs from the indirect regulation of the body in capitalist society, and features a combination

of the fever of sacrifice among the masses for collectivism with direct control of the body.

Lei Feng's metaphor, that he was willing to be a little screw in the big revolutionary machine, clarifies the relationship between one's own body and the revolutionary, collective body in a most revealing way. Lei Feng was a soldier of the People's Liberation Army and was well known for his selfless behavior in performing his duty and helping others. After he died on duty in the early 1960s, he was designated by Chairman Mao and the Party as a model soldier for the revolutionary cause. His sex life was an ascetic one, apart from the dreams he had and recorded in his diaries, featuring loving feelings for Chairman Mao. A little screw, a central metaphor which symbolized his life well, is standard, expendable and replaceable. Most importantly, in practice, a screw complies with instead of disrupting uniformity. Still, care must be taken by the state to prevent any move on the part of individuals that might disrupt uniformity. Sexual desire, which, ironically, might well be provoked by sexual regulation, must be closely watched out for.

My point is that to think about repression as a way to provoke sexual desire instead of a total repression is inspiring only if we keep ourselves from losing sight of the existing sovereignty. For example, the enticing effect of sexual regulation was indeed part of the story of the stringent regulations in the technical school. I remember that in at least two meetings one of the major administrators of the school emphasized revolutionary morality and cautioned against any 'indecent physical contact' between a male student and a female student. He said: 'Now we should be more vigilant, because it is already near summer time and the weather is warm, and the female students' summer clothing is thin and transparent. The possibility of indecent behavior and even rape increases.' I remember that he said exactly the same thing several times and said it with passion. In retrospect, his rhetoric produced the same effect each time – stimulating sexual imagination among the people attending the meeting at a time (1978) when very few girls actually wore something really transparent or wore a skirt in the summer.

Ideology and Structure

Yet the aspiration of the administration to maintain uniformity in schools was not completely based on pure ideology. One reality for the administrators was the system of *biyefenpei* (job assignment 畢業分配) at graduation. The centralized system of job assignment and lack of mobility meant that a lot of power was in the hands of the school administrators. According to the practices of the

danwei (work unit 單位) system under socialism over many years, once one's job was assigned, it was very difficult to switch work units even in the same city, not to mention between two cities. It was extremely difficult to switch work units to a bigger city or to a city of higher administrative rank. It was nearly impossible to switch work units from other cities to Beijing. It was possible for someone to be switched to another work unit by a certain level of administration, but only in the name of 'the needs of the revolutionary cause', or 'the demand of the Party and the people', a permanent, total and self-evident authority. By no means could family separation (*liangdi fenju* 兩地分居) override revolutionary needs, which were the justification of the previous decisions of each assignment at graduation. The *danwei* system functions as a carrier of the collectivistic rationale. To ensure the proper functioning of *danwei*, it is necessary to reduce free movement of personnel between work units. Job assignment at graduation in educational institutions was an entrance to the work unit system. It was a big moment for every graduate because there was still some room for changing decisions for each assignee. Studies on the work unit system so far seem to have paid little attention to how the practice of the work unit, including job assignment, represented a mode of subjectification and shaped selfhood under collectivism.

In practice, people who were separated from their spouses still tried to switch work units. In many cases I knew of, it took years to switch between work units sometimes only 10 miles apart from each other. The reasons for the rigidity of the work unit system were again manifold, but one important reason was the limited power of each unit in the bureaucracy of the whole personnel administration system, combined with the strong impulse of the system to ensure uniformity. Knowing the difficulties of switching work units, the administrators discouraged students from dating because dating would lead to more special needs for *zhaogu* (special care 照顧) in the assigning of work units at graduation. We must keep in mind that dating at that time was a serious step towards marriage, unlike now when dating may mean romantic feelings or sexual pleasure which does not necessarily lead to marriage, or is not associated with the motivation to get married at all. Therefore, there would be a tension between the administrators' human sympathy toward any possible separation and the room available for them to accommodate these 'special' requests.¹¹

As a result, the tendency to impose strong regulations on dating and sexuality did not just stem from moral concerns, such as avoiding any distraction from one's revolutionary work. Nor did the tendency to impose regulations on dating only result from ideological concerns, such as the idea that one should subject one's emotions (including one's need to date and have a family) to one's passion

and enthusiasm for the revolutionary cause. The regulations on dating and sexuality were also based on the structural limitations of the socialist work system. The three types of concerns – moral, ideological and structural – constituted an order for the body and sexuality in this school in the late 1970s and even in many colleges in the 1980s. This order, however, was often put to the test in the confrontation between the administration and the student. Behind some administrators' rigidity in stopping any dating as a disruption to the moral, ideological and structural order was, surprisingly, a concern about being put in a position where they would have to *bangda yuanyang* (beat apart 'the couple of mandarin ducks', a metaphor for an affectionate couple 棒打鴛鴦), an immoral thing to do according to many local folk traditions.

