

Glossy Subjects: G&L Magazine and `Tonghzi' Cultural Visibility in Taiwan

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Abstract The burgeoning cultural practices among gays and lesbians in Taiwan in the 1990s provide an important context for considering broader questions about what has been called 'weak group' (*ruoshi tuanti*) identity politics, family life and modernity in Taiwan. This article examines the construction of gay and lesbian identities in Taiwan as expressed in their cultural consumption of an enormously popular magazine *G&L* (1996 – present). Through a qualitative, critical reading of the magazine, we explore the questions of consumption, family life and relationships, in the context of the practice of filial piety central to the Taiwanese sociocultural formation and individual subjectivity. We argue that 'commodification' is an insufficient framework for understanding queer identity constructions in *G&L*, unless it recognizes the contradictory dynamics of new liberal democratic ideals and family politics negotiated in Taiwan's queer popular culture.

Keywords family, *G&L Magazine*, gay and lesbian visibility, popular culture, Taiwan

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Glossy Subjects: *G&L Magazine* and 'Tonghzi' Cultural Visibility in Taiwan

Introduction

In 1996, the first popular lifestyle magazine catering to young Chinese-reading gays and lesbians appeared in Taiwan. *G&L Magazine* was launched only nine years after the end of almost half a century of martial law, during which such a visible cultural production would not have been possible. The magazine was granted permission by the Taipei City government to publish in 1996, and its premiere issue arrived in bookstores in June of that year. Glossy, colourful and designed with a dual

cover featuring images of men on one side and women on the other, the magazine carries with it a vibrantly celebratory tone. *G&L* signifies more than gays and lesbians; it doubles as a shorthand for a number of multiplying nominations appropriate for its celebratory attitude (e.g. the premiere issue also names the magazine as *Glory & Liberty*, *Gentlemen & Ladies*, *George & Louis*, *Gina & Lisa*, etc.). Compared to the drabness of other 'underground' queer publications or queer-friendly magazines of earlier times (e.g. *Girlfriend* [*Nupengyou*] and *Teacher Zhang Monthly* [*Zhang Laoshi Yuekan*]), *G&L*'s design concept projects positive self-affirmation cloaked in commercial vigor.¹

'The World's First Chinese Language Gay and Lesbian Magazine' is how *G&L* proclaims its global appeal. Its current circulation reaches 40,000. Besides selling in Taiwan, Japan, Canada and the USA, the magazine achieves one-third of its sales in Hong Kong.² Many bookstores are too squeamish about putting the magazine in visible corners, except for the large chain Eslite Bookstore. A favourite hangout for young queers, Eslite places a big pile of the magazine out in the open to attract its 22- to 28-year-old readership. If young gays and lesbians in Taiwan were bound in 'darkness' (*heian*) under authoritarian rule, the arrival of this glossy magazine signals freedom to 'sunny' (*yangguang*) visibility. For many of them, the evocation of what appears to be a common and simplistic metaphor of sunny/darkness in fact serves to contextualize the significance of *G&L* within a fundamental frame for understanding power in the everyday life of Taiwanese society.

In this article, we offer a critical reading of *G&L* within the parallel contexts of the politics of 'traditional culture' (*chuantong wenhua*) and the politics of an emerging identity-based consciousness around sexuality in contemporary Taiwanese society. We reviewed all of the issues in the first two years of the magazine (from June 1996 to October 1998) as well as relevant newspaper and magazine coverage of homosexuality in Taiwan during the same period. We coded the magazine exhaustively under the following categories: feature stories, essays, editor's letters, family issues, activism, literary works, educational events, erotic materials, counselling, HIV/AIDS, non-AIDS health issues, international news and advertisements and promotions. Additionally, we interviewed the former Editor and staff of *G&L* in the summer of 1998.

In an effort to understand the historical and social formation of gay and lesbian experience under capitalism, recent investigations of queer consumer culture in the West have addressed a variety of complex and inter-related issues, the most important being the political paradox in the relationship between gay identity politics and experience of commodification. Perhaps because, as Rosemary Hennessy (1995) notes, 'queer spectacles often participate in a long standing history of class-regulated

