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Exploring Chinese Men's Friendship Talk: Discourses, Identities and Masculinities

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Abstract

The past decades have seen the rise of studies on masculinity and language; however, there is very little empirical research given on the topic of men's talk in contemporary China. With empirical evidence collected from two male friendship groups, this thesis explores how Chinese men construct friendships and gender identities in their spontaneous talk. The findings of this thesis contribute to gender and language studies with ethnography-informed discourse analysis and sociocultural linguistics. The empirical evidence from the participants' friendship talks offers insights into intersectional identities and masculinities in the Chinese context. The other original contribution to knowledge of this research is closing a gap in the existing study of Chinese masculinity, which does not yet offer extensive conclusions in terms of a linguistic perspective on men's lived experiences. My study adds to the literature on Chinese masculinity by enhancing two underexplored topics: male homosociality in contemporary China and sexual experiences as a retold narrative practice.

This thesis explores both the style and discourse of the narratives, conversational humour and personal talk that frequently emerge from men's talk. Various emerging social constructs, including locality, social class and age, interact to construct participants' intersectional identities and masculinities. Chinese men in this research still associate with a dominant masculinist discourse that devalues women and femininity. Further, they align themselves with success- and wealth-based hegemonic masculinity. They use their personal talk to define their understanding of male friendship, which suggests that 'male friendship as a virtue' has its contemporary expressions. Even though they show a desire to disclose their feelings, their personal and even emotional talk is still a site to lecture, police and reinforce hegemonic gender norms and expectations.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Men's Talk

Early research on men's talk has tended to align itself with a (male) dominance theory/approach or (cultural) difference theory/approach, both of which aimed to explain how men and women use language. With the investigation of mixed-sex interaction, frequently in heterosexual couples, research that takes a dominance perspective interprets any linguistic differences between women and men as evidence of men dominating women. Men are presented as using interruption and other linguistic strategies to assert their dominance, whereas women are portrayed as weak victims doing most of the conversational work (Zimmerman and West, 1975; Fishman, 1980). Cultural difference theory, on the other hand, sees these gendered differences as determined by the supposedly differentiated cultures of men and women. According to this approach, women and men belong to different subcultures because they have been socialised in their same-sex peer groups since childhood (Maltz and Borker, 1982). Given the theoretical background of this latter theory, men are perhaps not trying to dominate women; instead, they are just from a different subculture and, therefore, they have different conversational patterns.

Although the dominance approach recognises men's privilege, it is often restricted in its investigation of mixed-sex conversation. Subsequently, same-sex talk has been promoted as a way to understand linguistic features outside the dominance framework (Coates and Cameron, 1989). As a result, women's language use has been studied considerably more often than men's, demonstrating the former's positive features of cooperation, facilitation and politeness (Coates, 1996; Homes, 1995).

Men's talk has only been studied; however, for the sake of generalisation: women's conversation is regarded as cooperative, while men's conversation is found to be competitive and impolite (Tannen, 1994; Holmes, 1995). Hence, the focus on gender and language studies at the end of the 1990s and early 2000s was either to laud the victory of women's talk or to attempt to generalise gender difference tendencies (Litosseliti and Sunderland, 2002: 4).

With this trend, even though men's language has been studied, men have been treated as a homogenous group, showing a simplified and generalised picture without consideration of other social variables in gender identities. Coates (2003) further points out that the neglect of men's talk for so long until the early 2000s is the result of patriarchal work deeply rooted in social structures. Men are invisible and dominant at once because they are seen as 'the default human category in the language in society' (Kiesling, 2007: 655). Since the early 2000s, men's same-sex talk has been studied more extensively in a private and informal setting. So far, we have a good understanding of how men talk about games/sports (Johnson and Finlay, 1997, Cameron, 1997), and how they casually talk with their friends at pubs or at home (Coates, 2001, 2003; Pichler and Williams, 2016; Pichler, 2019, 2021b), how they talk in locker rooms (Kuiper, 1998; Cole et al., 2020; Rhodes et al., 2020), in American fraternities (Kiesling, 1997, 2003, 2007) and post-socialist university dormitories (Bodó et al., 2019).

These studies on men's talk perhaps reflect the intellectual and theoretical development of the past decades. With more empirical investigations into how men use their language, the long-standing binary perception that 'men compete, women cooperate' has been challenged (Cameron, 1997; Hewitt, 1997; Johnson, 1997). As a result, research focus on men's talk shifted from the

'cooperative/competitiveness' conversational style debate to the revelation of how differences work *in the construction of* dominance (Cameron, 1997). To further uncover this process, studies of men's talk employ a discursive turn to examine the substance of what is said - 'the gendered what'. It shifts the focus in previous studies on the 'the gendered how' of talk and style in which discourse is approached as 'language use' to understand discourse as social practice (Cameron, 1997; Sunderland, 2004).

In particular, with the help of the notion of 'hegemonic masculinity', which means 'currently most honoured way of being a man' (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 832), a growing body of literature reveals how hegemonic masculinity has been maintained, legitimised and naturalised through men's talk (Coates, 2003; Kiesling, 1997, 2003; Bodó et al., 2019). The exploration of men's talk has been closely linked to the topic of gender identities. In line with theoretical development that views gender identities as intersectional and contextual, more recent studies have shown how everyday talk-in-interaction has been drawn on by men of various backgrounds as rich resources to construct and perform a range of intersectional identities as well as masculinities (Milani and Johnsson, 2011, 2012; Lawson, 2013, 2015; Pichler and Williams, 2016; Pichler, 2019, 2021b). I embark on my research with one of the core research questions in language and masculinity studies: how do men use language to create different masculinities (Kiesling, 2007)?

However, most of these studies have been heavily centred on European and American contexts, and very little empirical research has illuminated the picture of Chinese men's talk. Current studies exploring language and masculinity are still restricted to the areas of media discourse (Yu and Narty, 2020), online discussion boards (Gong, 2016; Huang, 2018), or discourse analysis of gendered phrases (Huang, 2018; Liu, 2022). Therefore, this thesis addresses this research gap to examine Chinese men's

talks with their friends, employing linguistic ethnography as my methodology. The primary source of data that I analyse in this research is participants' self-recorded spontaneous talk with their friends, informed by ethnographic data collected from participant observations, ethnographic interviews and digital ethnography from my three field visits in Yunnan, China.

1.2 Focus of the Thesis

This thesis focuses on two male friendship groups in Yunnan, China, to explore men's talk. The 'reform and opening up' policy in the winter of 1979 marked the start of China's new socio-economic system, called the 'socialist market economy'. Since then gender ideology in contemporary China has dramatically changed compared to the socialist/Mao era. Scholars tend to use the term 'after-reform era', 'post-socialist' or 'contemporary China' to refer to the historical period from 1979 until the present. Although there are debates about whether China's current regime is a localised form of neoliberalism (see Harvey, 2005, Rofel, 2007; Wang Z., 2017), the ruling Chinese Communist Party government still plays a decisive role in the direction and scale of marketisation and resource allocation. For example, the 'one-child' birth control policy, which lasted from the 1980s to the middle of the 2010s, has significantly impacted millions of people's lives.

There are two strands in the studies of Chinese men and masculinity in China. The first, which started in the early 2000s, is the representation of Chinese masculinity. Researchers from literature, media and cultural studies have explored Chinese masculinity in classic and modern novels (Song, 2004; Wang, Y., 2004; Zhong, 2000; Liu, 2014), TV series (Song, 2010, 2017), magazines (Song and Lee, 2012), music (Baranovitch, 2003), and newspapers (Yu and Nartey, 2021). On the other hand, the strand that pays more attention to men's everyday experiences only started in the mid-2010s. This

may reflect the development of ethnography-informed research in China. Susan Brownell and Jeffery Wasserstrom (2002) point out that in-depth and comprehensive anthropological studies, particularly on gender issues, did not develop to a sufficient level in China until the 2000s. Even though the subsequent ethnographic studies were largely centred on women (Friedman, 2000; Farrer, 2002; Yan, 2003), their findings could still offer insights into changing gender ideologies since the 1980s.

In recent anthropological and sociological research, the impact of social class and economic status, which was frequently ignored in earlier research, has been examined. Focusing on socio-economically marginalised migrant workers in China, Choi and Peng's (2016) sociological research illustrates how men of lower socio-economic status compromise their traditional male power or status to deal with the changes and challenges they met in their new urban lives. For instance, they had to share much more household and caring responsibilities than their father's generation. In addition, combining the exploration of Chinese masculinity with the dimension of locality, Magdalena Wong (2020) explores everyday Chinese masculinity in China's peri-urban cities. Acknowledging that China has experienced more urbanisation and modernisation processes, her anthropological study scrutinises Chinese men from Nanchong, Sichuan Province. Peri-urban cities are not fully developed like major cosmopolitan cities, such as Beijing or Shanghai, nor are they as socio-economically disadvantaged as those in rural areas (see Yan, 2003; Friedmen, 2000); however, they account for the majority of cities in China.

All my research participants were born in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and by the time of data collection (2016-2019), they were in their late 20s and early 30s. They are the only children in their families, representing the generation affected by the 'one child per couple policy'. Growing up without siblings in peri-urban cities, they value friendship perhaps most significantly – in their words, their

friends are their chosen siblings. Given that most studies on Chinese men focus on romantic relationships and family life (Choi and Peng, 2016; Wong, 2020), the examination of their friendships can add to our knowledge of their lived experiences and masculinity.

In this thesis, I write about men from two cities in Yunnan: Zhaotong and Kunming. These cities are also representative of peri-urban cities in China. Compared to other eastern provinces, Yunnan is a southeast Chinese province with a relatively underdeveloped economy. Group 1 was a male friendship group from Zhaotong, which was formed in junior school, and this group is based in their hometown. Group 2's friendships were formed in their hometown city of Lijiang, but after graduation, they settled in the capital city of Yunnan province, Kunming. As single children in their families, most of their parents have worked for state-owned institutions or enterprises. This type of family is referred to as a 'wage-earning family' (*gongxin jiating*), which often denotes an ordinary family background (Huang, Y., 2018). However, even though this type of family appears ordinary or common in China, in terms of the British class system, they represent an upper-middle class background as most received higher education and had white-collar jobs with parents who were able to gift them apartments and/or cars for their weddings.

In the post-socialist era, social class has been downplayed according to the state will (Huang, Y., 2018). This means that people do not speak or think about social class much, and indeed even I had not intended to write about social class initially. My empirical evidence, however, shows that social class perhaps could be indexed and implied in many ways in young men's everyday talk. Social class as a viable factor in gender identities has been well synthesised and discussed in applied linguistics (Rampton, 2006; Preece, 2010; Gray and Block, 2014; Block, 2015) and variation studies in

sociolinguistics on British working classes (Snell, 2010; Moore, 2012). The research territory of language and masculinity has been extensively explored with the interplay of working-classness in Canada (Ehrlich and Levesque, 2011) and Britain (Lawson, 2009, 2013, 2015; Pichler and Williams, 2016; Pichler, 2019, 2021b). I aim to contribute to the current research literature on social class and gender identities with my empirical evidence. Moreover, I use this thesis to illustrate that masculinity is an aspect of identity, a result of the intersectionality of different social constructs, such as locality, social class and gender.

In this thesis, I have two primary research questions:

1)   How is everyday language use deployed by Chinese men in their friendship groups to construct a range of intersectional identities and perform an array of masculinities?

2)   How is friendship practised and perceived by these Chinese men, and how is male homosociality intertwined with the performance of hegemonic masculinity?

My data and linguistic approach aim to fill gaps in Chinese masculinity studies in which Chinese men's lived experiences are yet to be comprehensively explored. My empirical data collected from two groups of men in their late 20s living in Yunnan provides an insight into men's everyday life and friendship talk in peri-urban cities, where the majority of the Chinese population lives. It reflects how this generation, which was subject to the 'one-child' policy in China, understands friendship. With specific empirical evidence, including linguistic and ethnographic data, I demonstrate how the young men construct a range of (hegemonic and intersectional) masculinities   through their language and discursive practices in their friendship groups. Whilst my main focus is on the linguistic construction of (gender) identities, my ethnographic data, for example around the prominent role of alcohol and

sexual promiscuity in the young men's lives, has clear potential for real-life-societal impact with respect to men's health and consent issues in sexual conduct. In the following sections 1.3 and 1.4, I will introduce my theoretical stances to provide a better understanding for my research questions.

I aim to approach this research about everyday Chinese men's talk and masculinity from a linguistic perspective to fill gaps in Chinese masculinity studies in which Chinese men's lived experiences are yet to be comprehensively explored. My empirical data collected from two groups of men in their late 20s living in Yunnan can represent men's everyday life and their talk in peri-urban cities, where the majority of the Chinese population lives. It reflects how this generation, which was subject to the 'one-child' policy in China, understands friendship. With specific empirical evidence, including linguistic and ethnographic data, I reveal how a range of masculinities have been enacted through their language practice while talking to their friends. Beyond the revelation of gender identities and masculinities, my ethnography also captures the role of alcohol and sexual promiscuity in young men's lives. Therefore, whilst my main focus is on the linguistic construction of identities, I suggest that my research has clear potential for real-life-societal impact with respect to men's health and consent issues in sexual conduct.

1.3 How to Approach Gender

Alongside the conceptual and intellectual movement of post-structuralism and postmodernism, the notion of gender has been re-conceptualised. Post-structuralism encourages us to always be sceptical about universal causes, 'questioning what "true" or "real" knowledge is' (Baxter, 2003: 6). Gender, accordingly, does not simply mean being either a man or a woman, because this is more complex than a simple binary notion. This view challenges the essentialist idea of gender, where gender only

functions as a sociolinguistic factor, pre-determining how someone speaks. Approaching language and gender from a post-structuralist perspective, people are who they are not because of who they (already) are, but rather because of (among other things) how they speak (Cameron, 1997; Swann, 2002). In this research, I view gender from constructionist and post-structuralist perspectives, understanding it as performance resulting from the intersection of different social variables. Earlier male dominance and cultural differences theories in gender and language studies framed gender as a binary notion, with an investigative focus on differences (Sunderland, 2004: 23). By contrast, social constructionism sees language as not simply reflecting society but as being actively involved in the construction and maintenance of social categories such as gender (Coates and Pichler, 2011: 485).

A social constructionist approach allows us to consider gender as something that is socially constructed rather than a 'fixed attribute' (Swann, 2002: 47). This view often highlights that gender is context-dependent and culturally constituted, hence it can be fluid and multiple. For instance, as my data will show in Chapter 5, when a woman plays a role as a regular member of a male friendship group, the identity that emerges from the conversation is not her normative feminine identity. Instead, she uses her language to position herself to fit in with the social norms and expectations of a 'male friend' to maintain the group's social cohesion. It reflects the fundamental understanding of gender shaped by social constructionist and post-structuralist perspectives: 'feminine' and 'masculine' are neither what we *are*, nor what traits we *have*, but instead the effects we produce by way of what we *do*. However, adopting a social constructionist approach does not necessarily mean that researchers will find no evidence of traditional gender norms. Thus, even though I align myself with this theoretical stance, my data still contains substantial empirical evidence of normatively masculine discourses and conversational styles: Chinese men in my research still align themselves with

mainstream and dominant discourses of masculinity, displaying a more traditional 'masculine' conversational style.

To better understand how men and women in this research can use their everyday conversation to 'do' gender, I use Judith Butler's (1990, 1997) concept of 'performativity'. She defines gender as 'the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a rigid regulatory frame which congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a "natural" kind of being' (Butler, 1990: 33). This indicates that although gender is constructed, it is perceived as a 'natural' kind of being, as over time its acts and stylisation of the body have been constrained and regulated within social norms. Therefore, it is impossible to look at gender without considering the social structure in which the act of talk is embedded. For instance, the social changes after the 1980s will be introduced in Chapter 2 to allow for a better understanding of how the dominant discourses of masculinity have shifted in contemporary China. In Chapter 6, before I analyse the participants' sex stories, I introduce the historical and social-cultural context of how sex is perceived in China by my male participants.

Butler (1997: 160) emphasises that the performative 'is not a singular act used by an already established subject', but 'one of the powerful and insidious ways in which subjects are called into social being from diffuse social quarters, inaugurated into sociality by a variety of diffuse and powerful interpellations'. It suggests that a young man may learn how to be an 'accepted man' not only from school and the media but also from the everyday conversations he engages in with his male peers. Men in this research project in their late 20s and early 30s may learn to behave as 'mature men' based on their social relations with others from the inception of their existence. In my Data and

Methodology chapter, I introduce how linguistic ethnography as a methodology can be useful in revealing how men's talk is constrained in this 'rigid regulatory frame'.

Finally, I see gender as *gender identities*, an emergent process of the intersectionality of variable identities. Despite being 'misleadingly singular', pluralising 'identity' as 'identities' captures 'the idea of people identifying simultaneously with a variety of social groups' (Ivanič, 1998: 11). Gender has thus been conceptualised as 'gender identities', indicating that more variable identities, such as race, ethnicity, age, class and sexuality, should be considered when examining gender (Litosseliti and Sunderland, 2002: 31). In my research, social constructs of class, age, and local identities are heavily relevant to my study. In my analysis, gender is approached as an emergent *process* arising from the 'emergence and re-emergence of the self' (Jaworski and Coupland, 1999: 413), and accordingly, gender identity is a process that can be achieved by a series of choices continually made about oneself rather than a stable state or set of personal attributes. Hence, one of the research goals is to grasp identities in their multiple and dynamic sense, revealing the process of how it has been accomplished.

As a result of this intersectional approach, *gender identities* are regarded as the outcome of interactions between these social characteristics, and the focus of gender research accordingly shifts to how gender interacts with other social variables (Swann, 2002; Litosseliti, 2006). Hence, in gender and language, the research interest is no longer in summarising and generalising how men and women speak differently, instead, is to reveal how language is drawn on as a resource to construct identities (Cameron, 1997; Bucholtz, 1999). For example, Pia Pichler's linguistic study on Bangladeshi girls in London (2006, 2009) and working-class young men in South London (2016, 2019) reveals how social factors such as socioeconomic class, gender, ethnicity and even locality interact dynamically in

gender identities (see also Pichler, 2021a and 2021b). Some of these intersections emerged as relevant in my own study, as I show in my analysis. In Chapter 2, I review in detail how the concept of masculinity is approached with an intersectionality approach. Overall, I adopt this perspective to explore *what* multiple and fluid identities are constructed and performed by my research participants in their everyday talk with their friends.

1.4 Language and Discourse

Following an explanation of my theoretical stance regarding the notion of 'gender', this section clarifies how I understand 'language'. In brief, I understand language not as an abstract system, but as having communicative goals and contextual purpose. My exploration of Chinese men's everyday language use hence underlines the importance of context when I offer my interpretations of the functions of language use in their communication. With the emphasis on the importance of 'context', research in the early 2000s started to reflect the relationship between the linguistic forms and their gendered functions in communication. It reflects that after the 2000s, the intellectual development in gender and language studies always bears 'warrants for gender' in mind (Swann, 2002).

With what has been termed the 'discursive turn', more studies began to employ discourse to approach the relationship between discourse and gender identity (Litosseliti & Sunderland, 2002; Sunderland, 2004). Given that 'discourse' has been defined across disciplines and has various meanings with different intellectual persuasions, in this thesis I align myself with the theoretical stance of seeing discourse as a social practice (Fairclough, 2003) and as an ideology (Van Dijk, 1995; 1998). For example, Chapters 4 and 5 focus on young men's storytelling in their everyday conversations. Approaching narrative with a discourse perspective, I see Chinese men's storytelling as a social

practice for multiple functions, including indexing their intersectional identities and performing virile masculinity. In addition, understanding discourse as ideology, in Chapter 7, I explore several discourses that emerge from men's friendship talk. Gender difference discourses are drawn on by participants to define and construct gendered male friendships. This male friendship discourse is in contradiction with the discourse of the responsible husband, thus the 'brother or wife' dilemma has emerged. I will demonstrate that how a man prioritises his heterosexual bonding with his wife leads to a crisis to his commitment to male friendship, and how he uses a range of strategies to regain his status in the group.

To understand discourse as a social practice, it must be understood as not only representational but also constitutive. Post-structuralism provides the strength and shapes the understanding of the constitutive potential of discourse (Sunderland, 2004: 9). Initially, Fairclough defines discourse as 'different ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice'. This definition suggests that discourse can be pluralised as a countable noun as 'the different ways of seeing the world' (Fairclough, 2003: 26), while, on the other hand, the uncountable noun of discourse is perhaps only an abstract idea of discourse as language use. The constitutive nature of discourses, according to Fairclough (2003), goes beyond 'ways of seeing the world', but also, 'as ways of representing the world: the processes, relations and structures of the material world, the "mental" world of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and so on, and the social world'.

This constitutive nature of discourses means that discourses are 'abstract vehicles for the social and political process' (Jaworski and Coupland, 1999: 498). That is, when the young men in my research position themselves in a discourse which I label as the professional identity of local authority

discourse (Chapter 4), seduction expert discourse (Chapter 5), or male friendship discourse (Chapter 7), these discourses shape their (gender) identity performances. From this perspective, social reality is 'discursively constructed', made and remade as people talk about things using the 'discourses' they have access to. Fairclough (2003) argues that language presents and constructs a certain worldview, and through language use speakers can present *who* they are and how they wish to be seen in this world. In this research, I acknowledge this theoretical awareness, understanding that the relationship between language and gender is dialectical and constitutive. For example, participants in this research always use their words to *do* something. Put simply, when engaging in conversation, they are telling their listeners something about themselves (Cameron, 2001: 70).

This means that ideologies are always embedded in use, and language in return can be drawn on by people as a resource to say something about themselves. Van Dijk (1995; 1998) defines discourses as the site for the articulation and negotiation of ideologies. Ideologies, according to Van Dijk (1998: 308), as 'the basic social presentations of groups also relate to discourse and other forms of interaction'. Accordingly, by approaching discourse as ideology, I can further reveal the ideologies in relation to identities and masculinities that emerge from Chinese men's everyday talk. It is understood that a person cannot semiotically construct or represent reality without simultaneously identifying themselves and relating to other people in particular ways (Choularaki and Fairclough, 1999: 50). Therefore, more powerfully, discourse can be seen as a potential and actual agent of social construction (Litosseliti and Sunderland, 2002: 14), and hence gender can be socially and discursively constructed.

Based on this theoretical foundation, burgeoning research is revealing how discourses are used and drawn upon by speakers to construct their identities. Based on these theoretical perspectives, I will examine how Chinese men in my research creatively and manipulatively use their 'men's talk' to discursively perform and enact their identities and masculinities. I will argue that the content of the discourse/language they use also voices and constitutes broader cultural discourses of masculinities and male bonding. This provides a dynamic and emergent perspective to understand the dialectic relationship between gender identities and discourse.

As a discourse analyst, my main research task is to explain the language choices made by my participants, revealing how these choices are influenced by contextual settings, and how language and meaning are embedded and produced in these social, historical, political and cultural settings (Paltridge and Wang, 2010: 256). Discourse analysis (DA) thus becomes my main analytic perspective in this research. It not only allows me to empirically document the production of gender identities but also to reveal how these ideologies are grounded and ordered in discourse (Sunderland, 2004). I see DA as an umbrella term that includes various analytical and methodological approaches. In Chapter 3, I will explain how DA works hand-in-hand with the methodology of linguistic ethnography in this research. Adopting a discourse approach influences how I analyse narratives (Chapters 4 and 5) and conversational humour (Chapter 6). In Chapter 7, I use a more critical approach to unpack and reveal how the discourse of 'male friendship discourse' penetrates and reinforces the hegemonic discourse of masculinity.

1.5 Thesis Structure

Chapter 2 continues the review of major areas that provide a foundation for this research: language and masculinity as well as Chinese masculinity. First, I review how language and masculinity have been studied over the past decades, especially with men's spontaneous talk as their primary data source. I introduce the theoretical advantage of the concept of hegemonic masculinity and explain how previous studies have shown that masculinities can be enacted, maintained and naturalised in men's talk. Then I introduce how the concept of masculinity has been theorised in recent studies as performance and intersectionality. Secondly, to explore the social-cultural embeddedness of Chinese masculinity, the second part of Chapter 2 systematically reviews how Chinese masculinity has been studied. It aims to offer a comprehensive grasp of the hybrid and complex features of Chinese masculinity, which will support and enrich my subsequent analysis.

After locating my research in both areas of Chinese masculinity and language and gender, Chapter 3 justifies why I employ Linguistic Ethnography (LE) as my methodology. I start by outlining its historical development and the five key elements that most LE research shares to define LE. Then I present my data and participants, introducing how I collected multiple sources of data from two male friendship groups. Then I introduce the idea of 'openness to data', analytical frameworks and decision-making processes when researching multilingually. In the final section of the Data and Methodology chapter, I reflect on how my various positionalities as a female researcher, an 'insider' and an 'outsider' can impact my data collection and interpretation.

With the theoretical and methodological foundation established in Chapters 2 and 3, Chapters 4 and 5 first focus on a prominent conversational form of the men's talk: narrative. I first introduce the theoretical and analytical frameworks that I use in my narrative analysis. I illustrate how narrative is an important linguistic resource deployed by participants in the construction of their hegemonic identities, encompassing their locality, age, Han ethnicity, upper-middle-classness and their 'working within the system' professional identities. Adopting positionality theory for my narrative analysis allows me to show how storytelling as a practice can be constrained and can shape the macro-sociological order, such as social class (Silverstein, 2004). Chapter 5 focuses on a particular story genre in which sexual experiences become a re-told narrative practice in men's private talk. Their narrative practice enables them to construct masculine identities that highlight class and wealth-based virile masculinity and at the same time reflect the gender ideologies in sex morality and practice after the 2010s in China's post-socialist society.

Chapter 6 examines the playfulness of men's talk, illustrating how teasing is deployed by male participants for multiple functions and purposes. I reveal how conversational humour can be used for fun-based solidarity as well as a display of toughness, given teasing's dual nature of playfulness and aggression. In addition, I argue that teasing can also be used to negotiate professional identities as well as police gender and group norms. The final analysis chapter, Chapter 7, is dedicated to investigating men's personal and emotional talk. I illustrate the structural and genre characteristics of their personal and self-claimed 'emotional and disclosure' talk. Then I demonstrate how men in my research use this type of talk as a prime site to lecture and impose hegemonic and dominant gender norms. They also use this type of personal talk to define male friendship and discuss the 'brother or

wife' dilemma. Hence, in Chapter 7, approaching discourse as ideology, I unveil how different discourses of 'being an accepting man' interact in their pursuit of hegemonic masculinity.

Chapter 8 is the conclusion, in which I summarise the major findings of the thesis. I first summarise the intersectional identities and masculinities that I address in this thesis. Then I conclude how men bond in their male friendship talk through summarising the structural and genre characteristics of their everyday talk, including both discourse and conversational style levels. With the data collected from their private conversations in which their sexual experiences were re-told, I also highlight the contribution that this linguistic research brings to current research on sex in China. Finally, I offer a methodological reflection on this research and provide implications for future studies.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This PhD thesis aims to explore Chinese men's everyday talk with their friends, revealing how they use their language to construct and perform a range of interactional hegemonic masculinities and identities. After a brief introduction of how I approach 'gender' and 'discourse' in the previous chapter, in this chapter I first review the historical development of language and masculinity studies. With the research focus shifting from the style of men's talk to its content (Cameron, 1997), studies on men's talk between the 2000s and the 2010s have shown men's talk to be an arena that naturalises and maintains hegemonic masculinity (Kiesling, 2001, 2003, 2007; Coates, 2003). More recent studies have shed light on how masculinities can be fluid, pluralised, and ready to be contested, and moreover, how they interplay with other social constructs such as ethnicity, social class, age, race and locality (Milani and Johnsson, 2011, 2012; Lawson, 2013, 2015; Pichler, 2016, 2019, 2021a, 2021b).

With a review of how masculinities can be approached through intersectionality, I locate my research in the current intellectual trend of understanding masculinities in a plural sense as an array of performance and intersection (Milani, 2015). With this theoretical foundation, I aim to explore how Chinese men in my research construct and perform a range of interactional hegemonic masculinities and identities. Another research aim is to understand how Chinese heterosexual men bond in their everyday friendship talk. Therefore, in section 2.3, I review previous studies focused on male homosociality, explaining why and how heterosexuality is displayed in homosocial bonding, such as in men's same-sex talk. With reference to empirical data on Chinese men's friendship talk, I therefore link my analysis to a comparison of prior studies on men's talk and male friendships.

In addition to extending the existing discussion on intersectional hegemonic masculinities and identities with a focus on homosociality, this thesis also aims to contribute to current studies of Chinese masculinity with a linguistic investigation of men's talk. Hence, the second major part of this chapter reviews existing interdisciplinary studies on the topic of Chinese masculinity. I first justify why 'Chineseness' needs to be unpacked to better understand Chinese masculinity with its historical and cultural characteristics. The cultural concept of the *wen-wu* dyad (Louie, 2002, 2016) is introduced to theorise Chinese masculinity, illustrating how it plays a stubbornly influential role in shaping Chinese masculinity from the imperial period to today. With research from both representation and men's lived experiences, in section 2.3 I unpack the hybrid and complicated features (Song and Hird, 2014) of Chinese masculinities in Chinese contemporary society. I aim to offer an interdisciplinary and comprehensive understanding of Chinese masculinities that may provide interpretative relevance for my subsequent analysis.

2.2 Language and Masculinity

With the re-conceptualisation of gender and discourse, especially with the conceptual support of 'performativity', Cameron (1997) advocates the focus of future gender and language shifting from the style of conversation to the content of talk, examining men's talk as a performance. Her article foreshadowed a new future path for studies of masculinities and language. In line with this advocacy, I explore what Chinese men in my research *do* in their conversations: how they construct a range of interactional identities and perform an array of masculinities. With this research question, this section synthesises previous studies on the topic of language and masculinity, explaining how I theoretically approach the concept of masculinity. With such a broad topic, I only review research investigating

heterosexual men's spontaneous talk as it is closely relevant to my research. I acknowledge that other research methods, such as corpus linguistics (Baker, 2005, 2008) or variational sociolinguistics (Lawson, 2009) also significantly contribute to the research area of masculinity and language.

The concept of masculinity has been revisited in recent decades, thanks to theoretical backing through the growth of gender studies. Men's talk and masculinity as a category were both first problematized in the edited collection *Language and Masculinity* (Johnson and Meinhof, 1997), which pierced the invisibility and dominance of men and their language use as a default category (Coates, 2003; Kielsing, 2007, Lawson, 2020). In this collection, masculinity was approached with an emphasis on context: 'hegemonic masculinity and the linguistic resources drawn upon its construction' showing the characteristics of 'highly contextualised, inconsistent and unpredictable' (Johnson, 1997: 24). Almost two decades later, Milani (2015) revisited this topic with an edited collection titled *Language and Masculinities: Performances, Intersections and Dislocations* to illustrate the new changes in this field. As its subtitle suggests, instead of seeing masculinity as a singular uniform and essential trait, it is understood as a series of performances – in the plural – that can be *done* with the help of a variety of meaning-making resources (Milani, 2015: 11).

More specifically, this performance is a result of intersections between different social variables. Accordingly, intersectionality as an approach has been highlighted in recent linguistic research to explore a variety of masculinities. Unlike earlier research, which largely focused on the interplay of masculinity and sexuality, Milani (2015: 19) contends that more recent studies on language and masculinities widen their emphasis to include not just sexuality but also nationalism, age, race and social class. The third significant change in recent masculinity and language studies, especially

compared to the collection from 1997, is to dislocate 'masculinity' from 'maleness', notably from male-born and male-bodied people. Contributors in this collection investigate how lesbian (Jones, 2015), transgender (Zimman, 2015) and intersex (King, 2015) individuals perform various, unpredictable and unstable masculinities.

With the recent theoretical backdrop, I first unpack how hegemonic masculinity is naturalised, maintained and exerted in men's talk. Then I review how other studies reveal the interplay between masculinity and other social constructs, illustrating that masculine identities are an emergent process of intersectional identities. Finally, with my data collected from men's same-sex friendship talk, I focus on how hegemonic models of masculinity are constructed in the context of male homosocial bonding. I introduce how the display of heterosexuality is a powerful enactment of hegemonic masculinity in male homosociality. With the following review, I locate this research in the area of masculinity and men's talk, justifying how this thesis could fill existing research gaps.

2.2.1 Hegemonic Masculinity

With the impetus to understand gender in power relations (Holmes, 1987; de Klerk, 1997), research on men's talk after the 2000s has explored how men's talk maintains, legitimises and naturalises 'hegemonic masculinity' (Cameron, 1997; Kiesling, 1997, 2001, 2005; Coates, 2003). The concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' was proposed by Raewyn Connell as part of her gender order theory, which conceptualises 'male power' as 'hegemonic' or 'hierarchical' models of masculinity. This notion can be defined as the dominant and 'currently most honoured way of being a man' (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 832). 'Hegemonic masculinity' can simply mean 'the approved way of being male', hence, 'only a minority of men might enact it' (ibid.). The hegemonic model of masculinity is not a singular, static and distinctive model of masculinity, instead, it allows a pluralisation of

hegemonic masculinity, varying across time, culture and even between individuals. To exert hegemonic masculinity, men need to practice and legitimise their dominant position in society over the interests of others, often including women, gay men and even other men.

Deborah Cameron's (1997) paper on US white college students' sports talk demonstrates hegemonic masculinity is exerted and performed through a distancing from women and gay men. Considering that gossip is traditionally seen as feminine in Anglo-Saxon culture, Cameron's (1997) work is notable because it shows how gossip becomes reframed by the men in her data. They were very careful in how and who they gossiped about, and their heterosexual hegemonic masculinity is constructed through a deliberate performance of disdainfully commenting on the way that gay men dress. Their definition of being 'gay' is more of a gender deviance than a sexual deviance. For example, a person is said to be gay simply because they dated 'the ugliest-ass bitch in the history of the world' (Cameron, 1997: 53). For them being gay means failing to meet this group's standard of masculinity, which includes insufficiently masculine appearance, clothing and speech. They comment unfavourably on gay men's clothes to distance themselves from the effeminate masculinity they assign to 'gay' men.

Coates's (2003) research on British men's talk and Kiesling's (2003) study on American fraternity men show a similar picture. Hegemonic masculinity can be enacted through an opposition to and oppression of women and homosexual men. These studies indicated that sexuality plays an important role in shaping the performance and construction of hegemonic masculinity. Kiesling (2003) finds that members of a fraternity in a US college often share 'fuck stories' with each other at the end of a weekend. This form of ritualised gossip functions to construct and maintain group cohesion, and such men constantly display their heterosexuality through sharing these 'fuck stories'. Their narratives

construct the members' evaluation of women as sexual objects for the men, underlying the importance of women's appearance.

In another paper, Kiesling (2003) pointed out that the construction of heterosexuality is not only based on their accounts of the relationships they have with women but also on the relationships they create with other men. This is evident through the way they address and greet their male friends with utterances such as 'Bitch!' or 'Bitch Boy' and 'Hi Honey! I am home!' Such metaphorical representations of other male members as women reveals a discourse reinforcing the subservient role of a woman or wife for a man or husband. This discourse is used within the fraternity group to index local relationships of power/dominance and subordination, allowing male members to 'have' more than one (hetero)sexual identity (ibid.: 124). It can be argued that heterosexuality, as part of a man's socially constructed identity, is embedded in male dominance hierarchies.

Using empirical evidence gathered from one fraternity member in 'Four Faces of Pete', Kiesling (2001) illustrates how the manifestations of hegemonic masculinity can be 'highly contextualised, inconsistent and unpredictable' (Johnson, 1997: 24). Pete uses particular linguistic devices to display different masculinities in different speech activities with different interlocutors. For instance, boasting and insulting are more appropriate for 'just hanging-out' occasions with 'male mates', while a more collaborative conversational style is used when Pete talks to a girl on a date. Therefore, Kiesling (2001) draws a conclusion about the significance of bringing the socio-cultural context into the exploration of hegemonic masculinity. In his words, 'gender identity is a performance that is understood in a complex context that includes not only the immediate speech event but knowledge of cultural expectations for gender and knowledge of social structures' (268). Hence, linguistic strategies are seen as rich

repertoires for men, which can be drawn on to construct their authoritative stances that implicate a social hierarchy.

The above linguistic studies show that the macro concept of hegemonic masculinity can be linked to a micro level of language practice. It indicates that one of the attacks levelled towards hegemonic masculinity is possibly unwarranted. Ann-Dorte Christensen and Sune Qvotrup Jensen (2014: 61) suggest how 'the relationship between hegemonic masculinity at the macro level and men's practice and constructions of sense-making masculinities at the micro level needs to be clarified'. Linguistic investigation on masculinity shows its value and power to illustrate how hegemonic masculinity is practised at the micro level of men's everyday conversation and, more importantly, it can reveal more versions of hegemonic masculinity that can be enacted through language use.

In addition to revealing that women and gay men are constructed as inferior 'others' to discursively construct men's heterosexuality and dominance, Coates's (2001, 2003) narrative studies on British men present other manifestations. From various social classes and age groups, these men often perform their expert identities and highlight their achievements in their everyday pub talk to construct their hegemonic masculinity. Moreover, the toughness model of masculinity is also demonstrated with the deployment of expletives and taboo language as well as their endurance of pain in life-threatening moments (see my following review on Lawson, 2013). These findings are highly relevant to my data, and in this thesis, I illustrate how the discourse of achievement and experts in men's talk have their own manifestations in Chinese men's talk (Chapter 5) and how men in my research use teasing as a linguistic strategy to construct their toughness (Chapter 6).

With more empirical evidence, recent language and masculinity studies provide different and even contradictory pictures from previous studies, which echoes Johnson's (1997) statement that hegemonic masculinity can be very unpredictable and context dependent. For example, the view in Connell's (2005) original formula that hegemonic masculinity typically involves the subordination of women and the vilification of gay men (Cameron, 1997; Coates, 2003) has been challenged. Research has shown that not all men who desire and have sex with other men are necessarily victims of a masculine hegemony (Baker, 2005, 2008; Milani, 2013). In contrast, they may collude with a dominant masculinist discourse that devalues women and femininity while challenging marginalising discourses that portray homosexual men as intrinsically effeminate. Therefore, it may be theoretically simplistic and empirically limiting to continue with the claim that hegemonic masculinity is defined principally in terms of heterosexuality subordinating male homosexuality (Milani, 2015: 16).

Kiesling (2007) takes a step further to question the theoretical affordance of 'hegemonic masculinity': even if it has value in describing the oppression of gay men and women, it is still unable to fully explain the complexity and potentially contradictory aspects or hybridity of masculine discourses. Therefore, as the response to current criticism, hegemonic masculinity is further developed with the understanding that it is at best partial, fluid, always shape-shifting, and open to contestation. Secondly, hegemonic masculinity is pluralised, and formed at the intersections of gender, sexuality, class, age, ethnicity, professional background, and history. In this research, I align myself closely with this understanding to explore the plurality and intersectionality of hegemonic masculinity.

Despite the criticism of 'hegemonic masculinity', I still use this concept as it captures how men constantly pursue the status of 'accepted and approved men' in their everyday lives. However, at the

same time, I acknowledge that hegemonic masculinity may have different versions or models in a contemporary Chinese context. Hence, my first research aim is to pinpoint what hegemonic models of masculinity my participants perform and construct in their friendship talk. I endeavour to reveal how men in my research position themselves in relation to hegemonic models of masculinity in their socio-cultural context. When focusing on their micro language practices, I unpack how men's friendship talk is used as a resource to not only sustain and naturalise but also negotiate, distance and contest hegemonic models of masculinity. Moreover, I argue that different versions of hegemonic masculinity can only be identified with an intersectional approach; thus, in the following section, I review how masculinity can interplay with other social constructs, such as ethnicity, race, social class, locality, age in an intersectional way from previous studies.

2.2.2 Intersectional Identities and Masculinities

Intersectionality as an approach was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw to 'denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's employment experiences' (1991: 1244). With a particular focus on the intersections of race and gender, Crenshaw used this concept to highlight the need to account for multiple grounds of identity and oppression when considering how the social world is constructed (ibid: 1245). Despite some criticisms, such as the lack of a clearly defined methodology (McCall, 2005: 1771), inherent ambiguity in its definition, and the use of Black women as the prototypical intersectional subject (Nash, 2008), this approach provided a new perspective and understanding of how differences in identity politics are not transcendent, but rather the result of interacting intragroup differences. For example, many women are subjected to violence due to aspects of their identities beyond gender, such as race and class (Crenshaw, 1991: 1242).

Even though certain previous researchers have not explicitly stated that they have adopted an intersectionality approach, their empirical data can still show how masculinity interacts with other social variables to construct specific models of masculinity. For example, Kiesling (2001, 2003, 2007) has shown how masculinity interacts with whiteness in the US context, manifesting in four dominant cultural discourses of masculinities: gender difference, heterosexism, dominance, and male solidarity. More recently, especially after the 2010s, studies on language and masculinity have broadened their attention not only to sexuality, but also encompass the dominance of nationalism, ethnicity, age, race and social class (Milani, 2015).

Milani and Johnsson's (2011, 2012) ethnographic research in several Swedish schools shows how ethnicity has shaped the gender performance of young immigrant men in Sweden. Unlike the media portrayal of 'troublesome youngsters' who only speak a 'multi-ethnic slang', immigrant young men actually employ a rich repertoire that covers a continuum from standard Swedish to non-standard linguistic variations. These linguistic resources are drawn upon as a discursive toolkit to produce different masculinities. In the context of school, standard Swedish is associated with being a good student or a good boy, whilst non-standard linguistic practises are often associated with 'tough street-wise thugs'. These young men strategically capitalise on the ideological affordances given by linguistic styles to voice and bring into being a variety of different masculine personas.

Lawson's (2009, 2013, 2015) research on young working-class adolescent males in urban Glasgow demonstrated that linguistic practice is a rich resource to be drawn on in the construction of 'toughness' in different communities of practice. This toughness model of masculinity is closely linked to age, social class, and locality (Glasgow is often associated with a dominant hegemonic ideology of

'tough' masculinity). Lawson uses the notion of Community of Practice (CofP) to categorise groups in his ethnographic-informed sociolinguistic research. Defined as 'an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour' (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992: 464), this concept describes a particular group or community not based on certain predetermined attributes, such as sex, age or location, but based on their shared practices. This means that their shared ways of doing things, ways of talking, belief, values and power relations emerge in the course of a mutual endeavour to define a community. Therefore, in Lawson's research, even though his working-class male adolescent research participants attended the same school, four different Communities of Practice were identified.

Lawson (2009: 134-168) outlined these four CofPs as: a) the Alternative CofP who see themselves as different from the 'mainstream' and only participate in social practices that could be considered 'alternative' from a sub-cultural standpoint; b) the Sports CofP whose main social practices are playing, watching and discussing sports, specifically football and rugby; c) the Neds CofP who tend to drink, smoke, engage with the local subculture, fight and take an active anti-school stance; and d) the Schoolies CofP who value a 'pro-school' stance, are oriented toward conformity with the school, and are opposed to the use of alcohol and drugs. Lawson (2013, 2015) found that this 'tough' masculinity ideology can be partially rejected by some speakers, for instance, the Schoolies CofP, but it can sometimes be positively aligned with the Neds CofP. The discursive construction of 'tough' masculinity is operationalised by speakers from different CofPs through their non-standard linguistic practices (i.e. phonetic features) and narratives.

Capturing gender identities as a process, Lawson (2013) suggests that working-class male identity and 'tough' masculinity emerge in interaction. He argues that perhaps the focus in linguistic/ discourse study should not be on exploring how a 'working-class male' identity is produced through an examination of 'working-class male' language, but instead on how prominent cultural discourses such as 'tough' masculinity emerge in interaction and how these discourses operate as part of a larger set of identity practices (Lawson, 2013: 373-376). This perspective allows us to understand that these 'tough' identities are not only about 'being tough' as static psychological categories of 'ordinary', 'heroic' or 'rebellious', but also the complexity of the moment-by-moment unfolding of identity construction.

Lawson (2015) shows the indexical links between 'non-standard' variations and the social meaning of 'toughness' through narrative analysis. He illustrates how the four different CofPs react to the dominant discourses of tough masculinity – they reject, contest and challenge. Lawson argues that these male adolescents perform a particular form of masculine identity that draws on the association of non-standard variants with working-class speakers and, by extension, stereotypical working-class characteristics such as toughness, physical strength, and courage. Therefore, how young men in Glasgow construct and perform their identities as 'young urban men' is complex, sophisticated and subtle.

Using spontaneous conversation collected from a group of multi-ethnic working-class young men in South London, Pia Pichler's (2019, 2021b) research illustrates how social factors such as socioeconomic class, gender, ethnicity and race interact dynamically in the shape of gender identities. For example, cultural concepts such as 'white posh girls from The Hill' and 'hipsters moving into the

hood' that index cultural knowledge of hip-hop and various aspects of 'macrosociological order' (Silverstein, 2004) are deployed by them to authenticate their group identity. In these men's talk, race – interplayed with social class – remains important in the intersections of hip-hop authentication (Pichler and Williams, 2016). This group of men's intersectional identities and masculinities are also performed in their use of high-risk humour. Their conversational joking about hair and fashion is used not only for bonding in the group, but also 'allows for the policing of group norms and constitutes an important resource for the young men's authentication', which includes the interplay of social class, ethnicity and race (Pichler, 2019: 183).

Pichler (2021b) also explores masculinities in terms of a fatherhood discourse. She explores how these men position themselves in a range of fathering discourses, shaped by and shaping their intersectional and hegemonic masculinities. Those men's positionings are informed by the interactions of race, ethnicity and social class, and they show a heteroglossic construction of fatherhood. These men, on the one hand, balance traditional discourses of fathers as providers, protectors and moral guides with modern models of caring and dedicated fatherhood. On the other hand, these discourses compete with other discourses such as virile masculinity and bad boy identities. When reflecting the current theoretical development of interactional identities, Pichler (2021a) highlights how the 'locality' factor, even though not explicitly foregrounded, interplays with other social variables such as gender class, race, and ethnicity for an emergent construction of gender identities.

In this research, I align myself with this intersectional approach to understanding identities and masculinities. Only through this perspective can the complexity, nuances and subtlety of masculinities in everyday discursive construction be unveiled. More recent language and masculinity studies have

started to anchor their focus away from Europe and North America, including places such as Israel (Levon, 2015), Japan (Nakamura, 2020) and Jamaica (Anderson and McLean, 2014). In applied linguistics, some studies have explored teachers' identity in relation to masculinities, viewing white and heterosexual masculinity as part of many TESOL teachers' identity (Appleby, 2013).

However, there is no research on men's talk dedicated to the Chinese context that has explored the topic of masculinities. I aim to provide more empirical data from Chinese men's talk to enrich the current discussion of intersectional and hegemonic masculinities. In recent years, a few discourse studies have explored masculinity in the context of China. For instance, Gong Yuan[1] (2016) used critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine the communicative actions of Chinese Arsenal football fans with a close reading of 50 fan discussion entries on the Baidu message board. Her research first showed that, unsurprisingly, the online discourse reinforced the masculine hierarchy signified by '*gaofushuai*' and '*diaosi*'. *Gaofushuai* and *diaosi* are dichotomous nouns that emerged from Chinese cyberspace to describe two distinct types of men depending on their economic strength and social-class positions (see Huang, 2018). *Gaofushuai* (高富帅) is a combination of three Chinese adjectives – tall, rich and handsome, respectively – and it generally refers to Chinese males from the middle to upper classes who have considerable financial resources and consumerist power. *Diaosi* (屌丝), as the opposite, literally means the hairs on the penis, which often connotes lower-class, grassroots males.

According to Gong (2016: 21), *gaofushuai* and *diaosi* are often used together to represent an explicit masculine hierarchy, and the online discussions on football clubs and football players reflect and reinforce this hierarchy. On the other hand, those online discussions also rework the textual meanings

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[1] To respect the traditions of the Chinese language, I have decided to do the following citation convention for in-text citation of Chinese authors. I use their family name first and then their given name. For instance, Gong is the surname for this Chinese author.

of *gaofushuai* and *diaosi*, resulting in the contestation and subversion of the superiority and inferiority of *gaofushuai* and *diaosi* based on economic disparity. They contest the hegemony of *gaofushuai* through mocking some *gaofushuai* players or clubs whose superiority solely relies on their financial resources rather than actual performance and skill. They emphasise the importance of other noneconomic resources to define masculinities in relation to football (Gong, 2016: 26). Therefore, Gong (2016) argues that football fans' identities emerge from their linguistic resources in cyber space and their masculinities can be unstable, unpredictable and performative.

With a similar research focus on cyberspace, Huang Yanning's (2018) PhD thesis focused on online buzzwords related to gender and social class in contemporary China. The biggest implication of his research is perhaps to unravel the heterogeneous composition and social stratifications of Internet users, rather than taking for granted and celebrating 'grassroots netizens'. After a historical review of social class and gender in the Chinese context, his research shows how social class interacts with gender to shape the dominant gender ideologies in today's Chinese society. He illustrates that the post-1980s generation constitutes an emerging new middle class in post-socialist China. However, they are angry and anxious, underlining their 'underprivileged' status in the form of humorous wordplay. In terms of gender ideologies, whereas Chinese masculinity shows its model of wealth-based hegemonic masculinity, femininity demonstrates an emerging ideology of consumerist feminism. Embodied by young urban middle-class women, consumerist feminism only empowers women in the private realm of the body, sexuality and private consumption.

Continuing the exploration of the topic of masculinity from media discourse, Yu and Nartey (2021) examined the representation of 'leftover' men with the corpus built from 65 English language written

news reports in Chinese media. Considering the media representation of 'leftover' women has been extensively researched, while marginalised 'leftover' men are given very little research attention, their research has revealed how leftover men are represented. Such men are represented as poor men, troublemakers and victims through discursive processes that include referential and aggregation strategies as well as metaphors. Media discourses perhaps fuel the marginalisation of those 'left-over' men in the dominant society where Chinese hegemonic masculinity is largely defined by wealth (Song and Hird, 2014). However, Yu and Nartey's (2021) research lacks clarification about who those 'leftover men' actually are, as they simply suggest that they are from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. I argue that instead of treating Chinese masculinity as a vaguely defined term in the current language and masculinity studies, more historical reviews and perspectives should be used to understand the plural, intersectional and hybrid Chinese masculinities. Thus, in the following section 3, with an interdisciplinary research review, I illustrate how Chinese masculinity has been researched, and how those studies can bring more insights to this linguistic ethnographic research.

The review of the limited studies on Chinese masculinity and language shows that the currently available research is still largely based on media representation or online cyberspace discourse. More research with an ethnographic component is needed to allows to understand the complexity and nuances of Chinese masculinities and language. Therefore, I use multiple sources of data, including self-recorded spontaneous conversations, participant observation and ethnographic interviews to fill the gap and understand how men actually use words in their everyday talk with their friends. Using this empirical evidence, the subsequent analysis chapters reveal how social constructs such as locality, age, and social class interplay together to shape interactional identities and masculinities. With my

data collected from men's friendship talk, another aim of this thesis is to explore how men bond through their talk. Hence, in the following section, I illustrate how heterosexual males maintain homosocial bonding.

2.2.3 Men's Talk, Heterosexuality and Homosocial Bonding

Homosociality is defined as individuals of the same sex who have strong social ties with one another in a non-sexual way, such as friendship or mentorship, fraternities or men's physical or verbal interactions around sports events (Bird 1996; Flood 2008). Based on this context, homosociality relates to men's preference for the company of their own sex for social but not sexual reasons (Lipman-Blumen, 1976). This concept is highly relevant to my data as male closeness and bonding is central to my research. The multiple sources of data in this research were collected from two friendship groups whose members were all heterosexual men. Homosocial desire has a long-rooted tradition in Chinese culture and it perpetually impacts Chinese men today. Song (2010) argues that homosocial desire is at the core of masculine discourses in the Chinese tradition, and male friendship and loyalty is seen as an ideal model of masculinity (Louie, 2002). During my data collection, participants in this study highly valued and emphasised their friendships, and therefore, I aim to understand how these men bond through their everyday language use, and how their male homosociality impacts and constrains their masculinity.

The concept of homosociality has been shown to be a useful foundation to examine men's talk when heterosexual men are in the company of other men. Male homosociality, which involves the urge to develop and sustain same-gender social rapport, is crucial in maintaining hegemonic masculinity. However, such closeness may lead to a 'dangerous' perception of homosexuality (Cameron, 1997: 61),

which may paradoxically threaten hegemonic masculinity. Hence, a display of heterosexuality is often required to diminish the potential risk that often accompanies Western male homosociality. The aforementioned studies on men's same-sex talk (Cameron, 1997; Coates, 2003; Kiesling, 2001, 2003) have shown that displaying heterosexuality is central to hegemonic masculinity in homosocial groups. As a powerful form of hegemonic masculinity, those studies show that heterosexuality can be exerted through opposition to and oppression of women and gay men.

Heterosexual male-female relationships are often drawn on to balance this 'male homosocial double bind' (Lakoff, 1975). Bird (1996) conducted interviews with primarily white college-educated men and identified three characteristics of manhood: emotional distance from women, participation in competition (sports or otherwise) with other men, and sexual objectification of women. These features must be exhibited in front of other heterosexual men to gain their approval. Similarly, Flood (2008) found that male-female relationships can only have one sexual purpose, and such male-female relationships (platonic or sexual) are subordinated to male homosocial relationships. Accordingly, male bonding is strengthened through heterosexual talk with storytelling about their sexual conquests. Hence, men's talk becomes an important arena to seek the approval of other men in homosocial relationships (Kimmel, 1994). Telling stories of sexual experiences is a common theme in my data, hence, in Chapter 5, I explore how those sexual stories are told to maintain the homosocial dimension and virile masculinties.

Homosociality has been well-represented in straight sportsmen's 'locker room' talk. These heterosexual men value solidarity in their highly competitive games and they construct their solidarity with their teammates in an intimate surrounding: the 'locker room'. As a specific male discourse and

genre, 'locker room talk' may serve as a representative of men's talk to illustrate how men display their heterosexuality and gain approval from other men. Koenraad Kuiper (1998) examined the 'locker room' talk of a male rugby team in New Zealand, finding that these young men used explicit verbal sexual humiliation as a mode of address, greeting and vocative formulae to construct their solidarity. Similar to the American fraternity subjects in Kiesling's (2003) research, who addressed their male friends as 'bitches', these New Zealand sportsmen addressed their teammates as 'wanker', 'cunt' and 'cock'. While Kiesling interprets those terms of address as asserting their heterosexual identity, Kuiper (1998: 291) notes that such banter 'denigrates a man's masculinity by suggesting that he is a part of the female sexual anatomy'. Characterised with discourses of sexism, homophobia, and high competitiveness, 'locker room talk' further secures and maintains heteronormative hegemonic masculinity and male dominance in a patriarchal society (Cole et al., 2020; Rhodes et al., 2020).

The homosocial atmosphere requires men's conversation to avoid being perceived as 'feminine'. To stay away from the characteristics of women's talk, which centres on sharing personal feelings, men are found not to share or reveal feelings, emotions and vulnerability in their talk (Bird, 1996; Coates, 2003). Male friendships, accordingly, are seen as shallow and superficial (Seidler, 1992: 17). With his empirical evidence of American fraternity men, Kiesling (2005: 695) argues that men actually have a homosocial desire, and they can use their language to create and display their close social bonding personally and emotionally. However, this type of homosocial desire is created and displayed through indirectness, for instance such men broadcast their homosocial desire to the institution/group rather than individuals, to avoid potential perceptions of homosexual inclination.

Situating the examination of masculinity in central Europe, Bodó and colleagues' (2019) research demonstrates how Hungarian university students use their linguistic resources to construct their masculinities in a post-socialist society. Employing the theoretical concept of 'voice' (Bakhtin, 1981; Agha, 2005), their research reveals individual and social voices of masculinity. They argue that the multiple voices of masculinity do not simply imply the transformations of power and gender relations, rather, they allow the negotiation of multiple ideologies. For example, on the one hand, their conversation indicates that such men are misogynistic and homophobic, but on the other hand, this type of ideology was also often contested by their peers. Such incongruous discourses are not only evident in those men's disagreement with one another, but also occur in the same individual.

In the male homosocial setting of a post-socialist dormitory, young men deploy a 'homosexual innuendo' discursive strategy (Milani and Jonsson, 2011). For instance, the phrase 'I love you Otto!' was captured in their everyday same-sex dormitory talk. Unlike American fraternity men's 'Honey, I am home!', which drew on a heteronormative perspective (Kiesling, 2003), this type of strategy was used as a play of representing a homosexual figure for self-positioning. This positioning can serve a disciplining function to avoid weakness and femininity, but at the same time, it also strengthens the social bonds within the group as an exhibition of closeness. Put differently, the gay voice is involved in an interactional reality for a contribution of interactants' shared experience of proximity, even though they are heterosexual men themselves. This is very similar to what I identified in my MA thesis on Chinese men's same sex talk (Zhang, 2014). My empirical evidence showed that Chinese heterosexual male friends call each other 'good gay friends' (*haojiyou*) to demonstrate their closeness. Using their words: 'we live together, eat together, and play games together, we are pretty much like a gay couple'.

Most research on men's talk through the prism of homosociality has often been based on their shared institutional practices, such as in a fraternity, dormitory or sports team. In this thesis, I investigate a specific form of homosociality: post-80s generation Chinese men's friendship. As the generation that was impacted by the 'one child' policy, those men are the only children in their families. Hence, they particularly value friendship, using their word, 'our friends are our chosen siblings', and their friendships have formed their friendship over more than 10 years. Therefore, it is necessary to further discuss the Chinese socio-cultural context to reveal how homosocial desire can be understood in relation to the context of contemporary China. In this way, exploring male bonding can be accomplished through both comparison with Western male counterparts as well as socio-cultural explanations. Hence, in the following section, I review the topic of Chinese masculinity.

2.3 Chinese Masculinity

In this section, I provide a historical review of the topic of Chinese masculinity. I depart from the early research on Chinese masculinity in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which is often situated in the diasporic contexts. In those studies, Chinese masculinity was approached through the lens of ethnicity, and its cultural characteristics were often attributed to 'Chineseness' (Chua and Fujino; 1999; Hibbins, 2003). Subsequent researchers from various disciplines later brought the research focus on Chinese masculinity back to its origin, unpacking how this 'Chineseness' has impacted Chinese masculinity from history to today (Louie, 2002, 2016; Song, 2004). In the past decade, more research has been dedicated to revealing the hybrid and complex features of Chinese masculinities (Song and Hird, 2014) in contemporary China, from online discourse (Huang. Y, 2018), and representation of media discourse (Song and Lee, 2010, 2012) to men's lived experiences (Osburg, 2013; Choi and Peng, 2016; Wong,

2020). Through a review of those studies, I aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of Chinese masculinities to support my interpretation of masculinities and language in my data.

2.3.1 From Diasporic Context to Homeland: Chinese Masculinity

English academic studies on Chinese masculinities were first conducted, in diasporic contexts, in the 1990s following the first China studies in academic institutions in North America. Chinese masculinity was introduced as a topic to present how Chinese men were racially subordinated and, at the same time, exerting male dominance over women (Chan, 2001; Cheng, 1999a, 1999b). The characteristics of Chinese masculinity in those studies were often based on the comparison with their Western counterparts: they were portrayed as lacking traits like dominance, aggression, competitiveness, physical ability, stoicism, and control that are frequently associated with white males. Some scholars argue that this perception may be due to their relatively smaller physical size and strength. Therefore, as a result, Chinese men were constantly discriminated against in US mainstream society (Cheng, 1999a: 298). In addition, the over-representation in technical fields, such as accounting, engineering and computer science lead them to be stereotyped as 'nerds' (Cheng, 1999b). These stereotypes consequently reinforced the marginalisation of Asian male immigrants, leaving them the victims of (white) hegemonic masculinity.

Other scholars advocate seeing this difference as a 'new' or 'flexible' model of masculinity, endowing Chinese masculinity with more positive attributes. For instance, in a quantitative study of gender expectations and gender attitudes between Asian American and white college men, Peter Chua and Diane Fujino (1999) found that Asian American men saw masculinity as more flexible. Their questionnaire data showed that the Asian Americans were more willing to do household chores than

their white counterparts, and their caring characteristics made them more attractive to white and Asian women in the US. This research concluded that Asian American men had 'flexible' gender attitudes in which maleness could contain elements of both masculinity and femininity. Even though Chua and Fujino (1999) attempted to assign Asian masculinity with compliments, their interpretation of masculinity was still largely based on a Western gaze and definitions of masculinity and femininity.

Later, Jachinson Chan's (2001) argues for the empowerment Chinese masculinity as an alternative to counter the hegemonic (white) masculinity of US society. Through his examination of the representation of Chinese men in literature, films and comic books from the 1940s to 2000, his qualitative cultural study demonstrated how Chinese masculinity was perceived and stereotyped in American popular culture. Chinese men living in the West were excluded from the elite and hegemonic groups because of their ethnicity. Chan described this model of masculinity as ambivalent and ambiguous and referred to it as ambisexual masculinity. Despite the presence of studies at that time aiming to introduce Chinese masculinity for more discussion and even empowerment, I agree with Ray Hibbins (2003: 198) who observed that they failed to see the diversity of gender identities and heterogeneity of Chinese masculinity/ies.

Instead of seeing Chinese men living in the West as a homogeneous group, Hibbins (2003) conducted semi-structured interviews with 40 Chinese male immigrants living in Australia, who came from a broad range of backgrounds. To illustrate a picture of Chinese masculinity, Hibbins outlined different 'themes' or 'markers' of Chinese masculinity. The first theme was Chineseness, defined as 'the features of the traditional values and behaviours that have persisted in the present lives of the informants and that influence their thoughts and social actions' (Hibbins, 2003: 204). In his work, this

'Chineseness' was the core theme linked to the other themes of Chinese masculinity, including Chinese men's lack of asceticism and their reluctance to express affection.

While their white counterparts in Australia placed an emphasis on sports and leisure, Hibbins' informants focused on hard work and education. For them, masculinity was measured by their ability to achieve educational success and accumulate wealth from hard work. The emphasis of family and male friends was central to their masculine ideal. Hibbins observed that Chinese men were not averse to physical expressions of affection to their male friends. According to his research, those Chinese men held hands, touched each other, embraced, and even kissed, even though this might make Anglo-Celtic males feel repulsed and adopt a homophobic attitude (Hibbins, 2003: 212). Such behaviours are still evident in my ethnographic data. I observed that the closeness and bonding of the men in my research manifests in this form of physical intimacy. The emphasis and highlights of their male friendship are still seen as the ideal model of masculinity for most Chinese men to pursue.

Perhaps 'Chineseness' could offer a convenient explanation for different manifestations of Chinese masculinity in a diasporic context; however, those 'themes' or 'markers' are based on a comparison with their Western counterparts. Put differently, the findings are still subject to a 'West-East' dichotomy to make sense of Chinese masculinity. It may be too simplistic to attribute such differences in gender performances to the feature of 'Chineseness' without explaining how historical, cultural and social significance has shaped this 'Chineseness'. In the next section, I unpack how research from disciplines such as cultural studies and comparative literature on Chinese masculinity has unpacked 'Chineseness' in shaping Chinese masculinity (Louie, 2002; Song, 2004; Wang, 2003).

2.3.2 Unpacking Chineseness: Wen-Wu Dyad Model of Masculinity

Moving the research focus from the diaspora to its origins, Louie (2002: 2) argues that Chinese masculinities should be examined through a frame specific to Chinese historical and socio-cultural contexts before any further analysis and discussion can take place in a global setting. Louie's theory of the *wen-wu* dyad (2002, 2014, 2015) can form the departure point for historical reviews of Chinese masculinity and its theorisation. This concept of Chinese masculinity has influenced and even shaped Chinese masculinity throughout history until today. *Wen-wu* 'encompasses the dichotomy between intellectual and physical attainment' (Louie, 2015: 110), representing ideal masculine qualities for Chinese men to pursue. Women were not entitled to this dyad, even though some of them excelled at literary or military pursuits (Louie, 2015: 111). Mulan's story serves as an example that only a woman disguising herself as a male could attain this *wen-wu* evaluation. The exclusion of women made *wen-wu* a predominantly masculine ideal to pursue in imperial China.