Beyond the 'Return of the Expunged'

This repressive mechanism did not prevent surprises, nor did it remain unchanged. Mr Gu and Ms Li started dating in 1978, a year which still belonged to the Maoist period without Mao. However, many significant events happened both in the city and around the country during that year. Nationwide, the momentum of the political struggle between those who stuck to Maoist socialism and those who wanted to reform, particularly in the economic domain, began to shift in favor of the reformers. Officially post-Mao reform began in the third plenum of the twelfth Congress of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in late 1978 when Deng Xiaoping, who later became the general architect of the reform, was vindicated and resumed power. A strong mood of reflecting on the past 10 years of Cultural Revolution in order to initiate changes reached new heights when some radicals started to openly criticize Mao. A big character poster (*dazibao* 大字報) was posted in downtown Chongqing, voicing criticism of Mao publicly for the first time to many people. In social life, one after another, the prohibitions against old movies and foreign movies in the Cultural Revolution period were lifted. A debate triggered by the new argument that one should care about oneself rather than just the revolutionary collectivity became heated in a popular youth magazine, signaling a fresh voice of individualism. What was particularly relevant to the changing social milieu was that in late 1978 many students in the technical school had their ears glued to their radios listening to *The Place of Love* by Liu Xinwu, a novella reading program on the radio justifying the individual space for love.

The appeal of the novel was enormous. A commentary states:

When the first novella touching on love [in the new era] – *The Place of Love* by Liu Xinwu – was published, the readers competed with each other in reading it and recommending and

passing it on to others. The extent of excitement and joy – because the Chinese can face love – was beyond the imagination of those youths today who wander about in the wood showered in moonlight after just coming off the disco dancing hall. (Chen, 1991)

The author of the commentary is from Sichuan and was attending Southwest Normal College in Chongqing when Liu's novel was published. In an interview, a publisher recalled an era when there were not many books available. He said:

That year [1978], we were listening to radio, which was broadcasting Liu Xinwu's *The Place of Love*, while lining up in the dining hall to get our meals. Everyone was familiar with it. No other books were available, people throughout the nation were reading the same book and listening to the same story. (Hou, 2003)

Some exaggeration in his last sentence aside, his memory of the sensation caused by the novella resonated with many people's memories. Liu Xinwu later received criticisms from literary critics for the novel's lack of sophisticated esthetic taste, compared to Zhang Jie's *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, which came out later. In retrospect, Liu Xinwu agreed:

The Place of Love is very much a *gainianhua* [centered around concepts with little skill of literary representation 概念化] and artificial work. The only significance of this work is to print out the two words *aiqing* [love 愛情] in open publications. When *October* [a literary magazine] was first published, we had a consensus that we must have a work dealing with love in our first issue and the two words *aiqing* must appear on the title. It would be extremely difficult for today's young people to understand our eagerness then. That was because during the Cultural Revolution all literary representations were without anything on love, and even the normal relationship between husband and wife could not be presented! . . . A sent-down youth in a rural area wrote to me after he had listened to the broadcasting of the novella. He said that one day while walking back home after hours, he suddenly heard the two words *aiqing* [love] from the loudspeaker of the commune's broadcasting station. What immediately came to mind was: A coup is happening in China! (Deng, 1998)

This novella was a short one. It was on the air for half an hour at a fixed time (12.30 pm in this case) every day and lasted less than a week. The freshness of the theme – the place of love in life – in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution immediately attracted many students on campus to such a degree that many could not wait for the next section. In the story, Meng Xiaoyu, a 25-year-old female worker, falls in love with Lu Lichun, a chef in a restaurant in 1978 Beijing. They meet each other by accident and then get to know each other better. Good feelings develop between them to the point where Meng Xiaoyu starts to feel the need to justify her special feeling – love – toward Lu Lichun as necessary, even for revolutionaries. That there is a need to justify this feeling as a proper one reveals serious constraints on the development of such a feeling. There are three types of constraints revealed in the novel. The first is an instinct of 'self-censorship' on falling in love at her age. Meng recalls how she feels her heart-rate

increase and her head grow hot as she reads the description of the romantic relationship between Pavel, a revolutionary, and Tanya, a girl from a bourgeois family, and between him and Rita, another revolutionary, in the novella *How Steel is Tempered*, a revolutionary Soviet Union novella by Ostrovsky (1974). Meng feels so bad about the description of love, even between the two revolutionaries, that when reading it she feels that she is ‘committing a crime’. Meng Xiaoyu articulates a common feeling among many of her generation. *How Steel is Tempered* was one of the few works I read during the Cultural Revolution that has scenes of romantic relationships and an implicit description of sex. I remember exactly the same feeling of ‘committing a crime’ when reading the pages describing the romantic relationship as Meng Xiaoyu. Where does this feeling of committing a crime come from?

Here comes the second constraint on the feeling of love one could develop. Meng Xiaoyu attributes her own self-censorship about any feeling of love to the lack of the language of love in the revolutionary discourse, a discourse of revolutionary asceticism in the early and mid-1970s. She cites a 1974 movie *The Heated Era* (*huohong de niandai* 火紅的年代) as an example of this discourse. In that movie the hero does not have any life of romance or even marriage. She exclaims, ‘Love does not seem to have a place in the lives of revolutionaries!’