visibility' (p. 66; emphasis added), theories *about* gay consumerism fall prey to the same tendencies to valorize class difference as the privileged term of analysis. In any event, analyses of queer consumerism assume interdependence between queer identity and class experience or consciousness, thus contributing to an underestimation of other forms of social and ideological positioning for queers. Yet in the case of *G&L*, we shall argue that the merging of the economic trend of the so-called global gay consumerism with the political opportunity for charting a new sexual movement in a newfound liberal democracy, has enabled an opportunity to work out the relationship between gay and lesbian visibility and the cultural politics of family-centredness in Taiwan. We shall suggest that *G&L* evinces not a class politics, but family politics, that underwrites queer consumption of popular culture in Taiwan. The convergence between consumerism, politics and family life underscores certain tentativeness about queer identity in *G&L*. Queer identity is tentative, less because it has entered in to commodity relations (an inevitable price of modernity itself) than because it is the result of a delicate attempt to reconfigure traditional culture, especially matters of filial piety. Despite its (rightful) attempt to celebrate queer visibility, *G&L* provides its young readers with an approximating social and political ideal fit for an emerging visibility of homosexual culture in Taiwan.

This article is not a study of the gay and lesbian social movement in Taiwan per se; rather, it focuses on a highly visible and widely consumed cultural product in order to discern how it illustrates, animates and helps to shape readers' emerging identities in this historical moment of Taiwan's history.³ It has two parts. In the first part, we discuss briefly the political changes in Taiwan since the late 1980s and the rise of queer visibility in various social and cultural formations among Taiwanese youth during the same period. In the second part, we examine *G&L* with respect to questions of relational life, family and queer consumption. The range of private and public issues covered in *G&L* offers a prism for looking at various images and narratives of queer identities in Taiwan. We conclude by exploring the theoretical implications of *G&L* for queer visibility politics in an Asian context.

A brief note on the terminology used in this article. The nomenclature 'gay and lesbian' is not entirely accurate for the targeted readers of *G&L*, or for the public discussion of queer visibility in Taiwan. While the terms homosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender do exist in Mandarin equivalents, they all fall under one popularly used name: *tongzhi* (meaning 'same aspiration' or 'comrade'). It is this spirit of 'sameness' which in theory forges a unified 'gay' community and movement. Through appropriating the meaning of comradeship from the political vernacular of the PRC (People's Republic of China), *tongzhi* is a creatively ironic usage

deemed necessary for a repressed group. In addition, the idea of 'coming out', an interesting discourse in itself as it is understood in Taiwan, has been translated as *xianshen* (to 'let the body appear', or to 'reveal one's self') or *chugui* (to 'come out of the closet').

The term 'queer' that is popular in current American discussion has been translated in Taiwan as *guaitai* (strange creature) or *kuer* (for its rhyme with 'queer'). It is important to note that we use 'queer' only to echo what has already been accepted, localized and commonly used among Taiwanese *tongzhi*. While we do not believe 'queer' is the most widely used term there, we use it to highlight an emerging attitude of defiance observable among young gays and lesbians in Taiwan (and Hong Kong). We also use it heuristically to connect with the existing literature of 'queer theory,' which has been increasingly adopted and appropriated by gender and sexuality studies in Taiwanese universities. Above all, we agree with Adam et al. (1999) that the impact of international diffusion of terms such as 'queer' has been most impressive 'in the situation of a sudden change in political opportunities, such as the opening of the political system in the transition from dictatorship to democracy' (p. 369).

Contexts

The re-invention of Taiwan

Rapid social changes occurred in Taiwan during the 1990s and beyond. 1992 saw the first real legislative elections in over 40 years, the result of which replaced many mainland-elected old Nationalist Party supporters with younger, Taiwan-born, well-educated representatives intent on democratizing Taiwan. In 1996, the country held the first direct presidential election, while the National Assembly began revising the nation's constitution toward a more democratic and fair legal and political system. Since the lifting of martial law in 1987, the country has gone from an authoritarian regime controlled by one family – Chiang Kai-shek and his son Chiang Ching-kuo – to a multi-party system designed to make the government more representative of and accountable to the people of Taiwan. More recently, in early 2000, the new elections produced for the first time a new President, Chen Shui-bian, who did not come from the long-time dominant Kuomintang (KMT) party.

Economically speaking, Taiwan has enjoyed prosperity sustained by a vast and stable middle class. According to the World Bank, income inequality in Taiwan is the lowest of nine Asian nations.⁴ Taiwan's foreign reserves of US\$83.5 billion have helped it weather the East Asian economic crisis that began in 1997, as has its high domestic savings rate (Chen, 1998).⁵ It is important to note that political struggle faced by marginalized groups in Taiwan must be considered within this context of relative

economic stability and prosperity. Queer political struggle in this context is thus largely a middle-class struggle for visibility. (Queer consumption takes this middle-class context as self-evident.)