2.3.2.1 Wu masculinity

Specifically, the *wen* model is often represented by men who are said to have intellectual accomplishments. *Wu* masculinity, on the other hand, is seen as the opposite of *wen* masculinity, with its focus on physical strength and bravery. *Wu* masculinity is represented as brave warriors and fighters in literary accounts. Classic novels describe how *wu* heroes endure pain in war and how they finally achieve their ambition through bravery, brutality, physical strength and fitness. The identification of *wu* masculinity is meaningful because it shows that if masculinity is viewed through an appropriate 'cultured' lens, a more macho type of masculinity can be found in Chinese culture (Eng, 2001). For instance, the ancient warrior Guanyu, who is still worshipped today as the god of war, is often seen as the representation of *wu* masculinity. As a legendary general from the period of the 'three kingdoms' (200-280 AD), he is renowned for his martial techniques, strength and wisdom in

military strategies. Other *wu* heroes, such as *haohan* (good fellows) portrayed in the novel entitled *The Water Margin*, are characterised by their copious consumption of wine and meat, boundless generosity and absolute loyalty to male friends (Hird, 2019). These defining qualities are evident in my data: men in my research still use drinking prowess to define masculinity (Chapter 4 and 6), and the emphasis on generosity (Chapter 4) and commitment to male friendship (Chapter 7) are still valued today as virtues.

Another interesting characteristic of *wu* masculinity in historical literature is that a *wu* hero must constrain his sexual and romantic desire for women (Louie, 2002: 8). Unlike Western heroes who always have female partners, one of the strengths that *wu* heroes need to demonstrate is their ability to resist the sexual lure of women (Huang, 2006: 92-93). Song (2004) argues that this may be due to the perception that romantic involvement with women is an obstacle to the male protagonists' political ambitions. This perception continues to influence Hollywood kung-fu film characters thousands of years later in the US. In Chan's (2001) book on the stereotyped representation of Asian masculinity in US popular culture, he found that unlike other hero films in US mainstream culture, in American Chinese icon Bruce Lee's films, he rarely interacted with female characters or developed any romantic relationships. The resistance of romantic involvement with women and the emphasis on male loyalty in *wu* masculinity endows Chinese friendship with cultural and historical characteristics. Chapter 7 in this thesis demonstrates that the exclusion and denigration of women were often drawn on by my male participants to define their gendered male friendship.

2.3.2.2 Wen masculinity

In contrast to *wu* masculinity, which is represented by brave and physically fit fighters, intellectuals and scholars are the ideal images of *wen* masculinity. Accordingly, possessing intelligence or academic

excellence becomes a desirable masculine quality. In imperial China, the only official way of selecting people to become bureaucrats and leaders serving the state was the civil service examination, known as the *Keju* system (Louie, 2015: 3). Through a test of knowledge of classical Confucian work, successful candidates were selected based on their academic merit and then became government officials – the most desirable profession in Chinese history and culture (Hird, 2019).

Represented as the ideal image of *wen* masculinity, students, scholars and intellectual officials have accordingly become the focus of Chinese masculinity research (Wang, 2003; Song, 2004; Liu, 2014). In imperial China, these men were stereotypically presented in romantic stories about talented scholars (*caizi*) and beautiful women (*jiaren*), and this 'scholar-beauty romance' literary genre reached its peak in the Ming-Qing Dynasty (Louie, 2002; Song, 2004). Male characters in this literary genre were represented as sentimental and sexually attractive to women, with their masculinity constructed through their intellectual abilities and 'romantic hearts'. The men reflecting *wen* masculinity are beautiful, frail and emotionally vulnerable, and these qualities make *caizi* the ideal male lover (Song, 2004, VII). They are portrayed as having 'fair skin, elegant features, delicate physiques as well as tender voices', and these qualities to some extent correspond with female characteristics in many other cultures (Wang, 2003: 42).

Even though for most of imperial China *wen* masculinity enjoyed primacy over *wu* (Song, 2004; Louie, 2015)*,* the *wen* model of masculinity encountered challenges when China began its modernisation process. After the Anti-Japanese War and the Civil War, in 1949, new China was established, and since then the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has been working to modernise the state. During the highly socialist era (from the 1950s to the early 1980s), Chinese masculinity seemed to deviate from

traditional core attributes (Louie, 2002: 161). *Wen* masculinity was no longer appreciated and appraised because 'tough' and 'strong' men were desired and needed to rebuild the country. Hence, *wu* masculinity embodied as working-class men in factories became the dominant discourse of masculinity. Wang Yiyan's (2003) literary study of the novel *Defunct Capital* (*Feidu*) supports this argument. Written by Jia Pingao in 1993 and set in Xi'an City in the early 1980s, the novel portrays Chinese communist scholars as an undesirable and negative form of 'soft' masculinity. According to Wang (2003: 56), this shift was caused by the modernity of communism and the influence of the Western definition of male sexuality.

During this highly socialist (or Maoist) era, gender policies were a significant part of the CCP's agenda, aiming to achieve equality between women and men. Women were encouraged to work to rejuvenate China after the wars, and they enjoyed more civil rights than they ever had before. To reflect gender equality, women chose or were encouraged not to express their femininity. One of the results of this was the gender-neutral ethos: women wore the same uniforms and had the same short hairstyles as men (Evans, 2008: 85; Honig, 2002: 255). This campaign reached its peak during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). This societal transformation in terms of gender was accompanied by a pervasive public discourse, '*yin sheng yang shuai*', which translates as 'women are too powerful and men are too weak'. The discourse of the masculinity in crisis and concerns about the absence of 'real men' hence became prevalent in China's era of high socialism.

2.3.3 Chinese Masculinity in the Post-Reform Era

In December 1978, the party-state introduced a 'reform and opening-up' programme, which marked the start of significant social changes in China. This economic reform 'would reduce the role of

government in economic management, introduce marketisation to the domestic economy and open the domestic economy to global interactions' (Goodman, 2014: 23). The 'opening-up' policy allows China to embrace a much wider global economy. It accelerated radical economic growth in the following three decades and made China the global superpower that it is today. It also accompanied and resulted in dramatic social changes in China from the early 1980s. The loosening of restrictions on mobility and social organisations (such as *danwei* work units*)* shifted the emphasis on collective values in the previous socialist period to a rise of individualism (Yan, 2003). Against this social background, men and women began to express their own desires (Rofel, 2007) and, as a result, Chinese masculinity was redefined in this new era. The following section introduces the complex and pluralised features of Chinese masculinities in the post-reform era (Song, 2010; Song and Hird, 2014; Huang, Y., 2018; Hird, 2019).

Most of the men in my research work for the government or state-owned enterprises, which is often seen as 'working within the system' (*tizhi nei*). In this thesis, I illustrate how the historical residue of venerating governmental professions is still underlined and marked in today's society. Through the examination of their conversational narrative and humour, I show how men in my research display and negotiate their professional identities (Chapter 4 and 6), which can index their upper-middle class status.

2.3.3.1 'Masculinity in crisis' and a return to a traditional type of manhood

Despite the economic structure experiencing transformation and change, the previous masculinity in crisis discourse continued to haunt men after the reform. In the 1980s, Chinese male intellectuals searched for their traditional cultural roots to rebuild their 'manhood'; this was called the *'xungen'* cultural movement. They attempted to return to more traditional values to redefine Chinese

masculinity based on cultural roots and national identity (Zhong, 2000: 151-170). Baranovitch's (2003) interdisciplinary research on urban Chinese popular music in China from 1979-1997 also confirms this trend. He asserted that the popularity of rock music indicates a belief by male musicians and their audiences that rock music could be the solution to 'masculinity in crisis'. They attempted to regain, reconstruct or compensate for their repressed masculinity by displaying their 'rebelliousness' in their performance and music production (Baranovitch, 2003: 114-116). Chinese masculinities in rock seemed to display certain aspects of *wu* masculinity as rock musicians often embody Western-inspired macho and tough masculine figures.

However, they could not separate themselves from their Chinese cultural roots. For instance, the themes of many rock songs were based on traditional stories or the collectivist ethos and nationalist discourse (ibid.: 117-119). From the mid-1990s, 'rebellious' rock music became less popular, and the macho type of manhood lost much of its appeal. As such, Baranovitch (2003: 132) argued that popular music started to represent a 'neo-traditional mode of manhood'. This refers to a return to a more traditional *wen* type of male image, such as the refined and sophisticated expression of masculinity. After years of suppression from the 1940s, the *wen* model of masculinity regained popularity after the 1990s.

Song Geng further unpacked this 'traditional mode of manhood' by examining the representation of the 'good man' in TV series (2010) and a particular anti-Japanese TV genre (2017) on state-owned television channels. He argued that the return to the traditional male identity is linked to the conspicuous rise of nationalism in mainland China. Song found that 'a man who brings honour to the motherland and safeguards national dignity on the international stage' became a desirable man

(2010: 409). This relationship between nationhood and manhood is by no means unique to Chinese culture (ibid.: 419). Song (2010, 2017) believes that the new wave of nationalist sentiment since the 2000s in urban China is not simply the result of state-led propaganda designed to enforce social stability and harmony. Instead, it is more a reaction to oppressive global capitalism. The rise of nationalism can be linked to several riot events related to anti-Japanese sentiment in which urban youth legitimised their discontent with their economic conditions.

2.3.3.2 Wealth-based masculinity: how gender interacts with social class

The redistribution of wealth and power since the 1980s has made hegemonic masculinity in the post-reform era increasingly defined by wealth. The *wen* type of masculinity has hence been embodied as 'self-centred, materialistic, consumerist' in the post-reform era (Song and Hird, 2014: 24). In the collection *Men and Masculinity in Contemporary China* (2014), oriented from the discipline of media and cultural studies, Song Geng and Derek Hird (2014) argues that images of successful businessmen, the *dakuan* (literally, 'big money men'), have shaped a new hegemonic model of masculinity. The emphasis on personal wealth has become a benchmark for powerful and desirable men, and it continues to be a prevailing discourse (Song and Hird, 2014; Choi and Peng, 2016; Wong, 2020). Money-based manhood and masculinity is interwoven with consumerism, manifested in popular culture (Song and Lee, 2010; 2012) and social media discourse (Huang, Y., 2018).

Pursuing money and power as the ideal model of masculinity in contemporary China reflects the aspiration of social mobility accompanied by striking social changes since the 1980s. In his PhD thesis, Huang Yanning (2018: 81-125) provides a historical review of class and gender in China. He suggests that the concept of class, intertwined with gender politics, is framed, emphasised or downplayed largely according to the state narrative. In sharp contrast to the over-emphasis on class and class

struggle in the hyper-politicised socialist era (So, 2013, Goodman, 2014), since the start of the 1980s, the state has constantly downplayed class. In line with the official will, Chinese academia and media use terms such as 'stratum' (*jieceng*) and 'groups' (*qunti*) to refer to the meaning that class entails. Such a downplay of class is also captured in my ethnographic research in which my participants rarely explicitly expressed or discussed their social class. Even though their social class resembles the characteristics of the upper-middle class in the UK context (see introduction in Chapter 3), they often distance themselves from and even deny such positioning. However, this does not mean that their social class does not exist; in this thesis, I reveal how their upper-middle classness is indexed, implied and discursively constructed through their language practices.

Considering China's unique historical and social background in terms of class issues, the classification and identification of class is often based on a gradational model (Guo, 2009). However, to date there is still no consensus among academics in China on specific models for the identification of social class. Studies on social class in Chinese contemporary society are still undergoing theoretical development, hence, inevitably, Chinese masculinity often lacks an explicit discussion from the dimension of social class (Choi and Peng, 2016). However, a review of studies on Chinese masculinity in contemporary society can still illustrate how masculinity interacts with the implicit and under-defined social class.

Anthropologist John Osburg (2013) focuses on Chinese upper middle-class elite men in Chengdu, examining social networks forged among entrepreneurs, government officials and state-owned enterprise managers. Homosocial practices among elite Chinese men is highly valued, and contributes to achieving solidarity, social networks, the sharing of social resources and wealth distribution. These powerful and wealthy men, according to Obsurg, are the 'new rich' (*xingui*) class, and their elite

masculinity is constructed not only by their significant wealth but also through their morality, shaped by the ethics of brotherhood, loyalty and patronage. Their success and social status is strengthened through the expansion and maintenance of their elite social network. With his participant-observation and ethnographic interview data, Osburg (2013) illustrated how business opportunities, wealth and privileges are distributed within the social network, which often takes place in private and exclusive entertainment and leisure places, such as tea houses, clubs, and KTVs.

Masculinity related to newly emerging middle-class men in the post-reform era is often captured in consumerist and media discourse. Song and Lee (2010, 2012) examine the construction of masculinity and consumerism of a new form of popular culture: men's lifestyle magazines. Their research (Song and Lee, 2010) argues that Chinese middle-class men have cultural capital to define their social position, that is, 'taste', *pinwei*. In the Chinese cultural context, *pinwei* means 'a matter of knowing how to address, behave, dine and travel 'like a gentleman', which usually involves a superficial 'copying' of the Western lifestyle, or an imagined Western lifestyle' (ibid.: 165). Song and Lee (2010) argue that this is perhaps attributable to the long-standing association, conscious or unconscious, between Westernisation and modernisation in modern China. It indicates that the marketisation led by economic structural reform has situated the Chinese on a world stage (Louie, 2014, 2016), and there are now more complex criteria by which to define 'ideal' or 'desirable' masculinity.

Song and Lee (2012) further identify the discursive construction of middle-class Chinese masculinity in men's lifestyle magazines. There are two models of hegemonic masculinity: the 'new man' and the 'new lad'. Accordingly, they observe that 'new man' magazines target more educated, mature and middle-class men, aiming to educate their readers to pursue the image of business elites, executives

and professionals. The 'new lad' magazines, in contrast, cater to the tastes and desires of younger and more hedonistic men in the pursuit of material pleasure. Like the concept coined by Baranovitch (2003), the 'neo-traditional mode of manhood', these magazines continue to show a return to a more traditional type of masculinity in the 21st century. Overall, the notion of the 'urban stylish man' (*dushi xingnan*) resonates with *wen* masculinity, which also fits seamlessly with Western metrosexual images (Huang. Y, 2018: 123). Song and Lee (2012) argue that this return emphasises a patriarchal ideology, which can respond to discourses of a masculine identity crisis, particularly regarding sexual potency and reactions to women's liberation.

Hence, Song and Hird (2014) argue that hegemonic masculinity in contemporary China shows plural and hybrid features, foregrounding personal wealth and success, cosmopolitan taste and a well-groomed body. Even though some research portrays marginalised groups of men, such as nerdy *zhainan* (a young man who is obsessed with computers/TV/ games and stays at home all day) in modern-day China (Song and Hird, 2014: 79-121), it still lacks an explicit discussion in relation to social class/status, revealing how profound social structures impact the specific shape of Chinese masculinities. In addition to the exploration of upper middle class and middle class men, Choi and Peng's (2016) sociological research spotlights Chinese men of lower socio-economic status. With the social background of hundreds of millions of peasants having left their rural homes in search of better economic opportunities in urban cities, their research shows the emerging 'masculine compromise' from Chinese male working-class migrants in their intimate relationships. They compromise, negotiate and contest traditional gender expectations, showing changing attitudes to courtship and marriage to strike a balance in their new lives in urban cities.

2.3.3.3 'Able-responsible' model of hegemonic masculinity: men in private life

Based on an ethnographic study carried out in Nanchong, a third-tier city in Southwest China, Wong (2020) argues that in addition to financial prowess, the ideal masculinity for Chinese men also comprises men's family-centred duty. She identifies that the 'able-responsible' model of masculinity is the everyday hegemonic masculinity for Chinese men in 21st century China. Using empirical data on men from different life stages, she demonstrates how this model of masculinity has been practised and reinforced in small urban cities. By unpacking male identities in private spheres as fathers, sons and husbands, she also explores men's identities that have barely been investigated in family life: sons-in-law. She explains that, apart from the 'ability' (*nengli*) that often requires the demonstration of a certain level of material wealth, men and women find men who show responsibility (*zeren*) equally desirable, or even more appealing.

The above review shows that more empirical research has begun to examine men's lived experiences, especially in their private lives. Despite focusing on men's emotionality, desire and intimacy, I will argue that the dynamic of men's close relationships with their friends, however, remains largely underexplored. Men's social bonding with other men is often seen as an important social dynamic in Chinese history and culture (Hird, 2019; Mann, 2000); however, there is a dearth of empirical evidence discussed from either linguistic or ethnographic perspectives. Moreover, as my research participants often emphasise, as a result of China's 'one-child' policy (which lasted from the 1980s to the middle of the 2010s, varying based on region), they are the only child in their family. Therefore, same-sex friendship is a significant part of their social life, attached to their emotions and sentiments. As such, more investigation of their language use when interacting with other men will enrich our understanding of men and masculinities in today's China. Moreover, as Wong (2020) argues, we still

know very little about men living in peri-urban cities even though this category describes most of the cities in China. Therefore, linguistic ethnographic research on Chinese men, such as my participants from Kunming and Zhaotong in Yunnan Province, is meaningful.

To conclude, this section unpacks what 'Chineseness' refers to when earlier diasporic research has attempted to explain the different cultural characteristics of Chinese masculinity in comparison with white mainstream masculinity. The studies reviewed above, drawn from various disciplines, use their data, either through the representation of Chinese men or men's lived experience, to answer Louie's (2002) question, 'is there an indigenous model of Chinese masculinity?' The *wen-wu* concept equips studies on Chinese masculinities in China with a historical and cultural understanding. Despite the epistemic changes throughout the 20th century, the *wen-wu* frame still reflects a stubborn influence on Chinese men today (Song and Hird, 2014; Hird, 2019). My upcoming examinations of Chinese men's talk with their friends and the exploration of their emerging masculinities also proves the *wen-wu* frame still remains relevant when interpreting Chinese masculinities today.

However, I also acknowledge that the *wen-wu* conceptualisation may dilute interpretive and analytic sensitivities as Chinese masculinities reflect more hybrid features in post-socialist China. As Jankowiak and Li (2014: 14) conclude, today, a man can be more *wen* in one setting and more *wu* in another. In this new milieu, men and women have increased space to experiment with social personae that, in their way, range somewhere along the *wen-wu* continuum. Therefore, perhaps, on the one hand, we need to conceptualise Chinese masculinity within cultural and historical insights and sensitivity; but on the other hand, we still need to adopt new theories and perspectives to understand the nuances and complexity of Chinese masculinity in this new era. Therefore I still employ other concepts in this

research to support my theoretical stance when understanding masculinity, such as performativity, intersectionality and a Foucault-inspired discourse approach. More importantly, I would like to use my research to understand how these cultural and traditional values interact with the dominant discourse of masculinity on the global stage (Louie, 2015).

2.4 Conclusion

With the above review of previous studies in the area of language and masculinity, I have clarified how I theoretically approach masculinity with concepts such as performativity, intersectionality and hegemonic masculinity. With the illustration of the current complex and hybrid features of Chinese masculinity, I aim to identify how Chinese hegemonic discourses of masculinity demonstrate their interactional, plural, and performative characteristics. This chapter establishes the theoretical foundations for me to explore what hegemonic versions/models of masculinity participants in this research perform and construct. Through an examination of their everyday friendship conversations, I can reveal how they naturalise, maintain, or sometimes contest those hegemonic masculinities. Bringing the interactional approach to an understanding of the interplay of various social constructs in gender identities, the following four analysis chapters illustrate how a range of identities and masculinities emerge from their men's talk. This research hence contributes to existing studies of intersectional masculinities with empirical evidence from the Chinese context.

Secondly, considering my other research question is to explore how men bond in their talk, I have reviewed previous linguistic studies on how men demonstrate the dimension of homosociality in their talk. Past research shows that maintaining male homosociality is a crucial part of hegemonic masculinity. Hence, the opposition to and oppression of women has often been drawn on to construct

heterosexuality in homosocial talk. This feature is similarly represented and captured in my data, in participants' sexual storytelling (Chapter 5) and personal talk (Chapter 7) about their 'brother or wife' struggle. However, the topic of 'male homosociality' has not been well-represented in Chinese studies of masculinity. Furthermore, there is a dearth of linguistic investigations devoted to male homosociality in the Chinese cultural context in today's society. Hence, I aim to use my empirical research to fill in these research gaps. In the following chapter, I explain how linguistic ethnography methodologically fits my exploration of these research objectives and introduce my participants and data.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND DATA

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into three sections to introduce the methodology and data collected in this research. I first specify how I understand Linguistic Ethnography (LE) as my methodology, uncovering its historical development, key elements and principle understandings. In addition, I demonstrate how my research represents the five commonalities of LE research (Snell et al., 2015: 5-12). Secondly, I introduce how I collected multiple sources of data to support the analysis, followed by a presentation of my data and participants. Following the theoretical foundation of LE and the introduction of my data, I reflect how I approached the data in my analysis. I reveal the decision-making process when researching multilingually, particularly in terms of transcription and translation. Finally, I discuss the key concepts in LE when dealing with multiple sources of data, such as openness to data and reflexivity.

3.2 Linguistic Ethnography as Methodology

Taking its influences from ethnography of communication (Gumperz and Hyme, 1972, Hymes, 1974) and interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1982), Linguistic Ethnography (LE) has been theoretically and methodologically defined, discussed and developed by several scholars (including Rampton et al., 2004, Rampton, 2007; Creese, 2010; Rampton et al., 2014; Copland and Creese, 2015; Snell et al., 2015). It has become a strong force in the qualitative research methods used in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics, particularly in education (Rampton, 2006; Lytra, 2007, 2009; Pérez-Milans, 2016, 2017), health communication (Colins, 2015; Shaw and Russel, 2015) and gender/identity research (Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Lawson, 2009; Pichler, 2009). In this section, I first introduce the

development of LE, outlining its fundamental understanding in terms of both language and ethnography. Then I describe the five commonalities of LE research (Snell et al., 2015) to introduce how I used LE as my methodology.

3.2.1 Historical Review of Linguistic Ethnography

Linguistic Ethnography has been profoundly influenced by the work of great antecedents, anthropologists, sociologists and linguists including Dell Hymes, Erving Goffman and John Gumperz. They paved the theoretical and methodological way for the development of LE. Although the history of the relationship between linguistics and ethnography can be traced back further, Gumperz and Hymes' 1972 edited collection, *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*, is often seen as a departure point for the development of LE. Bringing together contributors from various backgrounds, such as linguistics, anthropology, sociology and psychology, Hymes explained the following:

> [i]n order to develop models, or theories, of the interaction of language and social life, there must be adequate descriptions of that interaction, and such descriptions call for an approach that partly links, but partly cuts across, partly builds between the ordinary practices of the disciplines. This is what makes sociolinguistics exciting and necessary. (1972:41).

This quote shows that in ethnography of communication, language is seen as a socially situated cultural form. Unlike the long tradition of structural linguistics, language is a sociolinguistic system that only exists and operates in conjunction with social rules and relations. This view sees language as context and resource, and the investigation and description of language and meaning involves an interdisciplinary exploration, e.g. anthropology. Drawing its roots from anthropology, ethnography has humanist and functionalist characteristics. In this tradition, language is accordingly defined as a resource to be used, being deployed and exploited by human beings in social life, rather than an

abstract and previously-defined language system. When language 'becomes the social and culturally embedded thing' (ibid), the context therefore should be investigated rather than assumed. This investigation often involves ethnography. Only like this, can the ways in which social action and speech interact in 'a systematic, ruled and principled way' (Hymes, 1968: 101) be explored.

In the UK, LE emerged from traditions within sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, rather than anthropology (Maybin and Tusting, 2011). It continues to explore the links between language, culture and society, aiming to explore relationships between the micro-level of language practice and the broader context and social order (Rampton, 2007; Tusting and Maybin, 2007; Rampton et al., 2014). Drawing on Hymesian ethnography, ethnography in LE aims to 'get the familiar things strange' (Rampton et al., 2004), instead of looking at those culturally strange situations from a distance. Linguistic ethnography has been impacted by an intellectual climate currently coloured by post-structuralist ideas and social constructionism.

Against the intellectual background of post-structuralism and post-modernity, established notions, such as gender, have been problematised and challenged (see more discussion in Chapter 2). The recent development of LE, especially its interpretative approaches, have been influenced by the 'turn to discourse' in the social sciences, informed particularly by Bourdieu's practice theory, Bakhtin and Volosinov's dialogism and Foucault's work on discourse, knowledge and power (Maybin and Tusting, 2011). The critiques of essentialism shifted the analytic focus of LE to understanding how identities are constructed through culture, discourse and ideology, and moreover, how humans come to inhabit these social categories in ways that are both similar and different (Rampton et al., 2014: 4). LE aims to use the combination of ethnography and linguistics to accomplish such goals. In their seminal

discussion paper published by the UK LE Forum, Rampton and colleagues (2004) explained the

orientations and affordance of LE:

> Although LE research differs in how far it seeks to make claims about either language, communication or the social world, LE generally holds that to a considerable degree, language and the social world are mutually shaping, and that close analysis of situated language use can provide both fundamental and distinctive insights into the mechanisms and dynamics of social and cultural production in everyday activity.

Hence, I use LE as my methodology to maintain a close examination of a particular 'situated language

use': Chinese men's friendship talk. It can provide insights into the gender dynamics of Chinese social

structure, unpacking how localised cultural productions – masculinities and identities – are

constructed in those men's everyday lives. My methodological approach combines the analysis of

discourse on an ideological level with microlinguistic analysis, informed by interactional

sociolinguistics, social theory and ethnography. Ethnography in particular encourages a reflexive

researcher position and a collaboration between researcher and researched. Today, LE is still used as

an umbrella term: Snell and colleagues (2015) agree that LE has not yet had a definitive definition.

Instead, they attempt to define it through five commonalities that they summarise from their edited

collections of interdisciplinary research that use LE as its methodology (2015: 5-12). My linguistic

ethnographic research confirms these five commonalities, and I unpack them below.

3.2.2 Five Commonalities of Linguistic Ethnography

The five commonalities of LE are: 1) using a topic-oriented ethnography; 2) interdisciplinary research;

3) combining linguistics and ethnography; 4) bringing different sources of data together; and 5)

aspiring to social change. In the following section, I first argue that as interdisciplinary research, LE is

indeed committed to aspiring for social change, sometimes with an emphasis on beneficial social impact. Then I introduce how I use a topic-oriented ethnography in my research, highlighting that I see ethnography not just as a source of data but also a perspective. After clarifying the theoretical and methodological considerations of ethnography, I explain why and how ethnography can be combined with linguistics. Finally, I argue that this combination will inevitably lead to multiple sources of data in a LE research. After discussing how to bring those data into the analysis, the chapter moves on to the following data section.

3.2.2.1 Interdisciplinary research

In recent decades, sociolinguists' interests have extended and diversified, and as a result, the borders between the traditional variationist, sociological, and ethnographic branches of sociolinguistics have become more obscured (Lawson, 2009). Sociolinguists care about the same questions and issues as their colleagues from other disciplines in social science, and they draw on similar sources of social theory, such as Bakhtin, Bourdieu, Foucault and Butler, to secure their theoretical grounding. I draw on these social theories to understand concepts such as 'discourse', 'masculinities' and 'identities'. The turns to social constructionism and to discourse across the social sciences have produced opportunities for interdisciplinarity, reflecting the theoretical and methodological scope of sociolinguistics (Tusting and Mayin, 2007: 576). In light of this, integrating linguistic analysis with ethnography seems to be a critical step towards a better understanding of the interrelationship between language and social life.

I adopt an interdisciplinary approach both theoretically and methodologically in this LE research. At the theoretical level, I extend the disciplinary boundaries to offer insightful understanding on Chinese masculinity. Departing from theoretical notions such as hegemonic masculinity, performativity and

normativity to conceptualise the research topic of Chinese masculinities, I also borrow from cultural studies on Chinese masculinity in its historical and cultural roots, for instance, the *wen-wu* theory (Louie, 2002, 2010, 2016) to theorise my cultural understandings. Pichler (2008) suggests that if we contextualise the findings in a wider social background, for instance, in a historical sense or in an interdisciplinary framework of research, we might be able to embrace some interesting and meaningful insights. My analysis draws findings and conclusions from other disciplines, such as Chinese masculinities through Chinese history (Louie, 2010), literature (Wu, 2003), media (Song, 2010; Yu and Narty, 2021), online wordplay (Huang, Y., 2018) and empirical research from other disciplines, such as sociology (Pan and Huang, 2013; Choi and Peng, 2016) and anthropology (Wong, 2020).

In the past decades, the development of LE has aligned with the change of 'interdisciplinary' knowledge production. Rampton and his colleagues (2014) introduce that traditional interdisciplinary research (that is interdisciplinary research Mode 1) employs cross-referencing of concepts and methods from different disciplines to get past a blockage in research, Mode 2 starts with real-world issues. This has led to two major methodological considerations. First, the multi-dimensional complexity of the real-world problem motivates a methodological mixing. It requires a high tolerance for ambiguity, being open and elastic on the key methods and dimensions of analysis. To answer the question of how men's friendship talk can be characterised, I do not just restrict my investigation into micro structural or genre characteristics of one specific feature of their talk. Instead, I investigate narratives (Chapters 4 and 5), conversational humour (Chapter 6), and emotional aspects of their personal talk (Chapter 7), exploring how they link to a wider social and cultural production of masculinities and identities. Secondly, when taking real-world problems as a starting point, researchers need to highlight public engagement and social impact beyond the academy (Rampton et

al, 2014; Lawson and Sayers, 2016). I explain in the following section how an aspiration for social change is one of the commonalities of LE research.

3.2.2.2 Aspiring to social change

Linguistic ethnography aims to achieve a 'beneficial social impact' (Snell et al, 2015: 12). Even though most of the discussion on this issue is centred on the subjects of education (Rampton et al., 2014) or health communication (Collins, 2015; Shaw and Russell, 2015), I attempt to use this PhD research project to explore the possibilities of conducting public engagement and social impacts. Applied linguistics and sociolinguistics have their tradition to not only just to do research on participants but, more importantly, for and with them (Cameron et al., 1992; Phipps & Ladegaarrd, 2020). The use of ethnography allows an inclusion of participants' own interpretations, and, therefore, this collaborative LE research is co-constructed by the researcher and the researched. The co-construction is the constant interaction that I have with them in my ethnographic fieldwork, including many valuable discussions and dialogues on gender issues. This would allow my research participants to look at their language use from an analytical distance, reflecting on the ideologies that emerge from their talk. At the end of my research stage, I came back to my participants for more discussion on how certain gender ideologies and norms could be challenged, and I will discuss more in detail in Chapter 8.

3.2.2.3 Topic-oriented ethnography

Most ethnographic research has taken a narrow focus on a particular topic, which Hymes (1996: 5) refers to as 'topic-oriented' ethnography. LE highlights the benefits of bringing 'topic-oriented' ethnography into linguistic analysis (Rampton, 2007; Snell et al., 2015). Ethnography, according to Hammerley (1994), is defined as social research gathering empirical data from real-world contexts, often focusing on relatively small scale social groups, via a range of unstructured methods including

participant observation. Data analysis accordingly focuses on interpreting the meanings and functions of human actions (Maybin and Tusting, 2011). In this research, the topic that I investigate is men's friendship talk. Previous LE studies in the US and UK context explored the practice of friendship, but was often based on schools (Eckert, 1989; 2000; Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Lawson, 2009). Therefore, it is worthwhile to use my LE research to address a gap on adult friendship, with data collected in the contemporary China context.

Ethnography can bring several advantages to examining men's talk. First, it allows me to describe the process of men's friendship talk in terms of its socio-cultural embeddedness. My first research aim is to explore how linguistic resources, such as narratives, conversational humour and even official slogans, are employed by participants for the construction of masculinities and a range of identities. Rampton and colleagues (2004: 2) suggest that ethnography can offer detailed investigations and descriptions about what is going on in male friendship talk, capturing and understanding the meaning and dynamics of male friendship talk in its specific cultural setting.

Secondly, ethnography can provide valuable insights to reveal the *process* of how masculinities and identities are constructed and produced in men's talk. In Kira Hall's (2009) ethnographically-informed discourse analysis on masculinities in a Hindi-and-English bilingual context, she highlights that ethnographic data helps to puzzle out the social meaning behind certain aspects of the linguistic practices. Having gained the knowledge of the social meanings of certain words, the exploration of masculinity is more than a simple statement of linguistic constructs of masculinity. Her research illustrates how the articulation of masculinity, while importantly influenced by ideological linkages within these larger parameters, is a product of everyday interaction.

I stand with Hall's departure from the exploration of linguistic meanings and masculinity, and I agree that when examining the relationship between form and meanings, the recognition of linguistic features and practices first requires that we understand the cultural context and ideologies that inform their interpretation (Hall, 2009: 144-245). For example, I constantly employ the valuable cultural knowledge that I have gained through my ethnography to enrich my analysis. In Chapter 6, a group of men tease their friend about shying away from going to a club on his own. Through my participant observation in my field work with this group of men, I have learnt that male-exclusive clubbing often indexes the performance and practice of their virile masculinity, such as girl-hunting, flirting and even casual sex. Failing to go there alone entails the loss of virile masculinity and therefore from the participants' perspective deserves to be mocked. Without the social meaning, which I can only obtain from participating in their social activity, I would not be able to understand the function of their teasing.

Discourse-oriented analysis on Chinese masculinities has largely remained focused on the investigation of discursive construction of representations (Song and Lee, 2012; Gong, 2016; Yu and Nartey, 2021), but little research has included the insights and interpretations of language users themselves. Therefore, the third advantage that ethnography can bring to the exploration of men's talk is the inclusion of participant's own perspectives and interpretations. Ethnography in this case 'tries to comprehend the tacit and articulated understandings of the participants' in their friendship talk (Rampton et al., 2004: 2). through actively involving participants in the social action under study as I have attempted in my study ethnography can generate insights that could not be achieved in any other way.

In this research, I first shared in my participants' daily lives, 'soaking and lurking' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 1-7) in their friendship activities to collect ethnographic data to provide the social-cultural meanings behind their language use and discursive positioning. The active participation in and observation of their friendship practices also included the interaction I had with them on social media platforms. Moreover, to include participants' own perspectives and interpretations, I asked questions in ethnographic interviews to enrich my analysis. In section 3.2, I explain how I collected data using participant observation, digital ethnography and ethnographic interviews. The involvement and participation of the researcher in social action may inevitably change the language practices under study, therefore, I reflect on how I approach multiple sources of data and how my positionality impacts data collection and interpretation processes in section 4.0.

3.2.2.4 Combining linguistics with ethnography

The combination of ethnography and linguistics seems to be a response to the turn to reconfiguring approaches within sociolinguistics, impacted by the intellectual climate of post-structuralism and postmodernism. The struggle between the openness and uncertainties of ethnography and the rigour and systematicity of linguistics 'links the micro to the macro, the small to the large, the varied to the routine, the individual to the social, the creative to the constraining, and the historical to the present and to the future' (Copland and Cresse, 2015: 26). When departing from the interests of real-world problems and concerns, this combination can help reveal the connections between the micro-level of interaction and the meso- and macro-levels of contextual and social structure (e.g. Rampton et al., 2004). In this section, I first justify why this combination is advantageous in tackling the research topics that I am interested in. Then I discuss the methodological considerations when combining linguistics and ethnography.

The combination of ethnography and linguistics is beneficial because it can complement each concept's inherent weakness. Ethnography can provide linguistic research with open and reflexive approaches, bringing formal and abstract text analysis with sharp interpretive concepts such as sensitising concepts, openness to data, worries about idealisation, and attention to the role of researchers themselves. This allows tried-and-true and finely tuned linguistic analysis procedures to have more analytic reflexivity and flexibility (Rampton et al., 2004). In return, slow, intensive, clear-cut, and rigorous linguistic analysis provides ethnographic data an authoritative analysis of language use (Rampton et al., 2004; Snell et al., 2015). The well-defined linguistic toolkits can sharpen the analytical relevance of spontaneous conversational data, and therefore it gives more authority for the data interpretation (Copland and Cresse, 2015: 26).

Apart from their inherent traits that make combining them beneficial, linguistics and ethnography have a common aim that makes it viable to combine them. Specifically, ethnography can mesh well with discourse analysis because both have a commitment to 'step back from the easy flow of communicative practice, interrogating its components, underpinnings, and effects' (Rampton, 2007: 591). This fits my research objective to de-familiarise taken-for-granted, mundane everyday male friendship talk and to uncover its ideological and interactional processes that often underpin the established and prevailing common sense that is under-questioned. Therefore, the combination of ethnography and discourse analysis can achieve greater analytic distance to answer my research questions, which may involve challenging views on masculinities and male identities, questioning the oversimplifications in influential discourse, and interrogating prevailing definitions (Rampton et al., 2014: 3).

When combining ethnography and linguistics in practice, it is often agreed to 'tie ethnography down' and 'open linguistics up' (Rampton, 2007: 596). The notion of drawing on linguistics to 'tie ethnography down' metaphorically suggests a linguistic 'reality' to which ideas about culture could be pinned and clarified (Tusting and Maybin, 2007: 581). Those highly developed linguistic analytical tools, such as indexicality and positioning theory, can uncover unnoticed intricacies in the discursive processes through which cultural relationships and identities are produced. Ethnography opens linguistics up to invite reflexive sensitivity to the analytical process, encouraging a willingness to accept (and run with) how the production of linguistic claims can be questioned, beyond the reach of standardised falsification procedures (Rampton, 2007: 596).

3.2.2.5 Bringing together different sources of data

As the results of the combinations of ethnographic work and linguistic analysis, LE inevitably has another inherent characteristic: it brings different sources of data together. In this research, the primary analytical data is drawn from participants' self-recorded conversations. I transcribed and translated excerpts from this audio data as a detailed presentation to support my analysis. In addition, I conducted ethnographic work, including digital ethnography, participant observation, and ethnographic interviews. These research methods produced useful ethnographic data that I could draw on to facilitate my analysis. In section 3.2, I explain in detail how I collected this data. Although I do not include any field-notes or transcripts of ethnographic interviews in the appendix due to the limits of space, this ethnographic information and descriptions have informed my analysis of the young men's talk throughout, as I will show in my analysis.

However, having said that, I see ethnography as far richer than just a matter of description. Taking its ontological and epistemological aspects into account, it is a perspective for understanding language and society (Blommaert, 2018: 5-7). The epistemological level of ethnography underlines the dynamic process of knowledge-gathering in ethnography. It emphasises that the whole process of gathering and moulding knowledge is part of that knowledge, and knowledge construction itself *is* knowledge. Collecting data through participant-observation, ethnographic interviews and digital ethnography, is a whole process of gathering and moulding knowledge, and this construction of production of knowledge itself is also knowledge. The value that different sources of data can bring to LE does not just bring more sources of data to make analysis a delimitable process (Rampton, 2007: 596), moreover, as I argued earlier, it brings a perspective for understanding how knowledge is gained and constructed in ethnography (Blommaert, 2018: 9). In section 4.1, I shall further argue how we should approach these multiple sources of data with the awareness of 'openness to data'.

3.3 Data

Following the illustration of how I employed LE as the methodology in my research, this section offers an introduction on my data. The following section begins with participant selection, the first step of data collection. I explain how I selected my gate-person, and how they helped me gain initial access to get my research started. Then I introduce how I collected data, including participants' self-recorded conversational data and ethnographic data produced from research methods of participant-observation, ethnographic interviews, and digital ethnography. I then present a table to illustrate the multiple sources of data in this research.

3.3.1 Getting Established

One of the primary goals of this research is to explore how Chinese men bond in their everyday interaction, and what cultural discourses of masculinity and male identities emerge in these interactions. To study the social action of men's talk and male homosociality, I approached participants who were in male friendship groups and willing to collaborate with me for data collection. I have collected my data from participants' self-recorded audio data and ethnographic data from participant-observation, ethnographic interviews and digital ethnography from 2016 to 2019. The following section first shares the process of how I selected participants for this study. After the introduction to the researched, I introduce the ethical issues considered when approaching participants and collecting data from them.

3.3.1.1 Participant selection

To work with research participants who are related to research questions on male homosociality, I approached men from my own friendship circles who frequently posted about their lives and friendship on social media platforms. The social media platform that I relied on was WeChat, one of the most widely used apps for people in China. Developed by Tencent, WeChat's social media platform, similar to Facebook's, allows users to interact with friends digitally. The social feed of friends' updates on this platform is known as 'Moments' (朋友圈), and friends in the contact list can access these posts and and express their agreement with or support for some of the posts by 'liking' it with an emoticon such as a heart (similar to the thumbs-up function on Facebook) and leave comments. Since social media plays a vital role nowadays in people's daily lives (Pink et al., 2016), the frequent posts of their free-time male-friends activities could be seen as evidence that those men are highly relevant to the topic of male friendship.

Initially, I had three groups of men consent to start my data collection. In this thesis, I only use data collected from two hometown friend groups which formed since their school time. The third group was composed of undergraduate students who shared the same dorm at university. During the course of my research, I realised that this group was different from the other two. Having its own distinct pre-assigned dorm life in post-socialist universities in China, six men have to share one room with bunk beds for their four years' of full-time study. They assumably were close because of their dorm life. This type of homosociality perhaps does not conform to many people's definitions of friendship: 'friends are someone that you choose, not someone that you have to live with, such as university dorm mates'. Even though male dorms have been a site of the investigation of masculinity (Bodó et al, 2019), I chose not to include the data from this group in this thesis.

3.3.1.2 Participants

All the participants are heterosexual men, living in urban cities. Based on the UK context of social-class, they may be considered upper-middle class. They all went to universities and have at least a bachelor's degree. They all come from family backgrounds of double-income parents, and most of their parents also work in state-owned institutions or enterprises, 'within the system' as some may say. For instance, Rui's parents were doctors at their local hospitals. Mingqing's father was a director in a governmental bureau, and he used his social connections to help Mingqing to gain his current job 'within the system'. Their social class is reflected in the fact that most of their parents helped their sons with a deposit or even a full payment to buy apartments and cars as preparation for their marriage.

I approached both Rui and Leilei (pseudonyms) as my key informants because I felt that they valued their male friendships, at least this is what appeared to be the case on the basis of how they presented themselves and their friends on social media. I only met them once or twice in person before starting the research. They often posted text, photos and short videos about their male friends and activities on their social media. Leilei once posted some poetic words with a picture of him and his friends holding beer bottles together, saying 'only kids are afraid of saying farewell, while adults plan for reunion'. One picture showed this group of friends sitting around a Mah-jong table, wearing their own self-designed t-shirts to celebrate their friendship. Similarly, Rui posted photos of his male friends engaged in various activities, such as football matches, travelling, camping, outdoor music festivals, and barbecues. When I approached them, they showed willingness to participate in a research project on men's friendship, and they were confident that, as they said, their 'solid friendship can be a perfect match for my research'. Having Leilei and Rui as my gatepersons, I got to know their friends. In the following section, I introduce the individuals from these two groups.

3.3.1.2.1 Group 1

Leilei was the contact person of Group 1, and members of this group were classmates in their secondary school in Zhaotong. Compared to the capital, Kunming, Zhaotong is a less developed city in the northeast of Yunnan province. This group highlighted that the shared life experience in their secondary school was central to their friendship, and their bonding continued when they grew up to the current day. They were the best men at each other's wedding, and they described their relationships as close and supportive, in their words: 'we are in [the kind of close] relationship that I will pick up his kids after kindergarten if he is busy'. Most were born between 1988 to 1990 and have (upper) middle-class professions after attending university. Further details can be found in Table 1 below.

Name (pseudonym)	Profession	Description	Relationship with other members	Romantic Relationship
Leilei	Salesperson in a national state-owned insurance corporation	Gate-person	Mother is the godmother of Xiaoli, a female friend in this group, whom he has known since childhood	Leilei got married in 2022
Mingqing	Officer in a state-owned tobacco company	Rebellious during school. After graduation, his father introduced and arranged his current job	Leilei's secondary school classmate; he often led the group activities in pubs and clubs	In 2019, he married a nurse, Hua, my secondary school classmate
Fengli	Entrepreneur and restaurant owner	Born into a teachers' family; quit his first 'stable' job within the system in the first year of his job, which upset his parents	Secondary school classmate to the rest of group members.	He had been a playboy for a long time, but in 2020, he got a long-term girlfriend.
Qingbei	Entrepreneur and owner of a youth hostel and a small cafe next door	Went to a university in the north-east of China; loves to craft coffee for his friends	Known most of its members since secondary school	Had several girlfriends during the course of the research

Name (pseudonym)	Profession	Description	Relationship with other members	Romantic Relationship
Xingkun	Government officer working at Publicity department	Xingkun was only introduced to this group by Qingbei in 2016, and since he becomes a regular member of this group	Originally came from a rural areas of Zhaotong, not from the same peri-urban city area as other participants are	Married in 2018
Meimei (female)	Teacher in a community college in Zhaotong	Often appears on local TV and radio because she teaches journalism and broadcasting in the local community college	Secondary school classmate to most members of this group	Married at the age of 23 immediately after graduation to a local TV anchor; they had their first child in 2015, and in 2021, their second son was born
Xiaoli (female)	Administrator in a state-owned financial products company	Went to an university in Sichuan province	Known Leilei since childhood, and is Leilei's mother's goddaughter	Had a long-term boyfriend since 2018

Table 1: Participants in Group 1

3.3.1.2.1 Group 2

Group 2 is a friendship group in which members were all hometown friends. They were originally from

Lijiang, a city five hours drive from the capital city of Yunnan province, Kunming. Members of this

group were born around 1990-1991, and they formed this friendship group in their secondary school. Two of them have known each other since kindergarten. One participant told me: 'in a small place like Lijiang, people often know each other. Some of my friends' parents already knew each other even before we became friends'. They left Lijiang when they were 18 for their undergraduate studies and then came to Kunming for settlement. In 2016 when I had my first field trip, Rui, the contact person for this group, was in the final year of postgraduate studies. During the data collection stage from 2016 to 2019, this group had their jobs settled, and most were married during this period.

There were five key members in this group, and they were more or less from the same upper-middle-class social background. Rui's parents worked in a state-owned hospital as doctors, and similarly, his other friends were also from a family where both parents worked 'within the system', in state-owned institutions or enterprises. This friendship group includes friends who have known each other since school time in Lijiang and currently live in Kunming. As non-locals living in the capital city, even though they all bought their flats there, they still constantly highlighted their 'Lijiang person' heritage (see more discussion in Chapters 4 and 8). Sometimes, this emphasis overrode other aspects of their identities for the construction of their male identities. The 'place' factor plays a significant role in the construction of and alignment with local discourses of masculinity. Table 2 introduces some basic information about these individuals.

Name (pseudonym)	Profession	Description	Relationship with other members	Romantic Relationship
Rui	Officer in a state-owned financial business	Gate-person in this group and he often organises their social activities; the only person in the group with a postgraduate degree	Rui has known Luzi since kindergarten and he took care of Luzi when Luzi struggled with his undergraduate work and job hunting	Rui's girlfriend was my close female friend, and in 2018, they married; in 2021, their daughter was born.
Wenxin	Salesperson for a national insurance company	Wenxin, Rui and Zitan often went to football practice together after their work or on the weekends	Secondary school classmate to the rest of the members in this group	Does not like Kunmmingnese people, but has a long-term girlfriend from Kunming
Zitan	Officer in a state-owned bank	Seems very mature and thoughtful in this group; when others got drunk, he took care of them	Has known the rest of group since age 12 when they started secondary school	Married in 2019, and his son was born in 2021.
Luzi	Unemployed	Luzi's parents divorced when he was in high school, which impacted him emotionally	Stayed in Rui's flat for a long time when he was struggling after graduation; after failing at several jobs, he went back to Lijiang	Stayed mostly single during the data collection stage

Name (pseudonym)	Profession	Description	Relationship with other members	Romantic Relationship
Zantai	Technician in a technology company	Tried several jobs and then settled in a technology company	Has known the group since secondary school, and has known Rui since kindergarten	Married in 2020

Table 2: Participants in Group 2

3.3.1.3 Ethics

With the approval of my ethical self-evaluation from the Research Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee (REISC) at Goldsmiths, University of London, I started my data collection stage in 2016. As Copland and Creese (2015: 176) argue, ethical issues should be resolved locally, drawing on contextual realities and mutual understandings. Each participant received a consent form to understand the project and to explain their rights. The information sheets and consent forms were written both in English and Chinese (see Appendix 1 and 2), and each participant signed to give their consent and willingness to participate. They had the right to withdraw from this study at any time throughout the data collection stage. Their consent meant they would record their spontaneous talk by themselves without my presence and allow me to observe and participate in their friendship activities.

BAAL's (British Association of Applied Linguistics) *Recommendations on Good Practice in Applied Linguistics* (2016: 5) points out that for research on spontaneous language use, 'there are compelling methodological reasons for informants not being fully informed about the precise objectives of the research'. When providing the consent form to sign, I explained in a general manner to my research

participants that I was very interested in their male friendship talk. I kept the explanation vague because on the one hand I did not want their linguistic behaviours to be deliberately (mis)guided; and on the other hand, as an exploratory linguistic ethnographic project, I was open to what would emerge from the data.

The consent form was slightly modified when the research was in progress. My initial consent form was mainly based on the consent of my participants in relation to their self-recorded conversations and the ethnographic interviews, but when I was in the field, I found the data from the observation and interaction of digital ethnography was very interesting and useful. The consent I obtained at the beginning of the project was no longer adequate, therefore, I renegotiated with the research participants to get their permission and consent to use digital ethnographic data. The boundary between 'public' and 'private' spaces, particularly in online contexts, is questionable (see Markham and Buchanan, 2012). As the *BAAL's Recommendations on Good Practice in Applied Linguistics* (2016: 4) adds, 'the rights, interests, sensitivities, privacy and autonomy of informants in all research contexts should be respected, including those in which users' rights are not so clear-cut, such as easily accessible internet sites'. Therefore, I adjusted my consent form to gain their full consent to use the online ethnographic data in my research.

In addition, I carefully dealt with different types of data with the appropriate ethical consideration based on their features. First, their personal information was treated confidentially and securely, and all my participants' real names have been anonymised, being replaced with pseudonyms (chosen by me) in my transcription and publication. The anonymity of the speakers is also protected in other ways. If any extracts of their conversation are to be played at conferences, their voices will be

scrambled with special technology and their names will be removed. All the data, including audio data, transcriptions, and my field-notes were stored on my personal laptop in a password-protected folder during my thesis writing. No third person – other than my doctoral advisor – has had access to the original recorded data.

3.3.2 Data Collection

In this section I explain how I collected multiple sources of data through various methods. I made three visits to Yunnan, in 2016, 2017 and 2019, and each time, it lasted 2-3 months. In 2016, I started my first visit to Yunnan as an ethnographer. I used this opportunity to build rapport and gain basic information about my participants. After they signed the consent forms, they started to record their spontaneous talk. I did not provide any deadlines for my research participants to hand in their recordings, so they could always give me the recording when it was convenient to them. Collecting self-recorded spontaneous talk from participants took place almost simultaneously and continuously with my ethnographic research. The last piece of self-recorded data was handed by my participants to me in 2019. My linguistic analysis also ran alongside my data collection. Dialectically, the more self-recorded data I had from my participants, the more pilot analysis I could do, which in turn could lead me to collect more ethnographic information that helps my linguistic analysis.

The conversational data that was self-recorded by my participants then fed into the questions that I asked later in my ethnographic interviews. I used the opportunity of my second and third field-trips in 2017 and 2019 to ask questions and ambiguities arising from my analysis of their self-recorded talk. In addition to asking questions related to their previously recorded talk, I also use the opportunity in the field to gain more participant observation experience to better understand my participants and their

friendship practices. I added all my participants' social media on my first trip when I got to know them. Therefore, the information that I obtained from digital ethnography strictly speaking started from my first field trip in 2016 and lasted at the end of my research stage.

I started to write my analysis chapters after I returned from my field trip in 2017. One of the goals of ethnographic-style interviews is a 'feedback session' (Pichler, 2008) – accordingly, some ethnographic interviews were scheduled after the initial analysis stage. In 2019 I took the advantage of my last field visit to primarily focus on how my participants interpreted my preliminary analysis and findings in our ethnographic interviews. Their feedback and our dialogues further enriched and modified my final analysis in this thesis. In my final writing-up stage during pandemic time from 2020-2022, I still contact my participants through instant messages on Wechat to ask for more clarification. Hence, unlike other LE research whose ethnographic work, such as interviews and observation, often takes place before the linguistic analysis stage of data collection (Creese, 2010; Coupland, 2015), there are no clear-cut boundaries for research my procedures. In the following sections, I will explain in more detail how each source of data has been collected.

3.3.2.1 Self-recorded friendship talk

I believe that close analysis of talk-in-interaction with ethnography can reveal how the manner of everyday life, which is relevant to the participants' gender, is constructed (Sidnell, 2003: 345). Therefore, the first and primary analysis data in this research is men's everyday talk with their friends. Tustin and Maybin (2007: 576) remind linguistic ethnographers that the involvement of the researcher in social action may inevitably change the language under study, 'whether through direct involvement in these practices or simply through the presence of recording equipment of which participants are aware'. To minimise the influence that my presence might have brought to their naturally-occurring

conversations, the friendship talks were self-recorded by participants themselves without me being present.

Unlike previous linguistic research in which conversations were often recorded by professional recording devices, most of the audio-data in this study was recorded using smartphones. This perhaps allowed participants to be less aware of their talks being recorded since phones are such common and necessary device in everyday life; when placed on a table, it is not as prominent as other recording devices might be. Moreover, it made the recording convenient for my participants. They could have their talk recorded whenever they felt comfortable, or whenever they remembered. Some of the recordings were emailed to me directly from their phones, so I could collect data even though I was not in the field. Some of the recordings were stored on a USB stick and then handed over to me by my participants when I met them in person.

After the consent form was signed, participants were advised to start their recording and to send them to me whenever was convenient. To allow my participants to dispel their unease about being recorded, I suggested recording each session for at least 20 minutes. The self-recorded data collection ended in 2019 and, in total, I gained 5 hours 14 minutes' audio recording from Group 1, and 4 hours 40 minutes from Group 2. Considering that there are two female members from Group 1, and there are 2 hour 25 minutes' length of content were recorded while this group's female friends were present, and the rest were all-male talk. All the recordings from Group 2 were all-male friendship talks. Most of the data was recorded when most of the key members were present for their group gathering. Only one extracts were recorded when the key informant, Rui, was having late-night food with his flatmates (see Extract 4 in Chapter 6) rather than his usual hometown friends. Also, there is

one extract that was recorded by Group 1 when a new friend, Xingkun, joined their prior-established friendship group (see Extracts 5-8). In the following analysis Chapters 4-7, before the presentation of each extract, I will introduce in more detail how the following episode was recorded and the information about the participants (especially those who are not the key members of the group).

3.3.2.2 Ethnographic interviews

An ethnographic interview is an informal interview that takes place in a naturalistic setting and is often the result of participant observation. Ethnographic interviews in this research took place in multi-sites ethnography when I attended participants' social activities. I went to the field in 2016, 2017 and 2019 respectively, and in total I participated in more than 50 events such as attending their dinner banquets, having late-night street food, outdoor barbecues, KTV, pub and club visits. I had hundred hours of ethnographic interviews with them in the multi-sites ethnography in my three visits. In 2019, they started to have their meetups more often at their own apartments or tea-houses, as they said, 'when approaching 30s, we prefer more privacy and quiet time'. Once, I was invited to a barbecue party on the roof balcony of one participant's apartment building. Those 'soaking and lurking' experiences (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 1-7) in their friendship practice provided very useful ethnographic data to understand their friendship. When I was involved in those activities, I had opportunities to observe and ask questions.

I recorded some interview data for this thesis, and I used some of the ethnographic interview data in my analysis (e.g., Extract 1 in Chapter 5 and Extract 7 in Chapter 7). I did not record the conversations when there were non key-members (my participants' other friends who did not sign the consent forms) join the conversation. Sometimes, participants tend to be less willinging to have our 1:1

interview data recorded, and for that situation, I wrote down the information as my field notes when I returned home. Most of my interview data were recorded when only key members of the group were absent and the environments could ensure the quality of recording. For example, I recorded some interview data in a car when my participants drove me home. I did not record ethnographic interviews in night club as it was very noisy, but I recorded some ethnographic interviews when we were having dinner together or having casual drinks in cafes. There are 7 hours 30 minutes ethnographic interview data from Group 1 and 9 hours 15 minutes from Group 2. Throughout the analysis, I made the contribution of my interview more explicitly by adding information of how I have gained certain information from ethnographic interviews.

As mentioned earlier, I made three visits to the field, and on each visit, I had different research tasks. Accordingly, interview questions varied depending on the local context. I asked different questions spontaneously according to the interests of that moment without deliberately designing or structuring my questions. For instance, in 2017, my participants brought me to a nightclub, and it was the first time I had ever been to one. I asked many questions (perhaps too many for my participants!) about the place, about their practices, and about their past experiences there. Those ethnographic interviews constructed my knowledge about their practices, which then became valuable resources that I could draw on to interpret their sex stories (Chapter 5) and teasing (Chapter 7). More ethnographic interviews took place alongside my participant observation on my visits, and they constituted a series of interviews across many venues.

In her linguistic ethnographic research on British adolescent girls from different sociocultural backgrounds for the purposes of understanding young femininity, Pichler (2008, 2009) used interviews

as a research method to complement her analysis of girls' spontaneous talk with their peers. She described this specific research method as an 'ethnographic-style interview'. Rather than referring to it as 'ethnographic interviews', Pichler argued that it was not only because the fieldwork with the girls was not long enough to label them as 'ethnographic interviews', but, more importantly, the term 'ethnographic interview' cannot cover the multiple-purpose nature of her interviews with the researched, which includes 'translation, transcription, conversation and 'interviews' with (requests for) clarification and feedback (Pichler, 2008: 58).

I agree with Pichler (2008, 2009) that conversations between the researcher and the researched, or 'interviews', often have multiple purposes. Firstly, I used ethnographic interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the subjects of my research – the individuals as well as the inter- and intra-dynamics within the friendship group. Those interviews happened frequently on my first two field trips, and I was able to ask questions regarding specific local cultural knowledge that I was unfamiliar with. Sometimes, I audio-recorded those ethnographic-interviews (e.g. when we were driving in a car or talking in a relatively quiet cafe) and sometimes, I only wrote the key information in my fieldnotes when I returned home from participating in their social activities.

Secondly, ethnographic interviews function as feedback sessions, allowing me to have a dialogue with my participants to clarify the ambivalence arising from the recordings and to exchange our interpretations on their language use. Those conversations often took place in my second and third visits in the field. They helped me to clarify some micro ambiguities in the text in transcriptions. Moreover, when asked about the content of their self-recorded conversations, they added more background information about the speech events, providing more complementary descriptions to

what they talked about. Sometimes, I was surprised to find out that participants offered different and even contradictory perspectives to my analysis. This type of ethnographic interview provided an opportunity for the researched to have their voices heard and for the researcher to reflect on their analyses and interpretations Therefore, their own interpretations are included to understand the broader discursive meanings and functions of their language use and choices which inform my analysis.

Their own interpretations enrich the understanding and perspectives of the relationship between language forms and their social and cultural meanings. This can be very helpful when discovering the multifunctionality and ambiguities of linguistic forms, such as teasing (see Chapter 8). Ethnographic interviews involve a relatively high level of interaction between the researcher and the researched, making the interview a collaborative event where all participants actively and collaboratively construct knowledge and social meaning (Pichler, 2008). Having explained how I conducted ethnographic interviews and their function in knowledge construction, the next questions to ask are how to approach this data and how to deal with the differences arising between ethnographic interviews and participants' own self-recorded recorded data. These issues are discussed in section 4.0.

3.3.2.3 Digital ethnography

Aside from ethnographic interviews, ethnographic data in this research also includes data gained from digital ethnography. Digital ethnography already played its role in selecting participants at the earlier stage of data collection. It brought significant benefits for participant selection, and moreover, it retained rapport with participants and generated useful data to support my analysis. When the term 'ethnography' applies to online communities and culture it is often given names such as 'digital ethnography', 'online ethnography', 'virtual ethnography' or 'netnography' (see Pink et al., 2016;

Silverman, 2016). In this research, I employ the term 'digital ethnography' for consistency, referring to my online observations and the interactions I had with my research participants on WeChat.

It is necessary to introduce the WeChat privacy policy to have a better understanding of the interactions between myself as the researcher, and the researched. First, privacy in WeChat works among groups of friends. Being added as Leilei and Rui's friend on their WeChat, I could see the contents of their 'Moments'; however, what I could see could be partial and limited. Based on the privacy setting of WeChat, users can divide their friends into several groups when they publish their Moments, and they can choose whether or not this Moment is visible to certain groups or individuals. I potentially could be seen by them as an 'acquaintance' after being friends on WeChat, so they could choose not to share certain content that was intended for other groups, such as their closer male friends. Based on this privacy policy, even though I could say that I accessed the digital information on their 'Moments', it could still be limited and partial, because I do not know what other information I was not able to access. This privacy policy also meant that I needed to build rapport with my research participants to gain their trust to gain access to more digital information.

Secondly, because privacy on WeChat works based on the setting among groups, I could only see the likes and comments from other users that were on my WeChat friends list as mutual friends. For instance, I added Rui as my close female friend's boyfriend, and initially I could only see the interaction between him and his girlfriend on his Moments because she was our only mutual friend. Later, Rui added more mutual friends from our female friendship group, and then I could see how my friends interacted with Rui. Hence, to obtain more information to see how individuals of a male friendship group interact with each other digitally on their Moments, I needed to add them as my

WeChat friends. Therefore, in my first visit to my research participants, I proactively added them on my WeChat. It somehow felt like an important ritual moment for me as an ethnographer on my field trip. I needed to wait for their consent after my friend request on WeChat, and then to guess which 'group' I would be put into on their list, which might determine how much information I could get from their Moments. Being added as a friend on their WeChat, I could see how my participants interacted with each other in a digital space (their Moments) with their 'likes' and comments. To protect their privacy, in this thesis I only use words rather than screenshots to describe the contents of their posts, including text, pictures and short videos, and interaction in the comments section.

Actively using social media to interact with my participants enabled me to maintain our rapport. After adding my participants as my friends on WeChat, I set all my Moments content to be completely available to them. We gave hearts and left comments on each other's Moments, and it led to a collaborative and close relationship between us. I gained information about my participants' important life announcements from their social media, such as their weddings and their new-born babies. I also gained more information about their friendship practices apart from my participant observation in the field. It meant that with access to their social media, I could also follow their other friendship practices when I was not physically in the field with them. It provided a possibility to observe the social action under study, digitally, without the limitations of time and distance. It presented a new form of continuity in the field and made the entire research part of an ongoing collaboration (Pink et al., 2016: 7) when I returned to the UK from my 2-3 months of fieldwork in Yunnan.

Moreover, I argue that extracting information from participants' social media can provide more fruitful background information about their speech events. On one occasion, Rui posted several photos of the group's hangover: there were empty bottles on the table in a pub, accompanied by lots of cigarettes; they hugged firmly, wearing white shirts and suits from their workplace, from which I assumed that it happened on a week-day night. I would not have been able to get the information if I only relied on a single source of audio recordings. In addition, digital ethnography also makes ethnographic interviews possible even when I was working in front of my computer in my home in the UK. In my writing-up stage – especially during the Covid-19 pandemic when physical field-work visits became difficult – I used WeChat instant message or video talk to quickly check some questions with my participants, which can be seen as a form of 'ethnographic-style' interview (Pichler, 2008). This type of interaction, I argue, constitutes collaborative research between me and the researched, even though it occurred digitally.

3.4 How to Approach Data

So far, I have introduced the theoretical foundations of linguistic ethnography as well as my data. In this section, I explain how I approach this data. Employing LE as my methodology, I first argue that openness to data sits at the centre of an approach to data, from data collection, key methods and analytical frameworks in the preliminary analysis, to interpreting participant's own understanding. I then introduce the analytical frameworks that I use in the examination of the spontaneous friendship talk I collected, with the explorative focus on masculinities and identities. The final part of this section is given to methodological considerations and challenges when researching multilingually, especially regarding transcription and translation issues.

3.4.1 Openness to Data

The theoretical 'openness' in ethnography can be understood as a sponge: it has to absorb new ideas and divergent approaches in order to remain dynamic, lively and creative. Indeed, 'openness to data' is one of the most important features in ethnographic research, and it allows ethnographic analysis to work with sensitive concepts and worries about idealisations (Rampton et al., 2004: 2). In this section, I explain how I understand 'openness to data' from three perspectives. First, data tells its own stories, and secondly, as an ethnographer, I hold an open and flexible attitude towards multiple interpretations. Finally, I argue that openness to data requires certain methodological considerations and perhaps solutions to respond to critiques of ethnography, bringing historical awareness of ethnography to our interpretations.

