

Beyond Hookups: Gender and Queer Politics of Dating Apps in Urban China

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Roadmap

- Background of the study
- Theoretical approach
- “Networked sexual publics”
- Three defining features of networked sexual publics
- Q&A

Two months ago, I saw two of my female friends swiping with their fingers on their phones and uploading their selfies. I thought it was very interesting, because on apps like QQ and WeChat many people do not use their real photos. I am not interested in people who do not post real photos because you cannot tell what they look like or how old they are. But on this app, the photos look real and people mention their hobbies and interests. My female friends told me that their friend had found a boyfriend through this app. Well, I thought it is fun to upload photos, so I downloaded the app.

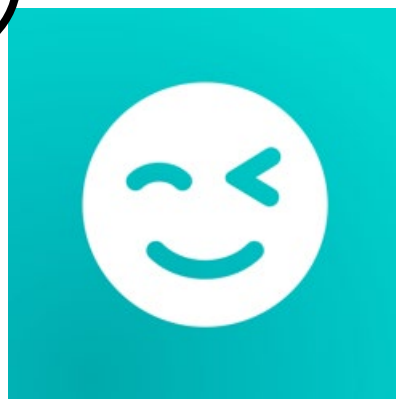
— Nancy, female, straight, 27 years old



Tantan 探探



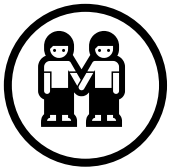
Momo 陌陌



Rela 熱拉



Lesdo



Blued



Aloha

“交友程式” (friend-making apps)
“交友軟體” (friend-making software)
“約炮神器” (a magical tool for hookups)
“social apps”
“hookup apps”
“location-aware dating apps”
“geosocial networking apps”
“dating apps”

I prefer using Tantan to make friends. Although many Tantan users are not there for friends, but for, you know, I can at least upload my photos there and get a few “likes.” (*Sam: How many matches do you have so far?*) More than a hundred, but I deleted a third of them.

Because [Tantan] has a list of pre-selected keywords, for example, “約炮 (hook up),” the system will remind you to report [harassment]. That is to say, I think the original intention of this app’s design is good....

I am a person who judges others based on their face. Because if you don’t understand someone’s mind, you definitely start with their appearance. If their appearance is okay, then I will want to know more about them.... When my female friends looked at the app, they kept saying, “He is so handsome.” I thought, “Wow, it is true. There are many good-looking men on this app.”

I think I like women too.

Critical approach

- “the personal is political”
- Michel Foucault (1978m p. 94) “relations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations), but are immanent in the latter”
- Langdon Winner (1980): Artifacts have politics
- Thus, “gender and queer politics”

Puzzles

- What roles do dating apps play in shaping gender and queer politics?
- What does a “dating app” mean for its users?
- How do these apps bind their users into new forms of publics?

Sexual orientation and gender	Age range	Relationship status
Straight women (<i>n</i> = 19)	21–38	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 single (in which 2 have divorced) • 3 married • 2 in a dating relationship • 1 in an open relationship
Straight men (<i>n</i> = 16)	19–37	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 single (in which 2 have divorced) • 5 in a dating relationship • 3 married
Queer men (<i>n</i> = 19)	19–28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 single • 3 in a dating relationship
Queer women (<i>n</i> = 15)	18–34	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 single • 9 in a dating relationship

Networked Sexual Publics

Publics: “a common understanding of the world, a shared identity, a claim to inclusiveness, a consensus regarding the collective interest” (Sonia Silverstone, 2005, p. 9)

Sexual Publics: “describes a loose affiliation of members who, for whatever brief or extended period, see themselves as part of a shared experience of mediated sexuality” (Katherine Sender, 2017, p. 75).

Networked Publics: “references a linked set of social, cultural, and technological developments that have accompanied the growing engagement with digitally networked media” (Mizuko Ito, 2008, p.2)

digital space *and* the collection of people it connects (danad boyd, 2011)

Networked Sexual Publics

both to the network of people who are united by their shared position in the patriarchal and heteronormative world and connected by dating app technologies, *and* the space where a multiplicity of interpretations and relationships for the publics is possible.