The changes in politics and the relaxation of the KMT government's control of the media signalled an unprecedented opening for a plurality of voices in Taiwan. Women's struggles, the rights of the disabled, concerns about the environment and gay and lesbian issues all thrust themselves or were thrust into the new public sphere. These new voices, which were previously ignored, are articulated not in the American political language of majority versus minority, but in a discourse about power which distinguishes them as 'weak groups' (*ruoshi tuanti*) who have been formally distanced from the traditional, patriarchal power centre.

The rise of queer visibility in Taiwan

While the activities of Taiwan's gay and lesbian community in this new-found political consciousness have only recently begun to receive scholarly attention (e.g. Chang, 1998; Ding and Liu, 1998; Gian, 1998; Patton, 1998; and Yang, 1999), the issue of homosexuality entered into public discourse in the early 1990s with the establishment of Gay Chat at National Taiwan University. In March 1993, Gay Chat became the first officially registered and recognized gay student organization on a Taiwanese university campus (Han, 1995). The news of its establishment spread quickly throughout mainstream newspapers and television and inspired students on university campuses around Taiwan. By November 1995, there were ten other gay and lesbian student groups at other universities, although they were still mainly 'underground' organizations (not officially registered with school authorities). From the beginning then, these student-centred *tongzhi* organizations gave the gay and lesbian movement in Taiwan a definitively youthful character.

Outside the university setting, the attention afforded homosexuality in the national media during the mid-1990s was nothing less than remarkable. Despite the persistent homophobia in the emerging discourse about homosexuality and AIDS,⁶ there were encouraging signs of an opening social and cultural space for queers in Taiwan. There has been a tremendous increase in gay-related publications of both 'underground' and public varieties. In the electronic media, the explosive growth of the internet and inter-university networks created opportunities for BBS chat sites targeted to and supported by gays and lesbians. By May 1996 there were at least seven MOTSS (Member of the Same Sex) BBS sites under university student operation. Even the government's Office of Education had an 'experimental' site open (Li, 1996). Furthermore, the explosion of books, articles, and films depicting homosexuality is too extensive to document here.⁷

In 1994, Nu Shudian, a women-, feminist-, and lesbian-oriented bookstore in Taipei, joined Eslite Bookstore in bringing news of the homosexual community to gays and lesbians and the wider Taiwanese reading public. In January 1999, another small gay and lesbian bookstore, Jing-jing, opened its door for business in Taipei. Eslite's *Chengpin Yuedu* (*The Eslite Reader*), a monthly book review, regularly brings attention to gay-related publications that also appeal to a wide variety of readers. Addressing gay issues since 1984 is *Zhang Laoshi Yuekan* (*Teacher Zhang Monthly*), a magazine which, like *Chengpin Yuedu*, appeals to a wide audience with its coverage of many social issues (see Lin, 1996).

G&L is capitalizing on this unprecedented visibility and has become the most popular glossy magazine among Chinese *tongzhi* readers today. Broadly, the cover stories in *G&L* span the public and private trajectories of queer life in Taiwan. The main concerns that receive feature treatment range from broad public issues (such as gay consumer culture, sexual harassment of gays, the Chang De Street police harassment incident,⁸ World AIDS Day, gays in the military, and gay marriage) to more personal issues of identity (such as coming out to family, ageing, self-love, transvestism, and so on). Besides the featured cover stories (which comprise about 5% of a given issue), the magazine is organized into five broad domains:

1. promotional materials for consumer goods, for celebrities (both local and western), and a whole host of cultural activities (about 30%);
2. gay and lesbian international news (10%);
3. materials on gay relationships in a format akin to 'Dear Abby' and in the personal ads format (10%);
4. gay and lesbian fiction and other literary writings (15%);
5. erotic photographs (30%).

Through this variety of materials, *G&L* projects a gay cosmopolitanism that not only flatters its young urban readers, but also provides a central guide for readers to seek each other out, to build their identities and to pursue their desires in a still conservative society.