3.4.1.1 Data tells its story

As an ethnographer, I explore what has emerged from the data, rather than using data to validate any hypothesis or assumptions. Although I began this explorative sociolinguistic research with the goal of finding out more about the interaction between language, masculinities and other socio-cultural variables that constitute participants' social identities, I did not formulate any concrete hypotheses *a priori*. In most sociolinguistic research with an analytical discourse approach, 'analysis', 'findings', and 'discussion', represent similar ways of presenting interpreted data. This way of presenting the interpretation of the data indicates that any analytical focus and hypotheses were generated in a continuous process of transcribing and working through the data. This interactive process between data, analysis and theory has been well-discussed around the root of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 12; Holton and Walsh, 2016), which frames this qualitative methodology-based research, adopting an ethnographic approach (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 23-24, 205-206).

3.4.1.2 Open to multiple interpretations

When accomplishing the goal of making familiar things strange in Linguistic Ethnography (Rampton et al., 2004), openness to data means flexibility and openness towards multiple, or even competing interpretations. The multiple interpretations derived from two aspects during the process of my analysis. The first was the change of my own interpretation, which constituted my own research trajectories. When I first listened to the audio data from my participants, I noticed the frequent emergence of their high-risk humour. Initially, I interpreted the toughness of their teasing as a form of bullying and verbal violence, paying little attention to its playfulness. However, after 'soaking and lurking' with my participants in their social activities, I started to understand their inside jokes and began to understand that teasing is a central practice in the distinctive culture of their friendship groups.

They emphasised many times in our ethnographic interviews that teasing is important to 'cheer-up the atmosphere', and this view steered me away from only looking at the aggression aspect of teasing, but also acknowledged the playfulness of humour. Therefore, as Maybin and Tusting (2011) explain, as an LE researcher, bringing knowledge of the wider cultural context gained from ethnographic experience, theoretical concepts and observational insights constitute how we interpret specific instances of dialogue. For example, the ethnographic information that I have gained to understand how teasing works within a male friendship as well as the theoretical exploration of conversational humour has guided my own analysis and understanding of the teasing episodes in my data (see Chapter 6).

Secondly, openness to data includes an open and reflexive attitude toward multiple, potentially competing interpretations, between me and my participants. Those interpretations are based on data

collected from different source events (e.g., ethnographic interviews or participants' self-recorded conversations). My research experience has confirmed the two models described by Rampton (2007: 596-597) when dealing with the differences between linguistics and ethnography: they are complementary and contradictory. The ethnographic information that I gained from my fieldwork provides richer descriptions to fill in ambiguities and uncertainties which arose from my engagement with the spontaneous conversational data. Moreover, while asking for clarification, I also sought my participants' own interpretations on some of the content and forms of their talk. Their interpretations were sometimes different or contradictory to my analysis. Retrospectively, they intended to position themselves more positively in the event of ethnographic interviews. The epistemological aspect of how to approach data, especially interview data gained from an ethnographic setting, is discussed below.

3.4.1.3 Data as knowledge

I see the interview as a co-constructed process between researcher(s) and the researched: they create meaning on certain topics together in a temporal-relational context. Pichler (2008: 62-66) presents three approaches to ethnographic-style interviews: a) interviews as displays of cultural knowledge; b) interviews as local accomplishments; and c) interviews as reports of other social realities. How I approach ethnographic interview data echoes Pichler's three models. Even though the majority of data that I analyse in this thesis consists of the participants' self-recorded conversations, my ethnographic interviews (and observations) informed much of my analysis of these conversational data, and I did analyse one extract of ethnographic interview data in Chapter 5 in more detail. The collaboration between the researched and myself when working on the interpretation of the language crafts our interviews as 'local accomplishments'. Participants' own accounts in ethnographic-style interviews allow me, as an outsider and researcher, to access 'the lived realities' (Pichler, 2008: 56-58).

Therefore, inevitably, there can be a tension between the goal of making truth claims on the basis of the data (i.e., recordings of self-recorded conversational data and ethnographic interviews) and the recognition of the role of the researcher's positioning, interpretive capacities and theoretical framings in shaping research findings (Maybin and Tusting, 2011: 522). In sections 4.2 and 5.2, I explain the analytical frameworks that I used to enrich my interpretive capacities and reflect how my positionalities may impact data collection and interpretation. However, at the same time, I point out that openness to data, which involves an explicit revelation of how I gained the knowledge for my interpretation, contributes to the easing of this tension. Capturing the dynamics of different and even conflicting interpretations entails a view to see data as *knowledge* rather than a final product. My knowledge on the wider socio-cultural context of male friendship discourse is gained as a reflective process through ethnography, a process of knowledge construction, rather than an outcome or result. Therefore, when presenting my analysis, the process of how the knowledge has been gained to inform the understanding of masculinities and identities needs to be explicitly explained in my writing.

When drawing my conclusions from my analysis, I am aware that the fundamental contextual sharedness can be replaced by a discursively constructed distance between me as an ethnographer and my 'object' – this thesis. I agree with Blommaert (2018: 61-63) that the way to escape this from-field-to-desk trap is to reintroduce history as a real category of analysis, bringing historical awareness of ethnography into our reflexivity and analysis. If we want to understand the actual functions of forms of language, we have to know where they come from, how they entered people's repertoires, and how they relate to larger patterns of social and cultural behaviour. For instance, my participants often use political slogans in their narrative and teasing, drawn from their workplace

discourse. When I was on my field-trip in Yunnan, I realised that they are not just repertoires derived from their workplaces, but also public slogans on street billboards situated everywhere in the local place. Therefore, it constitutes a prevailing discourse in their everyday lives, from which they actively draw and further reproduce.

To conclude, openness to data, in my view, goes beyond the basic level of approaching qualitative data to allow data to tell its own story. It requires researchers to consider data with open-mindedness, flexibility and reflexivity. We need to interpret our data with wider socio-contextual knowledge, which is often gained through ethnographic methods of data collection. We need to be careful and reflective when dealing with participants' own interpretations, considering how they attempt to position themselves in multiple sources of data for truth-claims. At the same time, openness to data also intersects with what theoretical concepts and observational insights we adopt to support our analyses. When bringing those theories and ethnography together in our analysis, we must recognise that data itself is a knowledge construction process. To reveal that knowledge is a process rather than a product, we need to bring a historical awareness to unfold and reflect how we acquired certain socio-cultural knowledge.

3.4.2 Analytical Frameworks

With the 'openness to data' mindset, at the early data collection stage, my research participants were told simply that I was interested in their male friendship talk and they only needed to record the talk with their friends whenever they felt comfortable and it was convenient. In this way, I attempted to make sure that their naturally-occurring conversations were not intentionally influenced by any topics or focuses. When working through my data, I noticed that narratives (Chapters 4 and 5) and humour

(Chapter 6) prominently emerged from my data, hence they became the main focus. Previous studies have shown that narrative (Kiesling, 2003, 2006; Coates, 2003) and humour (Pichler, 2019) are closely linked to the construction of masculinity, and therefore, Chapters 4-6 will examine how they were used by my research participants to perform masculinities. Apart from telling stories and sharing jokes, the men in the conversations also engaged in emotional and personal talk with each other. This led to my scrutiny of this type of genre in their friendship talk in Chapter 7. I aim to demonstrate how men in my research practise friendship considering 'male friendship' has always been perceived as a virtue in Chinese culture.

To analyse this data on a structural and discourse level, I used a combination of approaches to produce a more appropriate analysis. First, I use a discourse perspective to approach narrative, conversational humour, and personal talk, viewing them as a kind of social practice. When examining such genres, I keep in mind that masculinity and identity are the primary exploratory themes in this thesis. Therefore, I extend the micro analytic focus from micro linguistic analysis to a more macro style of discourse analysis, exploring what wider cultural discourses are drawn by those speakers to accomplish their more local and micro narrative or conversational humour activities.

For example, in this thesis, I see narrative as an emergent process, rather than a final product. Therefore, multiple identities and gender-related ideologies can also emerge, seen as an emerging process while the conversational narrative unfolds. The focus of this chapter thus considers how social identities are discursively accomplished, articulated and constructed in participants' narrative practices; and how their narratives become part of their shared resources that narrators and audience

in the interaction can draw on to not only construct and negotiate but also contest their identities through interaction (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2008, 2012).

I employ Bamberg's (1997) interactional approach to positioning in my narrative analysis, following Wortham and Gadsden's (2006: 319-341) four layers of positioning paradigm to support my exploration on narrative and identity construction (more details see Chapter 4). I also emphasise that conversational humour, especially teasing, can be lifted to a discourse level, divulging the multiple functions of teasing in men's talk in relation to gender ideologies and identity construction. In a more micro identification of teasing, I employ frameworks and concepts from Interactional Sociolinguistics, such as frame analysis (Goffman, 1975, 1981) and contextualisation cues (Gumperz, 1982). When investigating men's personal talk, apart from the investigation of structural characteristics, I also use frameworks of critical discourse analysis to offer a more critical stance to interpret their gendered discourse.

3.4.3 Researching Multilingually: Transcription and Translation

I collected data from my participants in Yunnan, China in Chinese and write this thesis in English, and there are various challenges when researching multilingually, which is defined as 'the process and practice of using, or accounting for the use of, more than one language in the research process, e.g. from the initial design of the project, to engaging with different literature, to developing the methodology and considering all possible ethical issues, to generating and analysing the data, to issue of representation and reflexivity when writing up and publishing' (Holmes et al., 2016: 101). This LE research involves multilingual research in many aspects. First, during the course of my ethnographic work, I used Yunnan local dialect to engage in social activities with my participants. Almost all the

recorded audio data, including participants' self-recorded talk and ethnographic interviews, is based on Yunnan dialect. I translated this data into English and presented them as transcripts. There were probably hundreds of times that I needed to make decisions about how to translate their conversation and present them as transcripts. In the following section I unpack the challenges and complexities that have emerged when researching multilingually, especially in translation and transcription.

3.4.3.1 Transcription

Even though there is new technology supporting time-consuming transcription work for conversation analysts (Bolden, 2015), I transcribed the conversational data by myself manually. I worked with audio data that was spoken in Yunnan local dialect that auto-translation technology may find difficult to capture, therefore I transcribed the original data first with the local dialect as a first draft, and then translated the data into English with transcript conventions. When presenting the recording content in transcripts, transcription is always a 'graphic representation of selective aspects' of interaction structure (O'Connell and Kowal, 1995). Based on this perspective, transcripts can never objectively present and capture everything that is happening in the recording, because 'it is always theoretically driven and therefore biased to a particular standpoint' (Coates and Thornborrow, 1999: 596).

My main research interest in this thesis is to examine men's group conversations with their friends, and I therefore needed a transcript system to capture multi-party conversations. Hence, I chose the stave system to transcribe my conversational data. Although Sack, Jefferson and Schegloff (1974: 700) offer a classic transcription model for Conversation Analysis on spontaneous talk, that model fails to present conversation as a joint accomplishment by all speakers (Coates, 1996: 134). Scholars who work on spontaneous conversations in a group setting, such as Pichler (2006, 2009, 2018) and Coates (1996, 2003), employ a stave system to transcribe their data.

In the stave system, all participants' names in a specific speech event are shown at the left (even if certain speakers do not speak in some utterances), and in each segment, participants' names maintain the same order. The presentation of a stave transcription looks like a musical score. The linear progression of talk is represented from left to right, whilst the multidimensionality from each speaker is conveyed by top to bottom alignment of utterances. In this way, it clearly demonstrates who speaks first (following participants' name) and which speakers overlap or interrupt (indicated by vertically aligned utterances). Employing the stave system to transcribe my data, the theoretical standpoint of how I understand talk is indicative: conversation among a group of male friends is an emergent process that can be unfolded, and moreover, it is a collaborative and interactive process. The more detailed transcription conventions that I use have been adapted from Coates (1996, 1997, and 2003) and Pichler (2006, 2009), will be provided in Appendix 3. I also use a mixture of transcripts in this thesis, for instance, when a talk develops into one speaker's monologue, I decided not to use the stave system to save space, instead, I transcribed them in sequence with numbered lines to benefit my analysis.

I believe that a transcript, as a way to represent data, should be accessible to readers, and at the same time, include necessary information to support my analysis. My research goal is to explore the interplay between the local, interactional patterns of everyday men's talk with friends and the wider socio-cultural discourses that their talk draws on, such as gender norms and social structures. Therefore, I do not include other detailed linguistics features, such as phonetic features, in the transcript. This is not simply because their phonetic features are based in their local dialect (and the transcript is in English) but also because those features may not be critically relevant to my research

questions. However, I do include paralinguistic features, such as voice, volume, and pitch movement, as descriptive features to support my analysis. For instance, in Chapter 6, paralinguistic features are included in the transcripts (e.g., changes of tone, laughter) because they can be evidence of 'contextualisation cues' to signal a playful frame to interpret teasing. This can be seen as a level of my interpretation, rather than completely 'descriptive', although for most researchers working with conversational data, analysis already begins when listening to recordings and transcribing the talk.

3.4.3.2 Translation

As with other sociolinguistic research, when researching Chinese language data that is presented in English (see Huang, Y., 2018), translation is a challenging task. Huang Yanning (2018: 150) notes that the difficulty of translating Chinese Internet buzzwords derives from their complex implications and subtle wordplay, which is exacerbated by the distinct Chinese grammar. For instance, a term that is worth discussing here to demonstrate the translation issue is *yaoyan jianhuo* (妖艳贱货). My first translation attempt was 'beautiful bitch', but I soon realised this may not capture the nuanced complexity that this term involves. The word '*yaoyan*' (妖艳) means a type of beauty that is often associated with evil witches. It has the implication of a bold make-up style and personality qualities that are the opposite of kind, docile or submissive. The word '*jianhuo*' (贱货) is a very degrading and literally means 'cheap product'. Using this word to describe women clearly suggests an intention of objectifying and devaluing women. The simple translation 'beautiful bitch' cannot capture the complex connotations of this Chinese term. Providing an explanation is a way of translation, and moreover, I argue that this explanation can be seen as a level of discourse analysis. I explore the lexical connotations as a linguistic trace to uncover how a word to address and describe women can reproduce gender attitudes and gender ideologies (Sunderland, 2004) – this is not the simple translation 'beautiful bitch' can offer.

Another challenge arising from translation is the English language choice that I have to make for certain words which may reflect my positionality and political standpoint as a researcher. In the original data, participants use '*zhao xiaojie*' (找小姐) to mean visiting a place for sex workers. '*Zhao*' (找) means to 'look for', and '*xiaojie*' (小姐) means 'Miss' as a term of address. I need to make decisions about whether I should use the word 'prostitute place' or 'brothels' or even 'whorehouse' in the context, and if 'Miss' should be translated as 'sex workers' or 'prostitutes' or simply reserve the Chinese term 'Miss'. As a linguist, I believe it is a language choice for Chinese men to use 'Miss' to refer to sex workers. As a feminist researcher, I would choose 'sex workers' rather than 'prostitutes' in my writing, but how would I translate them into a specific utterance from the mouths of male speakers? How can my English translation represent the ambivalent and ambiguous implications of a word in a specific contextual-embedded speech event? Will the translation become a political standpoint that I decide for them?

These questions can lead to a discussion of entextualisation when working on data presentation. Every type of data representation, not only transcripts but also translations, is a form of entextualisation. Discourse is being represented as a preferred reading, provided with a meta-discursive contextualization, guiding it and situating it within an interpretive frame of reference (Blommaert, 2018: 114). As an LE researcher rather than a CA researcher, I am aware that simple translation may lead to de-and re-contextualising (entextualising) the 'original' discourse into a 'new' discourse. If I use this 'new' discourse as my data for my analysis, then more complex implications would be detached and neglected. Many scholars whose research interests rest on gender in the Chinese context choose to keep the original Chinese pinyin form because certain terms are impossible to translate without

damaging the original meanings in Chinese, such as *Diaosi* (Gong, 2016; Huang, 2018) and *Shamate* (Huang, 2018). Of course, the decisions are made by researchers themselves, for instance, some researchers choose to use Chinese pinyin *zhainan* (Song and Hird, 2014: 211-254) to refer to young men who always stay at home while some researchers use *Otaku* (Huang, 2018), the Japanese term that has become well-known in the West. In this research, instead of translating in a hasty way, I chose to use the form of Chinese pinyin to refer to certain terms, such as *xiaojie* here, reserving more interpretive possibilities in my analysis.

Apart from the translation difficulties I share with researchers who work with online or media discourse data (Gong, 2016; Huang, 2018), I had to deal with one more challenge: fragmented and ambiguous spoken data. The Chinese language has distinctive grammatical features, and, compared to the English language, its syntax structure is relatively more fragmented. The fragmented and ambiguous meaning-making and meaning-understanding is even worse in colloquial Chinese, and it is often accompanied by tense confusion. Seeking research participants' clarification is not always helpful because they could not remember or even were not sure which tense they intended to mean in that specific past moment. As a native Chinese speaker, sometimes I also use certain vague tenses in my English translation, but the feedback I have received made me reflect on the accuracy of tense intention in specific utterances. Therefore, in my transcripts, I provide translation alternatives for readers to make other possible interpretations.

3.5 Reflexivity

Ethnography recognises the ineradicable role that the researcher's personal subjectivity plays throughout the research process (Tustin and Maybin, 2007). Hence, reflectivity is often required in

ethnographic research, as one of the principles of ethnographic epistemology and methodology is that we have to be open about our own subjectivity and make it visible. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2000: 18) commented that both the researcher and the researched speak from a specific 'class, gender, racial, cultural and ethnic community perspective', and those perspectives transform research into a 'multicultural process'. Thus, the background knowledge, assumptions and epistemologies (Mendoza-Denton, 2008: 44) that I hold may impact my data collection and interpretation. Hence, in this reflectivity section, I first offer a short story about myself and then discuss this before reflecting on my positionalities in this ethnographic research.

'Writing myself into the research' is an important part of an ethnographic endeavour. It acknowledges that ethnography actively places a researcher inside the research context (Milroy and Gordon, 2008). It helps the writer to emphasise that their interpretation of the data is coloured and impacted by their lived experiences and personal past (Mendoza-Denton, 2008: 44). Researcher's own cultural and interpretive capacities are crucial in making sense of the complex intricacies of situated everyday activity among the people being studied, and tuning into these takes time and close involvement (Rampton et al., 2014: 3). Writing my past history allows me to be reflective about the various positions that I put myself in or being perceived by the researched in ethnography.

3.5.1 A short story of a girl growing up in Yunnan

I was born and raised in Zhaotong, Yunnan Province, China for the first 18 years of my life, before moving to Tianjin and the UK to further my education. All my grandparents worked in state-owned institutions and enterprises (also 'working within the system') before they retired. My parents followed a similar career path as my grandparents: my father worked for the same state-owned

national bank for 40 years while my mother was a maths teacher in a state primary school. My parents retired in the same year at the ages of 60 and 55. When I was a child, I remember that my father often teased my mother as the only non-CCP (China Communist Party) member of my family. With the defence that 'it is too time-consuming to attend those CCP meetings', my mother maintains this political status as 'public citizen'/ or one of the 'masses' (群众). Even though I was approached by the party organisation at my university in Tianjin, I decided not to join the CCP.

I was born in 1991 as the only child to my parents. All of my uncles and aunties only have one child because of China's 'one child' (独生子女) policy that ran during the early 1980s to the early 2010s. Since I was 11, almost every holiday, my mother brought me to Kunming to attend various training courses. She believed that Kunming, as the capital city of Yunnan, had better educational resources than Zhaotong. My father's two brothers settled in Kunming, and their daughters were born and raised there. I went to the classes with my cousin, and we were very close because of the time we spent together. It was around that time I started to feel how I was perceived as a Zhaotong person. Located in the north-eastern part of Yunnan, Zhaotong as an urban city is often associated with economic under-development, a relatively high crime rate and a highland climate in winter. I would not say that I experienced unjust discrimination because of my origins, but I had several unpleasant encounters when (Kunming) people realised I was not a local, often based on my accent. Many years later, my mother disclosed to me that back when we were in Kunming, she felt unconfident simply because we were from a non-capital city.

To be more accepted, I learnt how to imitate Kunming dialect. My original interest and passion for linguistics perhaps helped me here, and I have always been fascinated in imitating different dialects

and accents. There was a time when I could speak a very good Kunming dialect, and I was proud that many people thought I was raised in Kunming, rather than a holiday visitor. This gave me some confidence as a young adolescent girl in Kunming. However, as I grew up, I changed my attitude. I have a very close female friendship group, which was formed by my close high school classmates in Zhaotong. Even though after graduation we went to different universities and started to work at different places across the world, we are still close today. On one of our holidays in high school, some of us went to a training course in Kunming together, and we were proud of our Zhaotong identity, and we spoke our Zhaotong dialect without hesitation.

In my adulthood, I experienced more mobility and immigration. I started my undergraduate study in 2009 in Tianjin, a city located in the north of China, around 2800 kilometres away from Kunming. In addition to my daily study for my major of English, I also worked as a journalist, then an editor and finally an editor-in-chief for a total of three years for my university's fortnightly newspaper. Later, I extended my journalism experience outside of university by working at *China Youth Daily*, a state-owned news agency under the supervision of the Communist Youth League of China. At that time, I began developing an interest in how media discourse can be ideological and used for manipulation. Then, I went to the *Discourse Studies* programme of the Linguistics and English Language Department of Lancaster University to pursue my interests in linguistics, particularly discourse analysis. When I started this research, my journalism experience helped me to quickly teach myself to be an ethnographer, advancing my skills of field notes-taking, interviewing and transcription.

My life experience in a close friendship group sparked my research interests on linguistic investigations of friendship talk. In one of my MA courses at Lancaster University, *Gender and Language* given by

Jane Sunderland, I explored the pragmatic strategies in females' friendship talk. To further my research trajectory, I explored male friendship talk in my MA thesis, with the focus on the 'style' of the talk, rather than the 'content'. Therefore, as the continuity of my research interest, I explore topics such as 'identity' and 'masculinity' for this PhD thesis. By the time I wrote this thesis, I had lived in the UK for eight years.

I left Yunnan in 2009, and since then I have only visited family and friends for holidays. In the past, they always teased me (as I also teased myself) that as someone who grew up in Yunnan, my tolerance for spiciness has declined dramatically. They joked that I have been staying in places that eat 'bland' food (i.e Tianjin and UK) for too long. This can be symbolic of how I am no longer an authentic Yunnan person because of my mobility and immigrant experience. From 2016 to 2019, I visited Yunnan three times, and because of this research, I saw this place as my field that I need to examine, rather than my hometown. I had to defamiliarize myself with the cultural knowledge that I may have taken for granted as an insider to realise the goal of what LE advocates: making familiar things unfamiliar. Therefore, in my writing, I explain the meanings and rationality in practice that may seem strange from the outside (Rampton et al., 2004: 2), especially considering this is a PhD thesis that will be evaluated and published in the UK. Like many other immigrants' stories, those experiences gave me a new layer of identity for my hometown friends, including my research participants. I will further unpack my positionality in the following section.

3.5.2 My Positionalities

A researcher's position in an ethnography requires reflexivity when approaching data, and after a short description of my past, I present my positionalities in this research. In this LE research, even with

the inclusion of participants' perspectives, my analysis still may reflect my own political commitments, life histories, and social positions. After all, at a political level, the researcher's own interests, shaped by their particular life histories and positionings, plays a key role in shaping the areas and approach of research. In the following section, I unpack how my female identity, researcher identity, and 'insider' and 'outsider' identities constitute my positionalities.

3.5.2.1 A Female researcher in male discourse

Almost every time I tell people that my research is on men's talk, they question how my gender might influence my findings. I am not the first female researcher who has reflected on this subject. In linguistics, Jane Sunderland (2004) criticised how female researchers in previous research represented their findings in a way that cast men and boys in a poor light. This echoes the earlier tendencies in gender and language studies around the late 1990s and early 2000s in which research was either about generalising gender differences in language use or to compliment the triumph of women's talk. In examining and problematising British men's talk, Jennifer Coates (2003) considered whether her status as a female researcher might influence participants' conversational data. Comparing her data collected from British men to those collected by male researchers, her recording included less sexist and homophobic material. She noticed that some younger participants were aware of her potential feminist identity. A young man said in the recording that, 'I hope this professor isn't an ardent feminist' (Coates, 2003: 3).

Coates was concerned that her female identity may have constrained the 'naturally-occurring' conversations in men's talk. However, some female ethnographers working with male participants saw more advantages. Taking Choi and Peng's (2016) sociological research on working-class male migrant workers as an example, they noted that young male respondents were surprisingly willing to talk with

female interviewers about relationship problems and intergeneration emotional dynamics. There was less embarrassment involved in discussing private concerns when young males were interviewed by senior female interviewers who approached them as an older aunt or sister figure. Five men cried in their interviews to express their emotions. Magdalena Wong's (2020) anthropological research on men and masculinity in Nanchong, Sichuan province, described similar experiences. When conducting ethnographic studies in the field she was in her 40s, and she found that men tended to feel comfortable disclosing their experiences and sentiments to her as an older sister.

I conducted this research not only as a linguist but also as an ethnographer. I argue that my female identity might offer some advantages and possibilities rather than merely problems and constraints. Having said that, I could never be perceived as a 'male-pal' in a male friendship circle, compared to male researchers working with male discourse. For example, Scott Kiesling carried out comprehensive research on the language used by a US fraternity (1997, 2003, 2007), and he was a member of the fraternity he researched. My female identity, similar to other female ethnographers working with male informants, provides a window for my male participants to express things they may find difficult to share with their male peers. One night I went to a pub with my research participants after dinner, and they bumped into their other friends sitting at a different table. Leilei introduced me to them as a friend and a researcher on men and men's talk. One man, whom I had just met, came to talk to me. After several shots, he addressed me with the term 'older sister' (姐 - jiě) in almost every sentence. It might be based on the fact that I was three years older than him, but it also indicated that my status as researcher on men's talk awarded me maturity and trustworthiness in his eyes. On that night, he told me about his marriage struggles and intergenerational distress.

Aside from the advantage of being emotionally trusted by my male participants, another benefit of being a female researcher in the field is that I was naturally welcomed to enter women's circles. Some of the ethnographic information I use in my analysis was provided by the female partners of my male research participants. For instance, in Chapter 7, I analyse an extract of conversational humour from Group 1 about drinking alcohol. Mingqing's girlfriend, Hua, gave me a lot of useful information about their past drinking experiences, especially how Mingqing and his male friends were sent to the hospital where she worked. It offers a balanced perspective to complement my ethnographic interviews with my male participants, and it further enriches my analysis in this linguistic ethnographic research.

As a famous quote suggests regarding ethnographic practice: 'One is never just a man or a woman' in the field (Grimshaw, 1986, cited in Callaway, 1992: 34). Not only does my female identity influence my positionality, other aspects of my identities, such as age and life experiences, also influenced how I was perceived in the field. I adopt the intersectionality approach to illustrate the interplay of different social variables in the construction of one's identities. I also see myself with multiple and intersectional identities in this research context. In the following section, I reflect on how I can be both 'insider' and 'outsider' in the field, and how that dilemma influences my data collection and interpretation. I shall unpack how my identities as a friend, a local, a peer, and a feminist researcher constitute the complex and multiple positionalities in the interactions with my male participants.

3.5.2.2 'Insider': local, friend, peer

I enjoyed many advantages and conveniences in this research as an ethnographer. First, compared to other sociolinguistic research where there are often age gaps between the researcher and the researched (Lawson, 2009, 2013; Pichler, 2009, 2016, 2019), my study participants and I are of the

same generation, with no more than three-years' age difference. This means we share similar life experiences and collective memories prior to entering adulthood, and this brought advantages when building rapport with my participants. Growing up as the generation influenced by China's 'one-child' policy, most of the research participants and I were the only children of our families. Against this socio-cultural background, we all value friendship, believing that 'friends are our chosen siblings'. Starting data collection in 2016 and finishing thesis writing in 2022, I have witnessed key life events of my participants in their late 20s and early 30s. I have shared struggles and happiness with them in their graduations, career development and family establishment. When important life events unfold, the process of building rapport involves a reciprocal sharing of experience and emotions between me and my participants.

Earlier, I explained that I approached Leilei because I was impressed by his WeChat Moment about his male friends. When I got to know more about his close male friendship group, I realised that one of his friends, Mingqing, was the step-brother of my close female friend. Surprisingly, his girlfriend back then (who later became his wife) happened to be my high school classmate. Those connections inevitably positioned me as an insider in this research context. Even though we were probably only acquaintances at the beginning of the research, they were still highly likely to see me as their friend's friend, rather than a distant researcher. As a result, I did not experience too many difficulties in persuading them to participate in this research and I had relatively easy access to their friendship group. Rui and Leilei, my gatekeepers or contact persons, facilitated me to smooth my progression in my research. Apart from recording their talk, they contacted more participants from their friendship group to join the research and invited me to their social activities so I could conduct my participant-observations and ethnographic interviews.

They were highly involved in this collaborative research, without getting paid to do so. They always said that they were doing a favour for their friend. To express my appreciation, every time I visited them, I always brought some gifts to thank their efforts for facilitating me in conducting this research. Approaching them as gatekeepers through my friends' network rather than public recruitment also raised a methodological concern, which led me to an 'ethically important moment' (Copland's, 2015: 95). Copland (2015) brought an 'ethically important moment' to a discussion in her linguistic ethnographic research on feedback conferences of English teachers' training. When collecting data in her workplace, she questioned whether it was ethical to recruit participants who were well known to the researcher, such as her colleagues. In a similar scenario, the gate-person in this research knew me not only as a researcher but also as a friend.

My first reflection is that as their friend, I was indeed perceived as a related ally because of my pre-adulthood life experiences. Group 1 is a friendship group established in Zhaotong, and my Zhaotong identity naturally helped me to gain my initial access to this group. Group 2 was a group of hometown friends formed in Lijiang and most of its members settled in Kunming after their education. My past experiences as a non-local living in Kunming made them feel connected to me, and they did not hide their hatred towards Kunming people in front of me. Their attitude was evident in their self-recorded conversations (see discussion in Chapters 4 and 7). Conversations with them about our shared real-life experiences shed light on the theoretical discussion of how 'locality' or 'place' plays a significant role in construction of identities (Pichler, 2021a).

Most of my research participants work 'within the system', and quite a few are China Communist Party members. My family background helped me to build rapport with my participants. For instance, as seen in Chapter 4, Mingqing was narrating his experience in the 'poverty reduction and alleviation' campaign. My father was working in the same campaign around the same time, so I used his personal experiences to elicit questions in ethnographic interviews with Mingqing. He felt connected and shared more personal thoughts with me. Those experiences led me to believe that, to some extent, I can be an insider in this research context, which naturally helped the smooth progression of my research.

3.5.2.3 Outsider: a feminist PhD student studying abroad

In her anthropological research in Nanchong, a small peri-urban city in Sichuan, China, Wong's (2020) Hongkongese identity was often challenged by the local people. She was even suspected of being a spy on several occasions. Because of my 'local' identity, I at least did not encounter those difficulties. However, my other aspects of identity, as a woman who currently lives outside of China without any working experience in the state-owned system, also impacts my positionality. My gender clearly also positioned me in opposition to my male participants. Gendered discourses emerged throughout the interaction between me and my participants. The topic of differences between female and male friendships was often discussed. This theme emerged again in their self-recorded all-male personal talk, which will be elaborated on in Chapter 7. Apart from the topic of gendered friendship, gender-differentiation discourses also gendered their sex stories (Chapter 5) and conversational humour (Chapter 6). As a woman, inevitably, I could not be recognised by them as a complete insider because of my gender.

Moreover, I was also perceived as an outsider because of my educational background. Some men teased me with a common expression in China: 'there are three types of people in the world, men, women, and female PhDs'. My experience in the field confirmed Li Xiaomen's (2021) Chinese 'leftover women' research in which female PhDs are constructed as the ultimate 'leftover women' in Chinese media's representation. Those sexist discourses degrade women who seek intellectual pursuits and excellence, and my participants drew on these problematic, but sadly well-accepted sexist discourses to justify and legitimatise some of our disagreements, which often departed from my feminist stance. They always commented that, 'of course, you are a female PhD after all'. They did not use the word 'feminist' explicitly, however, 'she is a female PhD' became a catchphrase for them to implicitly suggest my feminist identity. In their eyes, my feminist stance was brought by the higher education I received in the West. Because of the gender difference, I could never be an absolute ally to them even though I also shared their positionality as a hometown friend.

3.6 Conclusion

The reflection discussed above suggests an interplay between 'strangeness' and 'familiarity' (Rampton et al., 2004: 2). My positionality as a friend, a woman, and a feminist researcher may have impacted how I was perceived by my participants, which accordingly may have shaped the data collection and my analysis. Reflectivity is a continuous and recurring practice at all stages of my research, which perhaps sits in the centre of this LE research. In this chapter, I discussed why I used linguistic ethnography as my methodology, and I introduced both my participants and data, and I also reflected on multiple aspects of decision-making in this research project. With those foundations, this theis now proceeds to an analysis of the data.

CHAPTER 4: NARRATIVE, INDEXALITY AND IDENTITIES

4.1 Introduction

Male narrative as a kind of discourse practice has been researched extensively in British men's talk (Coates, 2003), American university fraternity men's in-group conversation (Kiesling, 2006) and Scottish young men's talk in an Academy (Lawson, 2013, 2015). Similar to the research focus of those studies, I investigate how identities and masculinities have emerged through storytelling practice. Storytelling constitutes a significant part of men's talk in my data, and therefore, I dedicate the following two chapters (4 and 5) to illustrating how the micro and interactional narrative can be linked to the wider social-cultural context with an explorative focus on gender. In this chapter, I first clarify how I understand narrative from a theoretical perspective and introduce terminologies and analytical frameworks I use in my narrative analysis. Then I illustrate how narratives become an important linguistic resource used by my research participants for the construction of their male hegemonic identities, encompassing their locality, age, Han ethnicity, middle class-ness, and a particular emphasis on the professional identity of being 'within the system'.

4.2 Theoretical Foundations

Narrative has been approached and defined differently in a wide range of disciplines, from literary criticism to studies to sociolinguistics. The research questions that I am interested in the examination of narrative are *how* and *what* social identities emerge from their conversational narratives. Therefore, I explain my theoretical foundations when tackling those questions. This section starts with how to approach narrative as practice (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2008) and 'narrative-in-interaction' (Georgakopoulou, 2006) from discourse and socio-cultural linguistic

perspectives. Then I introduce how Wortham and Gadsden's (2006) framework on positioning theory can work hand-in-hand with the concept of indexicality to illustrate the constraints of the 'macro-sociological order' on 'micro-contextual' positionings (Silverstein, 2004: 640). With this conceptual and analytic support, I can illustrate how a range of social identities, such as locality, social class/status, age and professional identities can be indexed in their narrative.

4.2.1 How to Understand Narrative

Collecting narrative from participants' own self-recorded conversation, I see narrative as an interaction (De Fina and Georgakopolou, 2008, 2012). Instead of seeing the recipient as the passive audience, the approach of narrative-in-interaction (Georgakopoulou, 2006) highlights the role that participants play in the process of storytelling. The audience of storytelling, therefore, is far more than a recipient. Instead, they join the process of narrative-telling and may modify, reject or under-cut tellings (Goodwin, 1984; Ochs and Capps, 2001). Coates (1997, 2001, 2003) uses a similar concept – 'conversational narrative' – to refer to storytelling in conversation. According to her, the reality is that participants (the audience) are in some sense always co-authors (Coates, 2001: 82). Thus, storytelling becomes a collaborative achievement, with narrative form and content being 'continually reshaped by the co-participants, through their ability to create certain alignments and suggest or impose certain interpretations' (Duranti, 1986: 242).

This theoretical shift to see narrative changes how to define 'narrative' and the according explorative focus in narrative analysis. I align myself with Coates (2003: 15-39) to define what counts as a narrative. First, from a local interactional sense, 'there has to be a sequence of narrative clauses (clauses containing a verb in the simple past tense, or, sometimes, the historic present tense) whose order matches the real-time order of the events described in those clauses' (ibid: 18). Secondly, a

story must have a point, or to be tellable to have tellability (Coates, 2001). In addition, I approach narrative as a type of discourse practice (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2008), shaped by and embedded in both 'context of situation' and 'context of culture' (Ben-Amos, 1993: 215-216; De Fina, 2008). I explore the tellability (De Fina, 2008) and embeddedness (Georgakopoulou, 2006; De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2008) of Chinese young men's conversational narrative data with their friends.

I explore questions such as why this particular story is told by this person at this moment in this specific situation. If storytelling is considered a joint venture, then what different types of actions and tasks are done by different participants in a collaborative accomplishment of narrative (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2008, 2012); and how does it shape the genre and structural characteristics of men's male friendship narrative practices? Apart from the 'context of situation', what identities and gender work does this story aim to accomplish? What 'context of culture', or wider socio-cultural discourses on gender and ideologies are drawn upon here to craft this story? To be able to answer those questions, I review how to approach identity construction in narrative practice and introduce a paradigm on positioning theory in narrative analysis (Wortham and Gadsden, 2006) in sections 2.2 and 2.3. Before any further elaboration, I will clarify certain terminologies that I use in this thesis.

First, there are two worlds when we talk about narrative: the narrative-telling/storytelling world and the story-told/taleworld. Taleword or story-told world refers to the there-and-then events described in the narrative. The narrative-telling or storytelling world, on the other hand, is the here-and-now local speech event. It is an emerging process and interactive accomplishment in which the narrator is a teller in themselves vis-a-vis their interlocutors, rather than a character in the story. This distinction is useful because it allows me to clarify which 'event' I refer to, and, moreover, considering two worlds

for narrative, it provides more interpretive possibilities when applying positioning theory in narrative analysis. Secondly, when I describe certain components of a narrative (taleworld), I use Labov and Waletzky's (1967) model to refer to the actions and sequences in the narrative. In this model, there are six sections that reflect the typical progression of narrative: abstract, orientation, complicating action, resolution, coda, and evaluation.

According to this paradigm, 'abstract' often refers to the introduction of a narrative, while 'orientation' is often the stage after the introduction, in which the setting of a story is given. Following orientation is the 'complicating action'. This refers to the actual events of the narrative, and in Coates's (2003) definition, it is often expressed using past tenses. 'Evaluation' means the point, or the reason the narrative is being told. In this research, I see why a story is told at a specific moment at a discourse level, linking to identity and gender work. Following this is what Labov calls the 'result' or 'resolution', which is often the conclusion of a story. Finally, comes 'coda', when the narrator stresses the story's relevance by linking it to current life, outside of the taleworld. The 'coda' is optional in a narrative as it creates a timeless feeling, bringing the narrative back to the here-and-now narrative-telling world.

I acknowledge that the local context of interaction can impact the action of participants in the act of storytelling, and therefore participants play different telling roles in the narrative-telling events (Georgakopoulou, 2006; De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2012). Therefore, Labov's identification of the six sections of a typical narrative progression can be useful, as I can show which participant takes which specific sections/action in a narrative-telling activity. Applying Labov's model with the 'narrative-in-interaction' approach, I can reveal how a conversational narrative is collaboratively crafted and constructed.

4.2.2 Narrative, Discourse and Identities

In the previous section, I explained a theoretical shift in what counts as narrative. 'Less polished, less coherent narratives that pervade ordinary social encounters and are a hallmark of the human condition' (Ochs and Capps, 2001: 57) are thus worth a closer examination. Narrative research shifts from the examination of classic structure of high-tellability stories to the exploration of the diverse shapes and generic forms of narratives (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2008). More recently, Georgakopoulou (2007, 2019) advocated a wider umbrella term – 'small stories' – to look at those more fragmented, less privileged, and often neglected narratives. Aligned to this trend, I investigate narratives embedded in male friends' everyday talk. Compared to interview-based 'big narratives' about the self and the life story in which deceptively coherent, settled, thought-out lives and selves tend to be represented, those small stories in conversations 'have been associated and documented in case of the tellers presenting emergent and hybrid identities for themselves' (Georgakopoulou, 2019: 264).

Indeed, narratives are often seen as the prime vehicle for expressing identity (Georgakopoulou, 2007; De Fina, 2006, 2019). In Chapter 2, I explained how I use poststructuralist and constructionist perspectives to understand identity. The underlying insights are that identity is always the outcome of identity work, and it is seen as an emerging process rather than a final product for its fluid and plural sense (Hall, 2000). Taking a similar view to approach narrative in talk-in-interaction, narrative accordingly can be seen as a type of practice, and it sheds light on the understanding of narrative as a discourse, shaped by context (De Fina, 2008). The socially-minded approach to understanding narrative as a practice also leads to the view that narrative is a performance for the potential audience. Therefore, emerging stories become participants' own resources (Kiesling, 2006: 256) and

crucial sites (Moita-Lopes, 2006: 293) for social identity construction in which language plays its constitutive role for such identity work (Hall, 2000).

Moreover, alongside the identity work, narrative can be a prime site for the expression of moral stance and attitudes (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2008, 2012). Narrative as discourse provides vast resources to allow participants in a narrative activity to present, construct and perform a person's self in relation to other selves in the social world. Kiesling's (2001, 2006) research shows that in order to create hegemonic identity, subordinate 'others' are marked or indexed through the use of linguistic features associated with a particular social group (i.e. stereotypical Black or gay traits). Such hegemonic identity-making in American fraternity men's discourse relies on their shared cultural knowledge on race, sexuality and gender, with which they create their stances and categories (Kiesling, 2006: 264-265). Similarly, Moita-Lopes (2006) shows how a Brazilian boy, Hans, created his identity in a position of hegemony as male, white and heterosexual in focus group interviews by constructing his margins: femininity, homoeroticism and blackness. Therefore, narrative is seen as resources more or less strategically and agentively drawn upon, negotiated and reconstructed anew in local contexts (De Fina, 2008). In the following section, I shall explain how positioning theory can reveal such enactment, as positioning is a useful construct in narrative analysis to understand how people are located in discourse or in conversation when they are engaged in meaning construction with others (Moita-Lopes, 2006: 295).

4.2.3 Narrative Analysis - Positioning Theory

In this thesis, I use Bamberg's (1997, 2003) interactional approach to positioning for my narrative analysis. Employing the terminologies of narrative-telling world and taleworld, I argue that tellers in a

narrative activity can position themselves in both worlds. Positioning in the taleworld considers how characters, including tellers themselves and other parties, are positioned in the story. In the here-and-now emerging telling-world, tellers are not a character in a story, instead, they are interlocutors in a local speech event. The interactive dynamics and involvements of the participants in a storytelling event are also important, and I explore identities and gender ideologies emerging from both interactive/local narrative-telling events as well as the narrated taleworlds.

To further apply positioning theory in a more systematic analysis, I follow Wortham and Gadsden's (2006: 319-341) four layers of positioning paradigm. The first layer considers how narrators position themselves in past events in which they participated. Secondly, it is also worthwhile to examine how various other narrated selves are represented in the story-world. I examine how narrators 'voice' or position others as recognisable types of people, and which social categories or social groups the tellers position themselves and other characters in the taleworld/story. Characters in the storyworld are assigned voices through direct quotes speech or evaluative indexicals or clauses. I will consider how others and narrators are positioned as particular groups or social categories, and what ideologies are attached to them as evaluation for identity construction.

Thirdly, when examining how narrators 'voice' and 'position' themselves and other narrated selves in narrative, it is important to further unpack how they evaluate them. While voicing themselves and other characters, either through direct or indirect quotes, narrators often evaluate these voices. Investigating this can show how identity work and gender ideologies are emergent, produced or reinforced. This is why it is argued that in certain genres (see De Fina, 2008; 2018), narrative becomes

the prime loci for the expression of moral stance and moral attitudes (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2012), conveyed through a variety of means from lexical choices to the use of modality.

The fourth type of positioning, according to Wortham and Gadsden (2006), is 'narrating interactions', that is, narrators position themselves interactionally with respect to their interlocutors in the storytelling event. It values narrative as an interactive and collaborative process between all the active participants in a local narrative event. Considering the positioning work at this level confirms my theoretical stance which sees narrative as a discourse, a practice and a performance. I acknowledge that in one narrative activity, there might be multiple tellers or narrators, and they collaborative to craft a narrative, the taleworld, by undertaking different tasks and actions. Through the examination of how tellers as interlocutors position themselves in this storytelling, the negotiation of their identities, moral attitudes and gender ideologies can be revealed. In other words, the multiplicities of identities of young men in the friendship group in this research are constructed and accomplished not only in the taleworld but also in a collaborative and interactive manner in the local practice of storytelling.

4.2.4 Indexicality, Cultural Concepts and Narrative

In the previous sections, I reviewed how identity construction is always closely linked to narrative, which can be examined through the paradigm of positioning in narrative analysis. In this section, I continue to explain how I use indexicality to further unveil such a process, establishing my theoretical foundations on indexicalities of social class, locality, and age. Bucholtz and Hall (2005: 594) write about the fundamental role that indexicality plays when understanding how linguistic forms are used to construct identity positions. The relationship between linguistic forms and identity position is

usually mediated rather than direct. As a mediational concept, indexicality, therefore, has been proposed and developed to bridge the micro text or talk instance to much wider socio-cultural meanings. Using the metaphor of index fingers, indexicality means to point away from what we say (words and expressions) to a more complicated context in which it fits. This indexing process can be indirect, and Ochs (1992: 336-337) explains such indirectness in gender and language studies:

> the relation between language and gender is not a simple straightforward mapping of linguistic form to the social meaning of gender. Rather the relation of language and gender is constituted and mediated by the relation of language to stances, social acts, social activities, and other social constructs.

Ochs' notion of indirect indexicality captures such mediated processes between language use and wider socio-cultural constructions of gender and identities. In Ochs' (1992: 341) Japanese example, linguistic features that index the stance of 'coarse intensity' are used to constitute a speaker as male, whereas features which index 'delicate intensity' are associated with, and therefore position speakers as, women. In her analysis on London's Bangladeshi adolescent girls' spontaneous talk, Pichler (2006) explains that this concept helps her to accomplish the exploration of how a range of socio-cultural identities can be indexed through multi-functional teasing. The (frequently stereotypical) expectations and beliefs about gender, ethnicity and social class that those girls share in their community reveal larger-scale ideologies, which they draw on and renegotiate in their identity work (2006: 227). For example, one of the functions of teasing used by those girls is to display toughness, in which they index toughness as pointing to contemporary stereotypes about British working-class youth culture.

In a similar fashion, the investigation, or the revelation of the relationship between the micro and macro, between situational and larger-scale sociocultural meaning in relation to gender and identities, constitutes my entire analysis. Approaching narrative as discourse, I find Michael Silverstein's (2004)

'cultural concepts' help to make the connection between discourse and indexicality. Silverstein (2004: 638) uses the term 'cultural concepts' to refer to stereotypical meanings indexed by certain words and expressions that emerge in spoken interaction. These cultural concepts can then invoke (often shared and in part unconscious) sociocultural knowledge of participants in a narrative activity, allowing them to further position themselves (2004: 632-33). Silverstein argues:

> the use of certain words and expressions at a particular point in discursive real time before does more than contribute straightforwardly to denotational text. It marks (indexes) the user as a member of a certain group or category relative to the groups or categories of person, things, etc. already in play through contextual and contextual indexicalities up to that point… (2004: 633)

The interpretation of these cultural concepts requires knowledge that goes considerably beyond that of the denotational meaning of works and expressions, which may require ethnographic observations and understanding. Silverstein points out such cultural knowledge is unlikely to be shared by outsiders or 'non-cognoscenti' (2004: 544), such as international audiences (or readers or speakers) who have not been exposed to the same 'stereotypic knowledge schemata' (2004: 633). For example, in the following analysis, specific cultural knowledge about (stereotypical) characteristics and expectations associated with certain regions or places is necessary to understand the positioning work that tellers attempt. Hence, certain words or expressions can therefore index a range of identities, explaining how tellers position themselves in narratives, through which they can further construct and negotiate their membership of certain social categories and their cultural identities.

The narrative in young men's talk in this research is rich in cultural concepts, that is, words and expressions that index cultural knowledge, encompassing knowledge about places, fashion brands, consumerist discourses, social class divisions manifested as Han versus ethnic minorities divisions and

urban versus rural divisions. Pichler's (2006, 2016, 2019) empirical research extends the discussion of indexicality in identity and sociolinguistics research from the focus of language style (phonological, grammatical and conversational features) to a discourse level. In those studies, teasing (2006), fashion/style conversation (2016) and high-risk humour (2019) are approached as discourses, as 'particular ways of representing part of the world' (Fairclough, 2003: 26). With those theoretical foundations, her work has continuously demonstrated the interactions between language, gender, social class, ethnicity and race. In a recent paper, Pichler (2021a) demonstrates how speakers use place references as cultural concepts to index a range of local and supralocal meanings, which contribute to the understanding of intersectional identities.

Aligning myself with Pichler to understand narrative from a discourse perspective, cultural concepts in Chinese men's conversational narratives allow them to 'deploy this knowledge like identity-linen by hanging it out interpersonally and intersubjectively' in a specific interactional moment (Silverstein, 2004: 633). I emphasised earlier that narrative should be seen not only as a final product, as a narrative/tale/story-told world, but also as a process, an emergent and local interaction. Those stories are embedded in a specific discursive moment in a speech event, told as a narrative activity. The approach to see narrative-in-interaction fits in well with Silverstein's emphasis on considering indexicality in 'the micro-context of interaction' (2004: 638-39). Drawing our analytic attention to the 'micro-context of interaction' can lead us to explore the indexical meanings of cultural concepts as invoked by the speakers in specific moments of interaction.

To sum up my theoretical foundation before my forthcoming analysis, I see narrative not only as a final product but as an emerging process, embedded in local and interactional narrative activities. With the

emphasis on its interactive and conversational features, male narrative in my data will be examined with the focus on its structural and genre characteristics. In addition, approaching narrative as performance, practice and discourse (at an ideological level), I explore how participants draw rich resources of 'cultural concepts' to index their intersectional identities. My theoretical stance perhaps echoes Silverstein's (2004) emphasis on the significance of examining indexicality in 'micro contexts of interaction', such as the narrative-in-interaction in this thesis.

4.3 Analysis

Having established the theoretical foundation for narrative and analytic tools, I now turn to my analysis. I illustrate the structural and genre characteristics of male narratives in participants' self-recorded conversational data, and how cultural concepts (Silverstein, 2004) were deployed in their narratives to index locality, social class/status, age, and their professional identities.

4.3.1 Indexicality of Locality and In-group Identity

Pichler (2021a: 570) points out that in the previous language, gender and sexuality research, even though place has often not been explicitly foregrounded, it has clearly always played a significant role. Using her empirical data collected from British Bangladeshi adolescent girls and working-class young men with ethnic backgrounds living in London, she demonstrates that 'places' are often invoked in spontaneous talk to index a range of local and supralocal meanings. Pichler (2021a) shows that place-references are used heavily by those speakers to function as cultural concepts (Silverstein, 2004), indexing social class, race, gender, ethnicity, and social status. Similarly, through an examination of my own data, references to places, or locality, have constantly emerged in Chinese men's everyday

friendship talk. In this section, I illustrate how places are frequently referenced in these men's conversational narratives, indexing not only local but also multiple socio-cultural identities.

The first example presented here is a narrative selected from the self-recorded conversations from Group 2, a friendship group located in the capital city of Yunnan, Kunming, formed since they were at school. Members of this group were born and raised in the hometown of Lijiang, a city in the north-west of Yunnan province. After graduation, they settled in Kunming. From my ethnographic experience, I learned that even though they have lived in Kunming for years, and some even had Kunmingese girlfriends or wives, this group of men had a highly negative opinion of Kunming people. This theme is evident in their self-recorded conversations, and the reference related to Kunming, or Kunming people, often emerged. The following conversational narrative was recorded when Rui, Zangtai and Litong were drinking in a bar. I first use Extract 1 to show how Rui's narrative was introduced and how the scene of that story was set in the talk.

I use a mixture of transcription for the extracts in this chapter. I use the Stave system to present the interactional features of the conversation, showing the immediate context in which the narrative is embedded. When one speaker starts his monologue-based narrative and holds the floor to solely narrate the story, I transcribe the utterance in sequence. Transcribing the utterances in sequence means that the narrative-telling is not interrupted by other speakers.

Extract 1: Wedding Guests – setting the scene/introduction

[1]Zangtai   1 I am that type of person (.) if I meet someone that I really dislike
　　　　　　 2 what should I say (.) you know those Kunming people
----
[2]Zangtai   they yo <rising tone with disgusted sign>

```
       Rui        yes yes  I also REALLY don't like (xx)
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
 ³Zantai    1 aww-yee <disgusted sign> very annoying
            2 you can say that I am narrow-minded (.) it is fine
            3 this is my character I really repel them
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
 ⁴Rui       you know =
  Wenxin              = I don't even want to drink with them
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
 ⁵Rui       1 you know let me  (.) let me give you an example (.)
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
```

Zantai starts the talk with a self-reflection about 'what type of person' he is. He explains that he would directly express his authentic attitude towards people he dislikes. In this male friendship group, not wearing a social mask in social interactions is seen as shown as having a 'being real' attitude. 'Being genuine/real/sincere' (*xingqing zhongren*) is highly valued in this group as a hallmark of their ideal model of masculinity. This particular masculine quality is closely linked to locality, which Kunming people do not possess but Lijiang men do. In the above extract, Zantai uses interjections expressing disgust, such as 'yo', and 'aww-yee', to convey his loathing for Kunming people. In terms of lexical choices, he uses 'annoying', 'repel' and adverbs such as 'really' and 'very', to emphasise his strong opinion of this group. 'Kunming people', at this point, are used as a specific social category, drawn to function as an example of someone that Zantai 'really dislikes' (stave 1). Zantai asserts and emphasises that he would not change his attitude as this is who he is, even though he may be at risk of being perceived as a narrow-minded person (stave 3).

This place-related reference, 'Kunming people', immediately evokes the cultural knowledge that members of this group commonly share. The supportive and collaborative responses from Rui (stave 2) and Wenxin (stave 4) indicate that they share the same social stance. Their actions reinforce and reproduce the social stance they hold towards a particular social group – Kunming people. To

authenticate this attitude, Wenxin particularly emphasises that he would not even drink with them (stave 4). For this group, drinking and being drunk together is a benchmark to display solidarity and true friendship. Drinking with someone genuinely, rather than on superficial social occasions, indicates that they acknowledge and appreciate that person. Put differently, 'Kunming people' are not recognised and approved of based on their in-group culture and ideology, and therefore Wenxin would not drink with them.

The intertwined link between drinking, being genuine and locality is further manifested and unpacked in Rui's subsequent narrative. In stave 5 Rui makes a bid for the floor to narrate a story of his past experience at a wedding to continue the affiliation of this stance. He attempts to use a storytelling practice to continue the conversation, supporting the argument why Kunming people are disliked by them. He narrates a story in which Kunmingese guests had exploited the groom's hospitality and were cowardly not to dare to drink alcohol. Rui tells the story as a sole narrator without being interrupted when the above talk develops after stave 5. Hence, I transcribe the content in sequences rather than in the stave system for convenient reading.

Extract 2: Wedding guest – Rui's narrative

stave 5 Rui:

1 let me give you an example
2 that was 21st of June
3 I was a guest at a wedding in Qujing
4 it was my university classmate, and he invited several Kunmingers
5 Do you know how those Kunming people dealt with it?
6 I first asked them how much we should give for the gift money
7 well he said 600 or 800
8 I think 600 or 800 is quite a lot for an acquaintance
9 it's for those people whom you have a close relationship with

10 but that's what he said

11 Do you know what he actually did?

12 he stayed there for two nights and had food for the entire two days

13 he only gifted 600 Yuan

14 but he stayed in a FOUR - star <emphasising tone> hotel (.) FOUR-star hotel <emphasising tone>

15 and then you know on the final day

16 the groom held my hands

17 definitely wouldn't let me go

18 you know on that night I actually planned to go back to Kunming

19 the groom (.) he held my hands and wouldn't let us go

20 he said that he already booked the rooms for us

21 you know he is also a genuine person

22 he said the rooms were prepared

23 and then I told him

24 'Alright brother! I will accompany you to drink for the whole night!'

25 but you know the groom couldn't drink too much

26 his father used to work in the army

27 and then he got drunk while drinking with his father's army friends

28 so he didn't go to the after-party

29 Do you know what those Kunming people do?

30 they thought they would be expected to drink a lot

31 so they stayed in the hotel

32 and they even didn't go at all

33 REALLY <loud voice> I am so speechless

Two sub-stories compromise this monologue-based narrative. Rui describes how Kunmingnese wedding guests dealt with their gift money (6-14), and how he interacted with the groom at the wedding event (15-28). In most places in Yunnan, weddings often take place around dinner, and sometimes after-parties are arranged to continue the celebration. The couple would normally pay for all the costs of the ceremony, and in return, guests would give the newly wedded couple some gifted money in a 'red envelope' (*hongbao*). The amount of money can index social class and social relations between guests and the married couple. For example, Rui initially thought 600 or 800 RMB was too much, which according to him may be the standard for close friends or family members (8-9).

With the initial orientation (1) and the abstract (2-4) of the story, Rui starts with the first story of wedding-gifted money. Rui first asked his Kunmingese classmates about the amount of money he should give (6). With the assumption that the wedding would only take place over a dinner, Rui did not plan to stay over in Qujing (18). So he believed the amount of money that Kunmingese guests prepared might be excessive, as they were still social acquaintances. He did not expect the groom's hospitality to cover hotel rooms (20) and two more meals (12) to welcome guests from Kunming, even though it was only a 2-hours' drive. This arrangement made the groom seem like 'a genuine person' (21) whereas the Kunmingese guests were greedy and took advantage of the hosts' hospitality to enjoy more than what the 600 RMB gifted money could cover (12-14).

Following the four layers of positioning paradigm in narrative analysis (Wortham and Gadsden, 2006), there are several positioning works here. Rui first narrates the actions that Kunmingese guests did at a past wedding event. He emphasised three times throughout the narrative-telling that they stayed in a four-star hotel for two entire days with everything paid for by the groom (12, 14, 31, 32). Hence, those actions position them as ungrateful, greedy and insincere people because they exploited the generosity of the newly wedded couple. In contrast, the groom is positioned in the narrative as the opposite of the wedding guests. As the narrator, Rui uses the 'voices' to reveal such positioning. With the direct quote 'he said' (20 and 22), Rui narrates the specific action (e.g. the rooms are already booked) to position the groom as someone who was thoughtful and generous. Furthermore, as a type of 'voicing', the evaluative clause, 'the groom is also a genuine person' (21), strengthens this positive positioning. From the perspective of a narrator, the word 'also' in this clause indicates that Rui and the groom belong to the same category: they are both genuine and sincere.

To secure such a construction and align himself with this stance, Rui narrates his specific actions: he changes his original plan to spend his entire night accompanying the groom to drink (18, 24). This social act (indirectly) indexes that equally he also has a genuine and thoughtful personal quality. He positions himself as a close pal of the groom who can provide practical and moral support for him on his wedding night, which often involves a lot of heavy drinking. The verb, 'accompany' (*pei*: 陪), used in his direct quote (24) indicates that he would drink as much as the groom wished him to drink. This helps Rui to earn recognition from the groom. The detail that the groom held his hand and would not let him go is reiterated twice in Rui's narrative activity (16 and 19). In his own narrative, the description about this specific action is clearly emphasised by Rui. Considering narrative-telling as a situational and contextual-embedded speech event, Rui attempts to tell his audience (his close friends) that he was acknowledged and endorsed by the groom because of his personal traits. This personal quality of being genuine and sincere is the hallmark of their group identity and ideal masculinity.

I argue that in the story/tale-world, drinking on a wedding night is a gendered practice. From my observation in the field, I have learnt that in the local cultural context it is the groom rather than the bride who is required to drink a lot at his wedding dinner (often until he gets drunk). Almost all the men on this occasion were expected (as a hegemonic social norm) to drink alcohol, including the groom, Rui, and Kunmingese guests. Often, at the end of the dinner, it becomes a male-only drinking practice. This cultural knowledge is manifested in the detail that the groom got drunk while drinking with his father's army friends (27). This cultural knowledge needs to be accessed to further understand Rui's attitude towards those Kunmingese guests. In Rui's understanding, which he

explained to me in our ethnographic interviews, being a sincere person is not a judgement about someone's ability to drink, rather, it is his attitude towards drinking alcohol.

In his narrative, even though the groom cannot drink very much (25), he is still seen as a genuine person by Rui because he did not avoid the drinking occasion. Kunmingese guests, on the other hand, are the counterexample to this exhibition of sincerity because they deliberately chose not to drink. I do not know the reason why those Kunmingnese guests did not want to drink, but it was perceived by Rui as a cowardly behaviour. So Rui narrates that they cowardly stayed in their room to avoid the after-party (30-32), even though it was cancelled because the groom was drunk after drinking with his father's army friends. Therefore, the groom and the Kunmingese guests are positioned as two social categories: one a genuine man (*xing qing zhong ren*), the other insincere cowards. Accordingly, Rui expressed different attitudes and moral stances towards them. With a direct quote (24), Rui addressed the groom as 'brother', which frames their conversation in a 'brotherhood' discourse. It underlines that the male bonding developed between the groom and Rui is based on mutual recognition drawn from shared personal qualities and moral viewpoints.

In this first-person narrative, playing the roles as both narrator and protagonist, Rui has rich opportunities to decide what voices he can assign to give indexed meanings. With the positioning strategies used, all the characters in the story-told world are positioned as 'recognisable social types' (Wortham and Gadsden, 2006: 321). The term 'Kunming people' is used as a place-related reference, functioning as a 'cultural concept' (Silverstein, 2004), to index not only locality but also negative and denigrating personal traits. Rui uses a narrative as a practice to define and negotiate membership of social categories of 'Kunming people' and 'Lijiang people'. Kunming people who are greedy, insincere

and ungrateful do not earn their place in the category of 'sincere people'. As a practice, this narrative authenticates the implicit 'Lijiang people' (in-group) identity defined by the qualities and traits they value.

The narrative positions Rui and groom belonging to the same 'genuine people' category and, because of their shared moral stances and personal characters, in just one night they went from being social acquaintances to becoming 'brothers'. Their male bonding and affiliation further reinforce their moral viewpoints, which are interlinked with the 'locality' factor. This can be both explicit (indexed through the expression of 'those Kunming people') and implicit (the groom is not Kunmingese – he is from Qujing, a lower tier city than the capital, Lijiang). With the rich positionings, this narrative helps Rui to accomplish the 'maintenance of our sense of self' and 'exchange of recognition' in his friendship group (Coates, 2003: 40).

4.3.2 Sneaker Consumption, Social Class and Age

The previous section demonstrated that the term 'Kunming people' is deployed as a 'cultural concept' in Group 2 to index more complicated meanings than the denotation of place reference, such as personal traits that closely link the construction of their in-group identity. In this section, I continue illustrating how place-references are drawn in Group 1's conversational narrative to index social-class, which is linked to wealth. Consumerism discourse is a constant theme in Group 1's self-recorded conversations, including topics such as shopping experiences, fashion choices, and fashion brands. Two extracts of conversational narratives will be presented below, in which sneaker consumption and the sneaker secondary market business were discussed.

4.3.2.1 A brief introduction to sneaker culture

Originally developed as a type of sportswear, in the past 150 years, sneakers have become a key component of consumers' identities (Salazar, 2008). As Scott (2011: 148) indicates, sneakers become a compelling site of investigation into 'fashion… as an explicit form of communicating and challenging numerous social identities and as part of the complex process of situating people and bodies within social worlds'. Research on sneakers (or 'trainers' in the UK), especially those which draw from historical and cultural studies approaches, has shown that sneaker culture has played a crucial role in youth subculture and identities. For a long time, sneaker has been linked to masculine identities, even though the earlier discussion is often related to its original embedded context, sport (see Miner, 2009).

Ben Carrington (2002: 142) states that 'sport served as a major male homosocial institution' where 'manly virtues and competencies' could be both learned and displayed as a way of avoiding wider social, political, and economic processes of 'feminization'". However, based on my ethnographic observations in the field with this group of men, I never witnessed them wearing sneakers for sports purposes. Sports did not form part of their main social activities, as they preferred dining and hanging out in pubs and clubs. This reflects the general modern trend whereby sneakers are more than just a piece of practical leisure equipment – they have become more entwined with both everyday clothing and high fashion (Salazar, 2008).