The third constraint is a whole mechanism of soft regulations through which the discourse of revolutionary asceticism operates. For example, Wei Shifu, the manager of the workshop and Meng Xiaoyu’s superior, not only oversees her work but also is responsible for his subordinates’ proper behavior with regard to sex and reproduction. He monitors any changes in Meng Xiaoyu, even including unusual letters she receives and the subsequent changes in her behavior. His agenda is to enforce late marriage and late reproduction. Meng Xiaoyu is 25 years old, which, under the unofficial regulatory norm, is still too young an age for dating. At the same time, Yamei, another subordinate and female worker under Wei Shifu, is 28 and is therefore eligible to date. Playing a role of go-between is another way to monitor the behavior and relationships of subordinates in order to enforce a moral order. As a representative of the state authority and the management of the factory, he is also senior in rank and a master in skill in the workshop, exemplifying the administrative regulation of marriage and dating that is well integrated in the personal, generational and professional hierarchy.

What was appealing to the technical school students in the radio program, though, was the point of departure for the forming of the subjectivity of ‘love’, a feeling and sentiment oriented toward another person instead of a collective cause. This is a moment of the emergence of what Judith Farquhar called ‘private selves – emotional, memorious, possess[ing] needs and idiosyncratic experiences

... as the demands of the collective began to recede' in her reading of *Love Must Not Be Forgotten* (2002: 190). Meng Xiaoyu tries to justify her feeling of love by questioning the discourse of revolutionary asceticism of the Cultural Revolution on the one hand, and by presenting the purity of a love immune to concerns about social status on the other. What is strikingly similar in Meng Xiaoyu's story, in Liu Xinwu's novel and in the story in the technical school is that sexual desire was not the basis for resistance to repression. Instead, love was given as central a place then as sexual desire is now.

Here the word 'love' represents a politics that is different from that of 'sexuality'. It focuses on emotional intimacy rather than sexual desire in this context. When the two stories intersected – when the listeners of Meng Xiaoyu's story in the novel were witnessing the unfolding of Mr Gu and Ms Li's saga of love and punishment – the notion of sexual desire and pleasure had not yet taken a central position in the emerging post-Mao subjectivity. The justification of love was couched in a language of *boluan fanzheng* (curb the chaos and resume order 撥亂反正), an official language that portrayed the 17 years of socialism prior to the Cultural Revolution as a normal and good time to which the current society under reform should return. Therefore, in retrospect, in students' consciousness what led to the conceptualization of this event was more a matter of repression of 'love', so to speak, than a matter of repression of sexual desire. In other words, sexuality is a culturally specific notion whose content is contingent on the intersections of historical forces within and outside the body. So is the notion of sexual repression.

Similarly, when Mr Gu and Ms Li were resisting the regulation on dating, the primary language they used to justify dating was *aiqing* (love) instead of *xingyu* (sexual desire 性欲) and *xingyuyue* (sexual pleasure 性愉悅).¹² After the Cultural Revolution, which was represented as an extreme situation of the Maoist period in the novel, the rebuilding of love discourses was 'a return of the expunged' of the Cultural Revolution. The discourse of romantic love was expunged during the Cultural Revolution, either for the sake of solidifying the sentiment of revolutionary collectivism or for the sake of being compatible with the political reality of class struggle. Yet this return of the expunged after the end of the Cultural Revolution ironically encountered the other impulse of official forces, which was the impulse for order. It might be the case that the impulse for order after 10 years of chaos manifest in very stringent control of the pace, form and content of life, including dating on campus, came into conflict with the forces such as romantic dating which began to be encouraged in literary representations but created uncertainties in terms of order.

However, 'the return of the expunged' is not an accurate description of what

happened in the new era, in that to assume a golden age before the Cultural Revolution is problematic. It obscures the historical continuity of the Maoist period from the pre-Cultural Revolution era to the Cultural Revolution era on the one hand, and misconceives the fundamental changes in the direction in which the society would move after the Cultural Revolution on the other. Evidence for continuity between the pre-Cultural Revolution and the Cultural Revolution eras includes factors such as the work unit system and the ethos of collectivism, which partly account for the prohibition of dating in the most extreme Maoist period, originated in the era prior to the Cultural Revolution. Also, class struggles had already made sex life a sensitive social space where 'revolutionary sentiment' took priority over 'love'. It is not that the word love (*ai* 愛) completely disappeared from discourse. Instead, the word 'love' was ostensibly tied to the official discourse of class struggle. The following two slogans were very popular in the Maoist period, particularly during the Cultural Revolution: 'There is no love without reason in the world; nor there is hatred without reason' (世界上沒有無緣無故的愛，也沒有無緣無故的恨); 'Whether or not one is close to another person depends on class' (*qinbuqin jiejifen* 親不親，階級分). The second slogan illustrates the reason for love and hatred – it all depends on which class one belongs to, and, first of all, depends on whether one belongs to a revolutionary class or the enemy class. To be sure, *ai* (愛 love) in the first slogan does not necessarily refer to romantic love (*aiqing* 愛情), but the class-centered discourse about the relationship did overshadow and construct the discourse of *tanlianai* (談戀愛 a kind of dating), encouraging the consciousness of class struggle in choosing someone with whom to develop a relationship that would move toward marriage.