As a means of developing subcultural knowledge for the readers, the lifestyle pages of *G&L* work as a shopping-mall-in-print that points the readers to the emerging local gay life in Taiwan while simultaneously connecting them to the international gay scene. The regular sections on gay-relevant films, music, books, fashion, restaurants, clubs and bars, tanning salons, gay saunas and hot springs, gay travel, and so on, mark out the social territory for the urban young queers with spending power. The centralization of these consumption choices appears in pages known simply as 'The Gay Map'. Of course, this map animates queer desires in commercial terms. The magazine also encourages queer consumption of international cultural goods, such as music (e.g. pages profiling Melissa

Ethridge, k. d. lang, RuPaul, Elton John), theatre (e.g. reviews of *Jeffrey, Angels in America*), films (e.g. reviews of *Go Fish*, *The Birdcage*, *For a Lost Soldier*, *Lilies*, *Bent*, *The River*, etc.). In short, a hip gay world is delivered by the magazine through a coalescence of local and imported queer tastes.

G&L also devotes a great deal of attention to books. In Taiwan, a thriving reading culture exists, which is supported by a 95 percent literacy rate and a highly educated population (US Department of State, 1997). Knowing that queer literature is an indispensable part of queer consumption, *G&L* routinely publishes book reviews, excerpts and featured essays about the queer literary scene. Moreover, like many western and Japanese queer magazines, *G&L* publishes a large quantity of male and female semi-nude photographs and recycles them in advertisements for seductive swimwear, tanning salons and bars. Interspersed with the promotional materials on books, these titillating images offer another kind of 'reading' material.

A critical reading of *G&L*

Consuming passion: Tongzhi relationships and affect

In a discussion with us about the origin of *G&L*, Michael Chiao, the former editor, placed the magazine as part of an early beginning (*qibu*) of the gay and lesbian movement in Taiwan (interview, 1998). Basic visibility rather than complex political assertions, he reasons, is the first step toward anti-discrimination of gays and lesbians. But, as we shall see, the kind of visibility constructed in the magazine is anything but basic.

What comes across clearly in *G&L* is the way the magazine attempts to represent a strong collective social desire for affirmation through the promotion of what can be called Chinese 'queer affect' (*tongzhi de qinggan*). Especially in the early issues, the magazine focuses on building a community of desire through shared emotional experiences of isolation, secrecy, fear of coming out and frustration in facing family pressures, as well as positive experiences of cruising, hooking up, clandestine romances and narratives of various sexual longing and excitation. Affect (*qinggan*) has a double-meaning here: it embodies both '*ganxing*', or sensibility, and its reverse '*xinggan*', which means sexiness. In this way, *G&L* offers space to tell the various stories of the yearning, and slightly sentimentalized, *tongzhi* as well as space to construct his/her positive sex appeal. There are articles filled with instructions on how to look and feel sexy and how to cruise (or 'fish' in local usage). There is a section devoted to publishing readers' letters, poems and short essays about their same-sex emotional and sexual experiences. There is another section called 'Mommy Bear Box' in which a mommy-bear figure answers readers' heartfelt letters about love, anxiety or confusion.⁹

Not surprisingly, many pages are devoted to gay relationship issues. In general, there are two notable observations about *G&L*'s coverage of gay romance. First, it tends to rehearse a parental voice, which is a substitute for the relationship advice that readers are not likely to obtain from their own parents. As we mentioned before, a regular feature of the magazine is a relationship advice column called 'Mommy Bear Box' in which readers can pose questions about sex and romantic yearnings and receive answers from a kind and supportive mommy bear. Second, in 'counselling' readers through their romantic affairs, *G&L* advocates a definition of desirability stemming from a certain sexual bashfulness. De-sexualization goes a long way, as it were, in developing and maintaining a 'healthy' and desirable image of oneself in relationships.

In an article entitled 'From Dating to Commitment', the author debunks the various myths of romance by issuing a universal call for rationality and pragmatism. This form of advising echoes strongly parental rhetorics. For instance, the reader is warned not to believe in soppy romantic movies or novels that profess love at first sight. Considering only the so-called 'chemistry' between two people is not enough: 'This type of romantic expression of love is great entertainment, but not necessarily applicable to real life situations' (Bi, 1997: 46). 'Chemistry' and rational judgment are contrasted over and over again; perhaps this is to mimic the rhetorical form of parental nagging. As a result, romance enters into *G&L* largely as a discourse of surrogate parenthood, as a family training for sense, rationality and emotional maturity. The practice of sexual modesty is clearly echoed in readers' constructions of personal ads. In discussing the culture of personal ads in Taiwan, Lin (1997) explains that in comparison with the more sexually explicit language of the American personal columns, ads in Taiwan are much more likely to be 'full of a romantic, artistic flavor' (p. 119). According to him, the personal ads by gay men and lesbians in Taiwan are not very different, since ads by both genders share a similar tone that is not centred in sexual excitation, but on expressions of emotional longing.¹⁰