With this new change, therefore, more recent exploration of the interplay between masculinity and sneakers has rested on the reciprocity between male consumption and masculinity. Sneaker consumption has historically involved gendered consumption. Miner (2009: 76) reminds us that prior

to 1985, the year the initial Air Jordan was marketed, Nike did not actively direct their marketing campaigns toward women. Sneakers' loyal consumers have traditionally been pictured as heterosexual, urban, male youth, a community that 'reinforces the traditional male qualities and excludes women' (Kawamura, 2016: 2). Those 'sneakerheads' (sport shoes enthusiasts) constitute a subculture, which is often described as a love for buying, trading and selling sneakers.

Even though more women (Lindsay-Prince, 2013) and gay men (Scott, 2011) have become visible and active within this sneakerheads culture as an enactment of their agency to negotiate more possibilities of femininity and masculinity, men in my research still conform to the more traditional representation of sneaker consumers. Men in Group 2 had an enthusiasm for sneaker consumption, and aligned with Kawanura's (2016: 2) description, they are heterosexual urban men. Sneaker consumption in this community is a gendered male practice. My participants explained to me in our ethnographic interviews that 'you women buy cosmetics, while we buy sneakers. It is more or less the same thing.' In the following analysis, I further unpack how sneaker consumption indexes gender.

Most of the available discussions on the cultural and historical embodiment of sneakers, especially in relation to race, ethnicity and social-class, are often in the context of the US (Carrington, 2002; Miner, 2009; Scott, 2011; Lindsay-Prince, 2013) and the UK (Denny, 2021). There is a dearth of research on sneaker culture in Chinese contemporary society. Jia Yulong's (2019) anthropological research is an exception: although she captured the significant social background that sneaker culture has spread into China in the late 1990s and since then played a crucial role in the development of Chinese youth culture, the research focus was on counterfeit sneakers. Referring to counterfeit sneakers as *changhuo* (厂货), Chinese sneaker consumers do not seem to be as motivated by legal notions of authenticity

and originality, instead, they practise their understanding of authenticity by purchasing products and engaging (or not) in conspicuous consumption. With this contextual and research background, I introduce my analysis on conversational narratives, with sneaker consumption as the main topic.

4.3.2.2 Crazy Sichuanese sneaker customer

The following extract starts when Mingqing noticed Fengli had just bought a new pair of sneakers, and he directly asked the price of it. Then the conversation unfolded to their past shopping experience, which elicited Qingbei's narrative about what he saw in a shoe shop.

Extract 3: Crazy Sichuanese sneaker customer

----
[1]Mingqing   how much you paid for your shoes again?

Fengli   not too expensive only around 1,000 yuan

Leilei

Qingbei

----
[2]Mingqing   OH <loud voice> this is the style that we saw the other day

Fengli

Leilei   yeah exactly

Qingbei   yah

----
[3]Mingqing

Fengli   yeah those Sichuan people are really Sichuanese

Leilei

Qingbei   it reminded me of those people that we saw   those Sichuan people   in the shopping mall

----
[4]Mingqing

Fengli

Leilei

Qingbei   they first asked your size at the entrance and they didn't allow you try them

----
[5]Mingqing

Fengli

Leilei

Qingbei   those people then just directly walked into the check-out counter (.) swiped their card and just left

```
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
 ⁶Mingqing                                                        yeah
  Fengli
  Leilei                                                  what
  Qingbei      most IMPORTANTLY <emphasizing tone>           they didn't not have any return POLICY <loud voice>
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
 ⁷Mingqing
  Fengli
  Leilei
  Qingbei      even there is some scratch or damages
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
 ⁸Mingqing      HA <a long scoff> then why do people still buy them
  Fengli                      aww-yoo                 fucking stupid
  Leilei                                                    simply because they are RICH
  Qingbei
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
 ⁹Mingqing     haha and if there were some bubble tea spilled on it  they just threw them in a bin haha
  Fengli
  Leilei
  Qingbei                                                                      hmm <rising tone>
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
 ¹⁰Mingqing                                                                      yeah
   Fengli                                    yeah most of shops are not like that
   Leilei      but generally those shops would not do these
   Qingbei
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
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This conversation starts with the price of the new pair of sneakers that Fengli recently bought. According to the Statistics Bureau of Yunnan Province[2], when this data was recorded, in 2018, the average salary in Zhaotong city (employed persons in urban non-private sector) was 80,552 RMB (12,023 USD), equal to 6,712 RMB (1,002 USD) per month. According to Fengli (stave 1), these 1,000 RMB (149 USD) shoes were not too expensive. With the evaluative adverb, 'only', it suggests that compared to their other purchased shoes, this pair of shoes was relatively cheaper. This statement was validated through my participant observation and ethnographic interviews in the field, knowing that men in this group often spent thousands of RMB, sometimes even one third or half of their local

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[2] https://m12333.cn/policy/sfee.html

average salary, to purchase one single pair of shoes. This type of conspicuous consumption can be seen as an indication of their middle-class socioeconomic background.

During my ethnographic research, I learned that men in this group were regular customers of certain fashion brands, which they called *chaopai* (literally meaning 'cool brands'). The clothes and accessories (e.g. hat, shoes and bags) they bought were often from independent designers (such as Edison Chen Clot), or big sports brands (such as Nike, Puma, or Adidas), and sometimes they would buy limited editions of certain products from brand collaborations. However, as a four-tier city, Zhaotong did not always have the shops to sell these collaborative designs, and sometimes, even the capital city of Yunnnan, Kunming, did not have the products or 'cool brands' that they intended to buy. Thus, the economic development of Zhaotong did not satisfy this group's consumption demands. Sometimes they drove six hours to Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province, to go shopping. Sichuan is more economically and financially powerful than Yunnan, which is evident in their GDP (Gross Domestic Product) in 2019 being twice the value of Yunnan, at 4,661 billion[3] and 2,323 billion[4], respectively.

Seeing Fengli's new shoes invoked Mingqing and Qingbei's memories of their past shopping experiences (stave 2-3). The conversation moved to a tale-world that Qingbei narrated (3-7), in which the leading character was 'Sichuan people'. It should be noted that in the original audio, this place-related reference was said as 'Sichuan ren' (四川人) or 'Sichuanese'. In Chinese, there is no distinction between singular or plural. With the temporal sequences of the action, staves 4-5 can be seen as the complicating action in narrative. Qingbei narrated the specific actions of the Sichuanese

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[3] https://www.sc.gov.cn/10462/10464/10797/2020/3/25/448a6d9b06bc40708c576e1af15d24ac.shtml
[4] http://stats.yn.gov.cn/tjsj/tjgb/202004/t20200414_938595.html

people's purchasing process. This past event positions the character as a rich person who makes a quick purchasing decision, especially on the condition of the non-returnable policy of that shop. The prompt response from Mingqing, Fengli and Leilei collaboratively displays their unified stance: they all agree that it is not rational and unnecessary (stave 8). Those rich customers' behaviours are evaluated as 'stupid', and Leilei seems to attribute the quick and impulsive consumption to the fact that 'they are rich'.

Mingqing soon added one more scenario (stave 9) to support the positioning and construction of 'crazy rich Sichuanese sneaker consumers': someone threw out their newly bought sneakers simply because they spilled bubble tea on them. He attempted to mock the irrational buying behaviour of Sichuanese consumers who consider costly sneakers as disposable objects that they do not appear to care much about. His description may come from his own experience or his fictional coda, but it backs up the purpose of Qingbei's narrative. The point of this story perhaps is to do identity work: through the positioning of Sichuanese sneaker consumers, their own identity can be implicitly and indirectly indexed. It indicates that even though men in this group might be in a middle-class socio-economic status in their local place (Zhaotong), compared to people from other regions, such as Sichuan, they are not wealthy. They position themselves as not wealthy and/or reckless/wasteful enough to make impulsive purchasing decisions about shoes, for instance, when a return policy is not guaranteed. It also positions them as grounded, realistic, and not lost to avarice.

The argument that Pichler (2021a) points out that place-related references are often linked to socio-economic status is evident here. 'Sichuanese people' is deployed again as a cultural concept to index several layers of supralocal meanings. Somehow, it indexes a higher socio-economic status. In

stave 3, when Qingbei mentions 'those Sichuan people', Fengli immediately talks over him, stating 'yeah, those Sichuan people are really Sichuanese' ('这些四川人真的很四川'). It shows that the word 'Sichuan people' from Qingbei's utterance immediately invokes the cultural knowledge that this group shares of this particular group, which is often based on the stereotypical traits of this social category. Fengli seems to understand the point that Qingbei attempted to make, and he made an evaluation before the event was narrated.

'Sichuan ren' (Sichuan people) may appear to be a social category based on locality, but in this narrative, it has been socially classed as rich people, indexing social class, wealth and consumption power. It indicates that social class interacts with locality. In this case, locality (at the level of a province) is generalised, indexing, sketchily and problematically, social class. Put differently, a place-related reference in this case becomes synonymous with social-class labels. It is hard not to relate this to the deliberate downplaying of class in contemporary China, forced by the ruling communist party (Huang,Y., 2018). In my fieldwork, I learned that people living in Yunnan often perceive Sichuan people as those who enjoy life and are more willing to spend their time and money on food, clothing and leisure activities. From my ethnographic interviews, many local people, including this group of men, seem to suggest this is the reason Chengdu (capital city of Sichuan) people are richer.

This logic is based on the social knowledge that Sichuan has stronger economic power than Yunnan in terms of GDP. The abstract number, alongside the term GDP, has been widely reported in state media, and therefore, people in Yunnan use this knowledge to conclude that Sichuan people are richer. However, statistics from government documents show that the average salary in Chengdu is actually

slightly lower than in Zhaotong, with 6,491 RMB in Chengdu and 6,792 in Zhaotong.[5] It shows once more that 'cultural concept' (Silverstein, 2004) in relation to regional reference is often based on stereotypical traits, which becomes a (problematic) resource for speakers when they reproduce and regenerate those stereotypes.

In addition, in their narrative-telling, by positioning impulsive shopping as a stupid buying behaviour, this group of men position themselves as rational consumers, with no attempt to align themselves with rich people's shopping behaviour. It shows that it is not only the sneakers that index identity (see Pichler and Williams, 2016) but also the consumption behaviour in relation to the sneakers. Moreover, this confirms what De Fina and Georgopoulou (2008, 2012) emphasise, in that narrative can be a prime site for moral stance and ideologies. In this particular narrative, they display an unfavourable attitude towards this type of consumption behaviour. The story ends with Leilei and Fengli's 'resolution' (see stave 10), suggesting that what Qingbei narrates could be an extreme situation: most shops allow customers to try shoes before purchase and have reasonable return policies.

This group shows that they do not recognise the conspicuous and impulsive consumption of rich people, which was implicitly indexed by a locality-related cultural concept in Sichuan people. This positioning is clearly linked to social status, largely associated with wealth and consumption power. Moreover, I argue that how they position themselves in relation to impulsive consumption and rich people is a strategy for the construction and performance of their own social identities. Their shared stances and values, which were displayed in the conversation, reinforces their in-group identities. In this narrative, place-related references index social class, and their attitude and stance towards the

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[5] www.cdstats.chengdu.gov.cn/htm/detail_183001.html#:~:text=2019年成都市城镇,9508元，增长10.8%25

problematic consumption can be a result or manifestation of the intersection of their other social identities, for instance, their age and 'working within the system' professional identity. I will continue unpacking this in the following analysis.

4.3.2.3 Young professional sneaker buyers

In this section, I continue to illustrate how the consumption of sneakers, as a shared practice in this group, is positioned in their conversational narratives. I argue that how they position themselves in relation to sneaker consumption indexes not only their social classes but also a range of identities, including their responsible, loyal and 'old fashioned' sneaker buyer identity. The latter suggests their highlight of age in the construction of group identity. The following extract is from an audio recording of the same group in 2019 in which they were discussing buying particular limited edition sneakers. The shoes that they wanted to buy were the Terracotta Warriors series from the 'CLOT X Air Jordan' campaign. These shoes were designed and produced by a collaboration between a Hongkongese independent brand, Edison Chen Clot, and Air Jordan, one of the lines of basketball shoes and athletic clothing produced by Nike, an American corporation. I include some non-narrative sequence in the transcription below to offer the local context that the narrated event was embedded in.

Extract 4: Young professional sneaker buyers

[1]Mingqing
Fengli   haha
Leilei   he likes those shoes who have thick heels
Qingbei   haha
----
[2]Mingqing
Fengli
Leilei   the price may have doubled
Qingbei   do you think you can get the quote for that pair?
----

³Mingqing

Fengli   no need to tell me the exact number as soon as you can get one pair   just swipe my card to get it   haha

Leilei

Qingbei

----

⁴Mingqing   haha

Fengli   %xxxx%

Leilei

Qingbei   then it seems not a big problem haha

----

⁵Mingqing   do you know there are professional buyers for AJ?

Fengli   yeah

Leilei   it has existed for very long time

Qingbei   of course they are

----

⁶Mingqing

Fengli   you know they queued outside of the shop the night before the arrival

Leilei

Qingbei   they stayed outside for the entire

----

⁷Mingqing

Fengli   and then they just took all the shoes

Leilei

Qingbei   night until the morning when the shop was open

----

⁸Mingqing

Fengli   so so so those young lads   those 90-generation

Leilei

Qingbei   so I am telling you that for now   so now each person can only buy one pair

----

⁹Mingqing

Fengli   do you know how they do their business? They have a reselling business

Leilei

Qingbei   it is their daily job

----

¹⁰Mingqing   haha

Fengli   speaking of which you are the only 90s-generation here

Leilei

Qingbei   I was born just exactly in 1990 okay? <serious tone>

----

¹¹Mingqing   that's true and those people really exist   it is a job

Fengli   yeah those chaps always have new shoes to wear

Leilei   yeah right

Qingbei

----

[12]Mingqing

Fengli   do you know that they got their shoes from betting or gambling

Leilei

Qingbei

Before this extract began, participants in this conversation were discussing the different style of the Terracotta Warriors series from the 'CLOT X Air Jordan' campaign. Some sneakers in this series have slightly thicker treads, which can potentially make men who wear them look taller. In stave 1, Leilei initiated a jocular mockery (Haugh, 2014) on one of the participants at this speech event, but it is not clear who this 'he' refers to. I assume it is Mingqing because he is shorter than most of the members of this group and he does not laugh here to play along with Leilei's mockery. For most Chinese men, the aspect of their body that makes them anxious is often their height, rather than their figure. Here, Mingqing's excessive concern over his appearance, which he attempts to solve through his fashion choice on sneakers, is being mocked. It shows that sneakers, as a type of footwear, have the power to indicate gender, and this can be even challenged and negotiated discursively in male conversation.

However, the conversation does not stay in a teasing frame; instead, it immediately moves to a serious discussion about price (stave 2-3) and the means to get the sneakers (stave 5-8). In stave 2, Qingbei asks for a quote for one pair, and Leilei answers that the price may have doubled. This reflects the recent emergent characteristics of sneaker consumption that high demand shoes can trade on the secondary sneakers market. Unlike items in other resale fashion categories (e.g. clothing), the secondary sneaker market is distinctive because sneakers often resell for more than their original retail price. The dizzyingly high market price is fuelled by the greatly increased consumer interest and demand. It can be influenced by factors such as social media, celebrity and designer collaborations,

together with the scarcity of merchandise (Slaton and Pookulangara, 2021). This is evident in the story here: as a special edition, the shoes that this group of men want to buy were in limited availability, so Qingbei needed to ask for a quote for its market price, as the price in the trade market may fluctuate, and even be doubled (stave 2)[6].

Due to their scarcity, Fengli told his friends that if any of them found a channel to get this limited edition, they could just 'swipe his card', no matter the cost. I want to pinpoint the cultural meaning that 'swipe card' (*shuaka* - 刷卡) can index in this sneaker consumption practice. In their other self-recorded audio, they mentioned that they do not trust online sneakers shopping because their authenticity cannot be verified. They would rather drive to more developed cities, such as Kunming (4 hours' drive away) or Chengdu (6 hours' drive) for a more trusted purchase. This supports Jia's (2019) finding that some sneakerheads in the Chinese sneaker subculture practise their concept of 'authenticity' by refraining from buying non-verified sneakers. Hence, 'swipe card' in this context indicates that they would go to a physical store, or at least a trusted trader, using a POS machine, to have their transactions conducted in-person. This specific purchasing behaviour positions them as responsible sneaker consumers who practise their understanding of authenticity.

Through the indexicality of the action of their preferred purchase method, they also position themselves as 'old-fashioned' sneaker consumers. This discursive identity has been continuously constructed through the positionings in their subsequent narrative on young professional buyers (stave 5-9, 11-12). Mingqing first asks a question to see if his friends know about the existence of

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[6]In the Chinese market, with the original retail price of no more than ¥1,500, this edition reached its highest market price of ¥4,000 RMB. In the UK secondary market, it reached its price peak between £747 and £1,019.

professional sneakers buyers (stave 5). It is immediately followed by Leilei, Qingbei and Fengli's collective display of their knowledge of this subject. In this way, they construct an expert discursive identity, which is comparable to the 'men-as-expert' discourse that Coates (2003) found in male narratives among British males. To further demonstrate they possess knowledge as professional sneaker buyers, a narrative, collaboratively drafted by both Fengli and Qingbei, is provided (stave 6-7).

Specifically, the narrative-telling focuses on the 'complicating actions' of how professional buyers conduct their business. When the limited-edition sneakers first went on sale, those buyers queued outside the store for the night before it opened, and then they bought all the shoes when they launched. Since the shoes are no longer available at the physical stores, the dealers' resale them for a higher price in the secondary market. Such behaviour artificially disrupts market supply and demand, and therefore, Qingbei adds that this results in a policy change in certain shoe stores whereby one individual can purchase only one pair at a time (stave 8). The narrative-telling progresses to its 'resolution' element. When the narrative comes to its 'coda', linking the story to the 'here and now' narrative-telling world, Fengli switches the focus to the youth identity of those professional buyers. This soon connects to the discussion of their age.

Those 'young chaps' who are doing professional buyers' jobs are mainly the 90s generation, people born between 1990 and 1999. In China, the reference '… generation (*hou*)' is a common expression of age, referring to the decade that someone was born.Using the phrase, 'speaking of which' (stave 10), Fengli directs the age evaluation from professional buyers in the narrative-told world to a member that is present in the local narrative-telling world. He teases Qingbei for being the only one who is from the 90s generation in this speech event. Age, as an important factor in shaping identities,

emerges and plays its role in this narrative-telling practice. Most of the members in this group were born in 1988 or 1989, and being a 80s generation constitutes their multilayers of identities, including their collective in-group identity. Admittedly, being born around the same age brings shared memories and experiences, which is central to a friendship group. This teasing puts Qingbei, 90s generation, in a potential danger of being excluded in this group in which most of the members are 80s generation.

In reply, Qingbei defends himself with a 'po-faced' response (Drew, 1987) in a serious frame. In stave 10, he explains that he was just born in 1990, implying that even though he may be categorised as 90s generation, the age difference between him and the rest of the group is slim. In this way, Qingbei negotiates his membership to social groups that are related to age. He does not want to be positioned in the same group as the 'professional buyers' – he is not one of 'those young chaps', and he wants to secure his place in this friendship group, dominated by men of the 80s generation. This identity marker was often highlighted in this group from my observations in the field. I was born in 1991, and during my interactions with this group of men, they often emphasised that I was a 90s generation while they were 80s generation. They explained to me that for them three years' age difference is one generation gap, and the age difference 'makes a huge difference when shaping people's opinions and other practices'.

Returning to this narrative-telling event, after Qingbei's 'po-faced' reply, the conversation returned to the narrative frame. This may imply that he successfully secured his in-group identity as there were no follow-up challenges displayed from other participants. The narrative on professional buyers at this point gradually moves to a conclusion. The narrative started with Mingqing's question (stave 5) and ends with his summary that the job of professional buyers does exist (stave 11). Fengli concludes the

narrative by offering more 'resolutions' (stave 11-12): through trading a relatively large number of sneakers, the young professional buyers always have new shoes to wear. Their trading in the secondary market even involves betting and gambling.

With this empirical narrative analysis, I argue that the discursive examination of how age plays into the construction of gender identities is important, although most discussion on intersectional identities often emphasise how race/ethnicity or social class/status interplay with gender. It shows that age becomes an important factor in their positioning, intersecting with social class, locality, and respectability. They position and construct themselves as experienced and knowledgeable and 'relatively' mature consumers in the shoe industry who have their own attitude. Their attitude and stance on the newly emergent characteristics in the sneaker industry, such as the secondary sneaker market and professional buyers, constitutes their group identity.

When this conversation was recorded in 2019, most of the members had just turned 30, and Qingbei was only 29. Age is an important factor for them in their identity work. Age in gender identity has been often explored either among children and adolescents or older people. The latter often synonymise 'age in identity' as 'ageing identity', which has led research to focus on retired men and women (Radtke et al., 2016). Recently, Ozturk, Rumens and Taltli (2020) acknowledged the paucity of scholarly knowledge on the interplay between age and other gender identities, such as sexuality. Their research have investigated how older gay men practise masculinity in their heteronormative organisations. I aim to use this LE research to contribute to how age matters in the construction of identities, especially for group identity. In this specific narrative, their group identity shows an interplay between gender, age, and their expert identity on the knowledge of the sneaker market.

4.3.3 Social Status in Professional Identity: A Panda Narrative

Previously, I discussed how male narratives are largely used to index locality, social-class, and age, which constitute the intersectional and multiple identities of Chinese young men in my research. Those narrative examples support the characteristics that Georgakopoulou (2006) and De Fina (2008, 2021) state when establishing the 'narrative-in-interaction' approach: they are often short and fragmented, embedded in the interactive process of storytelling events. However, I argue that longer narratives can also occur in the storytelling events in male friendship talk. For instance, there is a 20-minute-long narrative in participants' self-recorded audio data in which participants from Group 1 discussed a news story about two villagers who shot a national protected animal – a wild panda – and sold its meat. Due to space limitations, I only present three extracts in my following analysis. I illustrate how narrative becomes a rich resource used by these men to position themselves as people who 'work within the system', the representatives of the local authority, while positioning the Miao ethnic villagers in the story-told world as 'pitiful others'. The story was recorded in 2016 at a dinner when Xingkun started to join the friendship group.

Later he became a regular member of the group. Xingkun works for the publicity department of the local government of Zhaotong. Participants in this storytelling event all worked 'within the system' (*tizhi nei*) at the time, including in government and state-owned enterprises, academic and civil institutions. Mingqing worked in a state-owned tobacco corporation and Leilei worked as a coordinator in a state-owned insurance company. In 2016 Fengli still worked in a state-owned national bank, but he soon resigned to pursue an entrepreneurial career as a restaurant owner. In the following extract, Mingqing knew that Xingkun was leading a team to investigate the panda case, so he gave the floor to Xingkun to begin the narrative-telling.

4.3.3.1 Discursive identity of front-line investigator

Extract 5: They ate a panda!

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¹Xingkun   oh that =

Leilei   = that was a long while ago

Fengli   he was really hardcore <…> very hardcore

Mingqing   haha

----

²Xingkun   I led the team for this panda case

Leilei   it was a <u>panda</u> <emphasising tone>

Fengli

Mingqing

----

³Xingkun

Leilei

Fengli   oh yeah

Mingqing   yeah I saw you were there

----

⁴Xingkun   when they were walking on the street (.) they found a tuft of hair

Leilei

Fengli   wait what? really?

Mingqing

----

⁵Xingkun   1 those two Miaozi took it to their home to peel the hair of it

         2 and when they dragged it

         3 a tuft of hair was left on the door

         4 his wife took it

         5 then we rushed to Xuejiang to find more traces

         6 I even didn't have time to change shoes
         7 we still couldn't find it

         8 they were joking it is the 'tracing the shit' project <laughs>

         9 when we arrived at Shuifu

        10 we found the shit of the panda

        11 you know pandas normally poop while eating (.)

        12 they don't keep food in their stomach

        13 so they said their shit has a good smell of bamboo

        14 one reporter described it as the shape of a rice ball and with the smell of bamboo <laughs>

Staves 1-3 show that before the narrative unfolded, Leilei, Fengli and Mingqing already had a certain

level of knowledge about this story. The panda was killed by villagers in 2014, and the story was

covered in news not only locally but also nationally, even as late as 2022.[7] The collaborative display of

their knowledge on this story (highly likely to have been obtained through the media) functions as the

'orientation' of the story, allowing Xingkun to narrate more details about the story. Through the

explicit mention of his professional identity as someone who 'led the team for the panda case', the

storytelling starts (stave 2). It indicates that his narrative can be endorsed with an authorial voice

because he has first-hand experience. As a result, Xingkun gained his position as a primary narrator in

this narrative-telling event.

The narrative strategy that Xingkun uses here is his constant reinforcement of his authorial stance as a

front-line investigator. Based on the ethnographic information I acquired, when certain public crisis

events or accidents happen, only officials who work for the government have access to the frontline to

gain first-hand resources to report. Xingkun's role as an officer in the publicity department in the local

government gave him such authorization to do his investigative work, alongside law enforcement

departments. The publicity department, in particular, is responsible for the report writing work on the

investigation. After having their reports approved or amended by the authority, the results or details

of those public events can be sent to state-owned news agencies for further publication through

various news channels.

Xingkun's position as a front-line investigator and representative of the local authorities makes this

story a first-person narrative in a dinner talk, and therefore, participants in this narrative event can

hear more information that can be gained elsewhere, such as on censored news channels. The

discursive identity of Xingkun as a delegate or representative of the local authorities is first positioned

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[7] https://new.qq.com/omn/20210911/20210911A052KY00.html and
https://www.163.com/dy/article/H57I0V9405525W0J.html and
http://scitech.people.com.cn/n/2015/0515/c1007-27004674.html

through his distinction between him (and his colleague) and a 'reporter' (stave 5: 13). Xingkun uses a collective pronoun form 'we' to refer to his colleagues (stave 5: 5-6) but makes 'reporter' a notable and recognisable social group in his storytelling. This indicates that even though he is responsible for the report writing, his identity is not that of a journalist. He seems to use this strategy to imply that as the representative of the authority, he holds more power than an average reporter in a news agency who is at the very end of certain sensitive information processes. I argue that without the ethnographic information, it may not be that easy to understand why Xingkun particularly says 'reporter' here. As a strategy, he indexes the power he possesses in his job position, as he is at a relatively higher position in this hierarchy of news production.

To further reinforce his authorial identity, he uses specific actions in this narrated past event to position and construct himself a hard-working and responsible officer on the frontline. Xingkun describes how he and his colleague started tracing the panda with the evidence of 'a tuft of hair' (3) and how they 'rushed' to different places to investigate this case (5). The word 'rush' (冲 - chong1) indicates that they immediately responded to this case as soon as they received the report, with the connotation/metaphor that they 'stormed into battle'. This positioning is even supported with a detail suggesting that he did not have time to change his shoes (stave 6) but immediately rushed to the frontline. An image of him wearing a suit and office shoes is portrayed in this narrative-telling, and this contributes to his positioning as a responsible officer.

Xingkun's narrative shows how he positions himself in the past event he participated in as a front-line investigator who holds authorial power and a responsible and hardworking officer who represents the local government. In Wortham and Gadsden's (2006: 319-341) four layers of positioning paradigm,

they also suggest looking at how other narrated selves are represented in the story-world. In the above extract, the important narrated characters are the Miao ethnic villagers who killed the panda. In Xingkun's narrative, he uses the word 'Miaozi' (stave 5: 1) to refer to them in the tale-world, an address term that has negative and possibly insulting connotations. In Chinese, adding 'zi' after an adjective changes it into a pejorative nickname (similar to how, for example, 'fat' becomes 'a fatty'). For ethnic minorities, adding 'zi' after the name of certain ethnic groups (i.e. Hui, Miao) is perceived as an insulting address or reference. The Miao ethnic minority identity of protagonists emerges immediately when Xingkun first mentions them. Miao ethnicity is not only categorised by Xingkun as a particular and homogeneous social group but also as deviant others.

With the empirical narrative data shown in Extract 5 and Extract 6 below, I shall continue unpacking this 'panda story' narrative, illustrating how participants used this narrative as a practice to demonstrate their multiple social identities, while the villagers were used as the resources representing opposite others in their identity work. Extract 6 starts with a 'complicating action' of how those two villagers sold the panda meat on a highway; soon the narrative moves to the 'resolution' element, that is, what finally happened. Xingkun narrates how the local government decided to keep the news coverage on the 'down-low' for publicity reasons.

4.3.3.2 Discursive Identity as representative of local authority

Extract 6: He might be the first one in China who ate panda meat

[1]Xingkun	they sold it on the way on a highway		haha yeah they sold on a highway
Leilei		ho yo	
Fengli		awww-hoo-hoo	
Mingqing			

| [2]Xingkun | = yeah being sentenced (.) | |
| Leilei | | how many years? |

Fengli

Mingqing   has he been sentenced? =

---

[3]Xingkun   1 but it was kept on the down-low

          2 you probably don't know that

          3 our Zhaotong government initially wanted to do it with extensive coverage on the news

          4 I already had my photos prepared but we are not allowed to post them

---

[4]Xingkun   no no actually you know what we want to do?

Leilei

Fengli

Mingqing   I think they are just uncivilised   it feels they were

---

[5]Xingkun   Zhaotong has a really wide range of forest coverage   suitable for panda's living

Leilei   ai-ye right

Fengli   hmm

Mingqing

---

[6]Xingkun   we can also bring some breeds of panda   that is correct

Leilei   yeah

Fengli   then Zhaotong will be famous

Mingqing

---

[7]Xingkun   1 that we wished to do initially

          2 we wanted to do for the publicity reason

          3 to promote the city

          4 we don't want to emphasise the event itself

---

[8]Xingkun   he chopped the meat to sell (.) hands with the ribs were left and they made soup out of it

Leilei

Fengli   that is right

Mingqing

---

[9]Xingkun   his son told him he had enough of the meat=

Leilei   =hahaha

Fengli   hahahah

Mingqing

---

[10]Xingkun   they said the meat tasted like chicken (.) very tender (.) there was some left (.)

Leilei

Fengli

Mingqing

11Xingkun   they gave the leftovers to the dog   so I say his dog should be protected (.) and his son

Leilei

Fengli   <u>what</u>? <loud voice and rising tone>

Mingqing

12Xingkun   he might be the first one in China who ate the meat of a panda   <u>hahaha</u> <loud laughter>

Leilei   <u>hahaha</u> <loud laughter>

Fengli   hoo hoo   <u>hahaha</u><loud laughter>

Mingqing

13Xingkun   yeah that what we've known so far

Leilei   haha

Fengli   yeah really hardcore

Mingqing   ha that is what we've known so far

(8.0)

14Xingkun   you know that person is still in prison in Shuifu, sentenced for ten more years

Leilei   aww

Fengli   ohh right

Mingqing

----

llustrated by the stave system transcription, the above extract shows that when the narrative progresses to the 'resolution' and 'evaluation' element, more interactional characteristics emerge. Fengli and Leilei first display their engagement with the storytelling by laughing at the idea that the panda meat was sold on a highway (stave 1). Soon in stave 2, Mingqin asks Xingkun if the two villagers were being sentenced, which directs the narrative to progress to the 'resolution' of the story, that is, what finally happened. Participants in this narrative event actively join the crafting of the 'resolution' element of narrative-telling rather than leaving Xingkun as sole narrator to narrate the story in a 'one-at-at-time' structure (Coates, 1997), shown in Extract 4.

Mingqing seems much more interested in continuing the story with the focus on villagers, and he attempts to direct the narrative-telling to discuss their sentences (stave 2 and 4), but is ignored by the

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primary narrator, Xingkun. He simply answers that 'they were being sentenced' (stave 2) without elaborating on the legal punishment. Instead, he re-directs the storytelling back to his work specification, to construct and position a new layer of discursive identity as a spokesperson for the local authority. For Xingkun, perhaps, this narrative aims to show his achievements at work, which is similar to the main theme in British men's male narrative (Coates, 2003). After his hard work as a front-line investigator, he had photos of the event prepared, but the authority decided not to publish the details (stave 3).

Then he uses this narrative-telling to explain and reveal the decision-making process behind the news coverage. He explains that the local authority initially attempted to take advantage of this news story to promote Zhaotong's wide range of forests and the possibility of bringing more pandas to make Zhaotong a potential sanctuary (stave 5-6). According to Xingkun, the local authority did not want to emphasise the event itself (stave 7), possibly because it might imply Zhaotong's negative political reputation: it is still a backward region where villagers do not have adequate knowledge to understand that killing a panda is illegal. He continues to indicate to his audience that he possesses certain exclusive information that other people may not know. By doing this, he constructs himself not only as the representative of the authority but also as an insider of the local government.

During this process, Mingqing stays silent, without displaying his engagement, whereas Fengli and Leilei positively join in Xingkun's narrative-telling (stave 5, 6, 8, 9 11, and 12). Their collaborative crafting of the above narrative-telling therefore frames the focus of this story from a local authority's perspective. Xingkun, Lelei and Fengli focus on how the local government can take advantage of this opportunity for political gain and promotion. Fengli and Leilei show a similar stance to Xingkun,

agreeing that the local government could have used this event to promote Zhaotong from the perspective of its extensive forest coverage rather than focusing on the criminal activity of killing a nationally protected animal. Their evaluation of this narrative is based on the stance of the local authority, which positions them as socially superior professionals, who stand for the interest of the local authority.

Xingkun narrates a detailed sub-story from stave 8 to 12 of how the panda was eaten by the two villagers and their son, mocking their lack of knowledge. They particularly joke that they might be the first in China to eat panda meat. The mockery here reinforces their socially superior identity they constructed earlier, and at the same time, positions those villagers as 'deviant others'. Stave 13 can be a 'coda' for the narrative, bringing the past event back to the here-and-now moment, acknowledging the above discussion is 'what we've known so far'. This 'coda' can signal that a story has ended, and the following eight seconds of silence to an extent confirms the end of the story. However, Xingkun seems not to want to end this narrative, after the silence, he revisits the topic that Mingqing asked about earlier regarding the sentences of the villagers (stave 14). It shows that even after a story may have come to a clear ending, the narrator can still bring the same story back by re-addressing the unsolved threads.

In the following extract, the members of the group discuss whether the sentences of the two villagers' who killed the panda, of 14 and 11 years, were too much. They created 'what if' hypothesis scenarios as a narrated past event to support their arguments.

Extract 7: He didn't know

[1]Xingkun

Leilei

Fengli

Mingqing   5 or 6 years should be enough   actually if he hunted one and sold it for 150,000 or 180,000 (yuan)

----

²Xingkun

Leilei   ⌈he didn't understand

Fengli   he didn't know   yeah he didn't know

Mingqing   then he deserved ∟that long sentence   he didn't know it

----

³Xingkun   you know (.) when he found it he shouldn't have shot it

Leilei

Fengli   yeah but he didn't know

Mingqing   he didn't know it

----

⁴Xingkun   1 he should've immediately reported to the forestry department (.)

             2 if they can have the actual photos of the panda's traces

             3 he wouldn't end up in prison(..)

             4 instead he would've been rewarded

----

⁵Xingkun

Leilei

Fengli   ⌈but he didn't know it

Mingqing   he didn't ∟know it   he may have thought it was just a normal bear so shot it and ate it

----

⁶Xingkun   he could have (..)

Leilei   he didn't know that

Fengli

Mingqing

----

⁷Xingkun   this is what they Miao People call wild food   so it is just wild food hahaha <loud laughter>

Leilei

Fengli

Mingqing

----

⁸Xingkun

Leilei

Fengli   ai-ya...<a long sigh>

Mingqing   they are sentenced for too long

----

⁹Xingkun

Leilei

Fengli

Mingqing   they might just want to protect themselves (.) maybe not really want to eat that so-called wild food

```
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
¹⁰Xingkun    yeah because his goats were being bitten              so they thought about it to have it sold <laughing voice>
   Leilei
   Fengli
   Mingqing                                                        oh yeah
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
¹¹Xingkun                                    the Food Inspection Bureau was inspecting the restaurant
   Leilei
   Fengli                                                                              %oh, it seems%
   Mingqing    so how did they find it in the end?
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
¹²Xingkun    1 when they found it (.) it actually looked like preserved bacon
             2 they used a lot of salt to preserve it
             3 and they were selling it on the highway
             4 it happened in Yanjin but they were arrested in Shuifu
             5 then these two brothers were found
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
¹³Xingkun                                    haha <light laughter> I don't think they are innocent
   Leilei
   Fengli
   Mingqing    ai-i-i < a long and deep sign> they were innocent
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
¹⁴Xingkun
   Leilei
   Fengli       they are not innocent just the sentence was too much
   Mingqing
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
¹⁶Xingkun    1 their home was just made of some pieces of wood
             2 but the surrounding forest was so good
             3 their house was roughly two-metres high
             4 one metre for one floor
             5 they used bamboos for the construction of house
             6 there were only some potatoes and corns on the second floor
             7 IT WAS very sad
             8 BUT <emphasising tone> nothing we could do really
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
```

The above excerpt shows a discussion about the 'resolution' of a narrative, the final consequences of the two villagers. Mingqing suggests that 5-6 years would be a reasonable sentence, considering their case is different from the typical illegal cases of hunting and killing wild animals to gain huge profits

(stave 1). The two villagers did not trade the animals in the market, instead, they just sold the panda meat to random passengers on a highway. In stave 2, Leilei, Mingqing and Fengli all emphasise the specific contextual knowledge that 'he didn't know' should have been considered in issuing the penalties. The villagers who committed the crime did now know that the animal they had killed was a panda, the national protected animal. They also had no knowledge about the law that killing this wild animal, not to mention selling its meat, was a crime.

However, Xingkun does not join in this collaborative and shared stance. He suggests that if the two villagers had immediately reported it to the forestry department when they first found the panda and had the photos to show the trace, they would not have ended up in prison; instead, they might have even been rewarded by the local government (stave 3). Xingkun offers his evaluation, again, from his stance as a representative of the local authority, bringing his work experience into the 'what if' hypothesis scenario discussion. His assumption is immediately challenged by other interlocutors (stave 5 and 6) with their collective stance. Mingqing, Fengli and Leilei indicate that those ethnic minority villagers did not possess such legal knowledge to do what Xingkun suggested. They would not have committed the crime if they had more knowledge about it. Even though at this point in this narrative-telling event Mingqing, Fengli, and Leilei mention that this criminal tragedy was motivated by a lack of education and legal understanding, they do not go further in their reasoning to make a connection with social structural inequality.

After being challenged by other participants in this narrative activity, Xingkun compromises and negotiates his stance. He attempts to provide two arguments to explain why the villagers killed the panda. First, he argues that pandas may be perceived as a kind of 'wild food' (*yewei*, 野味) in Miao

culture (stave 7). This positions Miao people as a distant social group, not just different, but potentially alien from Han mainstream society, in which pandas are seen as food sources rather than national protected treasures. Miao people are positioned as the opposite social group, or 'deviant others', who still source their food from wild forests, including wild animals. According to Xingkun, the fact that their goat was attacked and bitten by the panda could be the second justification for the killing of the panda (stave 10). The laughing voice of Xingkun in stave 10 indicates that he believes that the Miao villagers killed the panda as revenge for the loss of their goat.

Mingqing, on the other hand, believes that the two villagers shot the panda to 'protect themselves' from wild animals' attack rather than the so-called 'wild food' purpose (stave 9). This justification may imply that as a self-defence in a dangerous situation, the shooting could be decriminalised to some extent. With those reasons, in stave 13, Xingkun and Mingqing conclude their contrasting stance and attitude towards the villagers, the protagonist of this narrative, bringing the story to its coda. Mingqing believes that they were innocent whereas Xingkun explicitly exhibits an oppositional stance, believing that they were not innocent with his scornful attitude, signalled by his light laughter. Fengli stands in the middle with a compromised stance (stave 14) that they are not innocent as they still killed a panda, but they had been sentenced too harshly.

This extract is embellished with some narratives, for instance, 'their goat was bitten', (stave 10), the sub-story of how the panda meat and the two villagers were found (stave 11-12), and detailed description of what he saw when he visited the two villagers' home (16). As a front-line investigator, Xingkun can provide information that other interlocutors may not be able to access. He gains 'narrative capital' because of his first-hand experience afforded by his professional identity. His

tellership in this narrative allows him to use narrative as a practice, to perform discursive identities such as the representative of the local authority and the spokesperson of the local government. In turn, this panda narrative provides significant resources for him to exert his hegemonic identity, as a Han, a middle-class man who works 'within the system', and as an insider within the authority system. His identity is largely drawn from his profession and the comparison to the Miao villagers. However, as a government officer, he comments that the living conditions of Miao villagers makes people sad but 'there is nothing we can do' (stave 16: 7-8). He does not reflect on the social inequality and social injustice brought about by the deep social structure.

4.3.3.3 Defaming Miao ethnic minority

In the above extracts, Miao people are used as the opposite 'others' for the positioning and construction of Xingkun's range of identities. Other participants, such as Fengli and Qingbei, align those identities and stances. However, Mingqing has a more sympathetic attitude toward the Miao people. I argue that this does not mean that Mingqing positions himself as an ally to this economically and socially disadvantaged group – villagers who are members of ethnic minorities living in rural areas. When more conversation unfolded, as shown in the subsequent Extract 8, Mingqing shifts his position to stand together with Xingkun, to generalise and defame Miao people as a homogenous group with devalued traits.

Extract 8: Miao people are like that!

[16]Mingqing 1 the environment indeed was good
           2 once (.) I went to a village
           3 for them
           4 they were content as soon as they had alcohol
           5 those ethnic minorities really liked drinking alcohol
----
[17]Xingkun   Miao people are like that   yeah their life is like that

```
    Leilei
    Fengli
    Mingqing                                    I've seen that
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
 18Mingqing   1 you gave them money they would immediately buy alcohol or
              2 they killed one goat or pig and invited everyone in the village to share
              3 when it was eaten up
              4 then somehow, they would figure out some alcohol from somewhere to continue drinking
              5 that WAS <emphasising tone> how they live
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
 19Xingkun      for the life of Miao people alcohol is very important =
    Leilei
    Fengli
    Mingqing                                              =exactly
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
 20Xingkun   1 so the birth-control policy was difficult to be implemented on Miao people
              2 you know there were no TV at night
              3 they had some alcohol and then sle::pt <dragging voice>
              4 haha <loud laughter>
              5 when you went to bed there was nothing you could do
              6 so they created babies to have fun
              7 the first thing the government did was to provide entertainment
              8 to let them have TV to watch
              9 to have things to do
             10 also you know they also gamble
             11 like my hometown           people gamble very often
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
 21Xingkun                                 correct
    Leilei
    Fengli
    Mingqing   yeah those regions are serious            especially during the spring festival very prevailing
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
```

Xingkun's description on the living conditions and surrounding environment of the two villagers (stave 15) leads Mingqing to narrate a second story (Coates, 2001) in sequence (stave 16 and 18). Drawn from his past experience (e.g. 'Once I went to a village' in stave 16: 2), Mingqing's story is created to first confirm Xingkun's point that 'the environment indeed was good' (stave 16: 1). This to an extent affirms why Zhaotong's local government wanted to deploy this news story to promote its forest

coverage for a positive publicity campaign. However, with the elaboration of a second story, the focus is no longer on the two villagers who killed the panda, rather, Mingqing generalises his stance and discussion on all ethnic minorities (stave 16: 5). 'Those ethnic minorities' therefore function as a cultural concept (Silverstein, 2004), invoking participants' existing and shared cultural knowledge about this particular social category. Ethnic minorities become a recognisable and homogeneous social group in this narrative, even though there are 26 different ethnic minorities in Yunnan and 55 across China. The ethnicity of the protagonists in the panda narrative, Miao, is only one such group.

In our ethnographic interviews, Mingqing told me his story about ethnic minorities was mainly drawn from his work experience in the poverty alleviation campaign in which he had interactions with villagers, some of whom were ethnic minorities. Since 2013, poverty alleviation has been one of the priorities of the ruling Communist Party of China. President Xi identified anti-poverty as a 'tough battle' for 2017 to 2020, and set 2020 as the year that the country should wipe out poverty and become a moderately prosperous society or 'Xiaokang'. In 2021, President Xi declared that China's battle against poverty had achieved a comprehensive victory.[8] The economy of Yunnan province is relatively underdeveloped, especially compared to other provinces in the east or other major cities in China. Within Yunnan, compared to Kunming, the capital of Yunnan, which had a 71.05% urbanisation ratio in 2016, Zhaotong's urbanisation ratio was only 31.49%. Thus, Zhaotong had more rural areas and population in the divided 'rural-urban' social structure. Zhaotong was thus listed as the principal target in the 'targeted poverty alleviation' campaign.

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[8] http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-02/25/c_1127137845.htm

In this 'largest poverty alleviation campaign in history', people who work 'within the system' (*tizhi nei*), including government and state-owned enterprises, academic and civil institutions, were required to work in rural areas with the local village authorities to tackle specific local issues. Working 'within the system' (*tizhi nei*), most members in this group participated in this campaign. Depending on specific cases, some may go to villages for a day while others may live in a village for three months. The experiences of this campaign often emerged in this group's self-recorded conversation, and I also used some excerpts from this topic in Chapter 7. In his narrative, Mingqing uses his cultural knowledge of ethnic minorities to display a patronising attitude towards them, positioning them in terms of stereotypically deviant traits: they are lazy people who only have gambling and drinking in their lives. Mingqing concludes his narrative with the summary, 'that was how they live' (stave 18: 5), standing at a higher hierarchical place to perceive ethnic minorities as pitiful and deviant 'others'.

Xingkun agrees with Mingqing's observation and stance (stave 17), and he provides more evidence to support the core argument that ethnic minorities generally do not work hard but only drink and sleep (stave 19 and 20). His narrative once again focuses attention on government initiatives. Xingkun explains his point using the effort that the government has made in its poverty alleviation campaign since the 1990s. Specifically, entertainment equipment was provided by the government, such as TVs, to help them take time away from drinking and reproducing. The latter links to the 'family planning and birth-control' campaign begun in the early 1980s in China, which led to the infamous 35 year 'one child per couple' policy. Han people who lived in the urban areas needed to obey this policy, especially those who 'worked within the system'. For them, the penalty for breaking this rule was the loss of their stable jobs, which for many was considered a huge risk and constraint. However, this policy allowed exceptions for several groups, and ethnic minorities were one of them. In certain areas, they

were allowed to have two children, and in some rural areas, there was no restriction on the number of children.

The storytelling in this extract from both Mingqing and Xingkun demonstrates that narrating past events from work experience can be an effective instrument (De Fina, 2008) to explain their stance on ethnic minorities. Hence, narrative becomes an effective instrument in (re)generating and negotiating their beliefs and attitudes (Georgakoulou, 2006), not only in relation to the protagonists in the news-event story, but also to widen those ideologies to the social groups of all ethnic minorities. I argue that their stances and attitudes towards Miao protagonists were largely drawn from their pre-existing and stereotyped cultural knowledge of ethnic minorities, and their narratives, in turn, also constitute, and even further reinforce and reproduce, those discriminatory discourses imposed on ethnic minorities.

Based on my analysis of Extracts 5-8, the following table summarises and demonstrates the emerging as well as contrasting identities of both the tellers and the protagonists in both narrative-telling and narrative-told worlds. I aim to offer a dynamic and comparative angle to unveil how identities are actually emergent in narrative-telling as a process.

Teller	Protagonists
Representative of the local authority	Villagers whose income relies on hunting
Hard-working front-line investigator	Lazy villagers who only drink alcohol and sleep
Well-educated with knowledge of national laws and local governmental policies	No basic knowledge about how certain wild bears are nationally protected animals

Teller	Protagonists
Law-abiding citizen	Criminals who break the law
City dwellers with a modern lifestyle (i.e. their dinner talk is in a private room in a restaurant)	Uncivilised people who eat wild animals
Family abides by 'one-child-per-couple' policy	Have more than one child
Middle-class with professions	Lower socioeconomic status, living under the poverty line

Table 3 - Identities emerge from teller and protagonists

The table illustrate that identities are emergent, plural and intersectional in nature. It shows that identity is work that is never finished and is always in progress (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005). The narrative on the Miao villagers becomes a valuable resource used by the men in Group 2 to do their identity work. The protagonists in the panda narrative index someone of lower social class, someone of lower socioeconomic status who has less power, wealth and knowledge. 'Those ethnic minorities' functions as a 'cultural concept' (Silverstein, 2004) not only to index social class and social status but also lifestyle, mentality and even personality traits. Their detailed narrative makes the protagonists, and the ethnic minorities they represent, a 'recognisable' social group (Wortham and Gadsden, 2006).

The efforts that these participants put in to describing how different the Miao villagers (and the later generalised ethnic minorities) from them are a construction of how they define themselves. They construct and position themselves in opposition to these 'recognisable' others, displaying and negotiating their membership in the opposite social categories. Therefore, othering is achieved through narrative, or put another way, narrative becomes a practice (De Fina and Georgakouplou, 2008; 2012) to implement 'othering' processes. The hegemonic male identities as Han, the

representatives of the local authority who work 'within the system', were not explicitly mentioned but implicitly indexed in the narrative-telling process. Their identity work has also shown that they belong to the same social categories.

Moreover, this conversational narrative of a panda killed by two Miao villagers is different from most media narratives. The 'evaluation' of media narratives, the point of telling this story, is on the discussion of the illegal use of firearms and ammunition when the villagers shot the wild panda – however, this subject never appears in this group's conversational narrative. The purpose of telling this panda story for this group is perhaps to have a more personal and private discussion about the news. With his first-hand experience of this news story, Xingkun owns the majority of the tellership of this story. For him, telling this story at a dinner indicates the social capital and power he possesses as an officer working in the local authority. The dinner, in which the narrative is embedded, is an opportunity for him to social network, and therefore, he needs to display what he can offer when entering this friendship circle. The group's narrative, collaboratively crafted by the participants, implies the privileges they share in the social hierarchy.

4.4. Conclusion

In Coates's research on British women's and men's spontaneous talk (1996, 2003), she finds that the 'one-at-a-time' structure is prominent in men's storytelling – that is, one sole-narrator crafting narratives without interactions with other participants in the local speech event (1997). On the contrary, women's narrative-telling is often characterised in a more collaborative and interactive manner (1996). As my analysis in this chapter has shown, male narratives in my data have structural characteristics of a 'one-at-a-time' structure (for example, 'wedding guest' in Extract 2) as well as

collaborative construction (see Extract 4 on how Fengli and Qingbei narrate 'young professional buyers). Most of the time, as manifested in the transcriptions, their narratives show a mix of in-between structural characteristics: certain 'one-at-a-time' narrative sections are embellished and embedded in a more collaborative conversational structure (see Extracts 3, 6, 7 and 8). Participants in a narrative-telling activity shoulder the responsibility of different sections of a narrative, for example, someone takes the action of narrating the 'complicating actions' while others may contribute to the narrative through directing the narrative to a 'resolution' or 'coda'.

Participants use narrative as a practice to do their identity and gender work, especially through rich resources of 'cultural concepts' (Silverstein, 2004) in their narrative. Those cultural concepts, such as place-related references, fashion consumption behaviour, or generalised ethnic minorities, are heavily deployed by them to index locality, social-class/status, age, ethnicity and their professions. Their emergent and intersectional identity work is accomplished through the constant positioning of themselves in relation to others. To enact their identities, people from other social categories, such as Kunmingese wedding guests, crazy Sichuanese sneaker buyers, young professional sneaker buyers and Miao villagers, are drawn in their narratives. As a result, their social identities as middle social class, male, urban, heterosexual and Han are constructed and performed.

My research has revealed that the ideal masculinity pursued by this group of men emphasises being real, generous, and sincere. Their fashion choices not only suggest their fashion taste, but also index their urban masculine construction, which closely intersects their age and consumption ability. Their consuming behaviour indicates that they endeavour to perform a relatively mature model of masculinity, manifested from their identity construction of old-fashioned buyer and their realistic and

grounded consumption attitude. In addition, men in my research particularly emphasise the social status that their profession could bring to them, and they exert their dominance and superiority over ethnic minority villagers. Their shared ideologies and stereotypes about social categories of belonging help them to build solidarity with others or enact discrimination and denigration of other individuals and groups whose membership they do not align with or recognise.

CHAPTER 5: SEXUAL STORIES, MASCULINTIES AND GENDER RELATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I continue to explore male narratives from my data, with the theoretical stance, terminologies and narrative analytic tools introduced in Chapter 4. I examine a particular genre of male narrative: sex stories, or 'sexual stories', defined by Plummer (2004: 7) as 'personal experience narratives around the intimate'. Sexual experiences are well-suited for storytelling in friendship talk because sharing this private aspect with their friends may be considered safe (Fjær, 2012). Moreover, sharing sexual experiences is an important dimension to maintain the primacy of male-male homosociality while exert hetersexual masculinity (Kiesling, 2005, Flood, 2008). In this chapter, I illustrate how sexual stories are told by men and show how their female friends engage in those storytelling. Analysing sexual storytelling at a discourse level, I argue that telling sexual stories can also link to identity work as in contemporary society sex is an important avenue for self-exploration and for obtaining social recognition (Collins, 2004). Through my analysis of a collection of sexual stories, I unveil the hybridity and complexities of masculinities that are performed and constructed through the narrative-telling practice.

Recent research on the sexual storytelling practice has often been based on a broader embeddedness of drinking stories (Fjær, 2012; Vaynman et. al., 2019; Sanderberg et al., 2019), with narrative data collected from semi-structured interviews. Moreover, I extend on prior studies on sexual stories from American and Nordic cultural contexts (Plummer, 2004; Vaynman et al., 2019) to zoom in Chinese

contemporary socio-cultural context after the 2010s. To give a better understanding of the socio-cultural embeddedness of Chinese men's sexual storytelling, I present a short introduction on sex and sexuality in the Chinese context before introducing my analysis (see section 2). In this chapter, I explore sexual stories as a specific story genre to contribute to current research on sexual storytelling. In particular, I do not examine sex stories told to an interviewer, but instead, to their close friends in a more private and relaxed situation. With this local speech event context, most of their sex narratives concern casual sex, with one-night stands or taboo sex as their main topic. It shows that 'behaving badly' is a strong theme in the narratives of younger men in the corpus and is viewed as a positive way of doing masculinity (Coates, 2000, 2001), and through narrating such 'behaving badly' sex, they demonstrate their hegemonic masculinity, including virile masculinity, heterosexuality and male dominance over other men and women they have sex with.

With the acknowledgement of the multiple meanings of narratives (Derrida, 1978), I use multiple sources of data, including participants' self-recorded spontaneous talk, ethnographic interviews, and participant-observation, to fully understand 'casual sex as an experienced and retold practice' (Tholander and Tour, 2020: 1398). Instead of only looking at stories as a final product (De Fina and Georgopoulou, 2008, 2012) or participants' own interpretations of those events, I focus on the meaning generated and the masculinities enacted through storytelling. I reveal how male participants position themselves and their female sexual partners in their sex storytelling, and how the involvement and engagement of their female friends may still keep the 'male homosocial dimension' (Flood, 2008) in a gendered sexual narrative-telling.

5.2 A Brief Introduction to Sex in China

Since 1949 when new China was established following the anti-Japanese war (1937-1945) and civil war (1945-1949), the ruling Chinese Community Party aimed to establish a new social order, wiping out 'traditions and old cultural customs' (*yifeng yisu* - 移风易俗). Sex had gradually been seen as a political enemy of this revolution, and it soon reached its peak in the Cultural Revolution era (1966-1976). Using Pan Suiming's words (2008), China was a 'desexualised society' as sex was repressed. The result of this 'de-sexualised' society was not the 'absence' of sex in real life. Instead, sex was approached only for the purpose of procreation, leading to a population explosion in this period (Pan, 2006). Since 1979, the focus of China's ruling CCP government has been centred on the development of the economy, and ever since, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been undergoing economic and social change. The social structural and economic transformation has also brought significant changes to Chinese people's sexual morality, sexual attitudes, and sexual practices.

China entered an era during which the official restrictions on sexuality were at their lowest point. Men and women no longer need to show their marriage certificate to stay together in hotels when travelling and can even get married or divorced without the approval of their work institutions. In Chinese streets, parks, and restaurants, it is increasingly common to see young and elderly heterosexual couples holding hands and kissing. Hence certain scholars suggest that, since the late 1980s, China has witnessed a sexual revolution (Zhang E., 2011; Pan and Huang, 2013;). This sexual revolution is often demonstrated by growing rates of pre-marital and casual sex, and the advocacy by female autobiographical novelists and sex bloggers of the right to engage in sex without emotional attachments (Pan and Huang, 2013, Jeffreys, 2015).

Even though some researchers do not agree with the accuracy of the 'sex was repressed' narrative in the Cultural Revolution (Honig, 2002) and doubt the rigorousness of the expression 'sex revolution' (Jeffreys and Yu, 2015: 7-13), the general agreement is that there were dramatic changes in Chinese people's ideology and practice around sex. Moreover, most research has cautioned that China's changing discourses on sex and sexual behaviours are not a 'natural' or 'advertent' process as the liberating product of China's embrace of Western influences; instead, they are related to national policy developments, not just international influences (Pan and Huang, 2013; Jeffreys and Yu, 2015; Huang, 2020). For instance, China's one-child-per-couple policy, introduced in 1979, severed the link between sex and procreation. The restrictions on sex for reproduction and the absence of the fear of pregnancy promoted the growth of public discourses on married sex for pleasure. Former limitations on non-marital sexuality have also been weakened by the accessibility of contraception and abortion (Pan, 2006).

Elaine Jeffrey (2015: 44-61) has explored the performative sexualities of China's urban youth – those who were born after 1979 as the only children in their families and allegedly leading China's so-called sexual revolution. She found that many such young people practice pre-marital and casual sex, engaging in unattached sex, while others use fashion and music to experiment with and express sexual personas that challenge conventional gender stereotypes. She argues that youth performative sexuality can be powerful as it shakes the traditional perception on appropriate sex and gender roles. It also challenges the assumption that expressions of female sexuality could only be restricted to heterosexual marriage and motherhood, which remained in a private sphere. However, she also critically points out that Chinese youth's performative sexualities are typically constrained by the fact that they are expressed as individualised, commercialised acts of self-expression rather than collective

political acts. The stories told by my male participants are all about their casual and pre-marital sex, confirming Jeffery's observation that telling sexual stories is an articulation of performative sexualities.

In a nationwide sociological survey that collected data from the total Chinese population aged 18 to 61 in 2000, 2006, and 2010, Pan Suiming and Huang Yingying (2013) illustrate the rapid change of Chinese people's sex attitude, sex morality and sex behaviours. Their research shows that after the 'sexual revolution', Chinese people at the begining of the 21st century use love to eveluate if sex was moral, which challenged the long-held belief that sex morality can only be legitimated by marriage and procreation. According to their quantitative analysis, from 2006 to 2010, Chinese people's sex attitude and morality had significant changed compared to the period between 2000 and 2006. The younger generation showed a new tendency in which pleasure took over love to become the primary evaluations for sexual morality.

This national research on the changes in Chinese people's sex attitudes, morality and behaviours was supported by empirical survey data; however, I argue more qualitative data and interpretation should be filled in this research area. Therefore, I use this linguistic ethnographic research to explore more specific and detailed expressions from men's self-recorded conversation data and reveal the discursive constructions and constraints around sex attitudes and morality. I shall investigate whether there have been new manifestations and developments around sex attitudes in recent years, with the sex narratives collected from Chinese men's everyday conversation with their friends, which occurred in a mixed gender setting.

5.3 Analysis

In this section, I present a series of sex stories from Group 1 narrated by Fengli, Meimei and Qingbei. Through the examination of their sexual storytelling, I demonstrate how virile masculinity has been closely linked to male dominance, the upper social class, and objectifying women. I first illustrate how casual sex was narrated in relation to a tourist city, arguing that locality, or place-related reference, intersects with gender. Secondly, through the examination of a 'teacher and student' sex narrative, I explore how questionable sex is initiated and re-told as a narrative practice, problematising its potential consent issues in the narrative.

5.3.1 Tourist City Casual Sex and Virile Masculinity

Fengli often portrays a 'playboy' persona in this group. During my data collection from 2016 to 2019, Fengli changed girlfriends several times and was often not in a serious or committed relationship. In 2017, he left his job in a state-owned enterprise and began entrepreneurship as a restaurant owner in Zhaotong. This career shift allowed more time for travelling opportunities across China. Fengli frequently shared his trip experiences with his friends, in which casual sex encounters frequently emerged as a topic. In this section, I use four layers of positioning theory (Wortham and Gadsden, 2006) to examine how he narrated himself, his female sexual partners, and how he evaluated himself and the narrated others, as well as how his female friends engaged in the 'here-and-now' narrative-telling event.

5.3.1.1 'Those places are for dating girls' – sexualising tourist cities

The following conversation was recorded in 2017 when I participated in this groups' social events. I had already built a strong rapport with them by that point, so when discussing certain subjects, like

sex anecdotes, we felt comfortable and trusted. Even though I named Group 1 a male group, as I introduced earlier, they also had regular female friends, Meimei and Xiaoli, whom they had known since their primary and secondary school days. As a female researcher, I always found it easier to first establish connections with male participants' female friends or partners. Meimei and Xiaoli helped me a lot when I was in the field, and they provided me with more information to know more about this group and invited me to join their various social events. On the day reported below, I had dinner with them and then we headed to a cafe for more follow-up conversations. The following conversation was recorded at our post-dinner drinking. Fengli first showed us a picture of a girl that he had just met online, saying that the girl invited him to visit Xiamen.

Extract 1: This Girl from Xiamen Asked Me to Visit Her - setting the scene

```
¹Fengli     see this girl from Xiamen asked me to visit her
 Meimei
 Xiaoli
 Yang
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
²Fengli      I told her that Xiamen is not very interesting so I didn't wanna go=
 Meimei                                                          = aww-yoo it is not that bad
 Xiaoli
 Yang
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
³Fengli                                                                                           boring
 Meimei                          but you know it has been commercialised
 Xiaoli    Xiamen seems nice                                    I haven't been there
 Yang
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
⁴Fengli    Xiamen is the most boring place that I have ever been
 Meimei                                                                                yeah
 Xiaoli                                                                         hmm
 Yang                                               many artistic youth went there
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
⁵Fengli    those places are for dating girls     there is no constraints  just for sleeping with (.)
 Meimei                                   yeah                                  young girls
 Xiaoli
 Yang
```