However, at the time the event was unfolding, the discourse of desire was emerging. My impression of Mr Gu shows the rising interest in bringing the discourse of desire into the realm otherwise dominated by the discourse of love. Mr Gu had also been exposed to the knowledge of the biological body, in that he grew up in a family of teachers of a professional pharmaceutical school. He was most comfortable talking about the body in the dormitory room. He complained that the regulation was against 'normal physiological needs'. Instead of only referring to the biological, the phrase 'normal physiological needs' has a strong political implication of justifying *xingyu* (sexual desire), an element that gradually started to be included in the discourse of love.

That 'normal physiological needs' became a way to talk about sexual desire and to justify any bodily contact between lovers at the time was significant.¹³ Mr Gu recalled that he fell in love with Ms Li at a sports event of the technical school in which they both were track runners. In one race event, Ms Li was trying to

daipao (run outside the track in parallel to the runner inside the track) in order to cheer Mr Gu, who was racing hard toward the finish line. During the break between races, she bought him an ice bar before they had really talked to each other. A good feeling (*haogan* 好感) toward her, a feeling he considered primarily one of love, emerged from this encounter. Mr Gu recalled that, during evening studies, he defied the punishment imposed by the administration by deliberately coming to Ms Li's classroom. The classmate who sat next to Ms Li would cooperate with them by leaving the seat so that Mr Gu could sit next to Ms Li. For Mr Gu and Ms Li, normal physiological needs at that time did not indicate sexual intercourse. Instead, it addressed the desire to get closer to the body of the lover, either by touching hands or kissing. Many men at his age recalled how, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, their first touch of the female body or kissing a girl was such a thrilling experience of life. In retrospect, Mr Gu and Ms Li's 'love and punishment' was a topic of much discussion on the campus. But all the discussions were more about their dating relation than about the possible sexual intercourse between them, because having sex during dating was unthinkable in that context. At that time, six to eight students shared four bunk beds in one bedroom. Mr Gu and Ms Li often went out on a date and came back late. Contrary to a common assumption now that they might have sex on those dates, the gossip about them then was not centered around sex. When I talked with Mr Gu during my 2000 fieldwork, Mr Gu told me that he had resisted the regulation by continuing to date Ms Li even after he had been put on probation. Yet, according to him, they had not had sex until after they graduated. However, a classmate of ours said in 2000 that he thought they had had sex. According to this classmate, one night they could not get into the dormitory building when they came back late, because the door was locked; they went to a cave on a nearby hill and spent the night there.

Looking back, what seems to matter more is not the 'truth' concerning whether they had sex, but the informal discourse (rumors, hints and allegories, etc.) built around their intimate relationship, to which the story of sexual repression was so central that it is an integral part of the memory of school life in those days. Yet, the lack of talk about their having sex, even at the peak of their relationship, indicates that 'sexuality' is indeed a historically specific phenomenon whose articulation varies from context to context. The discourse that combined revolutionary love and 'normal physiological needs' became the proper expression of sexuality at that time, in contrast to the sexual desire and pleasure-centered discourses some 20 years later in consumer society. In other words, what was repressed might not be the same 'sexual desire' as seen in today's regime of sexual desire (seeing prostitutes, having sexual

pleasure-centered entertainment, taking adventures in erotica, watching pornography, etc.), but a historically specific pleasure or desire. Pleasure and desire in this context were not sexual intercourse-centered, but a sentiment of intimacy, curiosity about the body and a challenge to the sovereign claim on the body.

In this context, by the time of graduation in 1979, in my memory, quite a few students had started to date openly on campus. Among this group of students dating was still discouraged in 1979, but it no longer led to explicit punishment.

Desire as an Assemblage

Repression encountered resistance as in the case of Mr Gu and Ms Li, and provoked sexual desire, or in this context, ‘sexual curiosity’ in the following case. One evening, about the time that Mr Gu and Ms Li were put on probation in 1978, I walked into a bedroom on the other side of the hallway in the dormitory building, looking for someone to chat with. I was shocked by what I saw: with the light off, the eight male room-mates were all lying on their stomachs in their beds, looking out of the window. Following their gaze, I saw female students undressing themselves through one of the windows of the other building – the female student dormitory – across the path between the two dormitory buildings. As they were undressing the exposed parts of the female bodies could be barely seen in the dim light before the lights went off, but the curiosity evident in the dark in this building was overwhelming. Similarly, a scandal occurred a couple of years later. A male graduate of the same school was caught hiding himself on the ceiling of a large female shower room, peeping at the naked female bodies in the shower. He became so exhausted on the ceiling in the hot steam that he dropped to the ground, to his great embarrassment.

These two events can be easily classified as voyeuristic. Yet, in the intersection of the flows of different events – the prohibition on dating, the punishment of the two students and the broadcasting of the novel *The Place of Love* – it is not difficult to discern the relationship between repression and voyeurism, between prohibition and resistance, between the sublimation of desire into study for the official revolutionary cause and the intensification of unauthorized feelings as seen in the peeping incident, and, in the final analysis, between the body invisible due to repression and the body that was made visible by voyeuristic means.