Expressions of coy modesty are coupled with a sentimentalized language of desire. This works to de-emphasize the physical side of queer romance. For instance, in an article about 'fishing' (*diaoren*), used in Taiwan to mean 'hooking up with someone', the emphasis is again placed on developing the skills of being demure as part of one's sex appeal. Even in the, supposedly, erotic photographs of young gay couples published in the magazine, the emphasis is on the models gazing longingly into each other's eyes, holding hands, sharing a lazy Sunday afternoon together or strolling in the garden on a pleasant autumn day, and so on. This kind of alluring image centering on an affective appeal to idyllic couplehood is, we suggest, far more powerful in the construction of romantic discourse for queer readers in

Taiwan than the appeal to explicit sexual display commonly seen in many American, European and Japanese magazines. The downplaying of the sexual self in fact appeals to young Chinese readers, because it works on a reserved sexual ethic *assumed* to be a part of their cultural sensibility.

Tongzhi lifestyle as a familial problematic

Behind *G&L*'s appeal to sexual modesty lies a broader and more underlying concern which is to do with *tongzhi*'s relationships with their families. In Taiwan, like their heterosexual counterparts, the overwhelming majority of unmarried young *tongzhi* live with their families. Sharing living space with one's grandparents, parents and siblings, and performing family duties define the typical character of life before (expected) marriage (see Chen and Chen, 1997). On the social scale, this explains a total lack of such things as 'gay neighbourhoods' in Taiwan. As a result, *tongzhi* are reliant on a gay market that is never entirely able to disarticulate from family life. This makes the formation of gay and lesbian identities – especially in matters of coming out – an egregiously complex struggle. We suggest that the editor and writers of *G&L* are fully cognizant of this dimension. From practices of 'reserved' sexuality to the problem of coming out, we see how *G&L* outlines a contour of gay life that is quite firmly connected to the figure of the parents.

In the spring of 1997, a gay university student was interviewed on a variety show in Taipei about his sexual orientation. When this programme aired, talk shows had already been delving into the subject of homosexuality for at least a year. The controversial aspect of the interview was that the young man's mother was brought onto the show, with no idea of what was going to happen. It was on this show that the son came out to his mother. Visibly shaken, the mother then burst into tears. After the show was aired, there was public outrage about the commercialization of the subject of homosexuality on television for the sake of ratings. In the gay and lesbian community, controversy erupted over the son's insensitivity to the feelings of his mother and his irresponsibility in 'bringing family matters into the open'. MOTSS BBS sites were full of fervent and mostly negative commentaries about the event.

This controversy inspired *G&L* to carry a six-page feature article entitled 'How to Come Out to Your Parents' in its June 1997 issue. Offering itself as a resource for counselling young *tongzhi* through the process of coming out to their families, the feature article contains a checklist of considerations to make before coming out. The advice of 'thinking about possible consequences' tops the list, while 'don't demand immediate acceptance' appears in a section on the 'dos and don'ts of coming out' (see W. Li, 1997). Indeed, the spectre of the closet is still a part of what *G&L* reminds their readers from time to time. 'The More Dangerous, The More *G&L*: Twenty

Ways to Hide Your *G&L* Magazines', a special report in the December 1996 issue, offers a list of lighthearted suggestions for concealing the magazine from the family. Besides the most obvious method of hiding it underneath the mattress, the reader also learns how to conceal the magazine inside the vacuum cleaner, underneath the cat litter box, and beneath the Buddha figure on the family altar table. The tongue-in-cheek tone aside, the need to conceal is not to be taken lightly.

By and large, in articles about coming out, *G&L* constructs the family space as the sanctuary of well-established traditional values, including filial expectations and roles. The parents, the central figures embodying traditional family values, are portrayed as unimaginative, uptight, but ultimately benevolent. For instance, in one article, we learn of one mother's extreme agony upon discovering that her son is gay. She writes about her disappointment, shame and even her thoughts of suicide. As a mother, she worries about her son finding a meaningful relationship, contracting AIDS and, most of all, not fathering children in order to carry on the family name (Jiang, 1996: 88–9). In another article, a father similarly expresses shame, but frames his son's homosexuality as '*bu zhengchang*' (abnormal) and describes the need for him to change as in 'turning away from evil' (*gaixie guizheng*) (An and Jiang, 1996). Both articles serve to remind readers of the possible agony that coming out to one's parents may cause. Moral considerations of filial duties therefore become a part of what the magazine appropriates for and sells back to the reader.