```
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
 ⁶Fengli                                        of course
  Meimei                                                          similar to Dali
  Xiaoli     do you mean it is easy to get girls at those places
  Yang                                                              or Lijiang
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
```

At the beginning of this conversation, Fengli told the audience (including me as both a friend and a researcher) that he had just refused a girls' invitation, with the reason that 'Xiamen is not very interesting' (stave 2). There is a real power display here in that he implies the girl is not interesting enough, and by stating that he said this to her face, he positions how insignificant she is. On the contrary, Fengli, as a man, holds more dominance and control. However, no one addresses this positioning. The conversation shifts to the evaluation of Xiamen as a tourist city (stave 2 - Meimei - 'it is not that bad'), discussing how Xiamen has become commercialised and no longer interesting (stave 3, 4). Located in the south-east of China within Fujian province, Xiamen is well-known for its island and beach scenery.

For Fengli's audience at this speech event, the cultural knowledge that is immediately invoked by his utterance is mainly about Xiamen as a tourist city. For instance, Meimei holds about Xiamen on the subject that it has been commercialised and potentially over-developed, so it does not have its original beauty as a small seaside town. I personally connotate Xiamen with 'artistic youth' (*wenyi qingnian*), as I remember many young artists going there for filming and photographs, and many written arts, such as poems and short stories, also have Xiamen as their setting. However, when Fengli joins the discussion (in stave 5), he does not continue the 'Xiamen as a tourist city' discourse; instead, he moves the discourse to sexualise Xiamen as a city by saying that there are many sexual opportunities – in particular, the casual sex there has 'no constraints'.

Xiaoli's follow-up question soon confirms that Xiamen is a city where it 'is easy to get girls' (stave 6). As a woman, Xiaoli's question constitutes the 'sexualising Xiamen' discourse and process. It implies that the rich sexual resources and opportunities are based on how easy it is for men to 'get girls', seducing and manipulating young women to have opportunities to sleep with them. In this discursive construction, Xiamen is sexualised, interwoven with a heteronormative discourse and the emphasis on virile masculinity, neglecting women's agency. The theme of having casual sex in tourist cities is often captured in research on sex narratives, with destinations such as Nordic countries (Hesse and Tutenges, 2011) and Thailand (Vaynman, et al., 2019). For instance, in Vaynman and colleagues' (2019) research, one heterosexual white male respondent defined Pattaya, Thailand, as 'the hooker capital of the world' when narrating his experiences in a night-time strip club (ibid: 13).

In the above excerpt Fengli attempts a similar positioning, but he defines Xiamen in a more ambivalent way: as a tourist city, it is boring, however, it has huge opportunities to sleep with girls 'without constraints'. This differs from the positioning of the aforementioned research in which the sexualisation of tourist destinations is tightly linked to its night-time economy. In other words, unlike Pattaya in Thailand or Amsterdam in the Netherlands where nightlife constitutes their fame as tourist attractions, Xiamen is not famous for its night-economy, at least, it is not the promotion and intention from the government. The socio-cultural backdrop we need to consider is that in China commercial sex is illegal (including erotic massage and oral sex). Therefore, I argue that the 'sexualisation of Xiamen' process in the above discursive construction is largely based on personal and private sex life, rather than closely tied to night-time economy or the sex industry as it is in other tourist destinations.

To respond to this sexualisation process, in stave 6, participants offer more examples to generalise this 'sexualising tourist cities' discourse. Meimei suggests Dali, a tourist city located in the north-east of Yunnan province, and I gave the example of Lijian, a tourist destination close to Dali. Those utterances reproduce and reinforce the connection between tourist cities and casual sexual opportunities. As a discourse analyst as well as a participant in that speech event, I argue that the analytic distance allows me to reflect the discourse that I produced in this conversation. At the beginning, my cultural knowledge of Xiamen was based on its association with artistic youth, which may have no intention or connotation to sexualise this city. However, when the conversation unfolded, a new layer of cultural knowledge about tourist cities was invoked and it was drawn by all participants (including myself) in this conversation to collaboratively craft the 'sexualising tourist cities' discursive process.

I reflected that this layer of knowledge can be invoked not only because of the local discursive construction, but also, derived from a much wider discourse. The broader socio-cultural discourse on the connection between a city and its sexual connotations are evident in everyday language. For instance, when people talk about Chengdu, they always call it 'the capital of gay', and Lijiang was often labelled as a 'city of erotic encounters' (*yanyu zhicheng* 艳遇之城). I inevitably drew on the wider discourse to produce my specific utterance here, suggesting that Lijiang can fit in this 'tourist cities full of sex opportunities' category. Those tourist cities with an artistic atmosphere are often small, away from big cities, attracting young people to escape the busier cities for more relaxed experiences. Yet, frequent and popular narratives of the sexual experiences that happen there often (also) constitute the cultural knowledge associated with those cities. Those tourist cities are thus gendered and sexualised because of their associated cultural knowledge. The names of those tourist cultures become 'cultural concepts' (Silverstein, 2004), invoking knowledge or stereotypes about their sexual

connections, which can be gained by people from the source of narrative they have often heard about.

Casual sex often being linked to tourist cities can perhaps be traced back to one of the forces for the 'sexual revolution': mobility. Before a large scale of migration, sex was frequently judged within small-scale neighbourhoods. Many sociological researchers (Pan and Huang, 2013; Jeffreys and Yu, 2015; Choi and Peng, 2016; Huang, 2022) have argued, the mobility between rural and urban, from small to big cities has contributed to the breakdown of China's traditional social structure, and therefore, having accelerated the liberation of sex. Even though those studies focus on long-term migration, I argue that travelling to tourist cities could be seen as a type of mobility, to temporarily stay away from the gaze of judgement in people's place of residence. Therefore, it may explain why tourist cities often sexualised in popular narratives, including Fengli's narrative on his tourist city sex and Meimei's subsequent narrative in section 3.2. This may explain why at the beginning of Fengli's story, when sexualising Xiamen with the definitions of rich sexual opportunities, he mentioned that sex in a tourist city is 'without any constraints' (Extract 1: stave 5). It indicates that travelling in a new city may exacerbated sexual liberty, especially when casual sex practice is still not widely accepted in small cities and rural areas (Peng and Choi, 2016; Wong, 2020).

5.3.1.2 'No time was wasted' - a seduction expert discourse

Fengli's narrative about his sex anecdote in Xiamen in Extract 2 constitutes and reproduces the wider narrative and discourse on the 'sexualising/sexualised tourist city', illustrating how tourist cities can be full of sexual potential. Note that Qingbei (male) did not engage in this conversation, even though he was present in the event.

Extract 2: Those Tourist Cities Are Just My Blessed Lands!

[1]Fengli   1 those tourists cities are just my blessed lands really

2 before I went to Xiamen

3 you know in the past there were Baidu discussion boards

4 I posted something on certain discussion boards

5 when you post you need to be smart

6 asking for travelling tips like you don't know that city

7 you can ask if anyone knows those local places

8 several girls replied saying that they were going there too blah blah

9 then I asked two girls to go there

----

[2]Fengli   heii <a long sigh> we met and I slept with a girl from Xi'an first

Meimei

Xiaoli   did you meet first

----

[3]Fengli   yeah cleanly and you know I measured time precisely

Meimei   did you play it cleanly

Xiaoli

----

[4]Fengli 1 I asked two girls

2 one is from Suzhou and the another is from Xi'an

3 after that Xi'an girl left I still stayed there

4 then girl from Suzhou immediately followed

5 no time was wasted

6 the girl from Suzhou was fucking awesome

7 after the night she asked me to delete all the contact details

8 saying that 'if fate wills it, we will meet again'

9 hahaha <loud laughter> man <loud and dragging voice>

10 I told her that

11 'I was about to tell you the same thing and fuck you just know how it works!'

This extract depicts Fengli's first-person narrative of his casual sex experiences with two women in Xiamen. Fengli starts the storytelling with the abstract idea that 'those tourist cities are just my blessed lands', implying that he has had many fortuitous sexual experiences in those cities. Then he starts to introduce how he strategically manages to seduce girls while travelling. In his narrative, he positions himself as a seduction expert, 'teaching' the audience the tactics that he used for seducing

girls (stave 1). The time this story took place was hinted at by the reference of the Baidu discussion board, which was only popular around 2009-2014, before mobile apps became available. Therefore, Fengli seems to suggest that his experiences of seducing girls in tourist cities began a long time ago, and so at the time of the actual narrative-telling event, he was already highly experienced in such practices.

When explaining how to attract the attention of girls from the discussion board, he uses the pronoun 'you' to create a closer interaction with the audience to intensify engagement. Moreover, the sequences such as 'you need to be smart' (5) and 'asking travelling tips like you don't know the city' (6) construct a 'teaching' mode in his narrative-telling. He positions the audience – his male and female friends, and me with my dual identities of researcher and friend – as someone who can learn from him. His tips-sharing is similar to the field-report of pick-up/seduction artists online community. Although not explicitly, it is a self-praise for himself to construct a pick-up artist identity (Dayter and Rudiger, 2020). This echoes Coates's (2003) research on male narratives whereby 'expert' identity and discourse of 'achievement' often emerge from British men's storytelling. In Fengli's narrative (stave 1), he underlies his large casual sex experiences as a kind of achievement, and these in turn endorse his self-positioning as an expert in this area. In his narrative-telling, he shares techniques and tactics for girl-hunting and seduction to further position himself as an expert.

This kind of strategy-sharing practice confirms what Rachel O'Neill (2018) observed in the seduction industry. The means of seducing females are conceived of as knowledge-based practices that can be learnt, and therefore, teaching others how to achieve sexual relations and intimacy becomes a commodified product. Similarly, in Vaynman and colleagues' (2019: 8) research on male narratives related to their sex experience, one white Norwegian participant described how to get women: 'If you

said the right things, worked on those right things, then you could trick any woman into going to bed with you'. It indicates that seducing girls for sexual purposes is a knowledge-based practice, depending on how a man strategically positions himself in his interaction with a woman.

It is difficult not to link this type of seducing strategy-sharing practice with the recent revelation of the practice of the notorious so-called 'Pick Up Artists' (PUAs). This community of men believe that the practice of attracting women's attention can be theorised as strategies (or the 'verbal arts', as they call them), which can be further trained and taught. In this industry, those experienced (largely male) PUAs sell courses to other men who seek 'knowledge' and 'skills' to seduce women. Often, the practice of 'seducing' is implemented strategically to manipulate women with the aim of exploiting them both mentally and sexually (Strauss, 2005). The intimacy gained through this type of seduction practice is gained through inequity. Hambling-Jones and Merrison's (2012) pragmatic research on the talk-in-interaction between male PUAs and their female targets uncovers that 'seducing' as a practice is strategically executed through male PUAs' carefully designed discursive strategies.

Fengli positions himself as a seduction expert with a similar belief that seducing girls requires strategies and tactics, and as an expert of this practice, he is willing to share those techniques with his friends and potentially to me, a researcher who may not be familiar with his causal sex history, through his storytelling practice. Secondly, similar to those men in the seduction industry community, he believes that seduction is a knowledge-based practice and can be executed strategically through 'smart' and 'careful' language use. On the discussion board, Fengli portrayed himself as an innocent traveller who was looking for travelling tips (stave 1: 6-7), and his careful linguistic strategies helped him to successfully seduce girls. The achievement discourse in his narrative consists of two narrated actions: he gained several girls' positive responses (stave 1: 8) and he had the choice of selecting the

two best girls (stave 1: 9) from several girls' replies to sleep with. This achievement further endorses his discursive construction of a 'seduction expert' identity.

In his narrative, in addition to a 'seduction expert identity' and 'sexual achievement' discourse, a male dominant discourse is also embedded. In stave 1 line 8, Fengli uses the indirect quotation to give 'voice' to the girls but omits most of the content of their actual reply. He may consider that the key information in his narrative-telling is that the girls 'were going there too', so the rest of what they said was not that important. It indicates that to him women are just objects for potential sexual relationships. Stave 1 functions as the orientation of Fengli's story of how he slept with two women in Xiamen, setting the scene for the main complicating actions. In stave 4, Fengli started to narrate the main action sequences of the story. He slept with two girls from another two places, presumably also tourists like him, in Xiamen. Fengli continues to position himself as a seduction expert through the narrative that he managed to schedule the time perfectly, so no time was wasted in his short trip to sleep with the two girls.

Compared to previous linguistic studies on seduction community, especially PUA practice (Hambling-Jones and Merrison, 2012; Lawson and McGlashan, 2017), this extract of narrative shows seduction experience can be embedded in conversational narrative as a re-told practice. I argue that the discourses emerging from Fengli's narrative on his seduction expert identity constitute the overarching system of power and dominance over women, which further reinforce gender inequality. He uses narrative as a practice to reproduce the discourses of male dominance and objectification of women. In particular, the 'strategy' that he emphasised suggests that women can be manipulated by men for sexual gains.

In this narrative, Fengli particularly evaluates the girl he slept with, who came from Suzhou (a city

west of Shanghai, in Jiangsu province), as 'awesome' (stave 4: 6). Broadly speaking, it confirms Pan and Huang's (2013) finding that pleasure became the main morality standard for sex after 2010 in China. Fengli is happy with his causal sex experience, that it provided pleasure without the attachment of love. Secondly, in telling his one-off sex experience to his friends, he is positive that casual sex is acceptable among them. Fengli considers the girl 'awesome' because she suggested deleting each other's contact details (stave 4: 6-7). Fengli may have said this in response to the question that Meimei asked earlier, 'did you play it cleanly?' (stave 3). In this group, 'play it cleanly' (*wan de qingshuang* - 玩得清爽) is the main criteria to evaluate whether the sex was moral. It means to keep casual sex private and 'mature' without letting it interfere with their normal lives.

In the ethnographic interviews, the implications behind the evaluation of 'playing it cleanly' are revealed. First, 'playing it cleanly' means 'no drama'. They explained that: 'We have seen a lot of drama in our youth, like a girl coming to your city, crying to not break-up, or seeking revenge after the break-up. We are not that age any more. No drama please. Playing it cleanly is the key'. This indicates a specific discourse about unattached sex where the girls are not even given the right to demand any level of emotional attachment (Flood, 2008). This is clearly a male dominant discourse, and men use this discourse to require women to constrain their emotions. I argue that his type of ultra-red-blooded heterosexuality constitutes hegemonic masculinity (see Cameron, 1997) in the local cultural discourses of masculinity.

Secondly, 'play it cleanly' means to keep casual sex private and low-key. Members of this friendship group are all upper-middle social classes with professions, and most have jobs 'within the system'. Degrading sexual relationships (such as reported extra-marital affairs) can potentially be seen as a stigma or even obstacles to their professional development, so they need to keep their casual sex

private. For example, Osburg's (2013) ethnographic research in Chengdu suggests that intimacy consumption constitutes a significant part of leisure activities for upper-middle class men (i.e. businessmen, government officials, and high levels of management in state-owned institutions). In his fieldwork, politicians from local government (*lingdao* - 领导) enjoyed social lives which were often accompanied by *xiaojie* (sex workers who may or may not offer sex but offer different levels of intimacy) but it is often required to keep very private and low-key. Therefore, many high-end clubs which highlight private spaces for this purpose emerged after the 2000s across various cities in China.

Finally, most participants have long-term partners and agree that they are not willing or plan to take any risks to let casual sex affect their long-term relationships or marriages. 'Play it cleanly' in its third level indicates that if someone is in a committed relationship, they should also keep it secret to not damage the relationship. Meimei's question in stave 3 positions her as an insider of this friendship group because it demonstrates that she knows the code of sexual morality in the group: if the sex is played cleanly, then it can be recognised as moral. She also practices this criteria to evaluate sex in her own life. Getting married at the age of 23 in 2015, Meimei had two sons in 2016 and 2021. When I was in the field with this group, she often expressed how she can accept her husband having casual sex as long as he 'plays it cleanly' before getting home. She would not be overly concerned about her husband's behaviour outside of their marriage as long as he did not bring sexually transmitted illnesses into the house or permit one-off sex experiences to interfere with their marital life.

To further demonstrate that he played it cleanly, Fengli narrates a particular action: the girl in his narrative-told world suggests deleting their contact details to ensure their causal sex is just one-off sexual intercourse, without emotional attachments. As the narrated other-self in this narrative, this girl is represented as taking the initiative, and Fengli uses his narrative to powerfully position her as in

opposition to the girls that he has met before. To 'play it cleanly' was to avoid 'drama' in which girls 'cry to stop break-up' or 'come to your city for revenge for a break-up'. However, the girl in Fengli's narrative-told world is the opposite, who appreciates and initially practices unattached sex. She negotiates and challenges the gender role in the traditional context of one-night-stands in which men tend to take more control and play a more dominant role. In Fengli's narrative, she is positioned as contradictory to the traditional femininity that women tend to be more passive and emotionally attached, even in casual relationships.

At the end of Fengli's narrative-telling (stave 4: 8-10), he provides direct quotes of both the girl and himself to accomplish more gender and identity work. Fengli first assigns a voice to the girl with the direct speech of a common expression that is often used by men who attempt to end a relationship: 'if fate wills it, we will meet again'. In line 10, Fengli told the girl, 'I was about to tell you the same thing', which confirms that this phrase is often initiated by men as a goodbye phrase to end a one-off sexual relationship. By drawing on a phrase that was often used by men, this girl reversed the gender roles and expectations in common casual sexual practice. As a heterosexual man who often takes an active and initiating role in casual sex relationships, Fengli may still feel it was unusual to see the reversal and challenging of gender-roles, which can be signalled by his laughter and surprised voice (stave 4: 8-9). His direct quote of his own voice in the narrated world, 'I was about to tell you the same thing' (stave 4: 10), indicates that he may attempt to claim power back, to regain the powerful position of being the one who defines the relationship, which the girl to took off him one step ahead.

Having said that, Fengli still appreciates this challenge, commenting that the girl is 'awesome' and 'knows how it works' (stave 4: 10). However, I pinpoint that Fengli's compliment is not the result of the recognition or awareness of the girl's potential feminist stance; instead, it may be purely because the

girl's actions helps him to avoid the requisite 'emotional caress', which he has encountered in his previous casual sex experiences. The point or value of telling this story perhaps is to set up a new moral role-model (for girls) to benchmark attitudes towards unattached sex. The narrative in the above two extracts is so rich in that it reflect the changes in sex attitudes and moral standards in the young generation after the 2010s. It reflects how the trend of casual sex, including unattached one-off sex, is happening more prominently in younger generation, not just among middle-aged upper-middle class men (Osburg, 2013).

Moreover, it also shows that sexual practice is class based on the Chinese socio-cultural context. Pan and Huang (2013) argue that the class nature of sexual practice may have faded in the developed world, but in contemporary China, it still plays a significant role. In their study, they did not use the term social class (*jieji*). Instead, they used social stratum (*jieceng*) to describe the class divisions. Through surveys collected on the Chinese population aged 16 to 61, they identify three social strata – high, middle, and low – based on social variables including education, profession hierarchy, income, urban-rural differences and city tier differences. According to their quantitative analysis, causal sex often happen in the high social stratum (ibid: 125-153; 188-195).

In our ethnographic interview, Fengli said he always covered all the costs of his casual sex, and he was proud that his generosity earned him opportunities to sleep with many girls. Often, he showed a disdainful attitude towards those men who 'split the cost of sleeping'. It confirms that Chinese masculinity is often defined by money, and the emphasis on personal wealth has become a benchmark for powerful and desirable men (Song, 2010; Song and Hird, 2014; Choi and Peng, 2016; Wong, 2020). This prevailing discourse continues to play a role in sexual practice, making sexual practice and sexual ideologies not only gendered but also classed. Alongside Osburg's (2013) research

on intimacy consumption among upper-middle class men, I argue that it may be plausible to bring the dimension of social-class into the discussion of men's sexual practice. Therefore, boasting about their sexual experience, especially costly casual sex, can be a display of male dominance, not only among women but also other socioeconomically subordinated men, to further construct their virile masculinity, which is closely linked to their upper-middle class status.

Pan and Huang's (2013) quantitative study shows a low percentage of working-class men in China have had pre-marital sex. They argue that it does not mean that they are more willing to comply with 'pre-marital chastity'. Instead, they are just less likely (or have fewer opportunities) to seek pre-marital sex. They advocate that in a Chinese socio-cultural context, casual sex is not a question of sexual morality, but of social class. In Yang Jie's (2011) research on working-class men who were laid off from their life-tenured employment in the late 1990s and early 2000s, she suggests that unemployment meant the loss of virility for mass unemployed Chinese men. This loss of livelihood and virility resulted in social instability. Virile masculinity in the Chinese context has always been associated with social class, embodied in wealth, power and male dominance. Hence, narrating sex stories about casual sex experiences constructs classed gender work.

5.3.2 'Those Jiangnan girls': A Female Narrative

In Extract 2, Fengli narrated his sex experience with two girls in Xiamen, and he particularly mentioned that the girl from Suzhou was 'awesome'. The following Extract 3 was selected from the same conversation when Fengli was narrating his sex experience while travelling in Macau. In this extract, 'girls from Suzhou' again become a narrated character in this group's storytelling. Similar to the narrative examples discussed in Chapter 4, in the 'sex stories' genre locality has also emerged, and place-related references were heavily deployed by this group to categorise girls, with attached

gendered meanings. The following narrative shows how locality interacts with gender when this group narrates sex stories. Moreover, I illustrate how a second story (Coates, 2001) that is related to 'tourist city sex' was told by a female speaker, Meimei.

Extract 3: They Are Girls From Jiangnan After All!

[1]Fengli   yeah good-looking
Meimei
Xiaoli was she beautiful?

----

[2]Fengli I am telling you girls from Suzhou their waists are just like water (.) they have a water-like waist
Meimei
Xiaoli   are they soft?

----

[3]Fengli yeah very soft
Meimei   they are 'women from Jiangnan' after all
Xiaoli   then there was a lot of fun I guess

----

[4]Meimei 1 my brother once slept with a Jiangnan girl

       2 ohh he just loved her so much

       3 she is beautiful indeed

       4 but that girl is very weird

       5 she wears a qipao all the time no matter what situation

       6 just don't understand those Jiangnan girls

----

[5]Fengli I am telling you girls from Jiangnan are really awesome
Meimei   ideal candidates
Xiaoli   for one-night stands

----

[6]Fengli
Meimei if he went to Chengdu then the girl also went there it's long term
Xiaoli   right

----

[7]Fengli   he did it well
Meimei
Xiaoli once every three months (..) they played it very cleanly

----

5.3.2.1 'Suzhou girls have a water-like waist': Sexualising Jiangnan girls

At the beginning of this extract, Xiaoli, as a female friend, attempts to evaluate the beauty of a girl that Fengli had sex with in Macau. The interaction between Xiaoli and Fengli in stave 1 shows that

through the practice of narrative in a friendship talk, men and women can collaboratively accomplish a male gaze on women. Soon Fengli shifts the narrative from individual girls to generalising about all girls from Suzhou as a homogenous group. According to Fengli, this recognisable category, 'girls from Suzhou', is the best choice to have sex with because their waists are soft like water (stave 2-3). The gendered generalisation that is based on locality – 'girls from Suzhou' – hence becomes a cultural concept (Silverstein, 2004), characterised by their sexualised bodies, their waists.

Jiangnan is a geographic area in China referring to lands immediately to the south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River. It encompasses the city of Shanghai, and other important cities such as Hangzhou, Nanjing, Ningbo and Suzhou. There has always been a perception that Jiangnan women have a pretty appearance due to its superior natural resources. They have been characterised throughout history with hyper-feminine features such as slim bodies, delicate skin and soft-tone dialect. With this historical awareness, 'girls from Jiangnan' is more than a simple locality-related reference, it shows how gender interacts with locality, and more importantly, from a male voyeur perspective, it refers to women from this region with qualities of sophistication, good appearance and slim but soft body figures.

In the Chinese language, there is a specific phrase to describe the ideal feminine waist – *shuisheyao* (水蛇腰), squishy waist, or literally, 'water snake waist'. Fengli's individual experience and the wider cultural context that generates the phrase 'squishy waist' suggests that men in China perhaps care more about the flexibilities of the body in sexual experience rather than fitness. There is a widespread discourse in China depicting men's desire for the ideal women's body: it 'looks slim but feels squishy'

(*kan qilai shou, mo qilai rou* - 看起来瘦，摸起来肉). It confirms Fengli's emphasis on the 'soft' or 'squishy' feeling when sexualising women's bodies.

This particular standard perhaps constitutes the definition of what is desired for a 'sexy body'. In Pan and Huang's (2013) research, they concluded that before 2010 it seemed that the Chinese people did not have a clear definition of 'sexiness' (*xinggan* - 性感), as it was still a relatively new concept from the West (p.86). It may be difficult to know people's perception on this subject from research methods such as structured interviews or surveys, but perhaps we can get a glimpse about how people talk about their understanding of a 'sexy body' from more private and relaxed informal talk, such as the participants' self-recorded conversations in this linguistic ethnographic research. The audio conversational data was recorded in 2017 and, compared to Pan and Huang's (2013) research, it provides more up-to-date empirical data. It shows that the young generation, such as this friendship group, uses their everyday conversation with friends to share their perceptions on sexiness and attempt to give their own definition about what a sexy body is.

Moreover, I argue that throughout my examination of their narrative-telling events, women discuss their ideal sexualized male body; instead, it is men that have always discussed the sexy and desirable bodies of women. While sociologists may be interested in conclusions about how the concept of 'sexiness' is perceived in Chinese socio-cultural context, my close linguistic analysis indicates that this topic can be talked about but is often based on sexualising women's bodies as the object of sex. In the local narrative-telling event, the women do not equally talk about how a male body could be gazed at, evaluated, and sexualised. Moreover, women such as Meimei and Xiaoli join the male gaze in sexualising women, even though they are females themselves. This is even more evident in how Meimei and Xiaoli respond to Fengli's sexualisation of women from Suzhou (stave 3). Xiaoli

commented that because of the 'water waists' of those girls Fengli must have had 'a lot of fun', while Meimei continues generalising girls from Suzhou with their feminine body characteristics, calling them '*jiangnan nvzi* (江南女子)' – girls from Jiangnan.

5.3.2.2 'My brother once slept with a Jiangnan girl': female gaze on Jiangnan women

The 'cultural concept' of 'girls from Jiangnan' invokes Meimei's cultural knowledge related to this specific group. She narrated a second story (Coates, 2001) in which a Jiangnan girl was also a character in a sex story. Coates (2001: 94) defines 'a second story' as a term that conveys a wide range of stories occurring in sequence, from more loosely connected stories to those with multiple close connections. In general, those stories are often thematically related. So Meimei's narrative about how her brother also has a Jiangnanese lover can be seen as a secondary story (stave 4), as it relates to the theme of sexualised Jiangnan women. Meimei's action of initiating a second story here shows that she would like to contribute to this 'sex experience' narrative activity, however, unlike Fengli's first-person narrative, she chose to narrate a story from her brother. Even though she is a female teller in this narrative-telling event, the sex story is still gendered as a male 'fuck story' (Kiesling, 2003).

In her storytelling, locality interacts more closely with gender and sexuality. The female character in her narrative was first introduced with her locality identity: Jiangnan. Drawing from the wider discourse on 'girls from Jiangnan', Meimei agrees that the girl fits the category of 'women from Jiangnan': 'she is beautiful indeed' (stave 4: 3). However, Meimei immediately evaluates the girl as 'weird' because 'she always wears a qipao all the time' (stave 4-5). To understand Meimei's positioning here, the socio-cultural and gendered meanings attached to qipao should be discussed. Most literature has discussed qipao as a symbol of national identity of China (Sun and Ha, 2020; Tibebert, 2021) as it often represents traditional Chinese aesthetical elements (Wang, 2013). Fashion research

has also shown that more contemporary Chinese fashion designers on the international stage have evolved from the promotion of concrete 'traditional Chinese' symbols to more amorphous ideas about 'the Chinese spirit' (Tsui, 2015).

Wearing qipao is therefore closely linked to identity display in present-day Chinese culture. However, I argue that more discussion on the gendered and more localised meaning of wearing qipao remains opaque. In Yang ChuiChu's (2007) PhD thesis on the use of qipao, she compared female Taiwanese and Chinese participants' perceptions of it, including their individual experiences. For instance, Chinese participants actively wear qipao for cultural events, weddings and social gathering but younger adult Taiwanese regard qipao as traditional dress, showing less inclination to wear it. Despite certain differences in its perception, both groups agree that they would not wear qipao for daily wear as it 'can make the wearer stand out in social occasions, and this can make the wearer uncomfortable' (Yang, 2007: 189). For many women, a traditional and formal qipao is often seen as an occasional dress choice but not considered suitable for everyday occasions. Therefore, Meimei may consider such a girl to be overdressed on everyday occasions.

In addition, I propose another conjecture that wearing qipao would be potentially perceived as doing identity and gender work. Wearing qipao, especially at international occasions, is often linked to Chinese identity display and Chinese culture representation. However, within China, qipao is often connotated with 'Jiangnan women'. Historically, even though qipao has been associated with 'traditional Chinese women's dress', it only emerged in the middle of the 1920s in China as the result of modernism. Qipao, with its most feminine form in the 1930s, was favoured by Chinese women of the emerging middle class in modernising cities, centred in the Jiangnan area. In today's communism

discourse, when searching qipao on various Chinese commercial websites, the results of qipao are often linked to 'Jiangnan'. 'Jiangnan qipao' seems to be a prevailing fashion style or genre of qipao consumption. 'Jiangnan women', in turn, is largely represented as women wearing qipao, which is manifested in Zhang Yimou's film, *The Flowers of War* (2011). More Chinese local scholars started to publicise their research to a wider audience to reinforce the connection between qipao and Jiangnan culture (Liu, 2022).[9] The close link between qipao and 'Jiangnan women' could be drawn by the girl in Meimei's story to wear qipao to imply her Jiangnan identity.

Historical studies on qipao have shown that it has been used and designed strategically by women in Chinese modernisation history (1911-1949) to defy the nation's authority and challenge dominant Western aesthetic standards. Fashioning the qipao became a silent tool for Chinese women to struggle against state regulation of their bodies (Ling, 2011; Cox, 2019). However, a recent trend in public discourse on qipao seems to reinforce the hyper-feminine feature of qipao, diluting its positive rebellious historical role played in Chinese history for women. A male Chinese cultural critic, Zhang Yongwei, referred to as a 'Jiangnan culture scholar', expresses such a view. He explains that through designs of flattering silhouette, the tightly guarded collar, cuffs and lapel, the graceful body of oriental beauty can be accentuated, and that is how qipao shows the 'beauty of subtlety' in Chinese culture (Xinhua, 2020).

Despite various lengths, qipao (even in today's modernised and modified versions) often covers the neck and chest but highlights the waistline of the woman's body. It may suggest that the feminine features of Chinese women's bodies are probably not about the exposure of the upper body (for

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[9] Liu Yu, a scholar who published *The History of Chinese Qipao Culture* (2011), gave a live stream lecture in 2022 titled *The Mutual Becoming of Jiangnan - A Look at Jiangnan Culture from the Shanghainese qipao* that received 160,000 views.

example, many sexy clothes were designed to expose women's shoulders and chest) but the flat belly and a curved waist, for instance, Fengli's emphasis on Jiangnan girls' water-like waists. Wearing qipao may indicate a hyper femininity, as its body-figuring design fits men's fantasy of a desirable and sexualised body. Therefore, Meimei may consider this girl overdid the performance of hyper femininity, considering this narrative is contextually (locally) embedded in a long conversation in which Jiangnan women were first sexualised. Meimei may not like the idea that she displays, performs and exerts this type of femininity all the time (rather than wearing a less hyper-feminine style of leisure clothing). Qipao are therefore perceived as overdressed for Meimei both in terms of occasion and femininity expression.

Another interesting positioning, or the point of telling this story, is that Meimei perhaps wants to use her brother's example to illustrate the casual sex code of 'play it cleanly'. Even though this story is thematically related to 'Jiangnan women' and tourist city sex (e.g., this couple leaves their place of permanent residence to go to Chendu for casual sex), there is a twist in this story: 'love' is involved (stave 2: 4). Meimei's brother's story may seem to fit the category of casual tourist city sex, but it is a stable, regular and long-term sex relationship (stave 6 and 7). As a second story, sharing the connectedness with Fengli's narrative genre in tourist cities casual sex, Meimei's narrative perhaps attempts to pinpoint that even though Fengli may pursue unattached sex, attached sex can also be 'played cleanly'. Meimei's brother back then was in a committed relationship, but he kept this sex private and low profile, without affecting his marriage.

Therefore, Meimei tries to use her storytelling to accommodate her male friends, positioning herself as someone who can share male solidarity, even though she is a woman herself. Kiesling's (2003)

linguistic research shows that American fraternity men often share 'fuck stories' with each other to construct and maintain group cohesion. Meimei takes a similar stance here: as a female friend, rather than criticising the 'fuck story', she joins in the sharing of sex stories by drawing on her brother's story. Similar to those fraternity men in Kiesling's (2003) research, she also evaluates women as sexual objects in the sex stories genre, highlighting women's appearance and dress style. As a woman, she does not position herself as an ally to the female character, the Jiangnan girl, instead, through the construct of the girl's identity with the interplay of locality and femininity, she criticises her by concluding '[I] just do not understand those Jiangnan girls' (stave 4: 6). She excludes and even denigrates her. This is not only because the girl does not comply with the social conformity that Meimei believes to 'overdress' qipao, but also because Meimei wants to show her solidarity with men. Hence, I argue that there may be several layers of indexed meaning to the girl wearing qipao in Meimei's narrative.

Another man that Meimei firmly stands with through the practice of narrative-telling is her brother. Meimei is the only child of her family, and this 'brother' is actually her cousin. Meimei explained in our ethnographic interviews that because they were really close, she called him 'brother'. As a married women, she positions herself as an advocate who believes, practices and supports the sexual code and morality of 'play cleanly'. In her story, even though her brother 'loved the girl so much' (stave 4: 2), he still adhered to the principle of 'playing cleanly'. He met the girl every three months, away from his residence in a tourist city, Chengdu, to maintain this long-term sexual relationship, without affecting his family life.

In our ethnographic interview, Meimei told me more details. Every time her brother went to see this girl, he always brought Meimei with him to Chengdu to ensure the trip did not seem 'suspicious' to his family. With her brother covering the cost for the hotel stay as well as her clothing expenses, Meimei used this trip to Chengdu as a shopping trip to buy clothes for her brother and herself. This confirms what I mentioned in Chapter 4 that members of this group often went to Chengdu for fashion shopping. Meimei jokes that her brother's message of 'let's go to Chengdu to buy some clothes' became a code between them. When her brother needs new clothes, then it means it is time to see that Jiangan girl. Hence, I argue that Meimei shares solidarity with her male friends and her brother, rather than her brother's wife or his Jiangnan lover.

5.3.3.3 'Jiangnan girls are ideal candidates for one-night stands': whom to sleep with and whom to marry

In stave 5, three speakers jointly arrive at the 'coda' of this 'Jiangnan women' sex story, concluding that 'girls from Jiangnan are really awesome' (Fengli), and they are ideal candidates for one-night stands (Meimei and Xiaoli). This reflects that in this group, they have shared standards about who to choose for casual sex and who is more suitable for more serious and committed relationship. Ethnographic interviews can be drawn on here to answer why they agree that Jiangnan women are for casual sex rather than more serious relationships, such as marriage. They need a marriage partner whose past they know very well and have a similar family background, which often indicates social class. As a result, they often take their parents' advice to marry locals, which can be seen as a form of self-protection (Ma and Cheng, 2005). This supports Choi and Peng's (2016) finding that younger generations of male mobile workers give their parents' suggestion more weight when making marital selections. Sexual encounters in the above sex stories, such as Jiangnan girls, may be 'awesome' in their sexual life, but they may not be able to fulfil those requirements, especially in terms of meeting

the men's parents' expectations. Other considerations, such as long-distance romances or unmatching family background, may restrict them developing more serious romantic relationships and marriages.

Sociologists and anthropologists (Choi and Peng, 2016; Wong, 2020) have revealed that many men in China carefully 'select' female candidates for their marriage partners based on various criteria and standards, such as if the girl has a stable job, property, or if she has younger siblings or ill parents to take care of. Here, I want to offer a perspective related to sexuality to enrich this discussion. Fengli once said in our ethnographic interview, 'I would never allow my future wife to give me a blow job!' According to him, 'a blow job is very dirty' and his wife should not do it, but other random girls he sleeps with can. Even though Fengli had numerous sex experiences with many women, he constructs himself as a man who shows more devoted 'respect' to a woman who fills the position of his wife. He may indicate that he would not just position his future wife as a sexual object, but correspondingly, other girls he slept with are positioned as people to be sexually exploited. His female friends clearly understand his stance and comment that Jiangnan girls are awesome, but they are only ideal for one-night stands (stave 5). Their shared stance strengthens their group bonding and reinforces the gender relation and ideologies they believe in.

5.3.3 'Teacher and Student' Sex Narrative

In this section, I continue to explore the genre of sex stories from the same group from their self-recorded conversations. The following extract starts when Fengli begins talking about how he had a really good relationship with his mentor. The concept of 'mentor' (*fudaoyuan* - 辅导员) here is a specific job position in Chinese higher education. In most Chinese universities or colleges, it is very common for a mentor to be assigned responsibility for the everyday administrative work of each class.

In addition, their job description includes organising team-building events for the class groups, such as group dinners or other leisure activities. This mentoring role is often performed either by early career academic staff or administrative staff within departments.

All the members of this group left their hometown – Zhaotong – to attend universities in different cities in China. After graduating from their universities for their undergraduate studies, they came back to their hometown to work. Their university experiences emerged as a recurring theme in their talk. In the following conversation, Fengli first started to narrate the 'good relationship' that he had with his mentor at university, constructing and performing his male attractiveness. However, soon, the floor is shifted to Qingbei, as he has a better story to tell: he actually slept with a mentor. The following extract is a good example of Coates (2003)'s notion of oneupsmanship.

Extract 4: I have a really good relationship with my mentor

[1]Fengli   1 I have a really good relationship with my mentor
            2 she was not married back then
            3 whenever we have group dinner she got drunk
            4 it is always me to drive this woman back home
            5 she is five or six years older than me
            6 she became our mentor immediately after finishing her postgraduate studies

----

[2]Fengli   our mentor? yeah yeah she is beautiful

  Meimei

  Xiaoli   is she beautiful?

  Qingbei

----

[3]Fengli   we have a close relationship

  Meimei   carry on your story

  Xiaoli

  Qingbei

----

[4]Fengli   every time when she was drunk from our group dinner =

  Meimei   = she didn't give you extra attention haha

  Xiaoli

```
     Qingbei
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
 ⁵Fengli    no no no look at her picture (..)  she looks young  right?
  Meimei                                                         yes yes yes
  Xiaoli
  Qingbei
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
 ⁶Fengli
  Meimei                                                   wow hahaha you guys play wildly
  Xiaoli                                      what? hahahaha
  Qingbei   I only slept with a mentor of another class
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
 ⁷Fengli
  Meimei                           yeah what was the story   what was going on
  Xiaoli    you guys really know how to play
  Qingbei
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
 ⁸Fengli
  Meimei                                                      was it true love?
  Xiaoli     tell me how you felt after sleeping with A MENTOR <emphasising tone>
  Qingbei
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
```

At the beginning of the story, Fengli quickly sketches an image of his mentor: a young woman who has just graduated and is only five or six years older than him (stave 1: 5-6). To demonstrate that they had a close relationship, he provides the detail that he often drove her home from their group dinner after she got drunk (stave 1: 3-4). Similar to Meimei, Xiaoli, despite being female, asked Fengli if his mentor was beautiful. With confirmation from Fengli, Meimei encourages him to continue the story (stave 3). Fengli, however, does not offer new information, but instead returns to the detail about driving the mentor home after she got drunk at their group dinner (stave 4).

Meimei may perceive Fengli's story is not very tellable, therefore, she teases that the mentor perhaps was not interested in him, signalled by her laughter (stave 4). Fengli responds to this potentially

'face-threatening' teasing, which may still have a bonding function or intention (Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1996; Pichler, 2006 and 2019), with 'po-faced receipts of teasing' (Drew, 1978). In stave 5, with three 'nos', Fengli rejects the teasing in a serious tone, attempting to claim certain power back by emphasising the young appearance of his mentor. By suggesting that she may be 5-6 years older, but she looks younger and is beautiful, Fengli seems to justify his attraction to her. As part of his 'po-faced receipts', he even shows her picture to Meimei, seeking affirmation that 'she looks young' (stave 5) to end the teasing instance.

Then in stave 6, Qingbei suddenly joins in the conversation, offering a story that he slept with a mentor. It shows that when a male participant engages in the conversation, gender dynamics in storytelling may change. Qingbei's second story here may emerge as the result of competition. Put differently, storytelling might be characterised as male competition over tellability. Qingbei's story may have higher tellability: he actually slept with his mentor, not just drove her home after she got drunk. In the abstract of his story, he said, 'oh, I only slept with the mentor of another class'. The evaluative adverb 'only' may be used for a sarcastic and humorous purpose – compared to Fengli driving his mentor home when she was drunk, Qingbei 'only' slept with a mentor. It may also indicate that he 'only' slept with the mentor of another class, not his own mentor, which may help Qingbei legitimise their sexual relationship as being outside of the direct 'mentor-student' power relation.

5.3.3.1 'So I drove her home': the prelude to taboo sex

Qingbei's abstract of the story immediately provokes the audience's interest (stave 6-8), and in the following talk, he holds the main floor to narrate the story he proposed. However, in the audio, Fengli stays silent while Qingbei tells his story, displaying no engagement, leaving the interaction between Qingbei and their two female friends. It seems that Fengli 'loses' in the competition of 'sleeping with

the mentor' narrative due to the low tellability of his story. As a result, the tellership of sex stories in 'mentor-and-students' genre/category shifted from Fengli to Qingbei. Because of this, Fengli's name is omitted from the stave system transcription of Extracts 5 and 6 below – he is present, but he is not involved in Qingbei's story.

Extract 5: 'so I drove her home'

[7]Meimei	she looks like a foreigner very juicy
Xiaoli	
Qingbei	here have a look

---

[8]Meimei	
Xiaoli	how many years older is she than you
Qingbei	I don't know how old she is

---

[9]Meimei	she is good-looking
Xiaoli	yes yes
Qingbei	yeah she is young she just graduated then

---

[10]Qingbei 1 she is not the mentor of our class
2 she drove an old model of Mercedes-Benz, the C model
3 you know at that time E model had not been released
4 she drove a big car every day coming to the university

---

[11]Meimei	
Xiaoli	she seduced you first or you first?
Qingbei	neither it happened in this way

---

[12]Meimei	
Xiaoli	you seduced each other at the same time haha <loud laughter>
Qingbei	no it also not like that we didn't seduce each other

---

[13]Meimei	was it in Harbin?
Xiaoli	
Qingbei	yeah I pushed her down

---

[14]Qingbei   1 we went out for group dinner together
2 there were several classes
3 our mentor just had her baby so she went back home immediately after the food

4 so that mentor stayed with us for longer

5 after the party (..) well (.) it is time to go home

6 she actually had quite a lot of alcohol

----

¹⁵Meimei

Xiaoli   well you guys really know how to play

Qingbei   she had a lot of alcohol   so she didn't dare to drive

----

¹⁶Qingbei   1 she asked who can drive

2 you know for fuck's sake

3 all of the classes so many people

4 only I have a driving licence

5 my dad didn't allow me to bring my driving licence to there

6 but I brought it with me

7 you know at that time the check for drunk-driving wasn't that serious

8 so I drove her home

To start his narrative, the first thing Qingbei does is to show the audience the picture of the mentor that he slept with. Similar to Fengli's narrative of his sex experience, as their friends, Meimei and Xiaoli here once again exert their 'male gaze' on the mentor. Specifically, her resemblance to a typical white Caucasian ('she looks like a foreigner') and her youth ('juicy' and 'just graduated') are highly appraised as aesthetic criteria for being 'good-looking' (stave 7-9). As exemplified by both Fengli and Qingbei, pictures of the female protagonists are often presented as visual complementary resources in their narrative-telling. Therefore, I argue that in the genre of 'sex stories', the evaluation of the story is to an extent also the evaluation of the female protagonists, especially in relation to their age and appearance. Women, as the characters of the story, are objectified, waiting to be evaluated and judged.

In Qingbei's narrative-telling, he describes in particular that she drives a big Mercedes-Benz car to university every day (stave 10: 4). Qingbei displays his knowledge about car and incorporate it as

background information about the female protagonist. He particularly mentions the detail (stave 10: 2-3) that she was driving the C-model because at that time the E-model was not yet available . It positions himself as a 'car expert' or connoisseur, and at the same time, suggests the upper-middle class status of the mentor. The evaluation of the female protagonists therefore not only comprises their appearance, figure and age but also their social class.

Then Qingbei's storytelling moves to how he earned the opportunity to drive the mentor home. In his narrative, Qingbei emphasised that in the narrative-told world he is the only one who had a driving licence (stave 16: 1-4). His evaluation of the situation, 'for fuck's sake, all the of classes, and so many people' and 'only I have a driving licence', positions himself as standing out from the crowd. This confirms Kiesling's (1997, 2003, 2005) argument that male dominance is not simply about men dominating women; it is as much or even more about men displaying power over other men. The evaluation of the situation allows Qingbei to position and construct himself as a man who holds more power than other men at that big dinner party, displaying his social-class privilege of having a driving licence at a young age. The dominance over other men enables Qingbei to exert his virile masculinity later on, but there is still one more power display here: his rebellion against his father. Even though his father did not allow him to bring the driving licence to Harbin (stave 16: 5), where the story-told narrative happened, he still brought it from Yunnan to Harbin, a city 3,782 km from Kunming, the capital city of Heilongjiang province.

5.3.3.2 'I couldn't help and then approached her to kiss her': narrating non-consensual sex

When preparing the setting of the story 'I slept with my mentor', Qingbei endeavours to narrate how he had the chance to drive the mentor home. It indicates Qingbei's construction of a range of

masculinities, encompassing male dominance over other men, rebellion against his own father, and most importantly, the 'upper-middle class' masculinity. The latter can be manifested through the privilege of having a driving licence and a constant display of car connoisseur identity. Only in this way can he drive a young, good-looking and wealthy girl home, earning him the opportunity to have sex with her. Then the narrative moves to its core: how Qingbei slept with the mentor, and accordingly, the narrative-told world moves to the mentor's home. I transcribe the subsequent narrative below in Extract 6.

Extract 6: So when we went to her home...

[17]Meimei   well you can take the advantage of being drunk

Xiaoli

Qingbei   so we went back to her home

----

[18]Meimei   the moon tonight is beautiful

Xiaoli

Qingbei   then she said   haha she didn't say about moonlight

----

[19]Qingbei   1 at that time our dorm would close the door

2 then she said shall we phone the dorm administrative team

3 I said okay

4 I answered yes to her question

5 and she called many people

6 but couldn't find the person who is responsible for our dorm building

7 she couldn't find that person's phone

8 so she said 'you know I tried but couldn't find the phone number

9 how about you stay here and tomorrow we go to campus together'

10 then I said okay it works for me

11 after that she went to the bathroom to take a shower

12 when she came out

13 gosh you know what

14 WHITE TO SHINEY <suddenly raises his voice> I am telling you

15 North-eastern girls are naturally white

16 I couldn't help it and then approached her to kiss her

17 I was thinking if I got a slap then I just deserve it

18 but there wasn't a slap

----

²⁰Meimei   you just took advantage of her being drunk

Xiaoli   aww-yoo-wei   probably she deliberately didn't find the number

Qingbei

----

²¹Meimei

Xiaoli

Qingbei   no no no those mentors generally would not have phone numbers for male dorms

----

In this extract, the story moves to the core scene of 'back to her home' (stave 17). Similar to other sex stories linked to heavy alcohol consumption, ambiguity and confusion arises (Vaynman et al., 2019: 10-12). Qingbei first positions himself as a well-behaved student, in a seemingly less dominant representation. He constructs himself first as a good student obeying the rules of the university and following the mentor's instruction in this scene. In most Chinese universities, students are required compulsorily to stay in the dormitories provided by the university with strict regulations. For example, Qingbei's university dorms shut their doors at 11:00 pm and students would not be allowed to enter or leave after that time. As the representative of the institution, the mentor was positioned to respect this rule, making efforts to find the contact information of Qingbei's dorm administrator (stave 19: 5). However, after the mentor failed to contact Qingbei's administrator, she suggests he stay at her place (stave 19: 6-9). When narrating this detail, Qingbei gives the mentor 'voice' with a direct quote (stave 19: 8-9). The strategy used here not only highlights the authenticity of the story, but also emphasises that this has been entirely the female mentor's decision, and he just simply follows along (stave 19 :10). It reinforces the positioning he attempted earlier to construct himself as a well-behaved student (stave 19: 3).

Since tave 19, Qingbei narrates the core complicating action of this sex story: how he takes the initiative to bed her (stave 19: 11-18). Cued with his emphasising voice (stave 19: 14), Qingbei

highlights the mentor's body as a desirable object. Scenes reminiscent of pornographic moves were reiterated in his narrative-telling of his sex experience: 'she went to the bathroom to take a shower' and 'when she came out…' (stave 19: 11-12). Qingbei uses the linguistic device of 'gosh you know what' (stave 19: 13) to draw participants' attention to emphasise his following male gaze. The male voyeur in this group's narrative often attributes the sexualised women's body to their place of origin. For example, Fengli links to the 'soft body' and 'water-like waists' of his sex partner to 'women from Jiangnan'. Similarly, Qingbei here indexes the bodily features of 'white' and 'shiny' to the locality of her identity: 'North-eastern girls are naturally white' (stave 19: 15).

I argue that the inclusion of the discursive male gaze of women's sexualised bodies not only allows the sexual experiences to be re-erotised when re-told in a narrative, but more importantly, it may justify men's problematic sex (Vaynman et al., 2019: 12). In Qingbei's narrative, the 'white' and 'shiny' body of the mentor becomes the reason that he initiated sex. Through this narrated action, he attempts to implicitly justify his problematic sexual activity by drawing on 'male sexual drive' discourse (Hyden and McCarthy, 1994: 548). Hyden and McCarthy note that public discourse often excuses men's problematic sex, including rape, with men's socially acceptable 'compelling' and 'uncontrollable' sexual impulses. Even though this 'male sexual discourse' has been recently challenged (Beres, 2013), in this storytelling, Qingbei positions himself to align with this socially acceptable discourse. It is because of the mentor's desirable 'white' and 'shiny' body that he 'could not help' approaching her to 'kiss her' (stave 19: 16). In this way, in his narrative-telling, Qingbei justifies his male sexual desire.

It should be noted that although Qingbei attempts to justify his problematic sex, he still reinforces the positioning that both the mentor and himself are well-behaved. This type of positioning can be

indicated in his interactions with Xiaoli. In stave 20, Xiaoli implies that the mentor might have the number but chose not tell Qingbei.However, Qingbei absolves the mentor of any duplicity in this regard. It suggests that Qingbei shows an inclination to position them with positive images. With the unfolding of Qingbei's storytelling, the ambivalence and possibly non-consensual sexual transgression emerges. His quote (stave 21: 17) – 'I was thinking if I got I slap then I deserve it' – suggests that he is aware that this sexual act was not being performed with the mentor's full permission. He may consider that telling this story of ambiguous sex to his friends is safe (Fjaer, 2012), so he self-reflexively admitted that he 'deserves' the expected slap because his sexual attempt indeed was questionable. His narrative-telling reflects how Qingbei constructs and understands 'consent' in sex. According to him, only aggressive resistance such as a slap can mean 'no'. Qingbei's interpretation of 'consent' relies on culturally dominant values and beliefs (or discourses) that 'no' means 'yes' in the absence of aggressive and frequent expressions of resistance (Ehrlich, 1998: 156-157).

I argue that the Chinese socio-cultural context has fuelled this problematic perception further. The ideal model of femininity in Chinese culture encourages women to be passive and conservative, hence, sexual invitation and rejection from women could be verbally indirect and ambiguous. Even though there have been some changes in terms of the attitudes from both gender in sexuality (see the Jiangnan girl from Fengli's story), it is often men who take the most active role in initiating sex (Pan and Huang, 2013). Xiaoli's teasing (stave 18) well-illustrates this point. In Chinese culture, explicitly discussing sex is often seen as a taboo (Hibbins, 2003), so implicit and metaphorical expressions are often used for sex reference. For instance, the poetic language, 'the moon tonight is beautiful', is often used as an indirect way to express affection, represented in literature and media productions (films, trending short videos). Drawing on this cultural knowledge, Xiaoli jokes that maybe the girl used

'moon tonight is beautiful' as a hint to imply a sexual invitation. Drawing on the dominant discourses of how women express their consent and willingness for sex, Xiaoli's joke in turn also reproduces and regenerates this problematic cultural belief.

Against such a socio-cultural backdrop, Qingbei perceives 'consent' in a way that, if his sexual initiative does not encounter resistance, notably physical aggression such as a slap, then he can legitimate it as 'acceptable'. When discussing consent in this case, I agree with Sanday's (1997: 237) proposal that justice in acquaintance rape trials will only prevail once 'the scrutiny shifts from the complainant… to the defendant's behaviour. Did the defendant obtain consent? Did the defendant know whether the complainant consented?' Qingbei's narrative does not present information about him obtaining consent from the mentor, and the description of the mentor's degree of consent and resistance is also very vague. Qingbei's narrative further reproduces the wider discourses that when taking advantage of a woman being drunk, the worst consequence when initiating problematic/unwanted sex is being slapped. If 'there was no slap', then it is assumed that the target accepts the sexual encounter.

The scrutiny of his narrative can tease out how Qingbei, as a male narrator, uses manipulative strategies to narrate the willingness of women in sexual practices. Similar to the sex stories narrated by Norwegian young men (Vaynman et al., 2019), Qingbei constructs and positions this 'willingness' with narrated actions that favour his stance. The female mentor allowed him to drive her home, she asked him to stay at her place, she went to the bathroom to take a shower (perhaps interpreted by Qingbei and the audience as a sexual invitation), and she did not slap him after his kiss. Even though the 'willingness' is indirect, vague and questionable, women are typically described as willing and active participants (Vaynman et al., 2019: 13). This aligns with what Susan Ehrlich's (1998, 2003) view

that positioning the women as agentive is a common trait in defence of rape. Men's sex storytelling practice may once more reproduce the already blurred boundaries between consent and non-consent in sexual encounters.

In this 'mentor-and-student' power relation, despite how much effort he made in his narrative-telling to position himself as a well-behaved student, when it comes to a sexual encounter, Qingbei exerts his male dominance, male gaze, and questionable sex over the female mentor. Although he may have reflected at that specific moment in the narrative-told world that his sexual behaviour could be considered problematic ('I was thinking if I got a slap then I deserve it'), he still enacts the questionable sex. The ambivalence emerging from Qingbei's story confirms what has been established in recent research, that although 'the dominant model treats sex as either wanted or unwanted, many people report ambivalence about sex' (Peterson and Muehlenhard, 2007: 73). However, I go one step further, by representing it as ambivalent in a first-person storytelling practice where the narrator has more tellership, ambivalent sex potentially masks unwanted sex or even rape.

5.3.3.3 'You just took advantage of her being drunk' - female friends' engagement on sex stories

So far, I have argued that the sex experience in Qingbei's narrative could be potentially considered questionable sex. However, it is perceived as acceptable and fun by the audience, and perhaps even as a proud moment for Qingbei. He narrates this 'mentor-and-student' taboo sex to compete with his male friend, Fengli. In the following analysis, I discuss how this problematic sex is reinforced by the reactions of the audience, Xiaoli and Meimei, and moreover, as a 'fuck story' was often told in a male

homosocial context (Kiesling, 2003, 2005), how the involvement of female friends may bring certain new characteristics to this narrative genre.

I argue that the female friends outweigh their 'friend' identity to shoulder the responsibility to maintain the 'male' bonding in this narrative-telling event. It is first accomplished through their efforts to justify their friend's possibly problematic sexual conduct. This narrative confirms that sex – embarrassing, problematic and unwanted sex especially – is often related to heavy alcohol consumption (Fjaer, 2012; Pedersen, Copes and Sanderberg, 2016; Pedersen, Tutenges and Sandeberg, 2017; Sanderberg et al., 2019; Vaynman et al., 2019). When introducing the setting of this story, Qingbei already mentioned the mentor 'had quite a lot of alcohol' (stave 14: 6), and Meimei teases twice (stave 17 and 20) that 'being drunk' can be 'an advantage' for their (problematic) sex. In showing her engagement with Qingbei's narrative-telling, Meimei's comment on Qingbei's story seems to justify their sex by excusing the intake of alcohol consumption.

I could have the option of translating Meimei's utterance as 'taking advantage of her being drunk', based on this aforementioned information. However, I decided to respect the original and inherent ambiguity rooted in Chinese grammar in Meimei's utterance: *chen zhe he zui* (趁着喝醉). Whether Qingbei had alcohol or not on that night is unknown based on this narrative. Maybe Qingbei also had alcohol, considering this group 'does not allow any opportunity not to drink' (see Chapter 7). Therefore, 'taking advantage of being drunk' can mean that Qingbei can initiate sex while the mentor was suffering temporary amnesia, and it can also be used by Qingbei as an excuse for him having transgressed moral boundaries (Sandberg et al., 2019: 12). Behaving like a male friend would do, Meimei suggests Qingbei 'take advantage of being drunk' to lighten the concern around his

problematic sex, especially the second time when Meimei said such (stave 20) was the response of Qingbei's reflection that he 'deserves a slap'.

Telling sexual experiences from men's drinking stories serves the function of maintaining male bonding, often in all-male conversations (Kiesling, 2005, Flood, 2008, Vaynman et al., 2019). The emphasis of being drunk was often narrated in their stories to create imagination for the audience, making them wonder what could possibly happen in that narrative-told world (Vaynman et al., 2019). However, this strategy is drawn on by Meimei, a female participant in this mixed-gender friendship talk, to maintain the male homosocial dimension. Meimei's engagement in this storytelling positions her as a loyal friend to Qingbei and this male friendship group. She shows that she interprets the story from the perspective of her male friend rather than standing together with the female protagonist. The identity of being friends with a group of men overtakes her female gender identity.

Secondly, the maintenance and construction of gendered group cohesion was achieved through their female friend's humorous comments. Kiesling (2005) argues that 'homosociality' can be manifested with various linguistic aspects, and 'conversational humour' is often believed to sit at the centre of male bonding (Lyman, 1987; Pichler, 2019). Therefore, adding laughter is a common theme in male narratives (Cameron, 1998; Coates, 2001, 2003; Kiesling, 2003). With her humorous comments and laughter embellishing Qingbei's narrative (stave 12, 15, and 18), Xiaoli shows that she has the knowledge and skills of drawing on the repertoire of male narrative in the sex stories genre to maintain the dimension of male homosociality. Sexual storytelling is often narrated in an all-male context for entertainment purposes; Vaynman and colleagues (2019: 9) critically point out that the

humorous effect of the narrative-telling, especially from a male audience, may remove guilt, taboos and/or embarrassment about the episode.

The humorous effect that Xiaoli creates, by deploying the strategy that male audiences use in their sex storytelling, functions in a similar way. For instance, Xiaoli first jokes that the casual sex between Qingbei and the female mentor perhaps developed from their mutual seduction (stave 12). This comment may potentially erase a good discussion on the consent from the mentor as she already labels the problematic sex as 'mutual seduction'. Similarly, she jokes the absent others (Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997) – the mentor in the narrative-told world – may use 'moonlight' (stave 18) as a hint as a sexual invitation. Her humorous comment penetrates and further reinforces the existing problematic dominant discourses and beliefs about women's consent in sex.

Previous studies have shown that teasing in story topics related to hangover and sex is typical, and the targets of teasing often appreciate it and go along with it (Kiesling, 2003; Fjær 2012; Vaynman et al., 2019). However, Qingbei responds to Xiaoli's conversational humour, including teasing, in a serious frame. For instance, in stave 12, he denies in a serious tone with a clear rejection, 'no, it is not like that. We didn't seduce each other'. In stave 18, even though he uses laughter to demonstrate his appreciation of Xiaoli's humour, he still responds to it with a 'po-faced' receipt, denying that 'she didn't say about moonlight' (Drew, 1974). Qingbei's response to conversational humour is different from other all-male groups in which the response to teasing, or high-risk humour, is to sustain and continue the humorous frame, functioning to strengthen the male bonding (Pichler, 2019). Therefore, I argue that on the one hand, female friends are making efforts to gender the storytelling to male homosocial discourses. However, even though they choose a perspective that favours their male

friends and uses strategies and repertoires to gender the conversation as a male bonding talk, Qingbei still does not respond to it as he would behave to his male friends (see how Qingbei acts differently in a teasing episode with more male participants present in Chapter 7).

To sum up Qingbei's narrative in this section, Qingbei may use this storytelling as the exploration of ambiguous sexual experiences as well as to maintain friendship bonds (by sharing a very private part of his life). Through the examination of the four layers of Wortham and Gadsden's (2006) positioning theory, I illustrate that Qingbei positions himself in a complex way both in the story-told and storytelling events. As the narrator of this first-person narrative, on the one hand he positions himself as an obedient individual (e.g. respecting the university's rules and following the mentor's instructions). He constantly justifies this casual sex experience to avoid being perceived as 'taboo' and 'problematic' (e.g. his emphasis on the mentor being from a different school class, rather than his own mentor). On the other hand, this story was told to demonstrate he has had a much closer relationship with a mentor, compared to Fengli's previous story. The competitiveness and dominance are also exhibited within his story in his positioning of the narrated selves, such as his peers and the mentor. He shows his dominance over other male peers (e.g. he is the only one who has the driving license among all the students at the group dinner) and the female mentor (e.g. he initiates his problematic sex even though they are in a 'mentor-student' relationship).

It shows that sex stories provides rich resources for gendered relationships not just between men and women but also between men and other men, allowing the narrator to construct and perform a wide range of masculinities, that is closely related to social class, wealth and power, encompassing virile masculinity and male dominance. Moreover, through their narrative-telling, they can position

themselves in a more favourable way, potentially legitimising transgressive and sometimes problematic sexual behaviour (Kiesling, 2005; Vaynman et al., 2019). Moreover, I argue that the act of telling a story is more powerful than just the narrator's tellership, as an interactive and local event (De Fina and Georgakopolou, 2008, 2012) can provide an opportunity for a reaction. For instance, in Vaynman and colleagues' research (2019: 12-13), one male participant shared a problematic and unwanted sex experience with a male interviewer. Although he may consider it 'accepted' in a male-male context, the reaction of the male interviewer functions in the form of a correction. The male interviewer challenges him by making him take the perspective of a woman. Meimei and Xiaoli could have used their engagement in Qingbei's narrative-telling as an opportunity to discuss his possible sexual transgression and problematic sexual behaviour. However, they chose not to challenge or even correct, instead, they aligned themselves with male solidarity, even though they are women themselves.

5.4 Conclusion

My above analysis illustrates how sexual experience was narrated and re-told as a narrative practice. Similar to their Western counterparts, Chinese men in sex narratives exert male dominance and male gaze, objectifying women and sexualising women's bodies. Considering sex in China has a unique history and socio-cultural context (Pan, 2006; Pan and Huang, 2013; Jeffreys and Yu, 2015), their sexual narrative also demonstrates certain new characteristics, for instance, a prominent interplay between social class and locality. Fengli uses the practice of storytelling to perform his playboy persona and to position himself as a seduction expert. It shows that virile masculinity penetrates dominant discourses of masculinity, and, in the Chinese socio-cultural context, it closely links to

wealth and social class. Women are often seen as men's sexual objects and are constantly evaluated based on their appearance, age and sexualised bodies.

This chapter also shows that sexual stories can be crafted not just in all-male friendship settings but in a mixed-gender friendship setting. When female friends engage in a sexual storytelling practice, they display their active engagement, which can be manifested in their contribution to a second story to exhibit mutual understanding and express connectedness with others (Coates, 2001). To maintain the gendered male bonding, those female friends also join in the evaluation and objectification of female characters in the story-told world. However, unlike their male friends who always tell a first-person narrative from their own sexual experience, women in this group only draw on stories from others. I argue that through their involvement of narrative practice, female friends in a male friendship group also support and even advance hegemonic masculinity in which discourses of male dominance, objecting and manipulating women are reinforced and reproduced.

When narrating their casual sex experiences, problematic sex may be involved. Telling their questionable sex experiences to their trusted friends may function as an opportunity to explore ambiguity and confusion; however, at the same time, their friends may also try to justify and legitimate non-consensual sex. With the linguistic evidence above, I argue that the men's female friends take a strong stance in favour of misogyny to facilitate male bonding, even though they are women themselves. Hence, discourses of male dominance and virile masculinity are not only performed in the narrative construction, but also co-constructed and supported by their female friends in the local and interactive narrative-telling events.

CHAPTER 6: CONVERSATIONAL HUMOUR, IDENTITIES AND MASCULININTIES

6.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters examined how a range of identities and masculinities are constructed from the unfolding of conversational narrative – in this chapter I focus on conversational humour. Unlike canned and predesigned joking units, 'conversational humour', or 'conversational joking', describes the type of humour that emerges organically from everyday talk, involving the participation of everyone present (Coates, 2007: 31). According to Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997), there are three types of conversational humour: teasing, self-teasing, and joking about absent others. Due to limits of space, I only focus on uses of teasing and self-teasing in this chapter, aiming to understand how they serve the purpose of accomplishing masculine identities and male bonding. Recent research has shown that teasing is probably the most complicated and ambiguous type of conversational humour (Sinkeviciute, 2013, 2014; Haugh, 2016). Hence, my other research goal is to reveal the nuances and complexities of how teasing as a linguistic device is occasioned, framed and responded to/interpreted by the recipient (Pawluck, 1989; Haugh, 2010, 2011).

Teasing has been extensively researched in the areas of pragmatics and socio-psychological studies. The former demonstrates the typology of teasing, illustrating how teasing is designed and responded to (Drew, 1987; Hay, 2001; Haugh, 2014), and the latter offers a picture of how teasing and its responses are constrained by social factors (Kotthoff, 2000; Everts, 2003; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp,

2006). In this research, I draw findings from previous research to enrich my analysis and interpretation, but go a step further to explore teasing from the approach of linguistic ethnography. I first understand teasing at a discourse level (Pichler, 2006), revealing how teasing is used as a discursive strategy to allow men in this research to express and negotiate their ideologies in relation to masculinity and their intersectional identities. Secondly, the notion of teasing is characterised by the emphasis on a playful or humorous frame created by the participants. It thus highlights the key factor of 'being there' in order to 'get it', valuing a backdrop of in-group knowledge (Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997: 279). To better understand such in-group knowledge, I bring ethnographic insights into the analysis of teasing. I use multiple sources of data to demonstrate how ethnography can work as a complementary source to understand how participants employ teasing in their conversation to achieve both local and wider contextual goals.

Finally, this research will continue to explore the ambiguous and multi-functional characteristics of teasing (Pichler, 2006, Lytra, 2007). According to Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997), it can function on a continuum from hurtful 'biting' to less challenging 'nipping', and finally, to 'bonding'. As a multi-functional device, teasing is used to fulfil the purpose of socialisation in adult-child interactions (Miller, 1986; Tholander, 2002), working as a verbal means of social control to correct children's mischievous behaviour (Eisenberg, 1986; Schieffelin, 1986). It is also largely used in the interaction among peers as a type of verbal play to enhance bonds (Eder, 1990; 1993, Pichler 2006, 2019; Lytra, 2007). In addition, teasing is used in the workplace to achieve workplace objectives (Holmes and Marra, 2002; Marra, Holmes, and Schnurr, 2006) and as a strategy for the construction of different leadership styles and identities (Schnurr, 2009). In this research, I unpack how teasing can work

multi-functionally in men's friendship talk to strengthen fun-based solidarity, to police gender norms, to negotiate professional identity, and finally to display toughness.

6.2 Theoretical Foundation

Teasing is often defined by its dual nature: challenge and playfulness (Eisenberg, 1986; Albert, 1992; Hay, 2001, Mills and Babrow, 2003). According to Haugh (2014: 77), teasing is defined by these two contradictory components as 'the combination of (ostensible) provocation with (ostensible) playfulness/non-seriousness'. The 'playfulness/joking and derogation/aggression' (Alberts, 1992: 164) of teasing makes it inherently ambiguous (Drew, 1987; Sinkeviciute, 2013). Recent pragmatic research has shown that teasing cannot be simply regarded as a variant form of politeness or impoliteness (Goddard, 2006; Haugh, 2011; Haugh and Bousfield, 2012), and it can occasion a spectrum of evaluations from politeness and impoliteness to mock politeness and mock impoliteness (Sinkeviciute, 2013). Even if it can be face-threatening, teasing can still be understood as a mock impoliteness strategy (Haugh, 2015; Goddard, 2006) to function as a politeness strategy for positive bonding purposes (Haugh and Bousfield, 2012; Sinkevicute, 2013).

In this chapter, I examine three dimensions of teasing to fully understand how teasing works in men's talk: how teasing is occasioned, how it is framed and how it is responded to/interpreted by the recipient(s) (Pawluck, 1989; Haugh, 2011). Therefore, in this theoretical foundation section, I first explain how I use the concept of 'contextualisation cues' (Gumperz, 1982) and ethnographic information to identify teasing episodes and explore the intention of teasing. Following this, I introduce the categories of responses to teasing (Haugh, 2014) that I employ in my analysis. Attempting to understand teasing at a discourse level (Pichler, 2006; 2019, Gong and Ran, 2020), the

final part of this section justifies the need for an emphasis on a discourse perspective when unpacking how teasing, as a multi-functional discursive strategy, allow for identity and gender work.

6.2.1 Identification of Teasing

Even though teasing often opens with a mock challenge or a faux insult, command or threat (Eisenberg, 1986; Eder, 1993), it is different from serious challenges, insults or threats because of its playful frame (Eder, 1993: 13). The idea of a 'play frame' was first proposed by Bateson (1972) to explain that our actions can be framed as 'serious' or as 'play'. In conversational humour, participants of conversation often need to frame their talk as 'humorous' or 'playful' by signalling 'This is play' (Bateson, 1972). The concept of 'frame' is understood by Pichler (2006: 226) as a speaker's own understanding of certain speech activities, such as teasing, discussing and arguing. Based on this stance, teasing is accordingly defined by Pichler (2006: 230) as 'provocative utterances or speech activities which target a participant and are set in a playful/humorous frame'. Hence, identifying teasing to a certain extent entails identifying this playful/fun/humorous framing.

Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997: 279) make it clear that teasing requires conversational joking to be directed at someone who is present. This person, as the addressee or hearer, soon becomes the centre of an interaction in which a humorous frame has been set up. Dynel (2009) highlights the fun aspects of teasing, arguing that the degree of aggression in teasing is gradable and can even be non-existent. Such an emphasis on playfulness is captured in recent terminologies, such as 'jocular abuse' (Hay, 1994, 2002; Goddard, 2016) and 'jocular mockery' (Haugh, 2010, 2014). Haugh (2014) further offers more sub-categories of teasing, which include jocular mockery, playful jousting, goading, baiting, and sexual tease. Jocular mockery is categorised as a specific form of teasing where the speaker diminishes something of relevance to someone present (either self or other), or a third party

who is not co-present, within a non-serious or jocular frame (Haugh, 2010: 2108). Jocular abuse, in contrast, is a specific form of insult where the speaker casts the target into an undesirable category or as having desirable attributes using a conventionally offensive expression within a non-serious or jocular frame (Haugh and Bousfield, 2012: 1108). This shows the wide range of playfully framed mockery/abuse still works on a continuum from biting to bonding (Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997).

Apart from using humorous frames to identify teasing, researchers have also used non-serious/humorous intent as the criterion to define teasing. Both Eisenberg (1986: 183-184) and Albert (1992: 164-165) suggest that teasing is different from serious challenges, insults or threats because 'the teaser did not intend the tease to be understood as true' (Eisenberg, 1986: 184). In a similar vein, Haugh's (2016) corpus-assisted pragmatic research on teasing first focuses on the non-serious claim in teasing. He examines a collection of instances that include expressions such as 'just kidding' or 'only joking' with the belief that 'claiming non-serious intent constitutes a form of locally situated social action' (ibid: 122). To ensure the essential feature of humour - that it is not serious - is being captured by the recipient, teasing also often occurs in a mode of exaggeration, therefore it is not true (Drew, 1987, Lampert and Ervin-Tripp, 2006). Lexical choices and formulaic expressions that indicate exaggeration and the contrasted nature of a certain action can thus signal non-serious intent and playfulness (Drew, 1987: 230-232).

However, as Pichler (2006: 230) points out, the criterion of the speaker's intention can lead to two new problems. First, the speaker's intent can be both serious and playful at the same time, which can be linked to the intrinsically ambiguous nature of teasing given by its dual feature. Despite it being playful, teasing can still be 'biting' and 'nipping' (Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997). It has already been

shown in previous research that teasing can get very close to serious challenges and can even vent real tension (Eisenberg, 1986; Drew, 1987; Eder, 1990; Alberts, 1992). The ambiguity of teasing then leads to the second analytical problem, that is, *if* and *how* the speaker's intent can be analysed. To address this issue, especially the 'how' question, more recent research on teasing uses the concept of 'contextualisation cues' to identify the playful frame of teasing (Pichler, 2006; Lytra, 2007). This research also uses this concept to identify the playfulness of teasing. The term 'contextualisation cue' was coined by John Gumperz (1982) as part of his theory of conversational inference to explain how mutual understanding is achieved in social interaction. 'Contextualisation cues' function as framing devices to signal how utterances, movements or gestures are to be interpreted, therefore those 'cues' can be linguistic, paralinguistic and extralinguistic signs.

I use the following contextualisation cues to help me identify teasing. First, laughter is a salient cue to signal the 'playful' frame (Haugh, 2010; 2014; 2016). Other paralinguistic cues such as the speaker's tone of voice, sudden changes in pitch or rhythm, or the use of a laughing or smiling voice (Holmes and Hay, 1997: 132) can also suggest that the provocative utterances are playful. Thirdly, lexical choices and formulaic expressions that indicate exaggeration and the contrastiveness of the certain action can also signal non-serious intent and playfulness (Drew, 1987: 230-232). Therefore, syntactic and lexical repetition, formulaic expressions (Drew, 1987: 231; Miller, 1986: 203; Lytra, 2007: 385-386) and exaggerated lexis (Drew, 1987: 231) are important contextualisation cues to indicate that a provocation is not serious or true. Finally, the aggressive component of teasing shall not be neglected – this can be identified through cues such as teasing names or nicknames, mocking acts of aggression (Lytra, 2007: 385-386).

As a linguistic ethnographic research project, I use mixed methods and multiple sources of data to support my analysis. In addition to deploying contextualisation cues to identify teasing, I use ethnographic information to offer participants' insights (Goddard, 2017) to better understand their use of teasing. Conversational humour requires 'a play frame created by the participants, with a backdrop of in-group knowledge' (Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997: 277) in specific communities of practice. This 'in-group knowledge', emphasised in teasing research, can be gained through ethnography. It offers non-linguistic background knowledge about speakers and their practises: for instance, the power-relations between subordinates and superiors in a workplace (Schnurr, 2009; Schnurr and Chan, 2011) and a multilingual/cultural background of pupils in a Greek primary school (Lytra, 2007). In taking advantage of ethnographic-style interviews with her young participants, Pichler (2006) gained information about the inter- and intra-group relationships in a London-based working-class Bangladeshi adolescent girl group. It revealed the positions and tensions between individual members in the group and topics and issues that were considered to be sensitive or even taboo. That information further supports her analysis of how teasing functions to release underlying tensions and as a display of respect for other speakers' disinterest in taboo subjects.

Hence, I highlight the importance of ethnographic consideration for teasing research. It offers valuable insights to understand the relationship among participants, the situational and social-cultural context of the speech activity, and more broad socio-cultural knowledge related to their social practices. It allows me, as an analyst, to access the in-group knowledge that shapes the frame and interpretation of teasing. I can, therefore, answer *whether* a provocation is teasing, and *what* is the intention of the teasing, according to the speakers' own perspective. Moreover, ethnographic interviews provide a dialogue for me as an analyst and for my participants to analyse teasing as a collaborative endeavour.

With speakers and participants in the teasing episodes joining in the interpretation of their teasing, we explore whether teasing successfully delivers its implicit message, and if not, why it failed. I use the inclusion of participants' own perspectives to make the ambiguous nature of teasing clearer, especially considering that certain 'insider's humour' can be opaque to an outsider, including an analyst like me. With this clarification, I can further argue how teasing as a discursive strategy can be used to construct participants' gender and identity.

6.2.2 Responses to Teasing

Teasing is a highly interactive action. Teasing often signals inappropriate or deviant (conversational) behaviour, for example, taking things too seriously (Sinkeviciute, 2013, 2014) or exaggerating things (Drew, 1987; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp, 2006). After the teasing instances initiated by a teaser, which often leaves the target in a spotlight for further reaction, we need to explore the reactions to teasing. We must examine how the listeners, including the target and other participants, interpret and challenge the teaser's intent through the analysis of the turns following the teasing utterance. 'This is play' (Bateson, 1987) can be identified not only through the design of teasing, but also through recipients' interpretation and reaction.

Eder (1993: 21) highlights the importance of a playfully framed response in a teasing sequence: 'in order for a teasing activity to remain playful the target of the teasing needs to respond in some non-serious manner'. A playful frame requires participants' efforts to sustain it (Pichler, 2006; 2019; Haugh and Bousfield, 2012). The interaction and development of teasing can be complex, and listeners (including the recipients of the teasing and the audience) often draw on a range of different strategies to respond (Pichler, 2006; Lytra, 2007; Schnurr and Chan, 2011). Often, the 'types of responses are not

mutually exclusive' (Lytra, 2007), and listeners may draw on a combination of strategies when responding to teasing. Previous pragmatic research has offered typological investigation into how recipients respond to teasing (Drew, 1987, Hay, 2001, Haugh, 2014).

Drew (1987) argues that recognising a tease and displaying recognition of it are two separable activities. Recipients may recognise that a tease is initiated without displaying this recognition. Drew (1987: 221-230) particularly looks at the 'po-faced' responses to teasing – how recipients may recognise the humorous remark or proposal of teasing but nevertheless respond seriously to it. Recipients can respond to teasing entirely seriously, with clear rejection or correction, or variously ignore the tease, or they can acknowledge the humour of the tease and then treat the tease seriously by building laughter into the rejection or correction. Laughter can be used to go along with the teasing, indicating that the teasing is actually not being perceived as inappropriate or face-threatening (Drew, 1987; Schnurr and Chan, 2011). When teasing is prompted by a reference to the target's negative identity characteristics, the most common reaction is po-faced (Drew, 1987: 219). These findings suggest that teasing, as an interactional practice, could be a useful tool for examining identity.

In this research, I borrow Haugh's (2014: 85) 'response design' categories as the basis of my analysis of how recipients react differently to teasing. Those categories are:

a) rejection of the mockery (including laughing rejection and po-faced rejection);
b) going along with the mockery (including laughing appreciation and laughing acceptance);
c) elaborating the mockery;
d) reciprocating or countering the mockery; and
e) not verbally attending to the mockery.

6.2.3 Teasing, Discourse and Identity

The previous two sections demonstrated how to identify teasing and its typology of response. In this section I first introduce how I use a discourse perspective to approach teasing, and how teasing can be examined in relation to identity and gender. Prior studies have shown that teasing and its responses are often constrained by social factors. Social distance is the factor that is most mentioned when doing teasing. Close and intimate relationships appear to be a prerequisite for allowing teasing among friends and family members (Everts, 2003; Keltner et al., 2001), whereas for the unacquainted (Haugh, 2011), teasing can be used as an attempt to build interpersonal connections. Other social factors, such as gender expectations (Hay, 1994, 2002; Kotthoff, 2000; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp, 2006), power relations (Schnurr, 2009; Schnurr and Chan, 2011) and culture (Lampert and Ervin-Tripp, 2006; Schnurr and Chan, 2011) are oft-mentioned factors that impact the occasion, development and response to teasing. Those studies have established a foundation for understanding teasing, however, I argue that they often lack an emphasis on the discursive constraints and construction of teasing.

Understanding teasing in regard to its socially constructed nature (Pawluk, 1989), this chapter raises research on teasing to a discourse level (Pichler, 2006; 2019; Gong and Ran, 2020). I understand discourse as ideology (or belief). Hence, '[d]iscourses are the site for the articulation and negotiation of ideologies' (Van Dijk, 1995; 1998), and accordingly in this research, I reveal how teasing as discourses allow both teasers and their audience to express and negotiate their gender ideologies. Ideologies, according to Van Dijk (1998: 308), are 'the basic social presentations of groups also relate to discourse, and other forms of interaction'. Through the expression and negotiation of their ideologies, the local discourses of their masculine identity are displayed, put to use, practised, produced, reproduced and challenged (ibid.). Drawing the notion of 'indirect indexicality' (Ochs,

1992), Pichler (2006) explains how teasing can be examined from the micro, through local language use, to the macro, in socio-cultural identities. Teasing can first signal a range of 'stances' (such as playfulness, toughness, and even politeness) and accomplish a diverse range of social actions (such as bonding), and these stances and actions only indirectly index social identities, indirectly establishing a link to categories like class, gender and ethnicity.

In her research on British working-class Bangladeshi adolescent girls, Pichler (2006) shows that teasing not only helps to accomplish communication goals, such as releasing tension about real issues and displaying respect for other speakers' dislike for taboo subjects, but also allows these girls to negotiate various competing discourses and in this way to index a range of socio-cultural identities. Teasing therefore is taken as a discursive strategy in the construction and negotiation of social identities, drawn from the girls' expectations and beliefs in relation to gender, ethnicity and social class. It functions as a versatile tool to highlight and negotiate membership to a specific class and to culture-related groups (Pichler, 2006: 228). In her later research, she demonstrates how working-class young men from South London use high-risk humour and competitive verbal humour (e.g. about fashion choices). Teasing works in a similar way as a social control to police socio-cultural knowledge and norms, which further serves the construction of authentic (racialised and classed) identities (Pichler, 2019).

Teasing as a multi-functional device related to the notion of identity is also found in the workplace, embedded in power relations. It assists the speaker to achieve business goals and workplace objectives (Marra et al., 2006; Schnurr, 2009), and functions as a valuable tool for superiors to enact solidarity and communicate potentially face-threatening messages at the same time (Schnurr, 2009;

Holmes, 2009). Schnurr's (2009) research has demonstrated that, drawn from a shared repertoire of linguistic norms, participants at a particular workplace in New Zealand used different styles of teasing (i.e. 'biting', 'nipping' and 'bonding' teasing styles) to construct different leader styles/identities. When interpreting how teasing connects with the notion of identity, Schnurr (2009) employs a non-essentialist and post-structuralist approach. For example, in her analysis, a subordinate can use a nipping style of teasing comment to partially display her power by criticising her male boss's behaviour, and therefore, constructing herself as his superior.

Even though recent pragmatic research has started to focus on the cultural constraints of teasing, it still largely remains in the scope of English variants (Haugh and Bousfield, 2012; Sinkeviciute, 2013, 2014; Goddard, 2017). It has been advocated that more cultural variations are needed to understand teasing (Lampert and Ervin-Tripp, 2006; Haugh and Bousifield, 2012). In a comparative study on teasing in the workplace in Schnurr and Chan's (2011) study, subordinates in a workplace in Hong Kong rarely talked back or teased their boss after being the target of teasing, whereas subordinates in New Zealand used a nipping style of teasing to tease their boss. According to them, it can be explained with cultural consideration that Asian culture tends to put a strong emphasis on maintaining hierarchical relationships and adhering to role expectations, while in Anglo-Saxon English-speaking countries, power relations are more equal, and appropriate behaviour is not so closely tied to specific roles.

In this chapter, I do not attempt to offer a culturally comparative analysis on the cross-cultural use of teasing, although I am aware that there is very little research dedicated to teasing in Chinese language data. Apart from Gong and Ran's (2020) research on how a host's institutional identities are

constructed and performed through teasing in Chinese TV shows, there is no available data in Chinese to investigate the usage of teasing in male socialisation in a more private setting by Chinese men. I agree with the argument that taking cultural variants into consideration not only means macro and cultural-social factors, but also the micro-level, specific norms that characterise interlocutor's specific Communities of Practice (Schnurr and Chan, 2011; Pichler, 2006; 2019). After all, a speaker's humour can be influenced not merely by the sex, age, and ethnic background of group members, but also by the speaker's sense of sameness and difference with others (Ervin-Tripp and Lampert, 2009). Therefore the primary goal in this chapter is to explore how Chinese male participants in my research use teasing to do gender and identity work, and what male identities and masculinities are emergent, constructed and negotiated through the development and responses of teasing.

6.3 Analysis

My research resonates with Pichler's (2006) argument that teasing is an extremely versatile tool to not only strengthen friendship bonding and manage local interpersonal identities (Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997) but also allows speakers to indirectly index a range of socio-cultural identities. I identified teasing instances from the spontaneous self-recorded conversations from my participants when they were having dinner or late-night drinks with their close friends. Through the examination of those teasing episodes, I use the following analysis section to argue that teasing functions to strengthen fun-based solidarity, police gender norms, negotiate professional identities, and display toughness.

6.3.1 Teasing for Fun-based Solidarity

Teasing functions around strengthening bonding have been researched in girls' friendship groups (Eder, 1993; Pichler, 2006), university students' socialisation (Lampert and Ervin-Tripp, 2006) and

mateship (Sinkeviciute, 2014). Research on teasing also shows that teasing is often used as a linguistic strategy in male socialisation (Eder, 1990; Kowalski, 2003; Haugh and Bousfield, 2012). Males frequently tease each other (Kowalski, 2003), and therefore teasing and verbal jibes can be seen as part of male socialisation (Eder, 1990). Kowalski (2003: 18) asserts that '[b]efore people can tease others effectively, they need to know some things about them. Thus the act of teasing conveys some degree of intimacy between the teaser and the target'. The two male friendship groups in my research have established their friendship over ten years, and my data shows that teasing as a discursive strategy is often employed in their talk. In this analysis section, I demonstrate the primary function of teasing: to strengthen fun-based solidarity.

This section begins with an excerpt in which key members of Group 1 share their embarrassing childhood experiences. They were classmates back in their secondary school when they were 12 years old. Mingqing and Leilei jointly tease Fengli by bringing up his previous school time. Their conversation was recorded over a dinner where key members Mingqing, Leilei, Fengli and Leitong were present.

Extract 1: He wrote a love letter to the ugliest girl in our class