In psychiatric terms, voyeurism is a deviation, even though voyeurs are not necessarily sexually deprived. In the cases here, I detect a very clear sense of venturing into what I would call ‘mild defiance’ of the state apparatus of repression, and ‘sexual curiosity’, or curiosity about the sexual body. If the invisibility

of the body in public discourse and in the realm of behavior made the body unavailable, the search for the visible body took a route outside the realm of control and also outside normality.

If, historically, what happened in the school was more than ‘a return of the expunged’, then, psychoanalytically, does the search for the visible body in the two ‘deviant’ cases exemplify the Freudian thesis of the ‘return of the repressed’? In Freudian analysis, ‘the return of the repressed’ signifies a permanent tendency of the content of the unconscious to re-emerge in the conscious. Seen in this light, neurotic symptoms such as voyeurism can be explained as a return of what has been repressed, namely, libido. Here it is helpful to emphasize the differences between ‘psychic repression’ and ‘social repression’. Psychic repression addresses the subject’s attempt to repel the thoughts, images and memories that arise out of instinctual impulses. It involves the operation of id, ego and superego in the relationship between the unconscious and the conscious, and in the mythologized family structure of the Oedipus complex. The result of such repression, according to Freud, includes three ‘vicissitudes’ – total suppression, sublimation, and change into anxiety or neurotic symptoms. In contrast, social repression addresses the regulation of desire, particularly sexual desire, by different forces, including social and economic determinants, such as state regulation. In the two cases discussed above, we are dealing more with social repression than psychic repression, or more accurately, we are dealing with an intersection of psychic repression and social repression. In the framework of Freudian psychoanalysis, both the administration as a regulatory force of the social structure and the psychic operation of self-censorship focused on the object – libido.

Libido is probably one of the psychoanalytical notions whose definition has not been completely agreed upon. For Freud, libido overlaps with a whole set of terms he used to delineate the content of the unconscious – instinctual impulse, instinct, psychic energy, interest, drive, wish, etc. It can be roughly understood as the energy of sexual instinct, which represents a force exerting pressure. Libido or similar notions resides in the mental dimension of the subject, but has biological qualities that were not clear to Freud. Leaving aside how the findings concerning hormones in biology since Freud’s time would contribute to our understanding of the biological dimension of libido, I emphasize here how the relationship between the notion of libido in the psychoanalytical tradition and the notion of desire within and outside the psychoanalytical tradition shed light on repression in the context discussed above.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, libido is central to the subjective essence of desire (1983: 333). The connotation of the inner instinctive impulse in the notion of libido plays an important role in defining the operation of

psychoanalytic dynamics. ‘The return of the repressed’ from the perspective of the Freudian subject limits us to only seeing the event as psychic repression. What was repressed is a permanent source of agitation – the energy of sexual instinct – that challenges the censors of the unconscious. In this view, the confrontation between the student lovers and the school administration would be reduced to a psychic drama, in which the administration is only an exterior version of the censor in the psychic set-up. In contrast, if we see this event in light of the Lacanian notion of desire, sexual libido is already more than an instinctual impulse. It is a consequence of the constant semiotic recuperation of the permanent lack, which is the impossibility of the satisfaction of desire itself. Desire stands out as being central to defining the Lacanian subject, accounted for fully neither by having needs as well as demands, nor by being responsive to the energy of sexual instinct. Desire becomes central to the grammar of the unconscious. The return of the repressed in this event would be understood more as a persistent progression of seeking recognition for the subject. It opens up the possibility of understanding the drama as a constant process of reproducing desire itself in desiring. The Lacanian notion of desire opens a path toward a less endogenous perspective on repression than that of Freudian psychoanalysis.

Pushing this reading one step further, I want to evoke the Deleuzian notion of desire, which he and Guattari state as having libido as its subjective essence. Yet here libido is neither only a mental event nor only biological drive, but something that ‘results from a highly developed, engineered setup rich in interaction’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 215). Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that what defines libido as sexuality is the association of the two modes of operation, mechanical and electrical, in a sequence with two poles, molar and molecular. This is, in my view, their way – continuing from Reich’s efforts to overcome the divide between mechanism and vitalism – of avoiding the simplistic connotation of libido only as instinctual impulse in the Oedipus complex (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983: 291).

As dynamic and interactive as it is, desire, therefore, always constructs an assemblage while going into an assemblage itself. ‘Desire is established and constructs in an assemblage always putting several factors into play’ (Deleuze and Parnet, 1996).¹⁴ Thus, the relationship desire has with an assemblage is significant in that the relationship overcomes the divide between the interior and the exterior, enabling an analysis of the intersection of psychic repression and social repression. It enables the unconscious to constitute the large production and reproduction of social relations, instead of being a theater of repression and resistance. In this framework, desire moves in several currents that cross the boundary between interior and exterior: prohibition in the different set-ups

(structural, ideological and moral) stirred up curiosity about the body; voyeurism as an erotic action became part of the politics of conscious defiance of the ascetic order in the school; curiosity about the body was encouraged by the open resistance of the dating students. The influx of desire now featured strongly an affirmation of life. Seen in this light, voyeurism is not simply a return in the voyeur of the repressed in the collectivity; nor is it simply the return in the voyeur of his desire that was previously obstructed. Voyeurism became part of the assemblage that included specific postures (peeping, for example), attitudes (resistance, for example), perceptions (normal biological needs, for example) and expectations (love, for example) all at the same time in the search for the visible body on the one hand, and the historical moment of constructing a new subject position on the other hand. Overall, the assemblage stood as a simultaneous construction of desire through a variety of actions in defiance to the set-ups that 'despised the body' and 'left it out [of] the account . . . treated it as an enemy' (Nietzsche, 1968: 131).