However, in affirming this traditional morality, *G&L* nonetheless expands the standard understanding of filial piety to a possible reconciliation with homosexuality in the family. This becomes clear because these stories of family agony often offer closure in the form of parental acceptance. In 'He is Gay, and He is My Son', the mother reaches a turning point in her struggle with her son's homosexuality when she reflects on the inadequacies of her own marriage:

Thinking about myself, in other people's eyes I am lucky because I have a husband and a son. But besides loneliness and worry, what else have I gotten from my marriage? Since my son is definitely not getting married, looking at this from another angle, isn't he escaping the miseries of a bad situation anyway? Why should I worry about what others say? After this realization, I made peace with myself. (Jiang, 1996: 89)

Conveying parents' concern for their children's happiness becomes a way to articulate how the rules of filial piety can be rewritten to accommodate homosexuality. This mother expresses her wish for her son's future:

I once asked myself, 'If one day my son settles down with one partner, and they want to live with me, could I accept it?' My answer was that I would be willing to accept it. And I would take care of his partner the same way I take care of

my son. Because no matter how old my son is, I want to see him often and be able to cook good meals for him, wash his clothes for him. This is all that any mother really wants. (Jiang, 1996: 89)

In 'Son, I Just Want You to be Happy', an 82-year-old grandmother explains how traditional hopes for children and grandchildren – marrying, bearing offspring and taking care of elders – can still be maintained for gay children:

If he's together with a boy in the future, I hope the boy is obedient, gentle, thoughtful, knows how to show deference to his superiors, and respects his elders. If the two of them can live a really happy life together, I would be willing and happy to live with them as one family. It would be like having another grandson. If they decide to adopt a child, I can help take care of it, too! If things work out that way, I will be really happy, too. (An and Jiang, 1996: 93)

Reconciliatory scenarios such as this offer the possibility for *tongzhi* to refigure and reevaluate their relationship with their families and with their sense of family duties (albeit through practices of the traditional domestic role for women). Ultimately, this provides hope to the readers.

Taking a step further, and in an attempt to localize an increasingly visible debate in the West concerning family rights for gays and lesbians, *G&L* began to cover the subject of gay marriage in 1998. Implicitly, its treatment of gay marriage works toward a redefinition of 'family', not through compromise within their family of origin, but through the construction of 'success stories' of independent gay households. The August 1998 issue features a story entitled 'Marriage? Gayriage?' It employs comparative stories to describe the two main marital possibilities for gays and lesbians in Taiwan. The first possibility draws on the experience of Hsu You-sheng, a famous gay author who, in November 1996, held the first public gay wedding in Taiwan. News of his wedding created a media explosion around the topic of homosexuality and gay marriage. The picture presented is one of 'Sunny Gayriage' (the English subtitle for the article on Hsu) in which openly gay couples are shown as healthy, happy and in Hsu's case, contributing to a positive change in society's view of gay relationships. Juxtaposed against this idealized form of same-sex marriage is the second possibility of a more troubling kind: that of gay men in 'fake' marriages. Presented under the heading of 'Closet Marriage', this second form of marriage for gays is depicted through three interviews with gay men who are married to women. The stories they tell convey entrapment, frustration and most of all, regret. Married for three years, one 36-year-old gay man exclaims: 'If I could do it all over again, I would not choose to be in this marriage' ('Marriage? Gayriage?', 1998: 27). Another man interviewed strongly opposes this practice: 'No matter what the reasons are, even pressure from parents and society, there is never a good reason

to enter into this kind of marriage. I think people have to face themselves. These pressures [from family and society] can be avoided' (p. 28). A third man simply advises the readers: 'If you absolutely have to get married, you must not reveal the truth to your spouse' (30).

Facing family pressure is by no means unique to Taiwanese queers. Most of us have had to confront it. What is unique is how *G&L* carefully inscribes the pleasures and anxieties of being gay as a problematic *of* the family. Eager to show its readers how to live a happy gay life (e.g. through the utopic story of Hsu), *G&L* is equally eager to ask them to be considerate of the potential agony gay life causes both to their family of origin and to their own families formed through 'closet marriages'.