```
¹Leilei                                                                        = haha <laughter>
 Mingqing    our foreign teacher was so angry and left school because of this big brother <laughing tone>
 Fengli
 Leitong                                                                       = haha <laughter>
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
²Leilei                              = yeah it is true
 Mingqing              ⌜isn't it true <rising and questioning tone>
 Fengli      don't exaggera-⌐ te <emphasising tone>
 Leitong                                                    haha < laughter>
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
³Leilei                                                     hahaha <loud laughter>
 Mingqing    you asked him to stand up to speak Mandarin=
 Fengli                                        = don't exaggerate okay-yyyy? <drawling tone>
```

| Leitong | | = woo-hoo \<laughing tone> |

---

[4]Leilei	at that time (.) he wrote love letters to the ug-LIEST girl in our class=	
Mingqing		=hahaha \<loud laughter>
Fengli		=hahaha \<loud laughter>
Leitong		=hahaha \<loud laughter>

---

[5]Leilei	and they also exchanged notes in the class \<teasing tones>	
Mingqing		hahaha \<loud laughter>
Fengli		hahaha \<loud laughter>
Leitong		hahaha \<loud laughter>

---

[6]Leilei	these two sang songs TOGETHER \<emphasising voice>	
Mingqing		hahaha \<loud laughter>
Fengli		hahaha \<loud laughter>
Leitong		hahaha \<loud laughter>

In Group 1's dinner talk, embarrassing childhood was often a recurring topic. In their dinner talk, drawing on memories of shared events, they used teasing and humorous stories from the 'old glorious time' to maintain their friendship. For example, in their other recording, they narrated how Fengli made money by sharing information about porn websites with his classmates; how they strategically skipped class together to play computer games at Internet bars; and how they collectively fooled Leilei's father to steal his cigarettes to smoke after school. The above episode of teasing mirrors what Haugh and Bousfield (2012) found in British English datasets whereby participants' embarrassing childhood activities, events and (mis)adventures were often the popular and discernible targets of jocular mockery and abuse. In their teasing, Fengli's friends collaboratively construct Fengli's past experiences in school. It indicates that the design of teasing in a male friendship is often based on their high and interdependent levels of shared experience and memory of the past activities (Haugh and Bousfield, 2011).

When Leilei jocularly mocks him that he had romantic interactions with the ugliest girl in their class, Fengli displays his loud laughter to go along with this teasing (stave 4, 5 and 6). Leilei engages in 'creative remembering' of childhood activities and youthful personas in formulating instances of jocular mockery and abuse (Haugh and Bousfield, 2012: 1111), providing details of Fengli 'wrote love letters' (stave 4), and they 'exchanged notes in the class' (stave 5), and 'sang songs together' (stave 6). After years after school, members of this group do not have contact with that girl anymore, thus perhaps, this teasing is safe, not as 'biting' as the previous one. The funniness of this teasing is based on the denigration of women and on an attach on Fengli's sense of 'taste'. Through their teasing, sexist and misogynist discourses are produced and reinforced, and chauvinist masculinity is performed and constructed. Hence, teasing is largely employed to strengthen male bonding, by highlighting shared values, practices and even memories. This means that the teasing is a central resource for the construction of hegemonic masculinity, both with respect to its (face-threatening, verbally competitive) linguistic style, and because it offers easy access to hegemonic discourses and identities.

Below, I further argue how jocular mockery can be gendered as a male-exclusive social interaction, excluding female friends in the same speech activity. The following extract was transcribed from a dinner talk by the same friendship group, but two of their female friends, Meimei and Xiaoli, were also present. One member of this group, Qingbei, left the dinner early to join another party in a nightclub that some of their mutual friends were attending. The following conversation starts when Qingbei enters the room, and participants at the dinner all express their surprise at his return. Instead of allowing Qingbei to seriously explain why he came back, Qingbei's close friends, Mingqing and Fengli, target him as the recipient of their teasing.

Extract 2: I was scared!

[1]Mingqing   YO \<rising tone\> my big brother (.) HOW COME you are coming back now:::?
    Leilei   hahaha
    Fengli   haha
    Qingbei   haha
    Xiaoli   oh you are back
    Meimei

----

[2]Mingqing   hahaha \<loud laughter\>
    Leilei   hahaha
    Fengli   so what is going on? you didn't dare to go to the club ALONE?
    Qingbei
    Xiaoli
    Meimei

----

[3]Mingqing   haha
    Leilei   haha   haha
    Fengli   they abandoned you\<emphasising tone\> haha \<loud laughter\>
    Qingbei   I didn't dare I didn't dare I was scared \< intimidated voice\>
    Xiaoli
    Meimei

----

[4]Mingqing
    Leilei   the only person they were waiting for is YOU
    Fengli
    Qingbei
    Xiaoli   they * were waiting for you ⌈ Mawei and others
    Meimei   ∟yeah they are already there
    *were/are waiting [tense is not clear in Chinese]

----

[5]Mingqing   (xxxxxx)
    Leilei
    Fengli
    Qingbei
    Xiaoli   if you leave NOW maybe you will still be there⌈at the right time
    Meimei   ∟there might be a traffic jam

----

[6]Mingqing   yoo-yee you can't
    Leilei   NO-YO you can't be \<laughing tone\>
    Fengli   betray us? \<questioning tone\>
    Qingbei   I'll betray you guys then
    Xiaoli

At the beginning of this extract, Mingqing uses an addressing term, 'big brother' (dage - 大哥) to function as a framing device, signalling that his utterance is teasing (Lytra, 2007). Even before his follow-up utterance, this addressing term already gives rise to a round of laughter from the audience (stave 1). 'Big brother' (dage - 大哥), as a context-dependent addressing term, is often deployed in this group to address each other. It functions as a contextualisation cue to frame speech activities as variously complimenting, jocular mocking, boasting, goading, and playful jousting. It becomes their shared knowledge in this group, and therefore Fengli, Leilei, and Qingbei exhibit their recognition of this playful intention with their laughter (stave 1). With the humorous frame established, in stave 2 Fengli makes the mockery more explicit, challenging Qingbei by saying that he 'didn't dare to go to the club alone'.

The ethnographic information that I have obtained reveals the reason why Qingbei's return to the restaurant was a matter to be jocularly mocked. Qingbei was supposed to go to a nightclub, a place 'full of sexual opportunities' (*yanyu* - 艳遇), quoting from their ethnographic interviews. Their nightlife events often include late-night spas, erotic massages, nightclubs, and sex-worker visits, and they are male-exclusive. Even though I had joined their dinners, KTV birthday parties, and camping barbecues, which included some of their female friends or female partners, I rarely had an opportunity to participate in their male-exclusive social activities on my first two field trips. With more rapport built after two field-trip visits, finally, I had a chance to go to a nightclub with them as a companion of Mingqing's sister in 2019.

Nightclubs have been described as 'affectively charged' (Duff, 2008). I argue that in addition to providing a socio-spatial context to fire up desires and facilitate sexual encounters (Heinskou, 2015), it is also a premier site for male bonding activities. There are often two floors in nightclubs. The first floor was designed for dancing where a DJ and two bars were located. Mingqing told me that they rarely go to the first-floor, as it was 'for the wild and young people to come here for dance', whereas they often go to second floor to drink. This group positions themselves as a different group from those young men and women on the first floor (who are potentially not as wealthy as them). On the night I went, they booked a premier booth on the second floor. This suggests their upper-middle-class identity because those booths often require a significant minimum spend. Several bottles of strong distilled liquor were ordered to the table, and their night began. That night involved aggressive and binge drinking.

Places in the night-time economy are not a 'passive backdrop'; instead, the settings, interiors, persons, events and overall mood lead up to and frame the sexual interaction (Pedersen et al., 2017: 162). Leilei told me a very interesting interior design story about this club. There are more toilets on the second floor, which can potentially facilitate the relatively rich men's 'girl hunt' game (Grazian, 2008). Girls know that men from booths perhaps possess more wealth, and therefore, Leilei said, 'young girls from the first floor often approach us for flirting'. This may end in casual sex, such as one-night stands. Unlike private rooms in most restaurants which prioritise privacy, nightclubs deliberately design their interiors to create spatial connections for casual sex seekers. Moreover, the nightclub's loud music and dark lights make people get very physically close when talking. Therefore, the men from this group took the opportunities of physical intimacy that this socio-spatial context brought to flirt, seduce, and

initiate casual sex. Fengli told me that he often brought his potential 'booty call' friend to this club before they headed to a hotel for casual sex.

With this backdrop of knowledge, Fengli's jocular mockery (stave 2) treats Qingbei's return as a symbol of being a coward – he is not brave enough to go to the club on his own. 'Going to the club' indexes a series of activities such as aggressive drinking, flirting, girl hunting, and casual sex. The fact that Qingbei 'didn't dare to go to the club' alludes to an assumption that he was afraid to enter the sexual battlefield of the nightclub. Qingbei's return to the restaurant is interpreted as a failure to enact virile masculinity, which lies at the core of the hegemonic model of masculinity in this group. Therefore 'big brother' can be addressed with the hint of sarcastic insult and jocular mockery. The constant laughter in this episode surrounds the playfulness of mockery.

As a response, Qingbei receives this mockery with the reciprocation of 'I didn't dare' and 'I was scared' to go along with the teasing (stave 3). In addition, he adds a more deliberate performance in stave 6, saying 'then I will betray you!' to further sustain the teasing frame. As the target of jocular mockery, Qingbei perpetuates this jocular frame by using self-teasing/self-degrading humour to respond to teasing. As a response to Qingbei's self-directed teasing, all participants (stave 3) go along with his laughter and elaborate on it to further sustain the humour/playful frame of this exchange. Fengli further adds one more round of teasing, positioning Qingbei as someone who is abandoned by his friends in a 'men's only' activity. It confirms Haugh's (2014: 86) finding that most responses to self-directed jocular mocking were that participants either went along with it (52% of responses) or elaborated on it (18.5%), with the latter simultaneously constituting an instance of other-directed jocular mockery occasioned by the prior self-directed jocular mockery.

Despite the playful verbal competition throughout this teasing episode, the female friends Xiaoli and Meimei were always in a serious frame. First, they did not engage in Qingbei's self-teasing. Secondly, they failed to interpret 'they abandoned you' as teasing with its exaggerated or untrue intention (Drew, 1978). The female friends attempted to correct the teasing to explain that someone in the pub was still waiting for Qingbei (stave 4). They may have interpreted the potentially nipping teasing as 'non-polite' (Kotthoff, 1996: 312) so they attempted to steer the frame to a serious discussion. Therefore, they suggest he return to the club with an entreaty about the traffic situation (stave 5). It indicates that even though Meimei and Xiaoli are the men's friends, they may not be fully involved in the teasing that 'going to the club' indexes. Such indexicality (Silverstein, 2004) is based on this group's male-exclusive late-night activities, hence, due to the lack of male exclusive group knowledge, they could not identify and sustain men's teasing cooperatively and creatively as other men do.

In this teasing episode, there are two frames at work in the above conversation: the female friends' 'serious discussion' frame and the male friends' teasing frame. It alludes to the Kotthoff (1996: 301) that 'humour can affirm not only social convergence, but also divergence... Humour can strengthen group solidarity...but it can also exclude people'. Hence, teasing is gendered as a male discursive practice in a heterosocial setting, leaving the female friends out of the male-bonding dimension. It shows that combative humour is central to the construction of masculine identities, both with its style as well as the content (discourse level). Their joking seems to be a particular way of establishing intimacy between men and at the same time excluding women.

Therefore, I conclude that teasing acts as a strategy for 'male socialisation' (Kowalski, 2003) and strengthens male fun-based solidarity. Moreover, it develops this male friendship group's own distinctive 'culture' (Holmes and Marra, 2002: 1707) in which both conversational humour and the dimension of male homosociality play an important role. The interpretation of the teasing in this extract reveals that the micro situational humour (Qingbei's return to a restaurant) is connected to larger-scale sociocultural meaning (Silverstein, 2003: 193) of how a man can be potentially judged and challenged in relation to bravery and virile masculinity. Therefore, teasing functions as social control (Eisenberg, 1986) among a male peer group (Pichler, 2019) to police the enactment of such hegemonic models of masculinity as their group norms.

6.3.2 Teasing as A Display of Toughness

Teasing has the dual nature of involving 'playfulness/joking and derogation/aggression' at the same time. In addition to reinforcing fun-based solidarity, I argue that teasing can also be used to display toughness, which can be further used to construct tough masculinity. Linguistic research has shown that toughness is manifested with different discursive constructs in various socio-cultural contexts (Lawson, 2013, 2015). In humour research on male socialisation (Haugh and Bousfield 2012), a lack of financial independence and a subsequent over-dependence on one's parents is equal to lacking 'toughness', and therefore, it can be jocularly mocked. However, as Haugh and Bousfield (2012) point out, this topic only occurs in the Australian context, not in Northern England. My own data in section 3.3 shows that this also may not be the case in Chinese peri-urban cities. In the local discourse, it is socially acceptable for a man to live with his parents even if he is in a relationship, thus it probably would not be a target for jocular mockery. Therefore, in this section, I shall show how toughness is

manifested in men's high risk humour, such as jocular insults and jocular abuse (Hay, 2002; Haugh, 2016).

To illustrate this point, I use the following extract from Group 2 when most of the participants in Group 2, Wenxin, Rui, Zitan and Luzi, were drunk in a pub. In this extract, Wenxin first asked the other group members to talk to him so he could be less drunk. Rui then initiates a jocular abuse (Hay, 1994; 2002; Goddard, 2016; Haugh, 2016), which soon functions as a prologue to invoke more subsequent teasing. The following conversation shows that jocular insults are uttered in a form of verbal insult as 'a remark that puts someone down, or ascribes a negative characteristic to them' (Hay, 2002: 20), but the underlying jocular frame (Goddard, 2016; Haugh, 2016) makes it contrast to genuine insults. Hence, Hay (2002: 20) defines Jocular abuse as instances where 'the speaker jokingly insults a member of the audience'.

Extract 3: You're all TRASH!

¹Wenxin   talk to me (.) so I can be so– ⌈ber <drunk voice>
Rui   ⌞ little <u>xin:::</u><dragging tone>(.) you're a FUCKING IDIOT
Zitan
Luzi

----

²Wenxin   haha⌈haha! <laughing loudly>
Rui   ⌞hahaha
Zitan   hahaha
Luzi   <u>hia:hia:hia</u> <exaggerated laughter>

----

³Wenxin   I don't wanna say but all of you here are TRA::SH:::
Rui
Zitan
Luzi

----

⁴Wenxin
Rui

Zitan   YOU are right (.) they are all TRA::⌈SH::

Luzi   ⌊WH:aat did you say <threatening tone>

----

[5]Wenxin   (xxxxx) indeed everyone

Rui

Zitan

Luzi   are you SAY::ing that everyone HERE is TRASH? <loud voice>

----

[6]Wenxin   is REAL TRASH = <sharp and emphasising tone>

Rui

Zitan

Luzi   = are you saying that everyone is TRA:SH?

----

[7]Wenxin   ⌈ WHAT <rising tone>

Rui   beat HI::M (..) you will WIN-N-N ⌊ hahaha

Zitan

Luzi

----

[8]Wenxin   do you wanna drink more? <slower and quiet voice>

Rui

Zitan

Luzi   I am TRA::::SH::: <imitating drunk voice>

----

[9]Wenxin

Rui   let me ask you(.) how much do you wanna⌈drink

Zitan   ⌊all of you should have already GIVEN IN fighting your FATE

Luzi

----

[10]Wenxin

Rui

Zitan

Luzi   let's <u>blow away</u> this bottle   yea:aah <cheerful tone>

Rui's jocular abuse opens with a nickname (Lytra, 2007), 'little Xin', followed by 'a conventionally offensive expression' that links to an undesirable category or attribute (Haugh and Bousfield, 2012: 1108) – 'you are a fucking idiot'. Prior research has shown that addressing close friends with denigrating terms and descriptions strengthens closeness and friendship (Eder, 1990, 1993; Everts,

2003). The laughter from all participants present (stave 2) indicates that Rui's insult can be interpreted as jocular abuse. The friendly and playful frame of the interaction dislocates those provocations from real insults. As the recipient of jocular abuse, Wenxin uses his laughter (stave 2) to stay cool under attack (Lee, 2009), indicating that the humorous and playful aspect of this verbal play has been accomplished. In addition to using laughter to display recognition and appreciation of its playfulness, in stave 3, Wenxin penetrates the jocular abuse frame with his own jocular insults. Wenxin uses the plural pronoun 'you' to address everyone present as 'trash'. This instance of jocular abuse exploits the strategy of using the pronoun 'I' and 'you' to personalise (Culpeper, 1996: 358; see also Bousfield, 2008: 115) the other members present with negative attributes.

Being framed in the additional 'drunk talk', this jocular abuse maintains its non-serious intention and frame, and the audience all react to it with laughter, with no offence taken. Even though Wenxin's jocular abuse ('all of you here are trash') targets everyone present as the recipients of his teasing, Zitan dodges this bullet (stave 4). He aligns himself with Wenxin as a co-teaser in this episode (see also his jocular abuse in stave 9). He first uses an affirmative response ('you are right') to get along with this 'biting' high risk humour, and then he reciprocates the teasing by recycling the insulting theme: 'trash'. This sustains and elaborates the teasing frame, and the use of the pronoun 'they' in this reciprocation successfully excludes himself from the target. Therefore, through creatively and strategically responding to the teasing with reciprocation, Zitan takes a deputy role to reiterate Wenxin's jocular abuse. Luzi, in contrast, clearly sees himself as the recipient of the jocular abuse. He receipts this abuse with a po-faced rejection, questioning it with a threatening tone (stave 4).

Soon, the teasing interaction becomes a retort, a game-like or competitive quality akin to the contest-like elements (Haugh and Bousifield, 2012: 1111), between Luzi and Wenxin (staves 5 and 6). This kind of playful jousting (Haugh, 2015), or verbal duelling, is often practised in friendship groups for fun-based solidarity (Labov, 1978; Goodwin, 1984; Eder, 1990; 1992). For instance, this verbal competition helps London-based Bangladeshi girls develop communicative self-defence skills and express closeness and friendship. Furthermore, the display of verbal toughness constitutes their claim to and construction of their working-class-ness, which is often drawn from the stereotypical tough femininity that is closely linked to the working-class (Pichler, 2006: 237-241).

In men's talk, this type of verbal duelling also functions to strengthen fun-based solidarity as well as toughness. After the verbal duelling in staves 4-5 between Luzi and Wenxin, in stave 7 Rui joins this playful jousting. Like Zitan, Rui also does not see himself as the recipient of Wenxin and Zidan's joint jocular insult. As his response, he comments on the teasing instances by suggesting Luzi beat Wenxin to win this verbal competition. This comment acknowledges the competitive nature of verbal jousting in a jocular abuse frame. Moreover, I argue that it underlines the aggression and competitiveness that are often seen as the core attributes of tough masculinity. It shows that verbal toughness and contestive humour is part of male solidarity (Pichler, 2019) and the active construction of tough masculinity (Lee, 2009). As a result, in this extract, only Luzi sees himself as the target of Wenxin's teasing, even though he clearly said that 'all of you here is trash'.

With the support of ethnographic information, I extend research on teasing and its association with toughness to understand the social aspects of this display of verbal toughness. This group of men agrees that their 'drunk talk' is a particular conversational genre that requires much 'performance', in

which a lot of jocular abuse can be involved. Rui suggested that '*when we had alcohol, we scream; we swear; we curse; we frankly insult each other. It is a play, but sometimes, because we had alcohol, we were able to say some aggressive but also true words*'. This extract was recorded in 2017, when most of this group had just graduated and begun job hunting. In other recordings around the same time, Wenxin mentioned that he failed a job interview, and Rui was under huge stress preparing for a qualification exam required by his job application. Rui reflected in our ethnographic interview, '*we were in deep self-doubt, and we confessed to each other that we all felt trashy*'. Their competitive verbal play and jocular abuse hence is largely just a drunken game, and in this specific context, to vent their pressure and anxiety.

All participants in this group agree that this aggressive, even 'biting' jocular abuse still serves the purpose of building solidarity and closeness (Sinkeviciute and Dynel, 2017: 2). There is no doubt that male speakers express male solidarity through the use of swearing, ritual insults and competitive banter (Cameron, 1997; Labov, 1992; Kuiper, 1998; Pichler, 2016, 2019). With this backdrop of in-group knowledge, I note that verbal toughness is a feature of drunk talk; moreover, it can be a strategy to balance their self-disclosure. The aggression of jocular abuse, perhaps, is their 'masculine' or 'tough' way of doing gendered male self-disclosure talk. Verbal toughness is how they vent their stress from their real-life struggles, such as job-hunting. The play of 'drunk talk' facilitates such delivery. Even though they call each other trash to comment on their failure in job hunting, as the data from Chapter 7 show, they also helped each other find jobs to get through this difficult time. Therefore, the verbal play of competitive humour is complementary to other friendship practises that function as fun-based solidarity.

6.3.3 Teasing to Negotiate Professional Identities

In Chapter 4, I demonstrate how male participants frequently use conversational narratives, particularly those that relate to their work experiences, to create and enact their intersectional male middle-class identities. The emphasis on their professional identities also emerges from their conversational humour. In this section, I illustrate how the construction and negotiation of professional identities is accomplished through teasing. The following extract is taken from an evening dinner conversation in which the key members of Group 2, Mingqing, Fengli, Leilei and Xingkun, were present. Members of this friendship group often bring new acquaintances to their friends to extend their social network. At the time the dinner was recorded in 2017, Xingkun had just joined as a new member of this established male friendship group. Soon, Xingkun became a regular participant in this group's other social practices. The following transcribed excerpt occurred after Xingkun told a story about his work experiences as a government officer tackling an illegal tobacco trading case. Soon, the conversational focus shifts to Mingqing because he works as an executive officer in a state-owned tobacco corporation.

Extract 4: Civilised Law Enforcement

[1] Mingqing
   Xingkun   haha <mild laughter>
   Fengli   yeah you know he was dealing with those tobacco dealers
   Leilei   hahaha <loud laughter>

----

[2] Mingqing   ha <a sharp scoff>
   Xingkun
   Fengli   you are a tobacco dealer
   Leilei   haha also tobacco farmer

----

[3] Mingqing   we specialise in curbing illegal actions and crime in tobacco industry
   Xingkun   haha <mild laughter>
   Fengli   yo <a rising and mocking tone>

Leilei   hahaha <loud laugher>

----

[4]Mingqing   STOP exaggerating, okay <emphasising>

Xingkun   hahaha <loud laughter>

Fengli   you grab their carrying pole and beat them right? <rising tone>

Leilei   hahaha <loud laughter>

----

[5]Mingqing   hahaha <mild laughter>

Xingkun   hahaha <mild laughter>

Fengli   hahaha <loud laughter>

Leilei   you eat farmers' food (.) take farmers' stuff

----

[6]Mingqing   we were enforcing the law in a civilised way <serious tone> you know <laughing voice>

Xingkun   haha enforcing the law in a civilised way?

Fengli

Leilei   hahaha <laughter>

----

[7]Mingqing

Xingkun

Fengli   haha <laughter>   huh <scoff>   what kind of civilised enforcement?

Leilei   hahaha <laughter>

----

[8]Mingqing

Xingkun

Fengli   only destroying their stuff but not beating them, huh? <serious tone> huh<scoff>

Leilei

----

[9]Mingqing   hahaha <laughter>   yeah sort of

Xingkun   haha <laughter> only destroying their stuff but not beating them <a laughing voice>

Fengli

Leilei

----

[10]Mingqing

Xingkun   hahaha <loud laughter>

Fengli   haha <laughter> then (.) take me to break their scales <threatening tone>

Leilei   hahaha

----

[11]Mingqing   hahaha <loud laughter>

Xingkun   hahaha <loud laughter>

Fengli

Leilei   you stepped in a farmer's house (.) yo-hey your potatoes look nice <imitating Mingqing's voice>

----

[12]Mingqing   why just potatoes? I should have asked for bacon joint

Xingkun	hahaha <loud laughter>
Fengli	haha <laughter>
Leilei	haha <laughter>

When spotlighting Mingqing as the new topic of their conversation, his close friends Fengli and Leilei collaboratively craft a sequence of teasing (staves 1, 2, 4, 5, 8 and 11). The function of teasing in the local context was to introduce Mingqing to Xingkun, who is new to this friendship group (stave 1). Xingkun therefore can be seen as a very important recipient and witness to their teasing. Fengli and Leilei attempt to use teasing to build a connection between Xingkun's previous narrative and Mingqing's professional identity as an officer in the tobacco industry. Teasing is employed here to accomplish the goal of their speech activity, dinner talk, to socialise, extend and maintain their social networks with a new acquaintance. Instead of introducing Mingqing's professional identity in a serious frame, this group uses teasing to do such a work in a playful frame. It confirms one more time that male socialisation is often fun-based, centralising with humour (Segal, 1990).

In staves 1 and 2, Mingqing was teased as a 'tobacco dealer' and 'tobacco farmer', which is clearly not intended to be taken as true (Eisenberg, 1986; Drew, 1987; Albert, 1992;). Their teasing challenges Mingqing's real professional identity as a management officer in the tobacco industry. The tobacco industry is the leading industry in their local area, occupying 16% per cent of the GDP in Zhaotong in 2021, according to the governmental annual statistics. Accordingly, working in a state-owned tobacco enterprise is often seen as an ideal career pursuit for the locals. It not only provides the stability given by most of the state-owned institutions but also a competitive salary as it is a very profitable enterprise and industry. Therefore, Mingqing is in a privileged social class and status in the local

socio-cultural context. When introducing him, Mingqing's friends downplay this aspect to avoid potential bragging, using teasing to make the introduction light-hearted and playful.

However, Lelei and Fengli's subsequent teasing, which targeted Mingqing, becomes more face-threatening, shifting towards 'nipping' and even 'biting' in the spectrum (Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997). Fengli attacks Mingqing through portraying him as a violent enforcer (staves 4, 6, 8), whereas Leilei, his other close friend, positions Mingqing as an officer who takes advantage of a less socio-economically privileged social group – farmers (staves 5 and 11). Their teasing challenges his professional identity, especially the integrity of his work ethic. Although maybe hurtful, with contextualisation cues, such as changes of speaking speed and rhythm, a mocking tone and laughing voice, Fengli and Leilei still sustain those provocations in a playful frame.

My participant-observations and ethnographic interviews in the field provides me valuable insights to understand the teasing in this episode. Fengli's teasing was drawn from the serious social problem in the area, the unlawful and violent law-enforcement in Zhaotong. A typical and often discussed case is that local authorities see street-selling as an activity that destroys the image of the city, as it may block traffic and make the street look untidy. As a punishment or to discourage people from street-selling, enforcers often destroy vendors' scales, carrying poles, or the goods they sell. In some extreme situations, this leads to physical violence, such as 'beating farmers with carrying poles' (stave 4) and 'breaking scales' (stave 10). Fengli uses this scenario to craft his teasing targeted at Mingqing even though Mingqing does not have any law enforcement authorisation to punish vendors. His law enforcement is only restricted to the illegal tobacco trading.

Similarly, Leilei's teasing (staves 5 and 11) alleges that Mingqing takes small gains from farmers. In Chapter 4, I demonstrate that taking advantage of others, especially small gains, is the opposite of the desirable and ideal masculine quality. Here, Leilei aligns with this moral stance to position Mingqing as a disdainful Other. Leilei's teasing reveals the moral stance in the local discourse that decent men should not take small gains from others, especially from less privileged and financially vulnerable groups. Mingqing admitted that he took 'trivial things from farmers' in our ethnographic interviews; however, he explained that they were gifted by farmers to show their gratitude. He often stayed in villages to provide support for farmers and bought tobacco leaves from farmers as the representative of his tobacco corporation. As he put it, 'those farmers give us home-grown vegetables to thank us, without asking'. The design of Leilei and Fengli's teasing demonstrates that they know Mingqing's job very well, and hence, they can add something untrue to exaggerate (Eisenberg, 1986; Drew, 1987) to craft a teasing.

To respond to this series of teasing, Mingqing employs a collection of different response strategies. First, he creatively and skilfully references official statements from his work as one strategy to respond to teasing. After a sharp scoff (stave 2), which can be interpreted as a cue for a jocular-mocking tone, Mingqing uses the official statement of his job description (stave 3) to correct the misrepresentation of his job as 'tobacco dealer' and 'tobacco farmer'. It creates a humorous and playful effect, signalled by the audience's laughter (stave 3). The formal genre inspired by those official descriptions contrasts with their informal, casual and fun-based talk. It is this contrast that means the 'correction' type of response can still be playfully framed.

Mingqing uses this strategy again (stave 6) when he is accused of exploiting the power given to him by his work (staves 4 and 5). After displaying his recognition of the playful intention with his laughter (stave 5), Mingqing quotes the government's political slogan (stave 6) to defend himself from claims that his action may be perceived as disdainful; he follows the local authority campaign of 'enforcing the law in a civilised way'. His laughing voice indicates that he decides to go along with the teasing, staying cool under attack (Lee, 2009). The laughter from both Leilei and Xingkun (stave 6) again frames their interaction as playful verbal competition. Therefore, even though it is a po-faced response (i.e. he still attempts to correct the untrue and exaggerated teasing), Mingqing's response is still delivered in a humorous manner, sustaining the playful frame of jocular mockery.

The following table illustrates how Mingqing and other listeners respond to six instances of teasing in this episode. It shows that teasing develops and unfolds as a joint endeavour in which all participants make efforts to sustain the playfulness of teasing. Teasing in the above interaction shows that men's talk can show a collaborative manner, even though their humour can be competitive (Cameron, 1997).

Location	Teasing Content	Reaction
stave 1	Fengli: tobacco dealer	Mingqing: mild laughter Listeners (Xingkun and Leilei): laughter
stave 2	Leilei: tobacco farmer	Mingqing: counter/correction by quoting the official role of his job specification
stave 4	Fengli: beat farmers with carrying poles	Mingqing: po-faced rejection ('stop exaggerating') Listeners (Xingkun and Leilei): laughter
stave 5	Leilei: eat farmers' food and take farmers' stuff	Mingqing: laughter + counter/correct with the official quote of 'civilised enforcement' Listeners (Xingkun and Fengli): laughter

Location	Teasing Content	Reaction
staves 7-8	Fengli: challenge the so-called 'civilised enforcement'	Mingqing: laughter + go along with it ('kind of') Listeners: laughter + repetition (Xingkun) laughter (Leilei)
stave 11	Leilei: manipulate farmers to have their potatoes	Mingqing: laughter + elaborate ('I should have asked for bacon joint') Listeners: laughter

Table 4 - Responses to Teasing from Extract 4

As the table shows, Fengli and Leilei are teasers, whereas Xingkun, who had just joined this friendship group, only participates in this teasing episode as a listener. It confirms what previous research has shown, whereby a close and intimate relationship is the premise for enabling teasing, among friends and family (Everts, 2003). Xingkun was careful with his position in this group and decided not to join in the potentially face-threatening teasing as a teaser. Mingqing uses mild laughter (stave 1) to display his recognition of the non-serious and humorous playfulness of teasing, but he still uses po-faced responses (Drew, 1987) to either counter/correct (staves 3 and 6 with official slogans) or clearly reject (stave 4: 'stop exaggerating') the teasing. His responses help him to negotiate and defend his professional identity as a law-abiding government officer. In our ethnographic interview, Mingqing pinpointed what was true and not for me – he did not want me to be misled by his friends' teasing. His response steers his identity construction away from jocular (also untrue) implications that he is a violent enforcer and greedy government officer (Drew, 1987). He draws on political slogans or official statements as a resource for his response, perhaps not only for humorous effect but also to endorse and reinforce his officer identity in a state-owned enterprise.

This episode shows not only the emergence, negotiation and construction of professional identity, but also the moral standards that accompany it. For Fengli, his teasing indicates that he holds a very unfavourable attitude towards the violent enforcement situation in their locality. He targets Mingqing as the representative of enforcers to mock their violent enforcement of economically vulnerable groups, including vendors and farmers (stave 4). On my field trips to Zhaotong in 2017, I noticed that references to 'civilised enforcement' were featured on many public billboards. Although the local government initiated a series of measures to tackle the issues, some enforcers still hold problematic views: they believe that whilst 'lawful' means that it is not acceptable to violently beat someone, it is okay to destroy vendors' or farmers' belongings or products. This perception makes Fengli question Mingqing's so-called 'civilised enforcement' (stave 8), implying that Mingqing may also have those problematic actions in his work duty.

Mingqing tries his best to distance himself from this portrayal, first using a po-faced response in stave 4, but then accepting the teasing frame and playing along with the positioning of him as a 'violent enforcer' (stave 9). Of course, by playing along with the teasing, Mingquing at the same time implicitly challenges the seriousness of the accusation. To respond to Mingqing's acceptance of teasing, both Fengli and Leilei then escalate the teasing. Fengli elaborates the teasing fantasy of violent enforcement, suggesting Mingqing take him to 'break their scales' (stave 10). It is interesting to see the shift of Fengli's stance at this point. He abandons his questioning of the problematic practices of law enforcement, and jokingly becomes an ally of the law enforcers, a social group he had just criticised. This perhaps is part of his efforts to sustain the non-serious frame of teasing and talk. Leilei's teasing about the farmer's potatoes is tapping into another discourse of greed, embezzlement and taking advantage of a less economically-privileged social class. However, compared to the

accusation of being violent, this attack is less harmful. Therefore, Mingqing makes a compromise, accepting and getting along with this jocular mockery that suggests he is greedy, and he should have asked for a bacon joint rather than simple potatoes (stave 12).

It should be noted that, compared to other research on teasing, which is often associated with professional identity in a workplace (Marra et al., 2006; Schnurr, 2009; Schnurr and Chan, 2011), the above negotiation and construction of participants' professional identity took place in a very informal and private situation where power relations play less of a role in their speech activity. Mingqing uses po-faced responses at the beginning of this teasing episode. However, with several turn-taking instances, he gradually goes along with it (stave 9) and then switches to an elaboration of teasing as his response (stave 12) to end this teasing episode. In this way, playful and friendly dynamics on a social occasion are carefully maintained in their interaction, securing the social cohesion of a networking dinner talk as well as group harmony.

6.3.4 Teasing to Police Gender Norms

The previous sections demonstrated the importance of in-group knowledge when shaping the design of and responses to teasing. The above analysis illustrated how sociocultural knowledge is invoked in teasing through certain words and expressions (Silverstein, 2004: 633). Their shared knowledge in the group builds the link between linguistic forms and and its indexed socio-cultural meanings (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005: 594), allowing teasing to achieve multiple functions. Teasing hence works as an important conversational practice in the men's talk to strengthen bonding (Eder, 1993; Kowalski, 2003) and police group norms (Pichler, 2019). In this section, I will show how teasing is further manipulated to police gender norms, which can be part of their group norms, invoked by socio-cultural knowledge.

The following extract starts when Fengli in Group 1 urges Mingqing to drink, and was recorded at a dinner occasion in 2017.

Extract 5: I really can't drink!

¹Mingqing   ha:: don't exaggera::te I really can't drink =

Fengli

Qingbei   = aww-hoo this guy <u>can't drink</u> \<rising mocking tone\>

----

²Mingqing   I can't drin::k anymore=

Fengli

Qingbei   = we shall see this later \<threatening tone\>

----

³Mingqing   = haha \<loud laughter\>

Fengli   don't worry it will be my job to drive you safely back to the retirement bureau =

Qingbei

----

⁴Mingqing   the beds in the hospital are reserved waiting for you guys =

Fengli   = haha \<laughter\>

Qingbei   = huh \<scoff\>

----

⁵Mingqing   = hahaha \<loud laughter\>

Fengli   = haha \<laughter\>

Qingbei   EVEN the infusion bottles are ready =

----

⁶Mingqing   let's agree now seriously (.) as soon as we are done with drinking

Fengli

Qingbei

----

⁷Mingqing   we will go to the hospital straight away \<lower volume and slower speed\>

Fengli

Qingbei

----

⁸Mingqing   and haha \<sudden higher pitch with laughing tone\>

Fengli

Qingbei

----

⁹Mingqing   let's NOT joke now \<serious tone, lower volume and slower speed\>

Fengli

Qingbei

----

¹⁰Mingqing

Fengli   yeah yeah let's stop being silly (.) we just can't drink any more \<serious tone>

Qingbei   seriously let's not joke now \<serious tone>

----

¹¹Mingqing   if you can't <u>drink then GET OUT = \<louder volume and quicker speed, threatening tone></u>

Fengli   =haaa:yy <u>yo</u>! \<scoff> =

Qingbei   = hah yeah, GET OU:T \<scoffing tone with loud voice>

----

¹²Mingqing   BUT you know that Leilei can drink   this big brother can drink two litres

Fengli

Qingbei

Leilei   what do you mean?

This extract starts with Mingqing's declaration that he could not drink any more (stave 1 and 2). Drinking alcohol is a very important ritual practice in this group, through which their friendship is maintained and strengthened. Mingqing's refusal to drink might be interpreted as a breach of the group's cohesion, which makes him the target for the follow-up teasing. Hence, Qingbei first teases Mingqing's drinking stamina (stave 1). Even in a friendship frame, his teasing can still function as a social control (Eisenberg, 1986), intimidating or mildly threatening Mingqing to carefully consider the consequences of his rejection (i.e. stave 2: 'we shall see this later'). Fengli soon joins in the teasing episode to persuade Mingqing to drink (stave 3). He suggests that Mingqing's insistence on not drinking alcohol makes him like those old people who live in retirement homes. This teasing is occasioned because Mingqing 'takes him too seriously'. The ethos of 'not taking yourself too seriously' is valued by British and Australian English speakers (Goddard, 2009: 38; Haugh and Bousfield, 2012; Sinkeviciute, 2013), and it is also shared by this particular community of practice. Mingqing already refused to drink twice when the interaction unfolded and still did not show any inclination to go along with the group norm to drink. Hence, jocular mockery (Haugh, 2014) is occasioned with good humour to potentially draw attention to and correct Mingqing's behaviour.

Fengli's teasing, with its ambiguous nature, can be interpreted with a range of meanings. Mingqing was living with his parents when the conversation was recorded. 'Retirement bureau' is where Mingqing's parents lived. It is possible that Fengli wanted to imply that Mingqing still lived with his boring old parents, especially since Mingqing had a girlfriend at the time. However, it should be noted that premarital cohabitation is still often seen as socially inappropriate in the local socio-cultural context. Most of the men in this group only started to live outside their parents' homes after getting married. Yan (2003) earlier pointed out that premarital cohabitation was a taboo in rural China. Decades later, Wong's (2020) anthropological research still suggests that premarital cohabitation is still not mainstream in peri-urban cities today, including Zhaotong in my research and Nanchong in hers'. Therefore, there might be another layer of indexed meaning of Fengli's teasing here.

When I presented this teasing episode back to Fengli in our ethnographic interviews, he linked his utterance to a different socio-cultural meaning. He first said there were burgeoning cases of drunk men who had died on their way home following binge drinking episodes, especially in cold winter weather. Then he asserted that he would safely drive Mingqing home as a 'dedicated friend' would do. Fengli positions himself as a caring friend, as the opposite of 'the irresponsible people who were liable to those tragedies and did not truly care for their friends'. Fengli emphasised this construct several times in our ethnographic interview, bridging his teasing with the backdrop of the social problem of the toxic drinking culture. I argue that Fengli may have attempted to represent a positive image in our interaction, acting like a caring friend retrospectively. With the ambiguous and multi-functional nature

of teasing, he might have intended to drive his friend home, but at the same time, he may also have meant to tease Mingqing.

It shows that ethnography allows researchers to tease out the multiple layers of socio-cultural meaning that one utterance can index. On the one hand, Fengli's teasing functions to correct the target's behaviour (Drew, 1987; Haugh and Bousifield, 2012): he attempts to attack Mingqing because he refused to drink. On the other hand, it can also be interpreted as an assurance that he will safely drive Mingqing home so he should have no concerns about drinking. It positions Fengli as a caring, thoughtful and responsible friend, which strengthens their friendship bonding. Fengli's teasing can therefore function as the spectrum between 'bonding' and 'nipping' (Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997), perhaps more inclined to bonding. As a response, Mingqing uses loud laughter (stave 3), and soon initiatesmore teasing to sustain this jocular frame throughout their subsequent conversation.

Mingqing's follow-up response makes the teasing frame both competitive and fun. He teases that hospital beds were already reserved if they continue drinking (stave 4), elaborated by Qingbei that even the infusion bottles were ready (stave 5). This teasing is drawn from their shared past. There were 'quite a bunch of times' that they got so drunk they were actually sent by their friends to the hospital where Mingqing's girlfriend Hua worked for emergency treatment. Hua, a nurse, told me that their binge drinking had already resulted in serious health issues. Mingqing, Leilei and Fengli all experienced gastrointestinal haemorrhages, and they had had infusion therapy in the hospital several times. Their excessive drinking corresponds with *wu* masculinity which has long glorified drinking. Their playful jousting is similar to the boasting that British men often use in men's talk in Coates's (2003) work, where they narrate stories of how their lives were threatened. In this way, they construct

tough masculinity that can tolerate a lot of pain (Lawson, 2013). Flashing back their shared collective life-threatening moments in this teasing episode, they strengthen their male bonding and display a tough masculinity.

It shows that, unlike ritual insults (Labov, 1978; Goodwin, 1990) or other types of teasing which are often intended not to be true (Eisenberg, 1986; Alberts, 1992) or deliberately exaggerated (Drew, 1987; Haugh, 2014), their teasing can be based on real events (Haugh and Bousfield, 2012). Bringing up their past life-threatening moments that were a result of binge drinking, Mingqing reminds his friends that he used to be able to drink like them, and perhaps they should really consider their health and not drink anymore. In this way, Mingqing's act of teasing compensated for his earlier loss of face when he was attacked for refusing to drink. It also functions to maintain the meta-message of 'this is play' (Bateson, 1987) when framing teasing. Even though previously he used paralinguistic cues, such as a lower voice and slower speaking speed to perform a serious tone when suggesting not to drink more in staves 6, 7 and 9, he added loud laughter in stave 8 to frame the speech activity as playful teasing. It means that, even with the serious tone employed in his performance, the playful frame was still signalled and cued with laughter.

To continue with the play, Fengli and Qingbei adjust their aggressive style of teasing, agreeing that 'we just can't drink anymore' (stave 10). It is followed by Mingqing's nipping teasing (stave 11: 'if you can't drink then GET OUT'), which continues to sustain the playful frame of their interaction. To end this episode, Mingqing shifts the focus of the conversation to Leilei, complementing Leilei for being able to drink 'two litres' (stave 12). Mingqing aligns himself with the group norm whereby drinking prowess is still an important criterion for the local discourse of masculinity. Even though he rejected the idea of

drinking more, he does not intend to challenge the gender norm that binge drinking constitutes hegemonic masculinity. He shows his respect and applauds his friend, Leilei, who can drink a lot.

To summarise Mingqing's reaction in this episode, he exploits the ambiguity of teasing to balance the seriousness of his refusal to drink with the need to protect face, balancing seriousness and playfulness throughout. He first uses serious rejection to refuse to drink. Even with a 'po-faced' response, he still uses laughter to demonstrate that he recognises the non-harmfulness of teasing (stave 3). He also does some repair work to humorously justify his decision (Schnurr and Chan, 2011) by bringing up their shared life-threatening moment that was a result of binge drinking (stave 4). With this illustration, the teasing episode develops. It leads the fun and playful frame of teasing and makes it an elaborate instance of conjoined humour (Schnurr and Chan, 2011; Haugh and Bousfield, 2012; Pichler, 2019). Mingqing, therefore, plays an active role in the construction of a fantasy scenario, and as a result, he accordingly shifts his role from the target of teasing to the role of teaser. This exemplifies Schieffelin's (1986: 166-167) observation: 'teasing creates tension, as one is never completely sure which way an interaction might swing, owing to the unstable nature of the teasing frames'.

I use the following extract to suggest that in-group knowledge is not always shared among participants in a group, and the lack of mutual understanding can mean that teasing fails to deliver the socio-cultural meaning that it is intended to index. Rui was my gate person to access Group 1, with the consent from his graduate school classmates and his flatmates, Kaiwen and Dadan, he also recorded some audio recordings when he had conversations with them for this research. This conversation was recorded when they were having food at a barbecue street stall one night.

Extract 6: You start to bring tissues now?!

¹Rui   ai-yaa:: Oh, FUCK! (.)

Kaiwen   there is a pack of tissue in my bag (.) there (.) just take it

Dadan

----

²Rui   = do you really have it

Kaiwen

Dadan   no (.) no need no worries =

----

³Rui

Kaiwen   yes I have it just there in front of (xx) give me the bag (..) it is a little bit heavy

Dadan

----

⁴Rui   HOLY::FUCK you are carrying tissues <u>NOW</u> <emphasising> fu::ck

Kaiwen

Dadan

----

⁵Rui   = oh <lower voice>

Kaiwen   I have had a cold recently (.) you know that =

Dadan

----

⁶Rui   = ah-ha <loud laughter>

Kaiwen   wait (.) then what are you trying to imply about me carrying tissues?! = <laughing tone>

Dadan

----

⁷Rui   haha-hehe <laughter>

Kaiwen   hey(xxx) what are you:: thinking (xxx)

Dadan   hehe

----

⁸Rui   then you can jerk off at any time and at any place haha <laughter>

Kaiwen

Dadan

----

⁹Rui

Kaiwen   haha do you want some tofu

Dadan   yeah give me some

The above transcription began when something was spilled and Rui started to curse. Kaiwen offered

Rui a pack of tissues (stave 1) and even kindly reminded Rui that his bag was heavy (stave 3). However,

Rui does not respond with 'thank you' as expected in this situation; instead, he questions Kaiwen's action of carrying tissues (stave 4). Cued with a mocking tone and the repetition of curse words, his provocation can be understood as jocular mocking. On my fieldtrip to Yunnan, I observed that many local men do not carry tissues because this is associated with femininity. Some men in Yunnan, including Rui, perceive carrying tissues as 'sissy' simply because this is what girls/women do. Therefore, men who seek to align themselves with a hegemonic model of masculinity need to distance themselves from this behaviour. Rui's teasing displays his surprise when he sees that Kaiwen carries tissues. He even asks for confirmation (stave 2) to make sure it was true after he heard that Kaiwen actually had a pack of tissues in his bag. Teasing is used here as a social control (Eisenberg, 1986; Schieffelin, 1986) to police a gender norm, that is, 'real men' should not carry tissues.

However, Rui's teasing is encountered with Kaiwen's po-faced response (Drew, 1987). He does not display his recognition of the playfulness of teasing; for example, laughter was absent in his response. He did not interpret Rui's questioning (stave 3) as rhetorical, instead, he answered with the real reason he carries tissues (stave 5). In a serious tone, he explained that he carries a pack of tissues because he had a cold recently, and Rui should have known this as they live together as flatmates. After the display of his po-faced response, he adjusted the response with a laughing tone to ask the reason for Rui's teasing (stave 6 and 7). It suggests that perhaps he sensed there were possible implications or certain socio-cultural meanings that Rui's teasing was intended to index to, but which he was unaware of. Kaiwen's response to Rui's teasing may reflect 'the insufficient hilarity of the proposition or the hearer's lack of comprehension (Dynel, 2007: 1873).

However, as Sinkeviciute (2014: 136) observes, the absence of laughter does not necessarily point to the failure of humour. Kaiwen probably did not share the same socio-cultural knowledge that Rui assumed him to have, so he failed to interpret or even rejected the implication of Rui's teasing to react in a humorous frame. Kaiwen was born and raised in North-eastern China and was admitted as a postgraduate student to a university in South-west China, in the capital city of Yunnan. Rui is a local in Yunnan, and he brings local socio-cultural understanding in his teasing to mock Kaiwen. Rui admitted in his ethnographic interview that men should not carry tissues, which might be 'a Yunnan thing'. It indicates that hegemonic masculinity can have its own local socio-cultural manifestations. Though Kaiwen's response can still be interpreted as him understanding the intention but choosing not to show it. He used the excuse of 'having a cold' to save face.

Even though Kaiwen asks twice for clarification of Rui's teasing, Rui does not offer the true explanation as he told me in our ethnographic interview. As a response, Rui uses loud laughter (staves 6-7) to further sustain this non-serious and fun frame of teasing. The explanation of his intention is likely to pierce the playfulness and non-serious intent in this exchange, and therefore Rui chose not to explain. With this effort, he sustains the fun and humorous frame of their conversation. Moreover, he creatively indexes a new sociocultural meaning to 'a man carries a pack of tissues' to continue the jocular mockery. In stave 8, Rui mocks Kaiwen's behaviour of carrying a pack of tissue as preparation to masturbate any time and anywhere. His teasing positions Kaiwen as a single man who does not have a partner to have sex with. In the Chinese socio-cultural context, singledom has never been seen as an ideal or desirable model of masculinity (Yan, 1995; Choi and Peng, 2016; 2020; Hird, 2019). In particular, in Huang's (2018) research on online wordplay in cyberspace in contemporary China, single men, especially those of lower socio-economic backgrounds, are represented with buzzwords that

have negative connotations, such as 'diaosi' (also see Gong, 2016 about 'diaosi' in Chinese football fans).

The lack of heterosexual attractiveness or sexual prowess (Kiesling, 2003; 2005) of those single men is closely linked to their social class (Huang, 2018; Yang, 2011; Song and Lee, 2010; 2012). Their lower socio-economic status does not help them to earn female partners, and to express their self-pity, agony and struggle, they often use the word 'masturbate' (to 撸 – lū) to imply their single status. In Chinese cyberspace jokes, comments, and memes, singledom is often indirectly indexed by the image of a roll or box of tissues. Tissues, therefore, become a cue to invoke the socio-cultural meaning of 'struggling' and 'pitiful' singledom. In my field trip with Rui, I commented that carrying a tissue can be useful and convenient, such as in the situation in the recording where food was spilled. He answered, 'restaurants usually provide tissues, and in emergency situations, you can always ask your girlfriend. Their bag is like a treasure box, and everything you need is there'. Not carrying a tissue, hence, becomes a privilege for a man who is in a heterosexual relationship.

When the conversation was recorded, Rui had a girlfriend, whereas Dadan and Kaiwen were single. Kaiwen was being teased because of his lack of sexual prowess (Haugh and Bousfield, 2012: 1110), and therefore Rui's second instance of teasing can be seen as provocation and challenge because singledom is not seen as an ideal quality in the cultural model of hegemonic masculinity (Ma and Cheng, 2005). Hence, this teasing can be 'nipping' or even 'biting' (Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997). He exerted his dominance over the other subordinate and less powerful men simply because they were single. However, both Kaiwen and Dadan chose to ignore this teasing (Drew, 1987; Haugh, 2014) and shifted the topic of conversation to re-focus on their food. It confirms Drew's (1987: 219) observation

that when a target's negative identity traits are brought up in teasing, the most typical response is po-faced.

Rui using teasing and high-risk humour as a strategy to police hegemonic gender norms is similar to the gender-related humour used by coaches in Adam's (2019) research. Coaches not only use face-threatening humour to discipline boys' soccer practice (Edwards and Jones, 2018), to 'fit in' and be successful in the world of football, but also use to re-align with hetero-normative and 'tough' masculinity (Adam, 2019: 6-9). When designing and recreating his teasing, Rui incorporates his own hegemonic expectations and conceptions of what it is to be an accepted man (Connell, 2005). The ambiguous nature of teasing allows Rui to index two gender discourses to re-interpret the gendered meaning of a man carrying a pack of tissue. He first drew on the wider (stereotypical) gender expectation and norm to mock Kaiwen carrying tissues, as it is associated with femininity. Then he attached a further layer of socio-cultural meaning that carrying tissues can index – singledom – which is the opposite of an ideal and hegemonic masculine quality. In this way, he crafted his teasing of Kaiwen as a social control, policing and reinforcing the gender differentiation discourse and hegemonic gender norms. Even though teasing requires a 'backdrop of in-group knowledge' (Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997) to function as a social control means or bonding tool, a teasing episode such as this can also establish such mutual understanding.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, through the examination of teasing episodes, I have illustrated how teasing is used as a discursive strategy in men's everyday conversation to accomplish multiple functionalities, including enacting their masculine identities. My data about Chinese men's friendship talk confirms that having

fun is still a very important aspect of male homosocial talk (Coates, 2003; Kowalski, 2003; Kiesling, 2005, Pichler, 2019). As 'playful jibes' (Drew, 1987: 219), teasing is first used to strengthen fun-based male bonding. With its dual nature of both playfulness/humour and challenge/aggression, teasing is also deployed to display toughness in men's drunken talk for a performance and construction of tough masculinity. Thirdly, as a goal-oriented humour strategy (Haugh, 2014), the interaction of teasing between the teaser and the target allows participants to negotiate how they want to present and position themselves, particularly with the aspect of their professional identity, which is closely linked to their work ethics and moral stances. Finally, teasing can be used as a means of social control (Eisenberg, 1986) to police gender and group norms.

Men in this research show their skills in manipulating teasing's ambiguous nature to index different layers of socio-cultural meanings, accomplishing both local and wider contextual purposes. Largely drawn from their in-group shared knowledge and past experiences, their teasing strengthens male-exclusive bonding, excluding outsiders such as their female friends. I argue that male bonding and solidarity is not only based on their in-group humour, but also escalated by their shared group identity, shaped and defined by their group and gender norms. In the interactive process of teasing, these men have learned and adapted to the in-group knowledge of teasing, which further secures and polices gender and group norms (Pichler, 2019). It has been found that teasing can be used to reproduce sexist discourses to reinforce male dominance and privilege, and moreover, to discipline men in their groups who fail to align with hegemonic models of masculinity, from carrying tissues to refusing to drink alcohol.

The use of ethnographic information helps me as an analyst to explain the intention of teasing, which is often seen as inaccessible and ambiguous. Thus, for example, information I obtained from the group about their practice in male-exclusive clubs allowed me to fully understand the specific socio-cultural meaning of the 'you don't dare to go to the club alone' index in men's teasing. Hence, it shows how the dimension of male homosociality is constructed through their exclusive in-group teasing. The findings presented in my analysis are the result of a collaborative endeavour between me and my participants. The ethnographic interviews allowed me to identify both the local and the wider and more macro socio-cultural meanings indexed by the teasing. With the support of ethnographic information, a certain level of ambiguity around teasing can be clarified, and its multi-functionality at a discourse level can be unveiled.

CHAPTER 7: MEN'S PERSONAL AND EMOTIONAL TALK

7.1 Introduction

Understanding and exploring how men bond in their everyday talk is one of the research goals in this thesis. Although previous chapters have illustrated how narrative and conversational humour are used to maintain male bonding, in this chapter I scrutinise how men in my research 'do' their friendship in their personal and emotional talk. Linguistic studies exploring men's talk support the view that men are emotionally inexpressive (Cameron, 1997; Coates, 2000; 2003). The reluctance to express vulnerability has led Western, middle-class men to interact less intimately, and hence, studies from the 1980s to the 1990s often perceive male friendships as shallow and superficial (Seidler, 1992: 17). In *Men and Friendship*, Stuart Miller explicitly states that men's friendships today are 'generally characterised by thinness, insincerity and even chronic wariness' (1983: xi). However, Kiesling (2005: 695) argues that men can use their language to create and display homosocial (as opposed to homosexual) desire, to 'manage to "connect" with one another personally and emotionally' in a heterosexist atmosphere. In this chapter, through the investigation of personal and emotional talk I unpack how homosocial desire and bonding is created and maintained by a Chinese male friendship group.

Heterosexual men's homosocial desire, as many researchers (Bird, 1996; Cameron, 1997; Kiesling, 2005; Flood, 2008) show, is often constrained by a 'male homosocial double bind' (Lakoff, 1975). Men, on the one hand, pursue homosocial bonding and male solidarity; however, on the other hand, they must be careful as such closeness may lead to a 'dangerous' perception of homosexuality (Cameron, 1997: 61). Therefore, gay men and women have been deployed as 'Other' to demonstrate their

heterosexuality. For instance, a group of American college men gossip about the bodies and dressing style of men whom they portray as homosexual (Cameron, 1997). Such positioning allows them to dislocate a possible homosexual desire outside of the friendship group (Cameron and Kulick, 2003). Similarly, in Kiesling's (2005) example of American fraternity men, homosocial desire is created and displayed, however, through indirectness. The direct expressions of homosocial desire are only broadcast to the institution/group rather than individuals, to avoid potential perceptions of homosexual inclination. Moreover, according to Flood (2008), male homosociality is highly valued and is supposed to be prioritised over male-female relationships, whether platonic or sexual.

In this chapter, I first explore the structural characteristics of men's personal and emotional talk from a linguistic perspective, understanding whether their talk matches what the men claimed in our ethnographic interviews – that they were engaged in 'disclosure talk' in which they shared emotions from the bottoms of their hearts. Secondly, I explore the genre of men's personal talk at a discourse level, revealing how those men define male friendship in their self-recorded conversations. It suggests that male bonding is not only about 'doing' things together (Aries and Johnson, 1983) but also includes talking about their concerns and feelings. In the following analysis sections, through 'Luzi's story', I first present the strategies and constraints that shape the structural and discursive characteristics of men's personal talk. It will be followed by discussion of how they use their emotional talk as a venue to display their understanding of gendered male friendship discourse. The emphasis of their male bonding then leads to a conflict for married men to balance between male bonding and heterosexual bonding. Hence, the final section of this chapter shows the complexity and nuances that occur when Chinese men attempt to use their personal talk to solve this conflict, when talking about this personal and private issue with their friends.

7.2 Luzi's Struggle - Men's Personal Talk

In this section I present three extracts of Group 2's self-recorded conversation to show how men talk about personal and private issues. The following Extracts 1-3 were selected from a conversation recorded in 2018 when most key members of the Group 2 were drinking in a bar. The focus of their talk that night was on Luzi's delay of graduation. Luzi was supposed to graduate in 2016 but he did not manage to graduate on time. His other friends, such as Zantai, Zitan and Wenxin, all graduated smoothly, and by the time when the conversation was recorded, they already had worked for two years. Rui chose to continue his education, and at that time he freshly graduated with a master degree in finance. In addition, all the members in Group 2, except Luzi, were in committed heterosexual romantic relationships.

Luzi, being the only one in the group who was single, unemployed, and had not graduated from university, became the concern of this group of friends. Their worrying about Luzi already started in 2017 when I was on my second trip to the field. To learn more about Luzi, I gathered ethnographic information from numerous occasions when I hung-out with this group. Luzi had academic excellence in his high school, and he went to a university to study pharmacy in Kunming, the capital of Kunming. However, in his first year of university life, his parents divorced. He no longer had the support from his father, emotionally and financially. He stayed in the dorm of his university during his undergraduate study, but since he failed several courses, he was not able to graduate. If he passed the courses that he failed, he could graduate, but he did not retake the exams. Therefore, his status at the university is on suspension. After leaving the campus, Luzi stayed in Kunming at Rui's flat, unemployed, and he chose to play computer games all day. Luzi seemed stagnant in terms of his life progress. The following

conversation is centred on how other members of this friendship group attempted to persuade Luzi to get out of his 'rotten life' and thrive by staying in Kunming with them.

7.2.1 Structural Characteristics of Men's Personal Talk

First, with the following Extracts 1-2, I show how men's personal talk is shaped with its own genre characteristics and consider which dominant cultural discourses of masculinity emerge and are reproduced.

Extract 1: This is my biggest wish

¹Rui   Luzi my biggest wish is   you fucking staying in Kunming and don't go back to Lijiang
Zantai
Luzi   okay

----

²Rui   REALLY<emphasising tone> this is my biggest wish
Zantai   for me how to say (..) well how to phrase it (.)
Luzi   I will try my best I will try

----

³Rui
Zantai   let me prepare my words
Luzi   (xxxx) <drunk gibberish>   I am drunk (.) you think about it what you wanna say

----

⁴Rui
Zantai   you can play less computer games   I think so   I really wish you play less
Luzi   I don't think that is the key issue

----

⁵Rui
Zantai   for now the most important thing is to get graduated and don't drag it for too long
Luzi

----

⁶Rui
Zantai   I barely talk to you about this but tonight I am gonna say
Luzi   but I can't do too much <quiet voice>

----

⁷Rui   I BELIEVE in you <loud voice>   I BELIEVE in you <loud voice>
Zantai   get graduated soon   get graduated soon

Luzi

---

⁸Rui   NO

Zantai   you are smart and it won't be a problem to achieve anything   really   we used to share the same desk

Luzi

---

⁹Rui   NO you didn't! <very certain tone>

Zantai   in high school   you were

Luzi   did we share the same <u>desk</u>? <laughing tone>

---

¹⁰Rui

Zantai   ha with Long and Qing   how can you have forgotten (..)

Luzi   aww aww aww that's right

---

¹¹Rui

Zantai   tell me your future plan

Luzi   I only planned until my graduation   only for that step

---

¹²Rui   talking to us   Luzi

Zantai   okay then   then why did you procrastinate before just want some fun?

Luzi   no idea

---

¹³Rui

Zantai   then did you have enough fun now?   almost?   then can you still graduate this time?

Luzi   almost now   I am just

---

¹⁴Rui   Luzi   do you believe us?

Zantai   can you focus on studying this time?

Luzi   I think I can for now I can

---

¹⁵Rui   really if you don't want to work you can open a shop or something

Zantai

Luzi   I do

---

¹⁶Rui   we have social networks in various industry   but you need to talk to us seriously

Zantai

Luzi   I know I know

---

¹⁷Rui   if you are still behaving like this we are going to urge you to DRINK

Zantai

Luzi   okay no I mean

---

¹⁸Rui

Zantai

Luzi   my current goal is to graduate   in my final year I didn't want to graduate because I wanted to play more

----

This extract starts with Rui saying that his biggest wish is that Luzi stays in Kunming. It indicates that Rui values and priorities Luzi as a significant friend in his life, and his words enable Zantai to join this topic. However, Zantai seems to struggle to phrase his feelings and opinions about Luzi's private and personal life (staves 2 & 3). He confesses that he 'barely talks' to Luzi about it (stave 6) and suggests Luzi play less computer games (stave 4) and graduates soon (stave 5). Zantai's linguistic behaviour implies that personal talk only accounts for a small portion of his everyday talk and may still be a new genre for him to get used to. Yet, Zantai is not the only one struggling in this type of talk; Luzi, as the subject of this conversation, also shows his discomfort. He uses 'drunk gibberish' (stave 3), denial of the seriousness of the issue (staves 4 & 11), distraction (stave 9), negative response (staves 6 & 12), and the absence of engagement (staves 7 & 8) to show his discomfort while his friends discuss his private affairs.

In Chapter 6, I demonstrated that teasing often requires a 'playful' frame (Pichler, 2006 & 2019), and similarly, personal talk is framed as 'serious and sincere'. Rui undertakes the responsibility to have this 'serious' frame sustained and maintained. For instance, he asks Luzi to be more involved in the talk (stave 12 - 'talk to us') and asks him to treat the talk more seriously (stave 16 - 'but you need to talk to us seriously'), and even threatens Luzi to drink more (stave 17). His efforts indicate that he believes that this frame is important to Luzi to share more of his feelings and situation. Hence, this talk is framed differently from their usual conversational humour episodes (see Chapter 6 on how members of this group tease each other). Unlike the 'nipping' and 'biting' teasing (Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997), which was often delivered through 'face-threatening' devices, face-saving strategies are

frequently used in this personal talk (Brown and Levinson, 1987). For instance, Zantai endorsed that Luzi was 'smart' as his high school classmate who shared the same desk with him (staves 8-10).

To maintain this 'serious and sincere' frame, drinking is introduced. First, this personal talk happens when most of the members are drunk (cued by their drunk voices). Research on drinking stories indicates that the consumption of alcohol often allows participants to cross boundaries, including moral ones, to initiate transgression (Workman, 2001; Pedersen et al., 2016; Sandberg et al., 2019; Vaynman et al., 2019). Men in this group perhaps feel that in being drunk they can cross constrained boundaries to start talking about Luzi's delayed graduation problem and his worrying life situation.

When I hung-out with this group, I was often suggested by them to drink some alcohol with them. Drinking with my participants was always beneficial to strengthening our rapport and trust, and they often recommended that drinking alcohol 'help people open their hearts more freely'. When I was in the field with this group, we drank beer over dinner, and then headed to a pub for more serious drinking, accompanied by liquors such as whisky, rum, or Jagermeister. When we were drinking together, they suggested to me several times that when having emotional and personal talk, binge drinking is a 'must have'. It applies to Luzi's case in this extract, as they may wish to use alcohol to faciliate their discussion of their concern about Luzi's life. Seeing Luzi piercing the 'serious and sincere' frame of personal talk, Rui urges Luzi to drink more (stave 17). He may wish that more alcohol can help Luzi to be more cooperative in revealing more of his feelings and thoughts.

In addition to the establishment of a 'serious and sincere' frame and the involvement of drinking in their personal talk, the theme of 'trust' constantly emerges in this talk to display their emotional

support towards Luzi. Zantai uses their shared experience to show that he believes that 'it won't be a problem' for Luzi 'to achieve anything' (stave 8). Rui's expression is more direct: he repeats twice that 'I believe in you' (stave 7) to encourage Luzi to complete the first task of the 'life to-do list', graduation. On the other hand, they also expect Luzi to react to their trust. Rui needs confirmation from Luzi that 'you believe in us' (stave 14). It indicates that trust, as the foundation of male solidarity and loyalty, needs to be mutual, and more importantly, it needs to be articulated explicitly to foreground their emotional support. This validation constitutes and signals another important element when framing the personal talk: participants need to be 'sincere'.

With those efforts, Luzi and Rui may want to have disclosure talk, however, their talk does not show the characteristics of self-disclosure talk, such as women's cooperative friends talk (Coates, 1997). As the subject of this talk, Luzi firstly does not self-disclose; secondly he does not show active and positive engagement in the talk (staves 7 & 8). Thirdly, he deconstructs the 'sincere and serious' frame with constant negation (staves 4, 6, 11 & 12) and distraction (stave 9). He does not use any face-saving strategies to maintain the cooperative nature of their talk. When Zantai compliments Luzi, saying that he was smart in high school because they used to share the same desk, Luzi rejects this immediately (stave 9), even though it turned out to be true (stave 10). Moreover, unlike women's friendship talk that is characterised by various politeness strategies and cooperative conversational features (Holmes, 1995; Coates, 1997; Mills, 2003), Zantai uses five interrogation-style questions (staves 12, 13 & 14) to poke Luzi, shaming him for being in a delayed life situation.

The above extract shows that men's personal talk is very conditional, as it needs the establishment of a 'serious and sincere' frame. The revelation of personal struggles is not a total confession or Luzi's

initial revelation. Instead, it is the result of Zantai's question (staves 12, 13 & 14), Rui's encouragement (stave 12) and even a mild threat (stave 17). Only in this way does Luzi respond that he delayed his graduation simply because he wanted to play more computer games (stave 18). In the next section, I will show how their personal talk unfolded when the conversation continued.

Extract 2: I am angry and upset and I really don't know what to do in my future

¹⁹Rui   then have you had enough fun for now?

Zantai

Luzi   it was very simple   I really don't know   for now

----

²⁰Rui   I hope you figure it out soon

Zantai   let me tell you

Luzi   I've never thought of what I SHOULD do in the future

----

²¹Rui   give me the bottle   indeed

Zantai   no I mean I just want to tell you to be more practical

Luzi   you know this time I talked to my parents

----

²²Rui   I know you TOLD ME

Zantai

Luzi   and my dad said he won't appear in my life

----

²³Rui   I told you already

             2 BROTHER

             3 if you FUCKING have difficulties I CAN HELP

             4 my financial situation just RECOVERED

----

²⁴Rui

Zantai

Luzi   I am angry and upset and <u>I really don't know</u> what to do in my future <a dragging voice>

----

²⁵Rui   1 I have been looking for job advertisement for quite a couple of days

             2 looking at your FUCKING face

             3 I found one that is suitable and I already sent it to you

----

²⁶Rui   Luzi now I think you have certain psychological obstacles

Zantai   hmmm < a long sigh>

Luzi   %I have my own plan% <very quiet voice>
----
^{27}Rui   we brothers are all willing to help you   really   I hope you accept our help
        Zantai   yeah yeah
        Luzi
----
^{28}Rui   1 we can provide several routes and I hope you can choose one of them
                2 or if you have your idea
                3 you can pop up a better route
                4 really you can't be rotten like this forever
                5 it's not the solution
----
^{29}Rui
        Zantai   really fuck it
        Wenxin   really you have been playing for a total of two years and it's time to graduate
        Luzi

In this extract, Luzi continues to show his discomfort as his friends put more pressure when they are discussing his problem (stave 19). At the beginning, he only reactively shares his struggle and even resists doing so when his friends put pressure on him (stave 19 -20). Later, he has three attempts to share more of his emotions and situations, but they are all interrupted. The first time happens when Luzi wants to talk about his situation with his father (stave 21) as his parents' divorce made his situation both financially and emotionally difficult. However, Rui immediately interrupts Luzi (stave 22), holding the floor to display the closeness he has with Luzi ('I know you TOLD me'). Later, when Rui starts to use adjectives 'angry' and 'upset' (stave 24) to describe his feelings, this emotional expression once again is not recognised and appreciated by the audience. The only time Luzi actively talks is the time in stave 26 when he uses a quiet and unconfident voice to share that he has a plan. This is supposed to be the topic that Rui and Zantai were eager to know (staves 11 & 20), however, neither of them encourages Luzi to continue. Zantai gives a long sigh, and Rui even harshly comments that Luzi has certain 'psychological obstacles'. Their interactions suggest that they are advocating the

'solution' focused nature of men's talk (Tannen, 2005) rather than engaging with Luzi's emotional dislosure.

What Luzi and Zantai do in the above action, instead, is just to tell Luzi what they think is best, which is the opposite of self-disclosure. Luzi's attempt at disclosure is interrupted by Rui to construct and position himself as a great friend. Instead of encouraging Luzi to reveal more of his feelings and concerns, Rui and Zantai underline the practical help that they have provided and are willing to do in the future for Luzi (staves 27-28). Rui pinpoints that he did job hunting for Luzi (stave 25) and accompanied him to play computer games, not for fun but for support and accompaniment (stave 39). Rui particularly emphasises the fact that as Luzi's friend, they have the ability to help him because they have social networks in various industries (stave 16).

It reflects that Rui perceives men's friendship as a personal association that is instrumental in promoting men's socioeconomic status and giving men socioeconomic advantages (Chamber, 2006). It not only constructs him as a friend who is loyal and helpful to Luzi, but more importantly, it shows how men perceive their own male friendship. Moreover, by displaying and explicitly articulating that they have the 'ability' to help, they construct and perform what Wong (2020) calls the 'ability' model of hegemonic masculinity for Chinese men. It reproduces and reinforces that wealth and the possession of social resources are important dimensions to define a man's masculinity (Song and Hird, 2014).

Luzi, unlike his other friends who already had careers and stable romantic relationships, shows his wanderlust and uncertainty about his future life. He admits that he has a plan for his future life, even

though he never specified in the recording (maybe because he did not have the opportunity to say in the above interaction). This revelation puts him in conflict with the pursuit of success and wealth, which has defined Chinese manhood since the 1980s. Accompanying the 'open and reform' policy, material success and social power are valued as a measurement for masculinity (Osburg, 2013; Song and Hird, 2014). Luzi runs the danger of being seen as unambitious and 'unsuccessful' because he does not display conformity to the male ideal of being ambitious and career focused. This becomes the reason for him to be lectured, persuaded, and even policed and regulated by his close male friends. Rui uses 'brother' as a term of address to create a close bond and he wishes to use this talk to broadcast how supportive and nurturing their friendship is. I captured a detail from my participant-observation in the field that during that time Luzi was staying at Rui's flat, which was bought by Rui's parents as 'preparation' for his marriage a year earlier. However, Rui did not mention it in this talk as the practical help he gave Luzi. Perhaps he wanted to save face for Luzi, as this admission may have been too face-threatening.

7.2.2 Men's Talk as a Prime Site to Lecture and Impose Gender Norms

Luzi's friend in the following conversation continues to persuade him to stay in Kunming. If Luzi could not find a job in Kunming, then it is highly likely that he would go back to their hometown, Lijiang, thus Rui's 'biggest wish' (stave 1) that Luzi stay in Kunming would not be realised. This 'Lijiang hometown friendship group' may lose one close member of their journey in Kunming. This personal talk is to ensure the stability and cohesion of their friendship group. The following talk continues to illustrate how Luzi's 'rotten life' (stave 28) is perceived as a problem in this group. Their personal talk becomes a prime site to lecture and impose gender norms on Luzi, in which dominant cultural discourses of men accomplishing life assignments before 30 and the 'able-responsible' model of

hegemonic masculinity (Wong, 2020) are reinforced and reproduced. As a result, Luzi does not display any active engagement in this personal talk, which is meant to inspire him.

Extract 3: 'You don't only live for yourself'

[30]Zantai   1 it's time to draw a full period for your university life
2 the time after graduation is very important
3 you need to have a clear picture about what you want to do in the future
4 the first step is to think it through
5 and the second step is to do it bravely
6 you need to make the first step
7 like to browse those job advertisements information

----

[31]Rui   don't be afraid of it   haha do you like this drink?
Zantai   you just need to try   like Sheng remember? when he was in Kunming
Luzi

----

[32]Rui
Zantai   he has been through a lot of difficulties   but he is still working very hard and I really admire him
Luzi

----

[33]Rui
Zantai   he told me 'so FUCK it it is NOT A BIG DEAL'
Luzi

----

[34]Rui   I think Luzi hasn't overcome his fear of the society
Zantai   no no no
Luzi

----

[35]Rui   if you thought about the consequences then why did you suspend for two years
Zantai
Luzi   the consequence of my actions

----

[36]Zantai   1 after graduation there are many things to consider
2 your parents
3 your future
4 the family you will establish in the future
5 and your friends

----

[37]Rui   I just want to tell you   really you don't only live for yourself
Zantai   all of those things   you need to consider those things

Luzi

---

³⁸Rui   1 you need to think through clearly what your mum thinks of you

                2 what does your dad think of you

                3 what do we think of you

                4 I am telling you that you can't live in your own world

                5 how we perceive you should also be in your consideration

---

³⁹Rui   yeah anything you want to do we all support you

Zantai   we all support you

Luzi

---

⁴⁰Rui   1 if you want to work or you want have your own business

                2 both options will be fine

                3 we all support you

                4 you should make your decisions as soon as possible

                5 don't be rotten in front of computer everyday

                6 you see I always accompany you for your games

                7 I really don't want to play

                8 I just want be with you and enlighten you

---

⁴¹Rui   yes

Zantai   we didn't say it in the past but those are the words from our heart

Luzi   haha home come that I didn't realise it?

---

⁴²Rui

Zantai   okay there is need to talk more

Luzi   I know <long dragging but also cheerful voice> you are all <u>positive energy</u> <cheerful tone>

When the above personal talk centres on Luzi's 'delayed and rotten life', his friends produce contradictory discourses and performances. They seem to display their emotional support to encourage Luzi (staves 31, 32, 33, 39, 40), however, they just talk and lecture, but not ask for Luzi's input. For instance, Rui and Zantai express allegedly 'unconditional' support with the catchphrase 'we all support you' (staves 39, 40: 3) to create a supportive brotherhood. However, at a discourse level, they do not stand with Luzi or agree with his life choices. When Luzi starts to talk proactively, reflecting on the consequences of his actions (stave 35), it is immediately interrupted by Rui, with a

harsh interrogation: 'if you thought about the consequences then why did you suspend for two years'. This clearly prevents Luzi from revealing and disclosing more. Their other friend, Wenxin, who was present in this talk, was drunk most of the time and only showed up once in stave 29, complaining that Luzi 'had been playing for a total of two years and it is time to graduate'.

Luzi's friends impose hegemonic gender expectations on him. As Zantai summarises, 'after graduation, there are many things to consider: your parents, your future, the family you will establish, and your friends' (stave 36). The Chinese motto that this group of men believe, 'men need to stand on the ground independently when they turn 30' (*sanshierli* - 三十而立), has been interpreted as a dominant discourse of masculinity today. In this hegemonic model of masculinity, successful men are supposed to accomplish three crucial life assignments before turning 30: graduating from university, having a decent job, and getting married. All the men in this group, apart from Luzi, had completed these tasks before they reached 30. Luzi, in contrast, had not even finished the first task yet while his other friends were almost at the end-point of this race.

Luzi is expected to align with this hegemonic model of masculinity to show that he is responsible, reliable and capable of accomplishing life assignments. Luzi first needs to align himself with the career success and wealth-based hegemonic model of masculinity. He needs to graduate soon and find a job or start his own business to prove he is a successful man. It confirms that the 'future' is synonymous with having a strong ability (Wong, 2020) to achieve career success and material wealth (Osburg, 2013). It constitutes the broader discourse that Chinese masculinity in contemporary society is often based on power and wealth (Song and Hird, 2014). Secondly, according to Zantai and Rui, Luzi needs to show he is reliable and responsible. The powerful cultural discourses of being a responsible man

are drawn on here (Wong, 2020). According to Wong's (2020) model of hegemonic masculinity for Chinese men, 'being a responsible man' means men must demonstrate their thoughtfulness and responsibility to their families (i.e., be a responsible husband, son, and son-in-law). Here, Luzi is expected not only to practise filial piety to his parents but also to be committed and devoted to the family he will establish. Therefore, Luzi is framed in a heteronormative expectation by his friends here of starting a family even if Luzi does not want to or can not.

In this talk, Zantai and Rui added one more layer of hegemonic gender norms and expectation on the heavily packed discourses of hegemonic masculinity: Luzi also needs to be responsible and devoted to his male friends. Both Zantai and Rui mention that Luzi needs to consider how he would be perceived by his friends (stave 36: 5 & stave 38: 5).It implicitly suggests that male friendship is 'a key social tie at the core of the management of gendered normality' (Chambers, 2006: 50). Even though Luzi is their friend, he stands on the opposite side of the dominant discourse of masculinity. If Luzi fails to conform to those gender expectations and norms, he may encounter the risk of losing male bonding and solidarity. His 'problematic' life is not accepted by a male friendship group that emulates the hegemonic models of masculinity. According to his friends, living a 'rotten life' (stave 28: 4 & stave 40: 5) is peripheral as Luzi 'lives in his own world' (stave 38: 4).

Through the examination of the above personal talk, I argue that Luzi's friends show their continuous support, but that their help can be further problematised as a manifestation of rejecting a marginalised model of masculinity. After rounds of lecturing, Luzi finally compromises with the words 'I know' (stave 42). His concluding remark, 'you are all positive energy', acknowledges the positive support that his friends have exhibited but still does not show a confirmative attitude towards his

future plan. The contextualization cue of his cheerful tone also switches the frame from a 'serious' conversation into a more light-hearted cheerful drinking session.

7.3 Gendered Male Friendship

In this section, I illustrate how this group of men use their personal talk to 'do' friendship (Coates, 2001). I unveil how their masculine friendship is gendered and constructed through expressing difference from, and opposition to, femininity (Chamber, 2006), especially through their own perceived feminine friendship. The following conversation was recorded by Group 2 in 2017, soon after Zantai proposed to his wife, Tingting. Members of this friendship group spent time with Tingting's friends to prepare and decorate Zantai's proposal party. Before the transcribed excerpt, Rui complained to Zantai that he does not like some of Tingting's female friends at the proposal. Tingting is a Kunmingnese girl and her friends are mainly from Kunming too. I will unpack their follow-up conversation to show how they draw on gender differentiation discourses (Sunderland, 2004; Kiesling, 2001, 2005) to construct and produce male friendship discourse. It involves an interplay of locality and gender: their 'Lijiang men's friendship is different from Kunming women's friendship'.

Extract 4: Our friendship is just different from theirs

[1]Rui   oh fuck it   their relationship just
   Zantai   our relationship is just different from theirs
   Luzi   very different
----
[2]Zantai   1 their relationship how to describe it
               2 if you seem good and then it is all good
               3 they laugh together
               4 and that's it
----
[3]Rui   1 I can tell you I have the same feeling
               2 their relationship is that
               3 they can share happiness

4 but can't go through struggles or hard times

----

⁴Rui   it is true   it's true it's true look at us look at us
  Zantai   so true   that's how it works
  Luzi   I agree I feel the same

----

⁵Rui   1 if ever you guys have any problems (.)
          2 you know it very well
          3 hai-ya no need to articulate it <emotional tone>

----

⁶Rui   really no need to say more
  Zantai   really no need to say more   no need to say more
  Luzi   that's true that's true

----

⁷Rui   1 just like last time for Sheng
          2 his girlfriend cheated on him
          3 really
          4 I was really angry
          5 I really wanted to rush to Dali and beat that man
          6 those situations like this we don't need to talk about it

----

⁸Zantai   1 they didn't experience what we've been through
           2 look at us we have known each other since childhood
           3 they haven't had this kind of experience
           4 so you know there is a really good poetic sentence
           5 bugs whose lifespan only last one summer wouldn't understand what ice is
           6 so for fuck sake
           7 if you are going to tell them what we said here they wouldn't understand it

----

⁹Rui   yeah right
  Zantai   they don't understand it   they don't understand it
  Luzi   ha yeah yeah

----

¹⁰Rui
  Zantai   yeah very simple that's how it works
  Luzi   once I hung out with Zitan and his girlfriend   very similar

----

¹¹Rui
  Zantai   their stupid face
  Luzi   so they didn't like when we got drunk

----

¹²Rui   really just motherfuckers
  Zantai   when you meet those people just have a performance to blend in on those occasions

	Luzi

---

[13]Rui	1 you know what
	2 I even don't want to fucking perform
	3 that one who has a fringe
	4 so fucking stupid
	5 I don't even want to <u>drink with her</u> <angry tone>

---

[14]Rui	really really
Zantai	
Luzi	that's what I have been telling you Zitan and his friends had beer but I drunk whiskey

---

[15]Rui	
Zantai	fucking morons fuck
Luzi	I was so drunk that I lay on the floor

---

[16]Rui	1 honestly I think my parents were so right
	2 honestly I don't have any siblings
	3 so I really treat you guys
	4 well also for those who are not here today
	5 Sheng and Peihan as my brothers
	6 I am not exaggerating
	7 if you meet any problems
	8 you know I don't need to say more
	9 <u>yeah</u> <accompanied by the sound of their glasses touching>

7.3.1 Using Gender Differentiation Discourse to Define Male Friendship

Following the consensus that their male friendship is different from Tingting's female friendship (stave 1), Zantai and Rui start *gendering* friendship. Zantai comments that those girls 'just laugh together, and that's it' (stave 2: 3-4), implying that female friendship is a shallow form of friendship. On my second trip in Yunnan in 2017, both Rui and Zantai once said to me when we were drinking in a pub: 'I wonder how many times girls would get completely drunk and disclose themselves to their female friends. I doubted they would do that. They just drink bubble tea together. They go shopping and watch films. When would they have a moment to drink properly like us and talk about something from

the bottom of their heart?' These men's understanding of friendship is different from Aries and Johnson's (1983) finding that male friendships are activity-based while women's talk is more centralised around talk (Coates, 1996). Rather, they believe that female friendships are based on superficial activities, such as drinking bubble tea, going shopping and watching films, whereas men often get drunk to talk 'from the bottom of their heart', such as the personal talk they recorded for me, presented in this chapter.

Gender differentiation discourses are drawn on to define their heterosexual male friendship. For instance, drinking bubble tea becomes a gendered practice, indexing casual and superficial social activities associated with women's friendship. Feminine friendship is positioned and represented as superficial and shallow, and hence, unconsolidated. Men's friendship, in contrast, goes hand-in-hand with drinking alcohol. Drinking alcohol is attached to a layer of gendered social meaning as a masculine practice, perceived as superior to bubble tea by these men. The men use alcohol to facilitate their personal talk, 'from the bottom of their heart', and they assume that without alcohol, women are unable to talk with their female friends about their feelings and emotions. However, through the rigorous linguistic examination of their so-called 'disclosure talk' (see above), they do not encourage any disclosure. Rather, their friendship talk becomes a core site for 'the management of gender normality' (Chamber, 2006: 50), deployed to lecture and police hegemonic gender norms among themselves.

Rui continues to draw on gender differentiation discourses to reinforce this gendered friendship discourse, attempting to prove that male friendship is superior to female friendship (staves 3 & 5). Using a well-established Chinese expression, he covertly expresses that female friends can have fun

together (*tong gan*) but are unable to go through tough times (*gong ku*), while male friends can not only have a fun time together (*tong gan*) and but also are committed to helping each other go through life struggles and hard times (*gong ku*). To explain, he uses a narrative to demonstrate this point. Their friend, Sheng, was hurt by his girlfriend because she was cheating on him, and as his friends, they almost 'rushed to Dali to beat that man' (stave 7: 1, 4 & 5). This narrative highlights how they can be loyal, dedicated and supportive of their male friends, especially when they are in a difficult situation.

Rui's gendered definition of friendship shows a residue of the virtuousness discourse that claimed women were unable to have true friendships. This view originated from classical thinking and can be found in both Western and Chinese historical and cultural discourses. For example, friendship regulated in Aristotelian discourse is signified as an inherently masculine virtue, characterised by bravery, loyalty and dedication to civic duty (Chamber, 2006: 51). Similarly, male bonding is also often seen as a virtue under the Confucian tradition, with qualities of loyalty, dedication, and sacrifice. Male friendship as a practice must be 'pure' – exclusive to men only. In the historical understanding of Chinese culture, women are often seen as obstacles in the pursuit of male friendship and political ambition (Louie, 2004). This misogynist ideology of excluding women persists in influencing how men construct their masculinity centuries later. For instance, Jachinson Chan (2001) uses this argument to explain why there are rarely interactions between male protagonists and female characters in Bruce Lee's heroic films. This particular hegemonic model of masculinity emphasises the virtue of same-sex male friendship and displays a misogynist ideology.

While producing gendered friendship discourse in their personal talk, participants display their collaborative and active conversational engagement to underline the gender difference. They use

repetition to confirm that they share the same feeling on this gendered perspective of friendship (staves 4 & 6) and agree that women would not understand their male friendship (staves 8 & 9). In particular, Zantai uses a poetic sentence as a metaphor to sharpen this gender difference: the difference is 'like bugs whose lifespan only lasted one summer wouldn't understand what ice is' (stave 8: 5). This metaphor perpetuates the gender differentiation discourse, emphasising how women cannot understand men. Hence, their masculine identity is constructed and positioned especially through the reinforcement and reproduction of a misogynist discourse.

Although they reciprocate each other's utterances (staves 1, 4 & 6) and use minimal responses (staves 9 & 10) to show a collaborative feature of their personal talk, they still often constrain expressions that articulate their appreciation of male friendship. The phrase 'no need to talk more about it' (staves 5, 6, 7: 6 & 16: 8) occurs often. They may use this catchphrase to remind themselves not to reveal too many feelings and emotions, as it is still perceived as having a possibly 'feminine' association. When I participated in their drinking events, they often said that there was 'no need to say more and everything is in this shot'. This phrase became a drinking ritual for them to toast. It may indicate that they know one another very well that their views are already known to one another, and therefore, they do not have to reiterate. This catchphrase is used, normalised and conventionalised at drinking events, restraining men's revelation of emotionality.

In my fieldwork, I saw this drinking ritual many times, not only in this group but in many other interactions between men. This ritualised phrase establishes a norm that shapes and constrains men's linguistic performance. Men perhaps have a desire to express their feelings; however, it is often constrained because of this gender and drinking norm. This group of men, on the one hand, relies on

drinking alcohol to facilitate their disclosure talk; but on the other hand, the drinking norm prevents them from disclosing more. Consequently, they may not be able to accumulate the skills, experience and opportunities to organise a disclosure talk as they would wish, to truly express themselves 'from the bottom of the heart'.

7.3.2 The Interplay of Locality and Gender in the Construction of Masculine Friendship

As their conversation progresses, the intersection of place and gender emerges. Their masculine friendship is constructed and performed based on a local discourse of masculine identity. Luzi narrates a drinking event that he participated in with Zitan (also a member of this male group) and his girlfriend (staves 10, 11, 14 & 15) to illustrate that masculine friendship is closely linked with alcohol drinking. Zitan ordered beer to accommodate his girlfriend and other female friends because they do not like men 'getting drunk' (stave 11). However, Luzi insists on being his true self, so he was the only person that night who drank whiskey (stave 14). This constructs not only his masculine identity, but more significantly, his identity as a Lijiang man. In Chapter 4, I demonstrated that drinking alcohol is closely linked to the localised Lijiang masculine identity because it can be a benchmark to verify if someone is 'genuine', a quality that defines Lijiang men.