Feature #1

In networked sexual publics, when there is resistance, there is also dominance.

Feminism and queer media scholarship on technology

- Three traditions in feminism (Wendy Faulkner, 2001)
 1. Women in technology
 2. Women and technology
 3. Gender in technology
- Cyberspace as an important space for queer people: e.g, Mary Gray (2009)

[In my town,] there were only some [Momo] users.... I and one of the men developed a casual sexual relationship, a purely sexual, mutually gratifying relationship. Although I was living in a small town, I was relatively open-minded.

— Kangqi, female, straight, 34 years old

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— Kangqi, female, straight, 34 years old

If I feel bored, I will log onto the app to see if there are any good-looking people nearby, check out their profiles, and “like” their profiles if they are good-looking.

— Brady, female, straight, 23 years old

Before I came out, I would watch the live streaming by *Qinyou Hui* 親友會. I watched some lesbians recounting their experiences of coming out. I would ask them questions. Even after I had come out to my mother, I watched their live streaming where they invited some parents. I would ask these parents, “Will my mom feel bad? Will she feel uncomfortable?”

— Charlie, female, lesbian, 24 years old

— Fred, male, straight, 25 years old

The centralized management of the back palace.

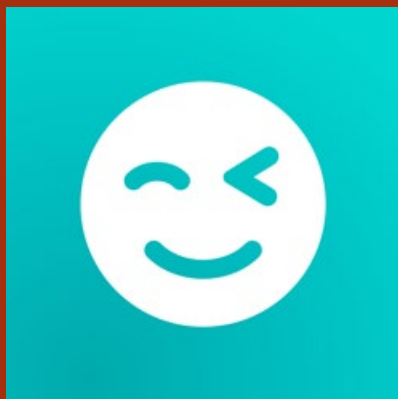
— Fred, male, straight, 25 years old

The centralized management of the back palace.

The letter B means that I have met them face-to-face before. The letter F is given to those I have not yet met. The letter Z basically denotes those whom I do not want to meet.

— Fred, male, straight, 25 years old





Rela 熱拉

中国电信 下午10:36 98%

详细资料



上传头像

昵称

你的昵称

自我认同

T

P

H

双性

其他

不想透露

进入热拉世界

Feature #1

In networked sexual publics, when there is resistance, there is also dominance.

- © No single scapegoat
- © Oppressive logics are reproduced in different ways

Feature #2

The meanings that users attach to dating apps cannot be reduced to psychological motives.

“They’re the modern-day gay bar”: Exploring the uses and gratifications of social networks for men who have sex with men

Breaking Boundaries: The Uses & Gratifications of Grindr

There’s an App for that: The Uses and Gratifications of Online Social Networks for Gay Men

Love me Tinder: Untangling emerging adults’ motivations for using the dating application Tinder

To meet or not to meet? Measuring motivations and risks as predictors of outcomes in the use of mobile dating applications in China

Development and validation of the Tinder Motives Scale (TMS)

Interpretations in science and technology studies

- “interpretive flexibility” (Trevor Pinch & Wiebe Bijker, 1987)
- Why people stopped using Grindr (Jed Brubaker, Mike Ananny, and Kate Crawford, 2016)
- How did my informants interpret sex-seeking on dating apps?

In the past, I knew nothing about sex. He was my teacher. I think that I learned from him how to separate sex [from romantic relationships].

—Xiaojiao, female, straight, 30 years old

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No. My point is, I enjoy the process. But first, I have to think [if the person] is okay, is interesting. [A stranger] can bring me a sort of fantasy, like the feeling of smoking weed.... But if you are talking about sex without love, it doesn't work. I have to strike a balance.

—Queenie, female, straight, 25 years old

The reason I downloaded [Tantan] was to hook up. I just finished high school and was very bored. I was stuck at home, got nothing much to do, so I downloaded it.... I do not know about others, but for my current situation, it is the kind of physiological dependence. Everybody has this thought, at least for a man, he uses the app because of his need.