The question of coming out (*xianshen*) indeed directs *tongzhi* to the centrality of the family. 'You can only truly come out if you're an orphan' has sometimes served as a common joke in this regard. This is why the effort to re-construct traditional culture (*chuantong wenhua*) so that homosexuality can be accepted is a compelling and welcomed idea. Another way in which coming out is dealt with is through collective activism. In recent years, we have witnessed the practice of 'collective coming out' (*jiti xianshen*) by Taiwanese queer activists. It is a practice presented largely to the media on university campuses as a human rights protest. In order to protect individual anonymity, *tongzhis* who come out collectively have put on Chinese opera masks in front of the media. The masks signify that their action situates queer identity precisely between 'in' and 'out': not exactly out, but not exactly staying in the closet either. What is being signified is that in Taiwan, *tongzhi* are caught between the family and the state, between claiming a stake for themselves in the newly democratized order of Taiwan politics and feeling uncertain as to whether this new order will include a space for them or not.¹¹ Bound by constraints in the family, and not yet recognized as a meaningful voice by the state, Taiwanese *tongzhi* do not see how *individual* coming out heralded by the West can work for them.¹² Local scholar Chu Wei-cheng (1998) has called it a case of 'cultural indigestion' (p. 40).

In the above, we have tried to show *G&L's* main preoccupations as a new queer magazine in a newly democratizing public sphere. We have suggested that *tongzhi* culture is constructed by *G&L* through an articulation of queer affect and a rearticulation of family life and filial duties. Yet an important question remains: how are queer affect and family politics, in turn, mediated by the larger process of commodification? In other words, how is queer experience in Taiwan filtered through a consumerist ideology?

Just another 'gay marketing moment'?

Critical analyses of commodified queer experience that are available from the West tend to be strongly underpinned by class concerns. Since John

D'Emilio's (1983) groundbreaking essay on the relationship between capitalism and gay identity, Western analysts have focused largely on class difference as a central problematic in their consideration of queer consumption. Amy Gluckman and Betsy Reed's important book, *Homoeconomics: Capitalism, Community, and Lesbian and Gay Life* (1997), places an implicit emphasis on the same, to an extent that differences between gay male and lesbian consumption and among diverse racial groups are examined as differences subsumed in class politics. For lesbians and gay men in the USA, the onset of the 'gay marketing moment' signals an increasing recognition of the interaction – and elision – among identity, commerce and politics. Yet more than anything else, this recognition of gay commercial visibility has brought home an important fact: visibility does not apply evenly to all gay people. In the USA, the impressive demographics, profligate spending habits and high levels of discretionary income boasted of the gay community by marketing organizations, and appropriated by conservative political voices, have produced a new mythology of gay affluence, which of course turns out to be a class-based mythology (Badgett, 1997). Accordingly, critical analyses of this new cultural mythology rightfully emphasize the politics of class in order to illuminate underlying conflicts in the phenomenon of gay consumerism. Moreover, implicit in such class-based analyses is a rather common assumption about queers' relationship to the nuclear family. The presupposition is that capitalism (and some social insurance or welfare safety net) provides an escape route for queers to exist *apart from* their families. Conceptualized as being independent from familial constraints (including pressure to marry and procreate), queers, especially queers who engage in popular consumption, are laced in a society and economy whose distinguishing feature is class stratification. In Taiwan, it is unclear how relevant this kind of individual-based and class-based analysis is. In this section, we extend our analysis of *G&L* by asking: What accounts for queer experience in Taiwan, even in a consumerist environment? Is class difference a major force in the commodification of Taiwanese *tongzhi* identities?

To be sure, class differences exist in Taiwan, especially in the urban/rural divide. Yet it does not follow that Taiwanese society has a strong class-consciousness. In fact, the KMT's economic policies have been directed against the creation of stratified class experiences. As Taiwanese scholar Tu Wei-ming (1996) has argued in 'Cultural Identity and the Politics of Recognition in Contemporary Taiwan':

An important feature of the 'Taiwan miracle' . . . is the absence of a sharp increase in inequality, despite extraordinarily rapid growth. Much of this . . . can be attributed to the role of the government. Through subsidies, taxation, trade policies and other remedial measures, the KMT leadership seems to have dampened economic pressures to polarize the society. (p. 1137)

To understand the formation of *cultural identity* as it is shaped – and ‘imagined’ – by acts of consumption, it is important to note the distinction between a politico-economic logic and a consumption logic. Broadly speaking, the former stresses various forms of economic practices, including labour relations and modes of production and consumption, as the basis of ideological experience. Social life is abstracted into economic life. The same conceptual abstraction also exists in a cultural logic of consumption, for it stresses that both the producers and consumers of culture acquire their (commodified) experience and identities through various modes of representation, fetishization, reification, etc. (see Goldman, 1992). With consumption logic, then, social life is abstracted into ‘discourse’. It is not our purpose here to delineate the validity of each approach. Instead, in the present analysis of queer cultural visibility in Taiwan, we want to highlight the role of consumption logic in the formation of an emerging identity politics. Specifically, we are concerned that a certain preferred analytic approach that may be suitable in other contexts may not apply to the present one. We maintain that the ‘cultural’ in queer cultural consumption as it appears in the pages of *G&L* has a strong ideological association with traditional ‘familial culture’.