Furthermore, instead of just being repressive, the school and the Youth League had tried hard to *zhengmian yindao* (guide conduct in a positive direction 正面引導) through a variety of means, including political or academic rewards for those who did well in their studies. As a long-term reward, those who obeyed would be assigned to a good work unit at graduation. Concentrating on revolutionary work or studies resembles sublimation of desire in psychoanalytical terms, but complete sublimation is not possible for the individual, according to Lacan (1992: 91). Here, again, psychoanalysis cannot tell the whole story. What motivated many to obey was the reward offered by the structure, whether or not obedience was a result of sublimation. The effect of the prohibition varied from person to person, contingent on the location of one's subjectivity that was emerging in the context – to be a fighter, an obedient follower of rule, a believer in revolutionary asceticism or a voyeur. Sexual repression as mode of subjectification produces different subjects. More accurately, the flow of desire in the assemblage formed various subject positions precisely at the point where the flow was being checked, while tending to erase the differences among the subject positions.

What was most problematic in the voyeuristic behavior was the gender imbalance. The search for the visible body was primarily a male affair. Females' bodies might be violated by the male gaze. Moreover, a female would risk being more stigmatized and losing more than a male if she did the same thing for the same reason and was caught doing it. *Nuliunang* (a female indecent person 女流氓) would be considered more scandalous and stigmatized. In other words, even the limited space carved out for resistance to sexual repression was a male-centered one.

In contrast to all those ‘voyeurs’ in the dark, Mr Gu and Ms Li became, among sympathetic students and even teachers, heroic figures of faithful lovers defying power. They chose to resist subjectification without becoming ‘voyeurs’ in the dark. Their unyielding attitude, particularly Mr Gu’s, made them prophets of the profound transformation in sexuality that has occurred since then: the justification of the use of the body, not only for intimacy and love but also for sexual pleasure. In the context of the technical school, the prohibition against dating aimed to prevent any erotic contact between bodies, and made the unavailable erotic nude female body a key signifier of the repressed experience, which was only made visible by voyeurism. Here I refer to the unavailability of the erotic naked body as ‘the body invisible’, a phrase borrowed from John Hay’s discussion of the phenomenon of ‘the lack of the nude’ in ancient Chinese art representations from the perspective of Western art tradition (Hay, 1994).¹⁵ My focus is not on the esthetics of the body invisible in Chinese art tradition (i.e. dispersed nakedness, without the Western focus on the nude), but on the phenomenon of sexual repression that blocked the path toward various forms of eroticism, including dating relationships, except the nakedness of the nude made visible by deviant behaviors of voyeurism. The body invisible became the metaphor for the specific milieu of sexual repression.

As seen in the efforts to break out of the behavioral norms of the body invisible, there were many similar interesting spaces in the search for the body visible during the Cultural Revolution in the Maoist period, even in the more tightly controlled urban space. During the Cultural Revolution (particularly in the early 1970s), when virtually no foreign movies were shown to the public, two early movies from the Soviet Union were shown again and again – one was *Lenin in October*, the other was *Lenin in 1918*. I remember that many of my male peers liked to watch *Lenin in 1918* repeatedly for one reason among others: It had a scene of the performance of the ballet *Swan Lake*. In this scene – which probably lasted less than one minute – one could see the female ballet dancers in their tight white swan costumes and, most importantly, their bodies. The curve of the body and the long legs seen in this movie represented for many their first experience of seeing a female body that closely resembled the visible naked body. A miraculous niche for this type of eroticism, in what was considered a movie full of revolutionary heroism, was carved out and preserved by the gaze. An unofficial gaze on the body and an unofficial reading of this fixed transcript escaped the state censorship of the meanings in the movie and in the ballet itself. Although it was nothing compared to the saturation of images of female bodies in today’s consumer culture, that niche was as enormous a symbol of the search for the body visible as one could imagine at that time. It created room for a different

sense of the body, the sense of the body visible. That the scene from *Swan Lake* became a small niche for the body visible indicates the apogee of the purging of the body during the Cultural Revolution. An international perspective, via the genre of early revolutionary foreign films (later including films from Romania, Albania, North Korea and North Vietnam), even at a time of total isolation from Western countries during the Cultural Revolution, preceded the transnational era of reform and opening to the outside in the 1980s and 1990s.