— Xiaoli, male, straight, 19 years old

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Self-actualization

Esteem

Love/Belonging

Safety

Physiological



Lesbians and gay men are very different. For gay men, perhaps they will have sex after they find each other “okay.” But for lesbians, we chat, chat, chat, and keep chatting. It is tiring actually. You keep chatting, understanding each other, but not for the purpose of dating. And then, [you] talk about life, ambition, and different topics. Only after all of these there is a possibility of having sex.

— Becky, female, bisexual, 34 years old

Feature #2

The meanings that users attach to dating apps cannot be reduced to psychological motives.

© Intersectional-like thinking (Kimberlé Crenshaw, 1989)

© “Extract the fine nuances and diverse shades of meaning that technologies have for different groups, thereby creating a richer, ‘thicker’ understanding of technology, culture, and social change” (Cara Wallis, 2013, p. 188).

Feature #3

Networked sexual publics are regionally specific.

Mobile cultures in Asia-Pacific

- *Mobile Cultures: New Media in Queer Asia* (Chris Berry, Fran Martin, & Audrey Yue, 2003)
- *Mobile Media and Social Intimacies in Asia* (Jason Vincent Cabañes & Cecilia Uy-Tioco, 2020)
- How to conceptualize a global phenomenon in a local context?
- E.g., the concept of “ma 間” in Japanese (Larissa Hjorth, 2003)

Masculinities

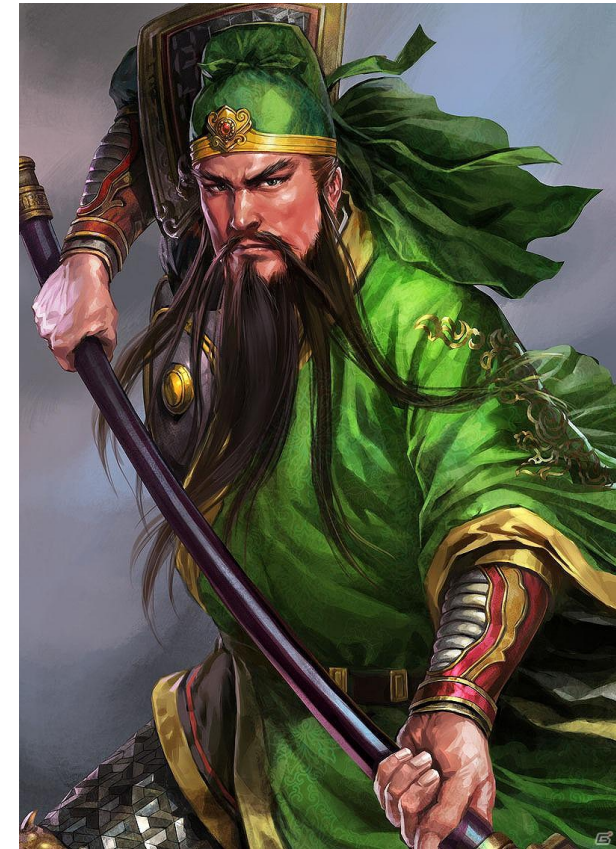
- Hegemonic masculinities (Raewin Connell, 1987)
- Have both positive and negative manifestations (Raewin Connell & James Messerschmidt, 2005)
- Entirely based on Western ideal

Chinese
masculinities
(Kam Louie,
2002)