In Luzi's narrative, his close male friend Zitan is deployed as 'Other', simply because he betrayed his Lijiang masculine identity. He had beer, instead of the strong distilled liquor that this group of men would normally drink, to please his girlfriend and other acquaintances. Zitan gave up his Lijiang men's 'raw' and 'authentic' qualities, instead being regulated by 'social appropriateness'. In the following

section, I will further unpack and explain how a man's masculine identity can be challenged when he is in a heterosexual romantic relationship. To demonstrate that he still has a Lijiang masculine identity, Luzi narrated the action that he was so drunk that he 'lay on the floor' (stave 15). Although this may be perceived as embarrassing, he does not regret it, rather, he is proud to tell this to his close friend, as it secures his Lijiang masculine identity.

Rui soon joins the collective endorsement of the Lijiang masculine identity. As the response to his friends' complaints, Zantai suggests they compromise, to 'have a performance to blend in on those occasions' (stave 12). However, this proposal is rejected by Rui. He emphasises in an angry tone that he would not act against his true feelings to please people he dislikes (stave 13). It contradicts his belief of being 'genuine' and 'raw', which defines what a Lijiang man is. He mentions that he does not want to drink with a specific girl, one of Tingting's female friends (stave 13: 5). It aligns with the discussion in Chapter 4 that those men use alcohol drinking as a practice to show their attitude towards individuals or recognisable social groups. In our ethnographic interview, Rui clarified the indexical meaning of 'drinking with someone'. They use the action of toasting in a drinking event to show their recognition, approval and appreciation of certain individuals. Therefore, when drinking becomes inevitable on certain social occasions, they can choose to toast or not to toast to someone, to imply their preference and attitude. Hence, displaying an unwillingness to drink with someone shows a disapproval and even disdainful attitude. In this way, Rui positions himself as an authentic and genuine Lijiang man and distances himself from Kunmingnese women. This display earns him a significant position in this male friendship group that highlights the local discourse of masculinity.

At the end of this talk, Rui broadcasts his homosocial desire and appreciation to this male bonding group (stave 16). Like Kiesling's (2005) findings of American fraternity men, the expression of homosocial desire is always broadcast to the group, rather than individuals. In particular, he argues that as the only child in his family who does not have any siblings, he treats his friends like his brothers. This may be similar to the 'family' discourse in male friendship that is often based on sport in the West. Those men use such a discourse to create closeness and belonging to strengthen their male bonding (Chamber, 2006). The family discourse that Rui produces here perhaps functions in a similar fashion to strengthen their bonding. However, I argue that more Chinese socio-cultural context needs to be taken into account. Men in this group are the generation impacted by China's 'one child per couple' policy, and as they do not have siblings to grow up with, school friends are often valued as significant life friends.

When producing the family discourse to appraise his male friendship, Rui uses his parents' voice to endorse that his friends (including those both present and absent in that speech event) are true friends (stave 16: 1). It reflects that parental authority is credentialed by those men who are the only child of the family to create a family discourse to strengthen male bonding. The social structure of one child per couple, lasting from the late 1980s to the early 2010s, may amplify homosocial desire, and this applies to both females and males. Almost all the men and their female partners in this research were the only children of their parents, and they all expressed a belief that 'friends are their chosen siblings' when I was them in my fieldwork.

Moreover, a shared locality plays a significant role for this bonding and solidarity. Historical and anthropological research shows that a male network based on a common native place is a significant

venue for male bonding groups. For instance, both Xiang Biao's research on 'Zhejiang' village in Beijing (2018) and Ray Hibbins's (2013) masculinity research on Chinese immigrants in diasporic society underlines that male solidarity is not only based on experiencing entertainment or leisure activities together, but more importantly, on how they help and support each other. Similarly, growing up in Lijiang, members in this group supported each other when they migrated to a new city (Kunming) to accomplish a socio-economic advance. For instance, Wenxin works in a national insurance company as a salesman, and his friends all bought their insurance from him to boost his sales performance at work. They also lend money to each other when needed. When Luzi suspended and delayed his undergraduate study, Rui offered his flat for Luzi to stay in for more than one year rent-free.

Male friendship is never an individual choice; instead, it is fundamentally impacted by social structures in China (Mann, 2000). The dominant channels of social mobility ensure that men spend the better part of their social lives interacting exclusively with other men. Mann (2000: 10) identifies that in late imperial China in Qing Dynasty, men would spend the majority of their social life interacting exclusively with other men, and 'this is a culture where we could expect homosocial bonding to reach the state of a very high art'. However, this is not just distinctive to the Chinese context. Male-exclusive clubs and associations in Western societies also give men a socioeconomic advantage, and hence men's friendships are crucial in promoting power, especially among white men in business and politics (Chambers, 2006). As my data has shown, male power and privilege exerted through the site of male friendship is also evident in informal male friendship groups. Their solidarity strengthens their power and privilege as men in an overall system of power, and as a migrant in a new city they need a collective power based on shared identity. Hence, their masculine friendship is constructed from the opposite 'Other', an interplay of gender and locality, thus Kunminese females and their friendship

groups become their target. Only in this way can their heterosexual masculine identity as Lijiang men be validated and secured.

7.3.3 Display of Empathy in Personal Talk

The above section illustrates that men's personal talk is a core site for the production of male friendship discourse. It is constructed as a sub-discourse of a wider 'gender difference' discourse, particularly with an intersection of locality and gender. In this section, I continue to explore their emotional and personal talk, investigating how 'true friends' are discursively defined. In my corpus of participants' self-recorded talk, there were several episodes when participants shared their feelings and showed their emotional support to others. The catchphrase: 'if you understand me, then that's enough' often emerges in this talk. It indicates that the ultimate pursuit in male bonding is to seek acknowledgement from close friends about personal struggles. Or put differently, those men share their personal concerns not only to seek suggestions and solutions but, more importantly, for their friends' moral validation. The following extract represents the episodes in my corpus regarding how empathy is accomplished through their bonding talk. It was recorded with Group 2 in 2017 when they were talking about their struggles in Kunming.

Extract 5: I can feel what you feel

¹Rui   yeah yeah we got it

Zantai   if you understand me then that's enough   that's how true friends would do

----

²Rui   it's true (..) you know it is the same for me I can feel what you feel really

Zantai

----

³Rui   1 if you look at those Kunmingnese people   <u>fuck them</u> <angry tone>

            2 they just deliberately want to embarrass you

            3 it is so obvious that they want to urge you to drink more

            4 if they want to do it then it is their choice

----

  [4]Rui

  Zantai   they ask me to drink but fuck them it is not that easy to get me drunk they are just so pathetic

----

  [5]Rui   really   I so understand your situation and emotions

  Zantai   really for fuck's sake

This snippet shows Zantai attempting to seek Rui's emotional support ('if you understand me then that is enough'), and this kind of acknowledgment, according to him, is 'what true friends would do' (stave 1). Zantai's quest for Rui's understanding perhaps links to Rui's discontentment at the proposal scenario due to Zantai's wife TingTing and her Kunmingnese acquaintances. Standing in the middle between his close male friend and his wife, Zantai indicates that he only wants Rui to acknowledge his difficult situation – that is all he asks for. Rui immediately responds with a positive confirmation, 'yeah, we got it' (stave 1), and the floor accordingly shifts to Rui. He soon uses a 'one-at-a-time' conversational structure (Coates, 1997) to exhibit his recognition and empathy of Zantai. He first confirms that it is true that genuine friends need mutual understanding and support. Then he explicitly expresses that 'I can feel how you feel' because he has experienced the same difficult situation (stave 2).

It demonstrates that they define friendship in terms of the more modern concept of emotional closeness (Chamber, 2006). Specifically, their closeness and bonding are built on their shared identities as Lijiang men and common experiences of interacting with Kunming people. They had both experienced embarrassing and unpleasant situations when they were urged to drink by 'those Kunming people' (stave 3), and those experiences made them bond and form a rally. Their personal and emotional talk, hence, becomes a way for them to vent their resentment against Kunming people, through which their emotional support and bonding is expressed. This conversation shows their desire

to seek acknowledgement of sympathy and a covert articulation of emotional support (staves 1, 2 & 5). The conversational purpose of their personal talk, therefore, is as a disclosure, aiming to accomplish mutual empathy.

This echoes the shift in the definition of friendship, from heroism or public civic duty to the more modern relationship of emotional bonding. With this benchmark, research around the 1980s to the early 2000s in the West led to a view that women have 'deeper' friendships than men (Segal, 1990; Chamber, 2006). Linguistic research has shown that Western middle-class men tend to be emotionally distant and restrain their expression around personal vulnerabilities (Coates, 2003). Drawing on their personal talk as a resource, Rui and Zantai attempt to pursue an emotional bonding and closeness that often characterises women's friendship (Seidler, 1992). Their talk in interaction, however, does not emulate women's friendship. Even though they articulate a mutual empathy, they still exert male dominance and construct a 'tough' hegemonic masculinity. For instance, after Rui recalls their experience of being urged by Kunming people to drink, Zantai displays his toughness, saying that he is not that easy to get drunk (stave 4). He is still reluctant to show vulnerability for a disclosure. Zantai uses his outstanding drinking capacity to compensate for the face-loss caused by being forced by Kunming people to drink to still claim and exert his dominance.

This short episode of personal and emotional talk shows that sympathy is needed and valued among this group of men. They display this acknowledgement and mutual emotional support (staves 1, 2 & 5), which strengthens their group identity and group cohesion. They show a certain level of positive listenership and minimal response (stave 1 & 5) to exhibit their mutual validation and confirmation. However, most of the time, they still align with the 'one-at-a-time' structure that Coates (1997)

identifies in most men's talk that involves less collaborative features. They have the desire for their friends' emotional support, but still do not show their openness to reveal their vulnerability. Their male bonding is achieved through emotional closeness, but at the same time, their male solidarity is also expressed through linguistic strategies that are often found in male talk for solidarity, such as swearing (stave 4: 1, 5 & 6) and ritual insults about a particular social group – 'those Kunming people' (stave 4). With the denigration of the 'Other', their group bonding and group identity as Lijiang men are reproduced.

To summarise, in this section I have scrutinised how male friendship discourse is produced in men's personal and emotional talk. Male friendship is defined by them through heavily drawing on gender difference discourses; their close friendship thus serves as a personal alliance to uphold the dominant masculinity of being Lijiang men. It means that their masculine friendship is constructed and accomplished through the denigration of Kunming women's friendship, a specific intersection of both gender and locality. Their hegemonic masculinity not only shows their misogynist discourse of not appreciating women and female friendship but also a dominance over men in their own group who betray their values. In this discursive construction process of their male friendship, drinking alcohol plays a significant role. Alcohol drinking, as a social practice, is first gendered and perceived as a masculine and superior practice compared to girls' bubble tea drinking. These men use specific types of alcohol and the capacity of alcohol consumption to index hegemonic models of masculinity. Hence, accordingly, being forced to drink against their will is often seen as a loss of their dominance and control.

7.4 Brother or Wife? Zantai's Dilemma

In the above extract, in order to meet the expectations of his female partner, a close male friend of Luzi's, Zitan, chooses to drink beer rather than whiskey. However, this is perceived as disdainful and disrespectful in their male friends' eyes. It indicates that their identity can be challenged when a man is in a romantic heterosexual relationship. In this section, I continue to explore and examine their personal talk, illustrating how men in my research struggle in a 'brother or wife' dilemma, when attempting to balance male bonding and the enactment of heterosexual masculinity. I will first introduce the socio-cultural context of this dilemma and analyse how a man who is under the threat of losing male bonding uses male friendship talk to regain his status. This will be followed by a discussion of strategies and nuances involved in balancing these two clashing discourses. Finally, with the ethnographic data collected from another Group, I present an alternative that other men offer to deal with this conflict.

7.4.1 Introducing the Dilemma

The 'brother or wife' dilemma manifested in Group 1 starts when the men become involved in more serious and committed relationships. The first time I participated in this group's men's drinking event was back in 2016, in a pub in the centre of Kunming. At that time, most of them had started committed relationships, so they brought their female partners to the gathering. Walking to the pub, Rui and other friends told me, 'we definitely want to have our men-only party, but we all have girlfriends now, so it is good for them to get to know each other well too!' However, when we sat down, Wenxin's girlfriend Zhenzhen offered a different interpretation. She laughingly said, 'the reason why we are here is simply because they need drivers after getting drunk!' Tingting shrugged her shoulders, adding, 'it seems I have no choice but only to be his driver and carer'. On that night, all

females including me ordered soft drinks while the four male participants shared a bottle of whiskey mixed with iced tea in a jar.

Alcohol drinking clearly sits in the centre of the men's homosocial activities, and in 2017 I participated in more drinking with this group. I started to drink alcohol with them to strengthen our rapport. On that field trip, I witnessed several fierce arguments between the men and their female partners regarding their drinking. As the female partners of the men in the group, the women formed their own bonds based on their shared experience of taking care of their intoxicated husbands or boyfriends. They shared their complaints with me, in both a teasing and resentful way. Their male partners came home very late after drinking, around 3 or 4 am. The women had to get up and take care of them, preparing honey water and making sure they slept safely in bed. Wenxin's girlfriend, Zhenzhen, complained to me that 'you would not imagine how difficult it would be to take a drunken man back home. Men are so heavy! I carried him above my shoulder, he was smelly, silly, gibbering all the time. Apparently, he could not walk, or even stand properly. I just left him for one second to open the door, and somehow that man was lying on the floor!'

The women soon got angry, discontented, and disappointed with these situations, and more arguments were initiated. Sometimes, the men chose to continue drinking. For instance, once, after failing to persuade Zantai to go home early with her, Tingting stormed out of the pub. Zantai continued drinking after Tingting left, believing that if he went home with her, it would be a big face-loss situation. That night, Zantai was drunk and lost his key on the way home. Tingting refused to open the door for him, so he slept on the street for a couple of hours before someone helped him get him a place in a hotel. The men were actually proud of their intoxicated behaviour, because 'behaving

badly' is often viewed as a positive way of doing masculinity (Coates, 2000, 2001). Their drunken experiences were often re-told as narratives to construct their masculinity and form their bonding.

However, when it threatens their intimacy with their female partners and the stability of their heterosexual relationships, especially marriage, the men compromise. There is another powerful model of masculinity that constrains their behaviour: 'responsible man' hegemonic masculinity. If they fail to exert this model of masculinity, they run the risk of not being perceived as 'a good family man' (Wong, 2020), hence, not an 'accepted' man. According to their female partners, the men apologise for their irresponsible drunken behaviour when they are sober. They also use social media – Moments on WeChat – to broadcast their apology and regret in a more public digital space. For instance, Rui once posted a hand-written 'guarantee letter' on his WeChat, accompanied by his girlfriend's photo, promising not to drink badly again in the future. This public exhibition, accessible (digitally) to all his friends, enables them to declare their 'responsible man' identity and masculinity.

Zantai was the first man in the group to get married. His wife, Tingting, was not very happy because he got severely drunk with his male friends. As a compromise to his wife, he stopped seeing his male friends, but it led to discontent in the group. Zantai's absence in their male homosocial activities challenged his masculine identity because he violated the homosocial obligations to prioritise male-male social relationships (Kiesling, 2003; Flood, 2008). As Flood (2008: 334) concludes, there seem to always be 'tensions between men's participation in collective masculine performances and other desires and attachments'. Existing research has shown that a man who chooses to pass up on homosocial bonding to be with his girlfriend is often subordinated, teased, and even punished (Messner, 1992; Flood, 2008). Men who fail to devote time to homosocial commitments are policed in

their homosocial groups or institutions (Lyman, 1987; Messner, 1992; Boswell and Spade, 1996). Similarly, Zantai's compromise resulted in a 'brother or wife' dilemma: after getting married, how could he continue male homosocial bonding, but at the same time fulfil his heterosexual conjugal responsibilities? Other men in the group also experienced similar struggles in their late 20s and early 30s.

7.4.2 Balancing Homosocial Bonding and Heterosexual Bonding

The following extracts were recorded when Zantai finally had a chance to hang-out and drink with his friends. The conversation was recorded around the end of 2017 in a pub. Participants include Rui, Zantai, Luzi and Wenxin, but Rui and Zantai hold the main floor of the conversation. Before the following excerpt, Zantai shared that he had had serious arguments with Tingting because of their disagreement in terms of their social lives. He did not like Tingting's Kunmingnese female friends, and Tingting was unhappy that he always got drunk after hanging out with his male friends.

Extract 6: We should work together to manage our small family well

[1]Zantai   1 you know what I have been thinking
              2 regarding this problem (.) I have discussed with her

----

[2]Rui   I believe that
  Zantai   we have discussed it

----

[3]Rui   understand each other's feeling   the two of you
  Zantai   I told her that the two of us should (..)

----

[4]Zantai   1 we should achieve (.) a goal
             2 that is a very simple sentence
             3 we should not stare at each other
             4 instead we should look into the distance in the same direction
             5 what does this poetry mean
             6 it means we should not look at each other's shortcomings
             7 we should have the same goal

8 that is we should work together to manage our small family well

9 that's it

10 this is what I have told her

----

⁵Luzi   1 oh <u>SHIT</u> <surprised and loud voice>

2 then she can have a solid argument to ask you to not to hang out with us

3 she just needs one simple fucking sentence to counter

----

⁶Rui   I don't care about her I just want to

Zantai   I just want to tell you how I feel

----

⁷Zantai   1 if she wants to hang out with her friends

2 I am okay with this

3 If I want to hang out with my own friends

4 then she SHOULD NOT say anything

----

⁸Rui   no no that's not what I meant   no no no

Zantai   really I told her that

----

⁹Rui   listen to me A-Tai I think the best marriage should be like this

Zantai   yeah yeah

----

¹⁰Rui   1 the husband has his own friends while the wife has her friends

2 the wife can hang out with her husband's friends

3 and the husband can hang out with his wife's friends too

----

¹¹Rui   there is no problem at all

Zantai   but men can choose not to hang out with those female friends <serious tone>

----

¹²Rui   fuck STOP laughing <loud voice>

Zantai   women can also   I don't give a fuck about it that is okay I don't give a shit about it

Luzi   hahaha

Zantai first openly shares with Rui that he and his wife Tingting have attempted to address the issue. He uses a 'business' metaphor to indicate that marriage requires both parties' commitment to operate and manage (stave 4: 8). This indicates that he emphasises stability in their marriage, even though some anthropological research has shown that Chinese people in cosmopolitan cities tend to perceive marriage with a more romantic view with an emphasis on conjugal love (Yan, 2003; Zhang E., 2011).

According to Zantai, to achieve marital stability, he and his wife should work together like business partners, sharing the same vision rather than complaining about each other's shortcomings. This positions him as a family man who prioritises marriage. His declaration at the beginning of this extract allows him to claim and perform a responsible husband persona, reproducing and reinforcing a 'responsible' hegemonic model of masculinity (Wong, 2020). However, this positioning is soon challenged by Luzi (stave 5). Zantai's prioritisation of his conjugal responsibility, in Luzi's opinion, may lead their male bonding to be subordinated and even neglected. Zantai may participate in their male homosocial activities even less.

Luzi's concern soon shifts the discourse from the highlight of conjugal responsibility to Zantai's compensation, in which he attempts to reclaim his masculine status and his male friends' support. His wife and her friends are unfortunately deployed for this construction of male dominance. Rui first shows a disrespectful attitude towards his close friend's wife (stave 6: 'I don't care about her'), which is followed by Zantai's resentment that his wife should not interfere with his social activities (stave 7). However, Rui distances himself from this stance (stave 8). He illustrates an ideal scenario to avoid the dilemma when a man wants to pursue both homosocial bonding and heterosexual bonding (staves 9-11): there should be a perfectly balanced heterosociality that can compass both a man's close same-sex friends and his female partner and her friends. However, it may not be that easy to accomplish such a practice in real life.

To respond to Rui's suggestion, Zantai first firmly asserts, 'but men can choose not to hang out with those female friends' (stave 11). Through distancing and even excluding his wife's female friends in his life, he may intend to exert a male dominance over women to regain the trust of his male friends.

Moreover, he produces a misogynist discourse to degrade his wife and her friends by saying that he does not 'give a fuck' about how his wife may perceive him (stave 12). Through this statement, he attempts to compensate for the loss of his masculine status in this male bonding, caused by him spending less time with this male group.

Throughout historical research on Chinese men and masculinity, male bonding has always been highlighted as a virtue, which cannot be overridden by heterosexual desire (Louie, 2002; Song and Hird, 2014). For instance, Song Geng (2004) argues that in late imperial China, Chinese society was dominated by a homosocial 'male culture', characterised by the repression of heterosexual desire and the reliance on male same-sex social bonds. Constructed by Confucian discourses, imperial China was a world of 'male homosocial bonds which valued same-sex loyalty, friendship and solidarity'. Florence Liu's (2014) research on late imperial Chinese literature acknowledges that male bonding has the power to shape and foster the dominant male homosocial desire; however, she disagrees with Song's (2004: 82) claim that 'the male-male bond does not need to use woman as the medium'.

Through the examination of the stories from a well-known novel, *LiaoZhaiZhiYi*, she finds that females play a key role in the male homosocial bonding. For instance, a man betroths his sister to his male friend to strengthen their loyalty and solidarity, and one man sacrifices his wife to re-marry someone else for money to privilege male gambling friends over heterosexual bonds. For them, friendships with other men symbolise a more fundamental affiliation with the patriarchal system, which reaffirms their masculinity in many ways. The historical residue of deploying heterosexual relationships to facilitate male bonding is still evident in men's talk today. Zantai uses the discursive strategy of denigrating his wife and her female friends to prioritise and show the value of his male friendship. In this way, he may

dissolve the challenges and concerns that Luzi imposed on him. With more unfolding of their personal talk, more strategies are used by Zantai to construct his masculine identities in a male bonding group, but the interaction with Rui also shows more complexities and nuances regarding how to balance this dilemma.

7.4.3 Strategies for Balancing the Dilemma

Zantai's earlier emphasis on the value of marriage stability indicates that men need to enact and exert a hegemonic model of masculinity: being responsible in courtship and marriage (Wong, 2016, 2020). This is also often accompanied by compromises. In Choi and Peng's (2016) research on the Chinese younger generation of migrant male workers' family life and intimacy, they find that Chinese working-class men need to negotiate with their wives over their personal expenditure on their male homosocial activities, such as gambling, drinking, smoking and dining out. Playing the role of a household manager, their wives often cut off their husband's budget on those activities because they are money costly. However, for such men, cutting the expenses of those activities means cutting their social ties, as well as the approval and recognition they can gain from their male peers in their shared activities. Sometimes, their insistence on spending money on friends (such as paying for dinner) can result in marital strife (Choi and Peng, 2016: 69-72).

Choi and Peng's (2016) research focuses on the dynamics of men's family life, and therefore, they only reveal how those men deal with such struggles with their wives, negotiating marital power and gender dynamics at home. The strategies Chinese working-class men use include delegation, communication, ostensible concession (through paid lip-service) and confrontation (72-75). However, the perspective of how those men deal with this struggle with their male friends is rarely discussed in existing

research. In the following section, I continue to examine self-recorded personal talk to unpack the strategies that men from Group 2 use with their friends when attempting to accomplish a balance in this 'brother or wife' dilemma.

Extract 7: You need to learn how to tolerate and be compassionate

[13]Zantai 1 between me and Tingting

     2 you know what kind of person I am

     3 I straightforwardly told her that I dislike some of her friends

     4 and she was so angry

     5 but I don't care

     6 I just told her that I don't like this person and I don't like that person

     7 in the end she was so annoyed and asked me

     8 why do you dislike all of my friends?

     9 I replied that I just don't like them

     10 I just don't like the way they do things

     11 if I was forced to like them to blend in

     12 then I don't follow my heart to do things

----

[14]Rui   I think really   it should be authentic and real

Zantai really that's how I feel   I told her   yeah

----

[15]Zantai 1 so I won't change no matter how much she argued with me

     2 she feels it is very strange that I said 'no' every time to everyone who asked me to hang out

----

[16]Rui

Zantai   I always told her that I wouldn't go outside

Wexin don't do it against your will

----

[17]Rui   no no no A-Tai let me tell you

Zantai she absolutely has no idea of how to deal with me

----

[18]Rui 1 since you married Tingting right?

     2 honestly

     3 no matter what happens I wish you two will have a long-lasting marriage

     4 if there is something that requires you to compromise

     5 then compromise

     6 you are <dragging and drunk tone> (.) right?

     7 I don't need to say more, right?

     8 I feel that Tingting was raised in Kunming after all

   9 so she <u>er</u> < dragging tone> (…)

  10 anyway so she is not like Bingling

  11 but the woman you married is Tingting

  12 you need to learn how to tolerate and be compassionate

  13 right?

  14 and if you have to do something let us know

  15 as your brothers we definitely understand

----

[19]Rui   alright?

   Zantai   okay okay I got it

Staves 1-12 show that because of Luzi's challenge, the discourse of this personal talk switches from the 'commitment to marriage' to the 'commitment to male friendship'. Male bonding is privileged over heterosexual bonding, accomplished through the subordination of Zantai's wife, Tingting. Men collaboratively display their disrespect for Tingting; for instance, Rui said 'I don't care about her' (stave 6), and Zantai expresses that he does not 'give a shit' about his wife's opinion (staves 11 & 12). In this extract, Zantai continues to discuss the conflict regarding their social life with his friends. First, he demonstrates that he aligns with the local discourse of masculinity of being a 'real and genuine' man, which is highly valued in this male group (see discussion in Chapter 4). Because of the constraints of this model of masculinity, he would not allow himself to pretend to like his wife's female friends, especially the Kunmingnese friends (stave 13). He constructs his identity as a Lijiang man by distancing himself from social categories of women and Kunming people.

Moreover, he reinforces this identity by displaying a toughness to show his stance. He shows a firm stance to uphold this 'raw and genuine' discourse of masculinity, asserting that this model of masculinity would exclude any room for compromise (stave 15). He values, defends, and guards this local discourse of masculinity, which are the core qualities that define Lijiang masculinity in this group.

In the construction of this masculine identity, the emphasis on the masculine bonding discourse overrides his earlier positioning and representation of a committed husband (stave 4).

To further assert his male supremacy, Zantai uses sexist and misogynist discourse to present and position himself as a powerful husband who can take control at home. He explicitly states that he did not care when his wife was angry (staves 12, 13: 4-5) and he would not change his attitude and stance 'no matter how much [his wife] argued with [him]' (stave 15: 1). Zantai attempts to use an extreme approach to gain control at home: as his 'raw and genuine' masculine identity would not allow him to be a fake social butterfly, he cuts off all his social gatherings, including his own male homosocial activities (stave 15: 2). In this way, he is proud that he exerts dominance and control in his marriage so that his wife 'absolutely has no idea of how to deal with' him (stave 17).

Zantai's in-group status and masculine identity was threatened before because of his absence of male bonding, which can be implied as he prioritises heterosexual over male bonding. His earlier discourse also indicates that his inclination to position himself as a committed husband makes this inclination more prominent. Hence, Zantai must devalue his wife, and even denigrates the social groups that she stands for (women and Kunming people), to regain both his status in the group and his Lijiang masculine identity. Only in this way can he position himself in front of his friends as a devoted friend with shared values as a Lijiang man. Thus, gender interacts with locality in this discursive construction. The collective group identity as Lijiang men is secured by Zantai, and hence group bonding is strengthened.

Moreover, Zantai uses one more strategy to seek male solidarity. In this personal talk, Zantai underlines that he is sharing his true feelings and emotions with his friends, and therefore he wishes to gain the acknowledgement and understanding of his male friends. He mentions twice that 'I want to tell you how I feel' (stave 6), and 'really, that is how I feel (stave 14). Zantai's disclosure soon earns his friends' understanding about his struggle. Rui (stave 14) and Wenxin (stave 16) show their positive engagement and involvement by responding to his disclosure. They endorse and support Zantai's alignment with the 'authentic and real' discourse of masculinity, agreeing that he should not do things that are against his will. It means that the strategies that Zantai uses are effective. Drawing on local discourses of Lijiang masculinity to justify his behaviour, he strengthens his group identity and their male bonding.

In an almost misogynistic manner, Zantai seeks the support of his male friends by demeaning his wife and her female friends. It enables Zantai to convince his friends to accept his behaviour – spending less time with them. However, Rui shows his disagreement with this discourse (staves 8 & 17), and he reminds Zantai that he needs to value his marriage. He first wishes that complaining about his absence from their social activities will not lead to marital discord for Zantai. Instead, he wishes them 'to have a long-lasting marriage' (stave 18: 3). He even shares that the core of a good marriage is to 'compromise' (stave 18: 4-5) and learn how to 'tolerate and be compassionate' (stave 18: 12). At the end of his lecture, Rui declares a brotherhood discourse to secure Zantai's worries. As his close friends, his 'brothers', they 'definitely understand' (stave 18: 15) and they are willing to help whenever Zantai needs them (stave 18: 14).

Even though Rui disagrees with Zantai's disrespectful attitude towards marriage, he does not deny or challenge the discourse of distancing and degrading 'Kunming people'. When I was on a field trip with this group, Zantai always attributed his discontentment with his wife to the fact that 'she is Kunmingnese'. In this talk, Rui confirms this reasoning by implying that Tingting is a Kunming girl and therefore she would not behave like Zantai's ex-girlfriend Bingling (stave 18: 8-10). In order to have a companionate marriage, Zantai can only acknowledge this reality (stave 18: 1 and 11), and downplay the attitude of disfavouring Kunming people, even though this is the core ideology that ties these Lijiang men together. It shows that the social category of 'Kunming people' has always been deployed as a cultural concept (Silverstein, 2004) by this group of men to construct their 'Lijiang people' identity; however, when it comes to the context of marriage, it shows more nuances and complexities. Sometimes, they have to show compromise and negotiate their stance because their significant life partners are members of this category. While fostering their group solidarity, the men are also required to show that they are committed and responsible husbands, hence, their previous stance on Others, such as 'Kunming people' has to be negotiated and even diminished.

7.4.4 Alternative Model for the 'Brother or Wife' Dilemma

Analysis of Extracts 6-7 shows that married men need to balance two contradictory discourses: male bonding and heterosexual conjugal responsibilities. When dealing with these two powerful and socially dominant discourses, men in Group 1 reveal their struggle. The above excerpts were selected from Group 2's self-recorded conversation in 2017, and this theme emerged again in 2019 when I participated in Group 1's social event. Men in Group 2, notably Fengli, seemed to offer an alternative for this dilemma. As a solution for this dilemma, Fengli decided to avoid marriage and maintain his single status and 'playboy' persona. The following conversation is transcribed from a recording in

which I participated in a post-dinner drinking with this group. Apart from Fengli and Qingbei, Xiaoli and Meimei were also present in this drinking event in a cafe. We had our chat in a private room located on the fourth floor of this cafe, which replicated the space of a residential living room. In the previous talk, we were discussing why Fengli stays single even though his mother was anxious and pushing him to go on more blind dates.

Extract 8: That's why I don't want to get married

[1]Fengli   1 for me the main reason is that (.) I saw friends around me who are married
           2 their life is so miserable and not happy
           3 so I don't want to get married (..)
           4 when they are back to their home
           5 they just stare at each other

----

[2]Fengli

 Meimei

 Xiaoli

 Yang   when they are at their home what do you mean? Do they need to be always at home?

 Qingbei

----

[3]Fengli   1 I know one couple
           2 they don't allow each other to go outside to hang-out
           3 so everyday they just stay at home
           4 what do they do?
           5 then just stare at EACH OTHER

----

[4]Fengli

 Meimei

 Xiaoli

 Yang   why   why are they not allowed to go outside?

 Qingbei   haha what you just described is also one of my friends

----

[5]Fengli

 Yang

 Qingbei   well (.) before he married he loved hanging-out so much

----

[6]Fengli

Meimei   haha very well-behaved?
Xiaoli
Yang
Qingbei   after getting married wow   haha not only being well-behaved
----
7Qingbei   1 his wife particularly set up a blacklist for him

          2 and he can't have the contact information of anyone who is on that blacklist

          3 she just completely cut off his connection with those friends
----
8Fengli

 Meimei

 Xiaoli   well basically it means that his wife has his phone forfeited

 Yang   I guess he would be resistant

 Qingbei   yah yah

9Fengli   that's fair he also need to be willing to do so

 Meimei   well she apparently can nail it

 Xiaoli   yes yes he needs to be willing

 Yang

 Qingbei

10Qingbei   1 well he is not willing to cooperate but that woman would tell his dad

           2 if his dad knows about it

           3 then he won't get money from his dad

11Fengli

 Meimei   see money is the most powerful thing

 Xiaoli   haha money is the key

 Yang   aww it's a financial reason

 Qingbei

A significant change for a married man is to show their conjugal commitment, which often means disconnecting from their male homosociality. Fengli and Qingbei shared more narratives to demonstrate that the discourse of conjugal responsibilities indeed contradicts male bonding discourse. Fengli observes the struggle of his married friends because of this conflict, and they are described and represented as 'unhappy' and 'miserable' (stave 1: 2). Qingbei soon provides a similar second story to prove this 'brother or wife' dilemma. In that story, the husband 'loved hanging out'

(stave 5) with his friends, but after getting married, all his male homosociality was cut off by his wife. Specifically, the wife set up a blacklist of her husband's male friends to prohibit all his connections (stave 7).

The audience's reaction to Qingbei's narrative-telling also reflects the perception of the roles that husbands and wives should play in the dominant discourse of culture. Meimei first jokes that the man in Qingbei's story perhaps becomes 'well-behaved' after getting married (stave 6). According to research on the marital intimacy in the Chinese context (Choi and Peng, 2016), this is often the result of a wife's control and discipline – *'guan'* (管). Chinese men place a high value on the abilities of a competent home manager in the position of the wife, and the wife therefore is expected to adopt a 'parenting' role. For instance, in the Chinese language, the name for bride, *xinniang* (新娘), literally means 'new mother'. It indicates that an ideal wife should emulate her husband's mother, not only to take care of the husband, but to an extent, to discipline the man to ensure he is 'well-behaved'. Perhaps that is why the audience suggests that the man in Qingbei's story is 'willing' to be controlled by his wife rather than my assumption that the wife's approach may have resulted in the husband's resistance (staves 8-9).

However, Qingbei elaborates that the husband did not want to cooperate, and the drive for him to be 'well-behaved' was to get his father's financial support. Put differently, the husband shows a compromise to step back from his homosocial activities, not because of conjugal love, but for the purpose of financial assistance from his parents. His father stands with the wife in restricting the husband's social activities to prioritise the stability of the marriage. The emphasis on conjugal responsibility is not only an ideology but also a practice that can be enacted through economic power

and parental authority. The examples, including Zantai's dilemma and Fengli and Qingbei's narrative of their married friends, show that male bonding can be in conflict with conjugal stability. Male bonding activities are not only costly financially, but also can relate to gambling, going to places that sell intimacy, such as KTV (a private room for guests to karaoke, often accompanied by drinks) or erotic massage parlours, that may lead to affairs (Choi and Peng, 2016). Therefore, to secure the stability of marriage, wives and husbands' parents often stand on the same line to restrict those married men's male homosocial activities.

In the following extract, Fengli further explains why it is better to be single as he could not stand 'being controlled' by his ex-girlfriend.

Extract 9: It's much better to be single

[1]Fengli   you can do whatever you want if you are single (.) isn't it a better option?
Meimei
Xiaoli
Yang
----
[2]Fengli
Meimei   yes it would lead a lot of problems
Xiaoli   yeah it is so troublesome to be engaged in a relationship
Yang
----
[3]Fengli   I used to be in a relationship fucking hell whenever I went somewhere I need to take a video
Meimei
Xiaoli
Yang
----
[4]Fengli
Meimei
Xiaoli   if you hang-out outside it will definitely end up in big arguments
Yang   how these two connected?
----
[5]Fengli   1 yeah a video is required

2 for example I am hanging out with you guys right now

3 then my ex-girlfriend would ask me to take a video of us

4 <u>like this</u> <showing a 360 degree video>

5 so I need to explain who are those people

6 what kind of relationship we have

7 just like this

Fengli's stance of staying single and being a 'playboy' is supported by his female friends (staves 2 & 3). He narrates what his ex–girlfriend would require him to do in a scenario when he hung out with his friends, such as the drinking event that I participated in. The girlfriend needed to know who was there, and what kind of relationship Fengli had with them to feel secure. Perhaps the girl needed to have control to make sure Fengli was 'well-behaved', not getting drunk and out of danger of any potential affairs. Hence, even though 'establishing a family' is a 'must-accomplish task' for Chinese men, and being single as a man at marriageable age is often seen as a worry in his family (Choi and Peng, 2016; Wong, 2020), Fengli still chose to stay single. This is an effective alternative for him to avoid the hegemonic masculinity of being a 'responsible and committed' husband.

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined a particular genre of men's talk: personal and emotional talk. I have illustrated that this group of men may have a desire to disclose their feelings and emotions, but disclosure is often constrained and not encouraged. Even though this group of men claims, 'we all support you', their support is implicitly conditional. They support their male friends only if they align themselves with the dominant discourse of masculinity, proving that they are 'able-responsible' men (Wong, 2020). In their personal talk, a certain level of emotional closeness and support is displayed, however it is acknowledged through their collective group identity as masculine Lijiang men. While using their personal talk to 'do' their friendship (Coates, 2001), their heterosexual masculinity as

Lijiang men is accordingly validated, secured and reinforced, accompanied by a strong misogynist discourse. The localised discourse of Lijiang masculine identity sits at the core of their male friendship and is accomplished through the opposition to and stigmatisation of the 'Other', including their female partners, Kunming women, and even their own male friends within the group.

Through their talk, male friendships discourse is produced and gendered, accomplished through gender differentiation discourses, especially through an interplay with locality. The discourse they produce not only reinforces the existing and deeply rooted gender difference discourse, more concerningly it penetrates a general view of male supremacism that men's friendship is a virtue whereas female friendship is inferior. The highlighting and primacy of their male homosociality hence inevitably clashes with their heterosexual relationships. The men's personal talk hence becomes an important site to regain threatened group status. Local discourse of masculinity and a misogynist discourse of devaluing their female partners and other female friends are drawn on as strategies to reclaim Lijiang masculine identity and to strengthen group bonding. I pinpoint that even though earlier research in the Chinese context on this topic has been examined through the lens of gender, it still lacks a discussion on the influence of social class and economic status. Perhaps, for those upper-middle class men, a virtuous wife is a woman who can blend in with their male drinking activities and allow them to spend both time and money on their male bonding. Sharing more male privilege, some men in my research choose to stay single as an alternative to balancing the repugnant discourses of the 'brother or wife' dilemma.

CHAPTER 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

The main aim of this thesis was to explore what Chinese men do with their everyday friendship talk. With multiple sources of data collected from two groups of Chinese men in their late 20s living in Yunnan China, this thesis uncovered both a style and discourse level the ways in which Chinese male friends construct their gender identities and masculinities in their spontaneous talk. Several foci emerged from the course of my analysis, including the relevance of homosociality and the performance of hegemonic and intersectional masculinities. My close linguistic analysis has been informed by my ethnographic data (i.e. participant observation, ethnographic interviews and digital ethnography). The previous four chapters demonstrated how the macro concept of hegemonic masculinity has been practised and naturalised on the micro-level of everyday conversation. I illustrated how men align, police and reinforce dominant discourses of masculinity, and at the same time, challenge and contest those hegemonic masculinities.

By adopting the concept of intersectionality, I was able to reveal how gender intersects with other social variables, such as locality, social class and age in the shape and construction of their intersectional identities and masculinities. I aligned myself with a social constructionist approach which sees identity not as fixed but as emergent in interaction. I understand masculinity as a series of performances rather than as a singular form of essential traits (Milani, 2015; Lawson, 2020; Pichler, 2021b). My analysis, therefore, unpacked how identities, as well as masculinities and male homosociality, are constructed in men's everyday talk.

With the theoretical foundation of seeing discourse as ideology (Van Dijk, 1995; 1998) and social practice (Fairclough, 1992; 2003), I demonstrated that there are multiple discourses that shape Chinese men's understanding of being 'accepted men'. For instance, being a 'real' man means being sincere, genuine and generous. Taking small gains from others, therefore, is seen as disdainful. Moreover, the value of devotion of loyalty and commitment to male friends also constitutes the hegemonic discourses of masculinity. Such discourses present and construct a worldview of how my participants understand their identities and masculinities, and through their language use, men in my research present *who* they are and how they wish to be seen in this world.

The first original contribution to knowledge this thesis set out is located in the area of language and masculinity. By providing data collected in contemporary China, my research adds to the global reach of understanding intersectional and hegemonic masculinity. I reveal how Chinese men in my research drawing on the repertoires of friendship talk, including narratives, teasing, and personal talk, construct culturally-constrained hegemonic discourses of masculinity. Those specific models or versions of hegemonic masculinity identified in this research, such as being generous and sincere, and being devoted to friends, suggest that hegemonic masculinity as a concept is not necessarily negative, and it could have positive and ethical dimensions (Wong, 2020). Therefore, my findings can shed a light on our understanding of hegemonic masculinity, illustrating how the wider socio-cultural contexts constrain the performances of hegemonic masculinity in Chinese men.

This research also offers a significant contribution to knowledge in studies of Chinese masculinity. Firstly, collecting data from two male friendship groups provides empirical data to understand the lived experiences of Chinese men in today's society, in particular in relation to male friendship practice

and their sexual experiences. Secondly, the linguistic and ethnographic evidence addresses a gap in Chinese studies of masculinity which have so far not included a linguistic perspective, especially with a focus on spontaneous talk among men. Finally, the examinations of how participants use their talk to strengthen their male bonding elaborate ethnographic research on Chinese men and masculinity. I have shown that male bonding is built on low-level sexism, which is an important contribution for us to understand everyday masculinity in a global sense.

Below, I first tie together the major findings of the thesis with the theoretical awareness and relevance and other research literature that I drew from. Then I will state how this research contributes to language and masculinity studies and Chinese masculinity studies. Followed by this, I will discuss the methodological reflection and social impact of this research. At the end of the chapter, I address the limitations and implications of this thesis for future research exploring masculinity and men's talk in both Chinese and global contexts.

8.2 Overview of findings

With the research focus on exploring how Chinese men do their gender and identity work in their friendship talk, Chapters 4-7 demonstrate the emerging process of how two groups of men construct their intersectional identities and masculinities. Before discussing my contribution to the disciplinary knowledge in the field of language and masculinity and my contribution to the topic of Chinese masculinity, I will summarise the findings of this research in this section. I will first provide an overview of the characteristics of Chinese men's talk at the conversational level and then synthesise what intersectional identities and masculinities have emerged in their everyday talk.

8.2.1 Chinese Men's Friendship Talk

In this linguistic ethnographic research, I find that Chinese men's talk shows significant similarities with their Western counterparts. In terms of linguistic features, similar to what previous studies have shown (Coates, 2003; Kiesling, 2003, 2007), storytelling and humour remain two central themes in Chinese men's talk. At the same time, evidence has shown that they share feelings and life struggles in their personal talk with their friends (Chapter 7). At the level of conversational style, men in my research still express their solidarity through 'traditional' and perhaps 'dominant' forms of men's talk, such as swearing, ritual insults, competitive banter and high-risk humour (Labov, 1992; Cameron, 1997; Pichler, 2019).

In terms of conversational organisation and management, empirical evidence in this research continues to deconstruct the long-standing opposition of cooperation and competitiveness (Johnson, 1997: 9; Litosseliti and Sunderland, 2002). For example, although they showed a level of positive listenership and minimal response to exhibit their mutual validation and confirmation, the further revelation of emotions and vulnerability were still constrained. Their storytelling practice also showed a mixture of structural characteristics. The 'one-at-a-time' structure (Coates, 1997, 2003) has preoccupied most of their narrative-telling but it is often embellished or embedded in a more collaborative conversational structure. It may be difficult to conclude whether men's talk in this study is more akin to a group property like women's cooperative informal talk or like the property of a single speaker in typical men's talk (Coates, 2000).

Men in my research express their closeness to both individuals and groups, which is in contrast to American fraternity men for whom homosocial desire could only be broadcast to abstract institutions (Kiesling, 2003). In their personal and emotional talk, they explicitly declare that they support and understand their male friends; however, their support is conditional. Men in Group 1 often underline that, compared to women's superficial and shallow friendships, they have more disclosure talk, in which they talk 'from the bottom of their heart'. This view has been emphasised many times both in the data of participants' self-recorded conversations and ethnographic interviews. However, through the rigorous linguistic examination of their self-claimed 'disclosure talk', I find that their disclosure is constrained and not encouraged. When discussing their friends' life struggles, even though they show a desire to help and support, their talk is a prime site of lecturing, fuelling hegemonic gender expectations.

8.2.2 Intersectional gender identities and masculinities

This research has shown that emerging social constructs, such as locality, social class, and age, interplay together with gender to shape participants' gender identities and masculinities. The first prominent social variable that frequently emerges from men's talk in this thesis is locality, confirming Pichler's statement (2021a: 570) that locality has always played a significant role in our understanding of intersectional identities. Place-related references as cultural concepts (Silverstein, 2004) were often used to index a range of local and supralocal meanings. For example, the expression 'Kunming people' was deployed in the construction of their own 'Lijiang men' group identity (Chapters 4 and 7). 'Kunming people' has been generalised and characterised with negative and denigrating personal traits. As a cultural concept, it indexes a recognisable social group (Wortham and Gadsden, 2006) who are insincere, ungrateful, superficial, and shallow. Men from Group 1 position themselves as the

opposite of this group, through which they successfully construct themselves as Lijiang men with the core qualities of being sincere and genuine.

In addition to 'Kunming people', other references to locality have also been heavily drawn on in men's talk to index multi-layered socio-cultural meanings. For example, locality-based references intersect with gender in sexual storytelling (Chapter 5). Women were referenced, portrayed and categorised based on the place they originated from. Those place-related references became cultural concepts, functioning to sexualise women under men's male gaze. For instance, 'Suzhou girls' become a locality-based, gendered generalisation, characterised by sexualised bodies and their 'water-like' waist. Similarly, 'white' and 'shiny' bodily features were attributed to the place of North-eastern China, serving to justify a man's initiation of non-consensual sex.

These place-related references have rich indexed meanings in the shaping of identities, not just at a city level (Kunming), but also extending to the provincial (Sichuan), and even the regional (i.e., Jiangnan and North-eastern China) levels. Often those locality-based references further index social-economic status (Pichler, 2021a). For instance, in the narrative of fashion and consumption, a reference to 'Sichuan people' is used by the young men as a cultural concept to index social status, wealth and consumption. Through the narrated actions of their irrational shopping behaviours, Sichuanese buyers were portrayed as impulsive rich consumers. Hence, 'Sichuan people' were generalised and stereotyped as rich people, even though statistics may suggest differently (Chapter 4). It shows that, although in post-socialist China social class is often ambivalent and vague (Huang, Y., 2018), social stratification can still be implied and indexed.

The longer I worked on the conversational data, the more obvious the relevance of social class became. Their class is accomplished through the discursive construction of their professional

identities, consumption capacity, and sexual morality in their conversational narratives. In particular, through the investigation of positionings in both storytelling and story-told worlds, I revealed that they contrast themselves with pitiful others: undereducated farmers who come from an ethnic minority background. This positioning allows them to perform and construct their identities as privileged urban men who possess much more social power and advantages. References to capital cities are often used in everyday talk to indirectly index more powerful social status/class. Hence, I argue that although they may rarely explicitly discuss their 'class', their classness can be indexed and implied.

In our ethnographic interviews, men from both groups self-identify as belonging to the 'ordinary' social 'stratum' (*jieceng*) even though their class background may resemble the upper-middle class in the UK context. This positioning confirms the recent observation of the newly emergent middle class. Receiving higher education and being employed in white-collar professions, many young post-1980s urbanites, including my participants, economically speaking, belong to the middle class (Li, 2010). However, they often emphasise their 'underprivileged status and improbability of climbing the social ladder' (Huang. Y, 2018: 117). Men in Group 1 could spend a third of the local average monthly salary on a pair of sneakers. At the same time, they contrast themselves with those of greater social status to suggest their limited consumption ability.

The display of their personal wealth and social status helps them acquire opportunities to sleep with women, therefore, their virile masculinity interacts with social class. Men of Group 1 often go to expensive areas of clubs when they are on their night out, and they use that opportunity to invite girls for casual sex afterwards. They also travel to other cities, paying for hotels and dinner to have sex, to keep their sexual activities at a distance from where they live and work.   With the unbalanced sex

ratio in China – roughly 118 males for every 100 females (Goodman, 2014: 37) – men need to demonstrate more dominance over other men to be able to have heterosexual relationships. Their sex narratives reinforce, constitute and reproduce the gender ideology in contemporary China that hegemonic masculinity is determined by wealth and power, which are often closely linked to men's social class.

Compared to data collected from semi-structured interviews in sociological research and online language practice (Li, 2010; Huang, Y. 2018), the men in my research complained less often in their self-recorded spontaneous conversations. When introducing their professional identities of 'working within the system', they attempted to diminish their privilege. For example, men from Group 1 teased their friend about his white-collar job in a state-owned tobacco company for social-networking purposes (Chapter 6). While constructing their identity as the representatives of the local authority, some participants questioned social justice issues such as civic enforcement and penalties on ethnic minority villagers; the latter may reflect the unevenly distributed educational resources for marginalised groups (Chapter 4). I argue that class is perhaps downplayed in accordance with the official will, but it is not invisible as it remains embedded in conversational narrative and humour. Therefore, we need closer examinations of actual language use in daily life to understand the 'macro sociological order' (Silverstein, 2004) in micro language practice.

In addition to the shared locality and social class, age also plays a significant role in the construction of men's intersectional identities. For instance, most of the members in Group 1 were born in the late 1980s and being an 80s generation constitutes their multilayers of identities, including their collective in-group identity. To reinforce this age-based identity, they distanced themselves from younger

people, such as young professional sneaker buyers, young customers in the club, and even their group members who were born in the 1990s (Chapters 4 and 6). They use story-telling and teasing to reinforce age as the core quality in the shape of their in-group identities.

The obsession with age in their identity is manifested differently in Group 2. Being in their late 20s and early 30s implies that age not only interacts with other social constructions in their identities but is also closely related to hegemonic gender norms. To be accepted as successful men, dominant cultural discourses require them to accomplish tasks, such as graduating and establishing a career and family before turning 30. My research shows that hegemonic masculinity defined by career success and material wealth (Song and Hird, 2014) interacts with age. If their male friend violates gender and social norms, see Luzi's story in Chapter 7 about his inability to complete his studies, his friends use their personal talk as a venue to lecture, regulate, and police him to make sure that he aligns with the social norms and expectations that a man needs to accomplish in their late 20s and early 30s.

8.2.3 Hegemonic masculinities

This thesis has shown that Chinese men still collude with a dominant masculinist discourse that devalues women and femininity. Through their talk, they produce sexist and misogynist discourse, objectifying and sexualising women. For example, in their sex narratives (Chapter 5), women were objectified as sexual objects, characterised by their body features (e.g. Suzhou girls' water-like waist, and a North-eastern girl's shiny and white body). The dominant discourse of devaluing women is largely manifested in the narratives in which women were seen as sexual objects and their bodies were highly sexualised. Even their female partners were seen as the opposite 'Other'. In Chapter 7, men from Group 2 denigrated female friendships in order to strengthen their male bonding and

construct their masculine identities. They constantly distance themselves from any possible perception of femininity, from not carrying tissues (Chapter 6) to constraining their expression of feelings and emotions in their personal talk.

Furthermore, my research has shown that these dominant masculinist discourses have been fuelled by men's female friends. Their female friends attempted to maintain the male homosocial dimension in the storytelling events by constantly evaluating the female protagonists' age and appearance. More importantly, as women, they did not challenge their male friends' questionable sexual behaviour, instead, they use conversational humour to lighten the concern around problematic sex. As women, they reinforce the existing dominant discourse on women's consent in sex, that is, 'no' means 'yes' in the absence of aggressive and frequent expressions of resistance (Ehrlich, 1998: 156-157).

In this dominant masculinist discourse of devaluing women, their female partners were portrayed as the opposite 'Other', and their female-male heterosexual relationships were subordinated to maintain the primacy of male homosociality. It further contributes to the broader gender differentiation discourses that constantly emerge from their men's talk. This discourse is perhaps contradictory to another powerful form of hegemonic masculinity, that is being a responsible man in family life. Men in my research on the one hand needed to demonstrate their desire to be dedicated husbands who prioritise family harmony and stability. On the other hand, this discourse inevitably conflicts with the pursuit of male homosociality as male bonding also requires time and commitment. Therefore, men's personal talk becomes a venue to solve this 'brother or wife' dilemma. As my data has shown, men from Group 2 have to use a range of strategies to prioritise male bonding to regain their status in a male friendship group.

The value of male friendship, accordingly, as a discourse, becomes a very powerful model of hegemonic masculinity. They use their talk to impose hegemonic gender norms on their friends to make sure they align with hegemonic models of masculinity. Their men's talk, therefore, constitutes and reproduces the prevailing hegemonic discourses of masculinity. This confirms what Chambers (2006: 50) argues, whereby male friendship is a key social tie, the core of which is to manage gendered normality. Drawing from gender differentiation discourses, friendship has been gendered. As Chapter 7 has shown, personal and emotional talk becomes an arena to define and practise male friendship. In their perception, women do not have 'true' friendships to share emotions and provide support, while men's friendship is a virtue. Men's talk becomes a practice, producing and securing their male bonding, accompanied by sexist and misogynist discourses.

8.3 Contribution to Language and Masculinity Studies

The past decades have seen burgeoning research in language and masculinity studies (LMS). In this ethnography-informed discourse study, I have answered one of the core questions in LMS, that is, how men use language to create different masculinities (Kiesling, 2007). With linguistic and ethnographic evidence collected from two groups of men living in Yunnan, China, this thesis enriches our understanding of intersectional masculinity, considering that WHMC - white, heterosexual, middle-class - men are often the subjects to be examined in LMS. Recent LMS examine masculinities outside of the hegemonic WHMC men, in the context of queer studies and/or the global south (Lawson, 2020; Singh, 2020). My research on Chinese men constitutes the recent orientation towards LMS for a global reach.

Diasporic studies have a tradition to consider Chinese masculinity as a non-mainstream model of masculinity because it is often racially subordinated and marginalised. Despite that, the Chinese cultural model of masculinity was often proposed as an alternative to encountering white hegemonic masculinity (Chua and Fujino, 1999; Chan, 2001; Hibbins, 2003). In a collection book on male friendship, the editor Nardi (1992) takes a similar stance. He suggests that Anglo-Saxon men's friendship is not deep because they are afraid of being perceived as gay, and learning male friendship practices from other cultures may open up new possibilities.

As a researcher in the early stage of my study, with this mindset, I was also eager to find the differences between Chinese and Western men's talk. However, the more I examined the data, the more similarities have come to me. For instance, as I summarised in the previous section in 8.2.1, like their Western counterparts, Chinese men also tease, curse, and constantly tell stories in which they highlight their expert identity and achievements (Coates, 2001; 2003). Moreover, male dominance discourse and sexist and misogynist discourses were manifested in their everyday friendship talk (Kiesling, 2003; 2005). Heterosexual relationships were subordinated (e.g. in their brother or wife dilemma) to prioritise male homosocial bonding (Bird, 1998; Flood, 2006).

It reminds me of the debate in the late 1990s and early 2000s which centred on the question whether there are more gender similarities or differences in men's and women's language use (Coates and Cameron, 1998; Litosseliti and Sunderland, 2002). Perhaps, like the result of this debate, the prevalence of similarities in men's talk across different sociocultural contexts exceeds differences more than we have imagined. I value this reflective journey because it brings me to a point on how

LMS scholars interpret similarities and differences when comparing our findings from a specific group to others in the previous studies.

My findings suggest that men's talk across the globe shares similarities. In a global sense, male friendship talk is a social practice to sustain hegemonic gender ideologies. Understanding their language use from the perspective of discourses as ideologies (Van Dijk, 1998), I revealed localised hegemonic discourses on how my participants understand who 'accepted and approved men' are. For example, the core quality to define a decent Lijiang man is to be generous, sincere and loyal to friends. Hence, hegemonic masculinity is no longer an abstract concept, but rather, it has become the specific and plural sense of discourses. My participants' construction of a range of hegemonic masculinities has been constrained by local sociocultural contexts.

Some versions of hegemonic masculinity that have developed under the constraints of Chinese culture contain a positive and ethical dimension. The specific models or discourses of hegemonic masculinity that I identified in my research confirm Wong's (2020) argument that hegemonic masculinity as a concept is not necessarily linked to a negative association. Previous research suggests that hegemonic masculinity is usually associated with negative, toxic, sexist and oppressive male values and behaviours (Wetherell and Edley 1999; Messerschmidt 2018: 39–40). While acknowledging that those discourses have emerged from my data on Chinese men's talk, some versions of hegemonic masculinity that my participants pursue and practice still have positive elements. For instance, men in Group 1 use teasing as a strategy to correct their friend's behaviour of taking food from socio-economically disadvantaged farmers. My research also implies that male solidarity, on one hand, has its positive function to provide emotional and practical support to their male friends; however, on

the other hand, it is intertwined with sexist and misogynist discourses, reinforcing gender differences and gender inequality.

8.4 Contribution to Chinese Masculinity Studies

My research on Chinese men's talk and masculinity contributes to the global reach of studies on language, sexuality and gender, moving from the previous focus on Anglo-Saxon culture towards other socio-cultural contexts. While acknowledging it provides empirical evidence for more global comparison, I argue that it also contributes to Chinese studies on masculinity. The first contribution is to offer more ethnographic research on the lived experiences of Chinese men in contemporary China, which is still an under-explored area in the studies of Chinese men and masculinity. Even though the theme of male friendship has always been emphasised in previous studies on Chinese masculinity and manhood (Mann, 2003; Hibbins, 2003; Choi and Peng, 2016), we still know very little about men's actual friendship practice in today's Chinese society. My research has filled the gap to illustrate how Chinese men use their everyday talk to practise friendship.

Secondly, this linguistic ethnographic research unpacks how 'Chineseness' has shaped Chinese masculinity, revealing its relevance to the Chinese cultural notion of *wen-wu* masculinity. While unpacking the 'Chineseness' of Chinese masculinity to understand its cultural characteristics, Chinese scholars' point of reference is always the *wen-wu* dyad (Louie, 2002; 2015; 2016). Even though this notion was coined by Louie based on Chinese history and literature, my research has shown that aspects of the wen-wu dyad are still interwoven with performances of intersectional and hegemonic masculinity of young Chinese men today. The cultural concept of the *wen-wu* dyad still plays a

stubbornly influential role in the hybrid and complex features of Chinese masculinities in contemporary China.

For instance, the historical residue of seeing government officials as the ideal occupation remains still influences people on how to perceive their profession. Working for government and state-owned institutions and enterprises indicates a privileged social status. Men in Group 1 discursively construct themselves as the representatives of the local authority, highlighting the social power and resources they possess. It enables them to conform to the success- and wealth-based hegemonic masculinity that has dominated post-socialist China since the 1980s (Song and Hird, 2014; Wong, 2020). The emphasis on education and academic excellence oriented from *wen* masculinity directly links to career success for most Chinese men. A teasing episode showed that an anti-academic stance can still be face-threatening for an adult man, as it may threaten his pursuit of success (Chapter 6).

In addition to *wen* masculinity, *wu* masculinity also continues to influence the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity in today's society. The characteristics of *wu* masculinity, such as boundless generosity, copious consumption of wine and meat, and absolute loyalty to male friends (Hird, 2019), were heavily evident in my data. Generosity is highly valued in today's ideal masculinity, especially in the local socio-cultural context in this research. Accordingly, taking small gains and being greedy is often seen as disdainful practices. This quality is so valued that it becomes the defining element of the in-group identities of Lijiang men in Group 1. In their narrative, people who share the same values are therefore seen as their allies and friends, whereas those who are greedy and take advantage of someone else's hospitality, such as 'those Kunming people', are seen as the unfavourable others

(Chapter 4). Similarly, in Group 2, teasing is deployed as a strategy to correct the behaviour of taking advantage of socially and economically vulnerable groups, such as farmers (Chapter 6).

Drinking is always at the centre of men's social activities. Drinking rituals and drinking attitudes accordingly become an exhibition of their morality and masculinity. For instance, drinking with someone could be seen as an acknowledgement and appreciation of that person and displaying a genuine attitude towards drinking has been highly encouraged (Chapter 4). Moreover, if a man fails to prove his drinking prowess, then he might be in danger of being teased (Chapter 6). For men in this research, drinking and being drunk together is a benchmark for displaying male bonding and solidarity. The emphasis on alcohol drinking hence works hand-in-hand with another powerful discourse: male friendship.

When explaining how male friendship has been perceived and practised, the cultural notion of *wen-wu* may not be sufficient. Chinese men in my research have shown that they understand friendship not only from *wu* masculinity perspective, in which generosity and loyalty are consistently valued, but they also see friendship from a modern perspective. Emotional support and closeness are seen as important criteria to define their ideal friendship (Chambers, 2006). To demonstrate this point, they maintain gendered friendships, arguing female friendship is superficial and characterised by entertainment activities. Their men's friendship, in contrast, has a more profound relationship, manifested as they can talk 'from the bottom of their hearts'.

Moreover, being impacted by the 'one-child' policy in China between the late 1980s and early 2000s, the generation born in this period believe that their friends are their chosen siblings. The research showed that friendship was not only valued in same-sex groups but also in heterosocial groups.

Specifically, I found that even the young men's female friends chose to foreground their 'friendship' identity over their 'female' identity, adopting 'male gaze' discourses and even going along with the blurring of sexual consent when supporting their male friends' positioning in their drinking and sex stories. It is ethnography-informed discourse analysis that allows me to show such nuances of Chinese men's (and at times their female friends') understanding of masculinity and friendship. Therefore, my analysis sheds light on the intricate and contemporary expression of 'male friendship as a virtue' that is deeply ingrained in Chinese tradition and culture.

Even though recent research has aimed to fill the gap of how masculinities are manifested in Chinese men's private life and intimate relationships (Choi and Peng, 2016, Wong, 2020), discussions on their sex practice and sexual attitudes remain under-explored. In Hibbins's (2003) research on Chinese masculinities in the diaspora, he argues that Chinese men rarely discuss sex-related topics. Pan and Huang (2013) acknowledge that Chinese culture perhaps constrains people's expressions about sex, so they advocate careful research designs to allow informants to feel comfortable enough to articulate their ideas on the subject. Employing linguistic ethnography as my methodology, I have gained more trust from my participants to collect data on their sexual experiences both from their self-recorded conversations and interview data with me. In this research, participants told their sexual experiences, in a private, trusted and relaxed setting while talking to close friends and me.

In this linguistic ethnographic research, the purpose of researching sexual experiences as a re-told narrative practice was not to label or define what kind of sexual relationship those men engaged in, but rather, to show the nuances and complexity of their moral stance and ideologies in relation to sex. With the research method of interpreting nationwide survey data, Pan and Huang's (2013) work

illustrates how Chinese people's sex practices and attitudes have changed from 2000 to 2010. However, after the 2010s, due to a lack of budgetary support, research that examines 'ordinary' topics and groups was not able to continue (Huang, Y. 2020). Studies on sex in China, which are often oriented from sociological research, hence switched to the aspect of governance (Jeffery, 2015), such as the prevention and management of AIDS from the perspective of sex workers (Huang and Pan, 2014; Huang et al., 2015). Using linguistic ethnography as my methodology, this research investigated Chinese men's sexual practices and morality through their expressions in private conversations – a method which may reveal more subtleties and complexities than options given in a survey.

Compared to the findings of Pan and Huang (2013), my analysis shows more nuances. First, various types of casual sex, such as pre-marital sex, one-night stands, and affairs, have become increasingly acceptable among the upper-middle-class younger generation. Unlike middle-aged and upper-middle-class men who use intimacy consumption, such as visiting entertainment places or erotic massages, to display their wealth and social power (Obsurg, 2013), younger men in this research enact their virile masculinity through different strategies. For example, Fengli demonstrates his virile masculinity through 'seduction expert' identities and discourse. Participants' extensive sexual experiences of seducing girls in tourist cities are re-told as an achievement in their narrative. Seducing women for sexual purposes becomes a knowledge-based skill and strategy that could be shared in their private talk with their friends. Their narratives also reflect their privileged socioeconomic situation, which has let them access more sexual possibilities. Hence, virile masculinity for Chinese men is still based on wealth and dominance over women and other subordinated men.

Secondly, my research demonstrates the concerns, embraces and strategies when men living in peri-urban cities engage in casual sex practice. Wong's (2020) research on Nanchong of Sichuan

province shows that men in peri-urban cities still hold a relatively conservative attitude towards pre-marital and extra-marital sex, at least from their interactions with a female ethnographer. Men in my research are also based in a peri-urban city, Zhaotong, in Yunnan province. I noted that almost all of their sex stories happened outside of their places of residence, and 'tourist cities sex' emerged as a theme. I argued that this may be a strategy for those men to avoid the potential judgement of their small-scale neighbourhoods, since certain types of casual sex may still be perceived as unacceptable in the local socio-cultural context. Most men in peri-urban cities moved out of their parents' places to live with their female partners only after getting married.

I revealed that on the one hand, more casual sex has been practised and accepted by the men in my study; on the other hand, the local sociocultural discourse might still constrain their practice of casual sex. Tourist city sex hence becomes a popular discourse (and a practice) where casual sex would not be judged as immoral or unethical. Similarly, the practice code of 'playing cleanly' that Group 2 advocates and defends functions to balance the possibly contradictory discourses between an individual's pursuit of casual sex and the social constraints on it. 'No drama' is the fundamental principle of the 'play it cleanly' code, which means that these upper-middle-class men and women prioritise and guard the stability and benefits of their marriages and lives. They use this rule to ensure that casual sex is only a spark in their life, and they would not allow it to be a potential obstacle in their careers or committed relationships. Therefore, unattached sex is practised among Chinese young men, reflecting the tendency that pleasure has increasingly become a major motivation for men's sex practice.

Previous research on sexual storytelling put weight on the male narrative, highlighting that men can use sexual storytelling to maintain male homosociality (Kiesling, 2005, Flood, 2008, Vaynman et. al.,

2019). In this thesis, I provide empirical evidence to show how sexual storytelling can also be crafted in a heterosocial setting. Men's female friends adopt a pro-masculinist stance, making efforts to maintain the gendered male group cohesion. They show their activity engagement and involvement in their male friends' sexual experience narratives. However, one narrative episode suggests that women in my research do not narrate their own sexual experiences, rather, they draw on other men's stories to continue the sequences of sex narratives. They exert a male gaze on the female protagonists in their stories, fuelling the sexist discourse while objectifying and sexualising women. Their identity of being friends with a group of men overtakes their female gender identities. Their male friends felt safe and trusted enough to share their private and even taboo sexual experiences with them.

Hence, I conclude that this thesis provides several up-to-date and specific expressions about Chinese men's sexual experience. It contributes to the current research on sex practice and sexual attitudes by demonstrating the above-discussed nuances and complexities. Chinese studies of sex often start with the departure point that sex before the 1980s was repressed, and China had been a desexualised society for decades. Pan and Huang (2013) describe the changes in sex practice and morality after the 2000s as a 'triumph' of the sexual revolution. However, I argue that we need to be cautious with our interpretations and conclusions. When more casual sex has been practised and becomes more acceptable, more issues should be discussed, as as the consent issue from my data. My analysis reveals narratives as the re-told practice of sexual experience can blur issues of consent involved in questionable sex.

To conclude, my research contributes to Chinese masculinity through three strands of analysis. First, it demonstrates how the Chinese cultural notion of *wen-wu* continues to influence Chinese men's pursuit of ideal masculinity. At the same time, Chinese men's understanding of male friendship and

sexual morality shows more hybrid and complex features since the 1980s when the social structure of contemporary China dramatically changed. In terms of data and methodology, my research contributes to the current studies on Chinese masculinity with more empirical evidence of Chinese men's life experiences and their friendship practice. It, therefore, provides a discursive analytic perspective on the exploration of Chinese masculinity. Their sexual stories as a retold experience also offer significantly more interesting data to understand Chinese men's sexual practice and morality in today's society, especially for those men who live in peri-urban cities.

8.5 Methodological Reflection and Social Impacts

This thesis employed linguistic ethnography (LE) as its methodology, exploring relationships between language use (e.g. conversational humour; narrative) and the broader socio-cultural context and social order (Rampton, 2007; Tusting and Maybin, 2007; Rampton et al., 2014). LE demonstrates its methodological advantage in revealing the process of how the wider discourses of masculinities constrain men's discursive practices in their everyday socialisation. The non-linguistic background information I gained through ethnography about speakers and their friendship groups illustrated a more holistic picture of men's friendship talk and it heavily informed my analysis. With the trust built between me and my participants (perhaps as well as female partners), I could offer interesting data, such as sexual storytelling (Chapter 5) and emotional disclosure of their struggle (Chapter 7). They are valuable to understand the private and intimate lived experiences of Chinese men, which can only be gained through the 'soaking and lurking' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 1-7) that characterises ethnographic endeavour.

The close relationship that I had with my participants often led me to reflect on whether my position as their friend's friend could affect my ability to evaluate their practice. At the beginning of my analysis, I tended to be more positive in interpreting their language use. For example, participants from Group 2 claimed the talk they had with their friends were words 'from the bottom of their hearts'. I labelled this type of talk as 'self-disclosure talk', which was often found in women's friendship talk. However, through a closer linguistic examination, I realised that their emotional revelation is often not encouraged by their friends as we could see in the example of Chapter 7 when Luzi wanted to tell more about his future plan but then was discouraged by his friends. It may therefore not be accurate to categorise their talk as disclosure talk. Their friendship talk is certainly an important resource for the men to bond and support one another, but it also serves to impose hegemonic norms of masculinity on their friends.

In this research I used ethnographic data, including participant observation, ethnographic interviews, and digital ethnography, to inform my analysis of participants' self-recorded conversations, and sometimes conversations that I recorded when I was in the field. Multiple sources of data equipped me with analytical resources to reveal the nuances, complexities and even competing discourses of men's friendship talk. For instance, men from Group 1 used various discursive strategies to highlight their group identity as Lijiang men. They positioned 'Kunming people' as the opposite social group to them, characterising them with denigrating personal traits (see Chapter 4). However, my ethnographic data showed that despite the disdainful attitudes towards 'Kunming people' displayed in their men's talk, some of them had Kunmingnese wives. The devaluation of their wives' Kunming identity was accordingly deployed as a strategy to prioritise male bonding discourse as well as in-group masculine identities in the 'brother or wife' dilemma (see Chapter 7).

Like other LE research, I also faced challenges in dealing with the differences arising from various sources of data (Rampton, 2007: 596-597). These men seemed to construct a more positive representation in ethnographic interviews, adding interpretations and explanations in favour of themselves. Alongside the discursive identities as a seduction expert and a playboy who positioned sexual experience as an achievement, Fengli particularly shared with me when we were walking together (only two of us) on our way to a restaurant while we were discussing what kind of husband he would want to be in the future. According to him, he would not allow his wife to give him blow jobs, as she would be his wife and a 'blow job is dirty'. He portrays himself as a man who is more devout in his 'respect' for the woman who would occupy the role of his wife, despite evidence from other sources suggesting that the women he slept with were treated as sexual objects of exploitation (Chapter 5). A similar situation was captured when I sought clarification and explanation from Fengli about the ambiguity of his teasing (Chapter 6). In our ethnographic interview, he was keen to clarify that the reason for his teasing was not aggression, rather he represented himself as a caring and loyal friend who would drive his intoxicated friend safely home.

Interestingly, their selective social media self-representation stands in contrast with their linguistic behaviour in their all-male friendship talk. On their 'Moment' on their WeChat social media platform, they perform the identities of loving and caring husbands, expressing their affection for their female partners. Such a digital public display is an effective strategy to secure their heterosexual bonding. However, they present a different and even competing discourse in their all-male talk. Their female partners were positioned negatively as the 'Other' to prioritise and secure male solidarity. I argue that when dealing with these differences, the key point perhaps is not to debate which discourse is the ultimate truth, as truth claims emerge in various sources of data with multiple layers of indexed

sociocultural meanings. When drawing my research findings and conclusions, as a researcher, I argue that it is important to reflect on and acknowledge the tension that can sometimes arise between truth claims from participants' own accounts and my interpretive capacities and theoretical framing (Maybin and Tusting, 2011: 522).

Some scholars argue that one of the characteristics of LE research is its aspiration for social change or beneficial social impacts (Snell et al, 2015: 12). This research first of all is not just on participants but also with them and for them (Cameron, 1992; Phipps & Ladegaard, 2020). From the start of this research, this research was a collaborative endeavour between the researcher and the researched. I worked very closely with my research participants: they not only helped me to collect data but also joined the process of data interpretation. While considering how I could bring this research to benefit the community that I worked with, I aimed to create a space for us to exchange ideas on gender ideologies. This is not a 'solution-oriented' approach when I engage with my participants while discussing how my research may bring benefits to them.

I appreciate that my participants and I could have an opportunity to look back on the journey that we created together. Some of my findings may challenge their ingrained idea of gender. For example, in our discussion, they still insisted that their male friendship was much more profound than female friendship. As a researcher, I did not feel it was easy or appropriate to challenge someone's beliefs, especially those that my male participants were proud of. Therefore, I endeavoured to be discreet but also honest while engaging in our discussion. I chose to ask them questions to create space and moments for them to reflect on their practices.

On my third field trip, I asked Rui and his friends why they did not drink bubble tea. I shared with them my view that this particular action, alongside their many other practices, was a performative act to do gender work. Drinking bubble tea was gendered by them as a feminine practice, and therefore they chose to stay away from it. They nodded and said that they just simply did not like the taste and indeed 'it was a girly thing'. Then I asked a follow-up question, 'do you think drinking alcohol is more masculine, and therefore, more superior'? They did not give me a clear 'yes' or 'no' answer but started to share with me that sometimes they were obliged to drink, and they were aware of the health issues that it might cause (or already had caused) because of their drinking. Our conversations started to provide a space and moment for them to reflect on this issue.

I agree with Lawson and Sayers (2016: 16) that 'impact can be achieved across the full range of career stages and with very different levels of resources'. 'Drinking' is a constant theme in my data, and after the completion of my PhD, I will continue to engage in this kind of dialogue with a wider audience to have more public engagement, including about the role of alcohol for gender performances in China. Moreover, I argue some interdisciplinary collaboration on the research on drinking stories could shed some light on men's health issues to effect positive social change. Scholars from the background of criminology (Sandberg, et al., 2019) argue that 'drunken story' should be approached as a distinctive narrative genre as it provides significant implications to understand intoxicated drinking, violence, and sexual misconduct. I believe that more collaborative and interdisciplinary research on the drinking story can enable us to use our research findings to generate more beneficial social impacts.

8.6 Implication, Limitations and Future Studies

The past years since I started my PhD have seen a rise in linguistic research focusing on the topic of Chinese men and masculinity. Recent linguistic studies have shown their strength to explain what sociocultural and discursive meanings certain Chinese phrases entail and imply in relation to masculinity (Gong, 2016, Huang, 2016; Liu, 2022). Yet, more research will need to be done to scrutinise the everyday language use of men in different intersectional groups. With a small and limited sample, this thesis does not show a full picture of Chinese men's talk. As my analysis has suggested, the interactional masculinities that emerged in this research were largely based on peri-urban and upper-middle-class identities. The language use of men of different ages, classes, and sexuality in the Chinese context is still worthy of further exploration.

My data has shown that both *wen* and *wu* models of masculinity are embodied among my participants in contemporary China, and perhaps the *wen* type of masculinity enjoys greater primacy among my participants. Under the influence of *wen* masculinity, social power and status brought by their 'working within the system' professional identity are still highlighted as an ideal model of masculinity. However, in more recent years, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019 when China was caught in a crisis in Sino-American and Taiwan Strait relations, there has been a rise in *wu* masculinity. State media has criticised the soft and fragile type of *wen* masculinity and highly complemented *wu* masculinity that embodies how Chinese soldiers protect national safety and glory. The widespread discourse of 'sissyphobia' (Song, 2022) in the current dominant discourse may perhaps threaten the primacy of *wen* masculinity that has been around since the 1980s. We need more up-to-date research, especially empirical evidence to capture this new change.

The core research aim in language and masculinity is to reveal and demonstrate how various meaning-making recourses could be deployed by individuals to perform masculinity. Recent studies

have advocated dislocating masculinity from male-born and male-bodied individuals (King, 2015), the research area of masculinity and language in the Chinese context can be accordingly extended to wider groups to grasp the broader meaning of masculinity. Another direction that future studies could consider is to include more diverse and variant linguistic resources. In this research, I approached language with the genre of men's talk, but more diverse genres and data related to the exploration of masculinity can be investigated. More linguistic/discourse studies can be undertaken with all meaning-making resources, for example, the multimodality approach could further contribute to the masculinity and language research area.

My findings are based on a select number of young men, hence, they may not necessarily apply to every man. However, showing the positionings of Chinese men's talk in my research can reveal the macro-ideologies of Chinese masculinity and male homosociality, which may still be valuable beyond these immediate groups. The thesis findings could be enriched or contested by future research with more diverse data or different research methods, such as corpus-driven discourse analysis on the language used in media or online discourses. Language and masculinity studies recently have shown a direction to work on language use in men's online anti-feminist communities, dubbed the 'manosphere' (i.e. Krendel, McGlashan and Koller, 2022; Lawson, 2023). Those studies have revealed more extreme versions of masculinity or 'hypermasculinity' which should also be extended to contemporary China to enable a more global comparison and discussion of the topic of gender violence and gender relations.

With this dissertation, I hope I have demonstrated everyday but yet often hegemonic versions of masculinity that Chinese men construct and perform, and how they use their language to perpetuate, police and reproduce those hegemonic discourses of masculinity in their talk with friends. My

research shows how gender intersects with other social constructs, such as social class, age and locality, to shape the identities and masculinities of men in contemporary China. It constitutes the recent trend in studies of language, sexuality and gender to explore more context in the global south. To stretch my work in the future, I aim to use my data to explore possible theoretical and methodological tools to de-colonise our thinking on the interplay of gender and language when moving away from central European Anglo-Saxon culture (Signh, 2020).

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Information Sheet

<u>INFORMATION SHEET</u>

I am Yang Zhang, a PhD student from the department of English and Comparative Literature at Goldsmiths College, University of London. I have approached you because the talk in your friendship group is likely to provide interesting data. I would be very grateful if you would agree to take part.

If you agree to join, then you consent to record some of your talk between you and your friends. Each recording can last as long as you like, but ideally at least 20 minutes. I will be in touch with one member of your group so that you can send me the recordings. With your consent to join this research, you permit me to observe and participate in your friendship activities. During my participate-observation, I would appreciate you can answer some questions that I ask. I may use some of the content of your social media - Moments that you publish on your WeChat. However, I would only use my words rather than screenshots to describe the contents of your posts.

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time throughout the period of my data collection (i.e. the group recordings). You can also switch off the reorder and delete anything you do not want me to hear. At every stage, your name and other personal information will be anonymised, being replaced with pseudonyms in my transcription and publication. The data will be kept securely and will be used for academic purposes only.

If you have any queries about the study, please feel free to contact me by email at yzhan018@gold.ac.uk, or my supervisor, Dr Pia Pichler, who can be contacted at p.pichler@gold.ac.uk**.**

研究说明书

我是伦敦大学金史密斯学院英语和比较文学系的博士生，张暘。我找你是因为你和朋友们的闲谈可能会对我的研究提供有趣的数据。如果你同意参加，我将非常感激。

如果你同意加入，那么你就同意录制你和你朋友之间的一些闲聊。每次录音的时间可以视情况而定，最好是至少20分钟。我会与你们小组的一名成员联系，以便你们可以将录音发给我。在你同意加入这项研究后，我会被允许观察和参与你的社交活动。在我参与观察期间，我希望你能回答我提出的一些问题。我可能会使用你的社交媒体的一些内容，比如你在微信上朋友圈发的内容。但是，我只会用我的文字而不是截图来描述这些内容。

在我收集数据的整个期间（即小组录音），你可以随时退出研究。你可以随时关闭录音和删除任何你不想让我听到的内容。在每个阶段，你的名字和其他个人信息都将被匿名化，在我的转录和出版中被替换成假名。这些数据将被安全地保存，并只用于学术目的。

如果你对这项研究有任何疑问，请随时通过电子邮件与我联系：yzhan018@gold.ac.uk，或与我的导师Pia Pichler博士联系：p.pichler@gold.ac.uk。

Appendix 2 - Consent Form

<u>CONSENT FORM</u>

Project title: Men's Same-Sex Talk: Chinese Masculinities and Their Friendship

1. I have read and been explained by Yang Zhang the Information Sheet relating to this project.

2. I have been explained the purposes of the project and what will be required of me, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to the arrangements for my participation as described in the Information Sheet.

3. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time throughout the period of data collection.

4. I have received a copy of this Consent Form and the accompanying Information Sheet.

Name:

Signed:

Date:

同意签署书

项目名称 :男性同性间谈话：中国男性特质构建以及男性间友谊。

1. 我已阅读并且张旸已同我解释研究说明书的相关内容。

2. 她已向我解释了研究目的以及注意事项，并且我的问题得到满意解答。目前我同意研究说明书中所阐述的关于我参与研究的事宜安排。

3. 我已清楚我的参与是完全自发的并且我在项目开展的任何时候有权退出，且不会超过数据采集以及田野调查期间。

4. 我已收到这份同意签署书的副本以及相应的研究说明书。

姓名:

签字:

日期:

Appendix 3 - Transcript Convention

The transcription conventions used in this project for the conversational data are as follows:

1. A question mark indicates the end of a chunk of talk which I am analysing as a question, e.g.:

   ```
   what's the advantage of two two Tony?
   ```

2. A hyphen indicates an incomplete word or utterance, e.g.:

   ```
   wh- which projector do you use?