The phenomenon of 'the body invisible' in practice in the Maoist period was less an esthetics than a phenomenon of the prevalence of the repression of sexual desire in the specific contexts I discussed. Chinese scholar Dai Jinhua mentions how impressed she was, during her visit to an American university campus in the mid-1990s, by her American academic friends' appreciative reading of the ballet *The Red Detachment of Women* (*hongseniangzijun* 紅色娘子軍), one of the eight revolutionary model shows of the Cultural Revolution. The revolutionary and somehow masculine female body in this Chinese ballet was excitingly fresh to the eyes of her American friends, who were used to the bourgeois genre of ballet with its clearly dichotomized gendered bodies (Dai, 1999). This reading in the context of advanced feminism in the US in the 1990s, particularly within the debate concerning gender and sex (for example, the performativity of gender and sex against the oppression of essentialism), was stimulating to me. Yet, in the context of the sexual repression during the Cultural Revolution, art representations (revolutionary paintings, the eight revolutionary model Beijing operas or ballets, etc.) not only inherited the tradition of the body invisible from ancient arts, but also intentionally bracketed out the sex lives of the characters, transforming the esthetics of the body invisible into a moral code of hostility toward individual desire. This moral code became an integral part of Maoist collectivism, which the whole system had to defend.

Conclusion

Through the example of sexual repression in the late 1970s, I argue that sexual repression as part of sexuality is a historically specific phenomenon in that sexual repression enforced by the socialist state was accounted for by the forces – moral, ideological and structural – converging on the site of the body. The mechanism of repression found expression in the idea of the sovereign ownership of the body by the state, and the structural need to control the flow of desire in order to maintain the stability of the danwei system. The ethos of collectivism was accordingly built into the structure and the use of the body. Repression is seen as producing the effect of an emerging discourse of desire out of the return of

the discourse of love, forming the assemblage of sexual desire and sexuality at the beginning of the great transformation from the collective ethos of asceticism in the Maoist period to the ethos of desire for the body in post-socialism.

Notes

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1. I did my fieldwork on *nanke* (men's medicine), interviewing patients diagnosed with impotence or related diseases. I looked at the interrelation between social transformation and bodily transformation during the 1980s and 1990s.

2. See Yan (2003), Hershatter (1996), Larson (1999), etc. Honig (2003) offers the most comprehensive and nuanced review of such a complexity.

3. I define sexuality in this context as heterosexual behaviors, as well as discursivity that constructs behaviors, focusing on sexual desire rather than reproduction. As I will discuss later, sexual behaviors and the discursivity that constructs them already implicate sexual regulation, primarily by the state, as an integral part of sexuality. Sexual regulation, in turn, can take various forms, from laws to administrative protocols. Likewise, sexual behaviors are broadly conceived, including sexual fantasies. Drawing on recent scholarship of gender and sexuality studies, I distance myself from the narrow sexologically oriented notion of sexuality. Also, I want to emphasize that sexuality is a historical notion, in that it emerged in modern times, and has had a complex relationship with various traditions of older sexual cultures, such as those of the ancient Greeks, India and China, and the construction of colonial desire in various locations. This article locates sexuality on the eve of epochal changes of socialism in the reform period, in a context in which the use of the body and sex life was an integral component of the state's affairs and collective morality.

4. Chongqing became the fourth autonomous city (behind Beijing, Shanghai and Tianjin) in 1997, and is no longer part of Sichuan Province.

5. These two students were among those who were admitted to the technical school in the first half of 1977, not long after the Cultural Revolution had officially ended. It was not until the second half of 1977 that all institutions of higher education, such as universities and colleges, restored their admissions systems to ones based on the scores of annual nationwide examinations. Like the majority of students in that school, these two students were, at the time of their admission, older than the average high school graduate, as they had waited a couple of years for an opportunity to continue their education beyond high school. Unlike the prohibition against dating among younger students in many junior high or high schools, even in present-day post-Mao consumer society, the prohibition against dating in this school at that time absolutely had to do with a practice unique to the ethos of Maoist socialism.

6. The official announcement of their probation, however, emphasized their violation of the rule

of evening self-study session (*wanzixi*) attendance, and their rejection of criticism from the leaders of the Party branch.

7. In fact Foucault never denied that there was sexual repression. He made a clear statement, 'We must therefore abandon the hypothesis that *modern industrial societies* ushered in an age of *increased* sexual repression' (1990: 49, emphases mine). He defined clearly the domain of discussion in 'modern industrial societies' and argued against the thesis that there was 'increased' sexual repression.

8. It is helpful here to make a distinction between psychic repression and social repression as Deleuze and Guattari (1983) do. Freud's discussion of repression falls into the former category whereas what Foucault refers to as repression is more the latter. Of course there is no sharp line between the two. For example, Freud's thesis of the general tendency of repression in civilization is about how psychic repression is an internalization of social repression. So, when Foucault discusses the system of power that regulates, he refers to the institutional, judicial and discursive power under modernity (see Foucault, 1990: 25–6).