Wen 文 – Cultural attainment



Wu 武 – Physical prowess



Chinese
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LINKEDIN



FACEBOOK

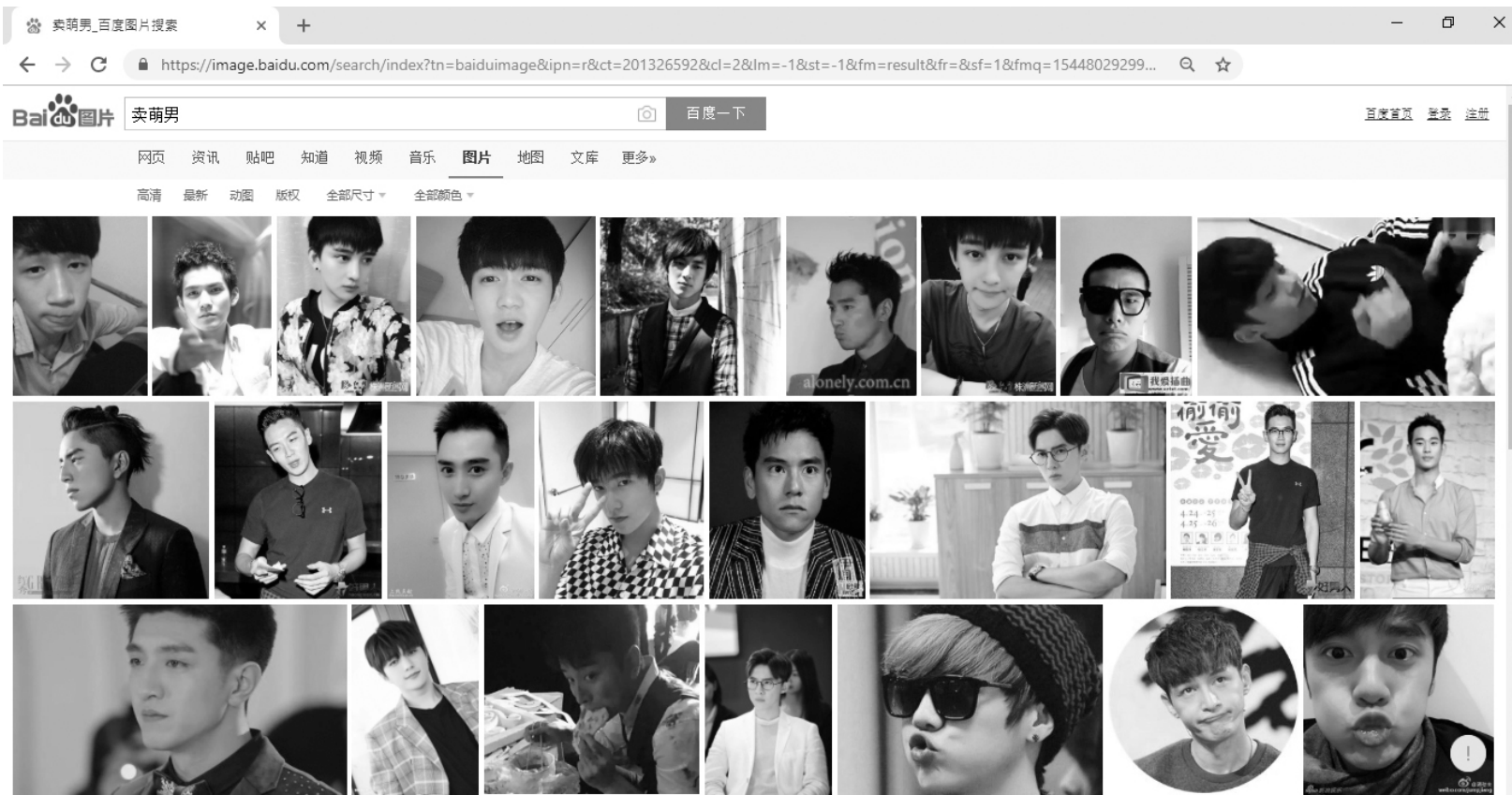


INSTAGRAM



TINDER





Examples of “*maimengzhaos* 賣萌照”



Ritualization of subordination

- Erving Goffman (1976): women in advertisements

I want to let people see my life, my business.... (*Sam: Is that balcony in your house?*) No, I do not own a house. That photo was taken on a hotel balcony.

— Dylan, male, straight, 29 years old

Image labor

- Shaka McGlotten (2013): crafting of a profile and the effort going into making the best photo

Feature #3

Networked sexual publics are regionally specific.

- © Maintain our cultural sensitivity
- © Analyze an issue through the lens of local concepts.

Networked Sexual Publics

- © resistance and dominance
- © multiple users having multiple interpretations
- © a strong regional specificity

I think I still, comparatively speaking, prefer men.

Thank you.

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This talk is based on:

[Coming in 2021; Tentative Title]

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