   I- I think I'm- I'm better than Fantin-Latour/
   ```

3. Pauses are indicated by a full stop (short pause - less than 0.5 seconds) or a dash (long pause), e.g.:

   ```
   in the middle of . Czechoslovakia/
   ```

4. A broken line marks the beginning of a stave and indicates that the lines enclosed by these lines are to be read simultaneously (like a musical score), e.g.:

   ```
   -----------------------------------------------------------------------
   Tim:        it's really strange that you don't drink actually =
   Alex:                                                     = why? =
   -----------------------------------------------------------------------
   ```

5. An extended square bracket indicates the start of overlap between utterances, e.g.:

   ```
   -----------------------------------------------------------------------
   A:         ⌐ that's what it is/ yeah/
   B:         ∟ that's that's what I ((can see))
   -----------------------------------------------------------------------
   ```

6. An equals sign at the end of one speaker's utterances and at the start of the next utterance indicates the absence of a discernible gap, e.g.:

   ```
   -----------------------------------------------------------------------
   ```

```
A:          I'm better than Fantin-Latour =

B:                                       = yeah yeah I know/
```
----

7. Double round parentheses indicate that there is doubt about the accuracy of the transcription, e.g.:

```
((do they)) have one of ((their own?))
```

8. Where material is impossible to make out, it is represented as follows: ((xx)), e.g.:

```
you're (xx)- you're prejudiced/
```

9. Angled brackets enclose additional information or give clarificatory information about underlined material, e.g.:

```
I grew my hair long/ <laughs>

grrr/ <vicious noise>
```

10. Capital letters are used for words/syllables uttered with emphasis:

```
the feminine shape which IS more melding in together/
```

11. The symbol % encloses words or phrases that are spoken very quietly, e.g.:

```
%mhm%
```

12. The symbol .hh indicates that the speaker takes a sharp intake of breath, .e.g:

```
and on the other hand .hh a- a bunch of middle-class creeps/
```

13. The symbol [...] indicates that material has been omitted, e.g.:

```
it's sort of one separate thing and another separate thing [...]
```

Based on: Coates, J. (1997). 'One-at-a-time: the organization of men's talk'. In *Language and Masculinity*, S.Johnson and U.H.Meinhof, (Ed.), (pp. 107-129). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.