9. Pheng Cheah and Elizabeth Grosz (1996) discuss law as a constitutive force of the body and help to highlight this less developed domain in the discussion of the construction of the body. Even though their discussion of law as ontological violence focuses on the Western juridical tradition, it helps shed light on the body under sovereign power in the form of the regulatory protocols enacted in the context of the Maoist period. Recent discussions of sovereignty constitute not a disengagement from, nor a negation of Foucault, but a re-engagement with the juridical, legal and brutal forces of sovereignty, even under modernity, conditioning Foucault's discussion of flexible power, biopolitics and governmentality. These discussions do not cancel out Foucault, but enrich his brilliant, unconventional views on the order of things under modernity (see, for example, Agamben, 1998; Mbembe, 2003). The increasing interest in the study of violence and trauma in anthropology, and the revival of interest in Hannah Arendt, are two examples of this.

10. Marx did not develop any explicit theory about the body or any notion of the body. In my view this is because the body was not as important as a unit of analysis of capitalist relations of production at his time as the notion of labor. Being a laborer is a result of alienation under capitalism, which deprives the worker of his opportunity to fully develop his human nature. Therefore the notion of the ownership of the body, to Marx, would be primarily about the ownership of the laborer in the concrete sense, and the ownership of labor in the abstract sense. The weakness of this labor-centered notion of the ownership of the body, according to Foucault, is that it misses the body techniques under modernity that bring about the existence of labor. The notion of the body entails a more careful examination of time and space, out of which labor is produced (Foucault, 2000: 86). On the other hand, those who think that the Foucauldian view of the body misses out the dimension of political economy emphasize the centrality of labor to the body (Turner, 1994). Taking the two views into consideration, the school in this context aimed to produce skilled laborers through bodily techniques as well as direct control.

11. This tension has to do with the power of the Chinese state in penetrating the social structure at a very basic level, namely, that of the family, on the one hand, and the persistence of a family structure built upon the habit of family members (particularly husband and wife) being together to ensure reproduction on the other. The impulse for family members to stay together, which can be easily identified as an essential component of the family structure in many societies as a form of social ties, was also a cultural construction. For example, in imperial China as in many other places, the recruitment of soldiers for wars often caused a long separation of husbands from their wives. The sovereignty of the state overrides the impulse of family members to stay together. This is still true in modern times, but systems for reducing such separations have been built up in many societies. This tradition of the sovereign was definitely reinvented under the Chinese socialist state, to contribute to the collectivization of civic life in the form of the *danwei* system under the sovereignty of the Chinese socialist state. The impulse to get together for married couples could not override the 'revolutionary

need for collectivism', but in practice physical separation was still an issue that could be raised for *zuzhi zhaogou* (組織照顧 the special care given by the danwei administration) and might be resolved, after a long wait in some cases. Often, though, those who raised this issue risked being considered 'too individualistic' and 'putting themselves above the revolutionary cause'. Therefore, caught in this tension, or, more accurately, exemplifying this tension, administrators in the context of the school might well minimize the amount of 'special needs' among dating students by preventing dating in the first place, rather than dealing with the special needs that were its consequence.

12. Giving an overview of the historical changes of the vocabulary defining romantic and/or sexual relationships in Chinese, even just in the 20th century, including both vernacular expressions and literary representations, is beyond the capacity of this article. See Larson (1998) and Lee (2002) for a systematic analysis in the realm of literary representation. Some recent explorations of practice and vernacular expressions of love (*ai*) emphasize the increasing openness as well as the diversity of those expressions (Farrer, 2002; Jankowiak, 1995; Yan, 2003). My intention is to explore how the linguistic relationship between love (*ai*) and desire (*yu*) reflects the complex relationship between romantic passion and sexual desire at the specific moment.

13. In my memory the phrase 'normal biological needs' had appeared in official conversations (e.g. a conversation between a cadre and his subordinates, and even between parents and their children) about the necessity of marriage and was a euphemism for the sexual life of a couple. But spoken by Mr Gu, this phrase did not sound like a euphemism, but a provocation and an affirmation of his urge not only to continue the romance but also to move towards the point where the lovers could satisfy their bodily needs.

14. Assemblage is an important notion in Deleuze. It is part of the form a schizoanalytic takes in carrying out the spirit of deterritorialization, a way to understand capitalism and the economy of desire. It is an aggregate, suitable for the analysis of flows (capital, human, desire, etc.) that defy the divide between interior and exterior, between human agency and nature. On one occasion, Deleuze defines the assemblage as consisting of four characteristics – the state of things, a kind of style, the creating of territories and deterritorialization (Deleuze and Parnet, 1996).

15. Hay makes a distinction between the Western and the Chinese art tradition by making a distinction between the nude and nakedness. In Western art representation, the nude – the anatomical, individual body – is presented, whereas in the Chinese tradition, even when there is nakedness (people with no clothing) in some representations, there is no nude, because what is presented is dispersed, often less dichotomized (female vs. male) bodies. Hay's point is that this distinction may have to do with different ways the self is formed, the interior and exterior are differentiated, and, above all, bodies are situated in the cosmological universe. To him, the absence of the visible, naked body is not necessarily an inadequacy, because this esthetic reflects a different ontology of the body and its relationship with the universe. The only comment he makes with some political and ethical overtone is that the naked body in art representation (as only one example of the uncoded body) is considered less cultural and even not yet 'Chinese'. I wonder if more can be said about the social and historical construction of this esthetic tradition concerning the body in Chinese art history.

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