Thus, the primary concern of *G&L* in its attempt to animate a ‘*tongzhi* lifestyle’ in Taiwan is about how to have the pleasures of the body in commodity terms vis-à-vis the family space. This often means either shielding those pleasures from the family (e.g. ‘The More Dangerous, The More *G&L*: Twenty Ways to Hide Your *G&L* Magazines’, December 1996) or making them visible so as to intervene into traditional family constraints (e.g. ‘Mom, Dad, He’s My Other Half: How to Introduce Your Lover to Your Family’, August 1997). In *G&L*, the ‘*tongzhi*’ becomes a dual construct: a pleasure-seeker in the form of a free, imaginative adult consumer, and a curious, somewhat melancholic person in the form of a family member (more specifically, a child). Put in another way, the magazine can be seen as providing an understanding of homosexuality emerging as an interesting process of hybridizing a new market-liberated identity and one that is articulated into a hegemonic familial tradition. In this way, *G&L*’s participation in the rapid proliferation of sexual discourses in Taiwan helps to outline the homosexual as a democratic invention on the one hand (a sort of new cultural citizenship constituted by market ideology) and a familial re-invention on the other hand (as a resource to engage with and possibly change, traditional Chinese gender and sexual systems). Such is the ‘everyday-ness’ of being gay in Taiwan, a notion that entwines the commercial and the familial.

In contrast with the economic life of gays and lesbians in the US detailed by D’Emilio (1983), Faderman (1991), Gottlieb (1997), Matthaei (1997), Valocchi (1999) and others, the development in Taiwan of a labour force

autonomous from the family sphere provides partial economic autonomy for queers without *cultural* autonomy from family responsibilities. Industrial modernity in Taiwan does not agitate cultural traditions – the former, in fact, works in conjunction with the latter.¹³ This has produced contradictions for young queers whose identity increasingly relies on re-working the lines that intersect economics and culture. One of the consequences of this contradiction is the creation of differences between gay men and lesbians (which, by the way, is also prevalent in the US).

In general terms, the sexual division of labour in the Chinese family positions men firmly in the heterosexual framework, making marriage a fundamental definition of family duty as well as masculine personhood. For women, however, the patriarchal pressure to serve the family, ironically, allows a space for homosocial relationships. Filial duties in some sense alleviate women from the pressure of marriage; so long as they take care of the family, singlehood is a more permissible identity for women than for men.¹⁴ Under this particular perspective, Taiwanese gay men generally experience a more salient tension between economic independence and cultural constraints of family duties than lesbians do. This difference would in turn result in a divergence of consumer desire between the gay male and lesbian readers of *G&L*.¹⁵

In *G&L*, gay male desire is visibly configured around the tabooed male body repressed by heterosexual masculine and family ideals. In fact, in their letters to the editor, many male readers demand to see more male images showing more open nudity. They also frequently request more information about how to obtain sex in public commercial sites. The challenge to the repression of erotic desires is facilitated by gay men's relative economic freedom. Lesbian desire, on the other hand, is configured around the consumption of female homosociality and the homoerotic feelings that can flourish in it. Some lesbian readers in fact complain about the nude photographs of women in the magazine. They reason that since images of nude women are widely available in the dominant male culture (e.g. *Playboy*), a queer magazine like *G&L* should devote more space to female-to-female relational issues. They argue that the female body need not become a focal point of lesbian consumption because it is not a tabooed or repressed object in the patriarchal erotic imagination. The difference in consumption between gay men and lesbians, therefore, does not appear to be mitigated by class distinctions (which seems to be more evident in the US), but rather by their different ideological positions in traditional patriarchy and the gender hierarchy supported by it.

In sum, in asking what kind of consumer identity *G&L* promotes for its readers, we have suggested moving away from a class-based analysis for understanding the commodification of Taiwanese queer identity. Rather, we have argued that family ideals continue to shape male and female

tongzhi's different desires and tastes in cultural consumption. Seen in these ways, queer consumerism in *G&L* (and other similar cultural products) must be seen as something that is situated between the market and the national imagination of traditional family morality. Consumption stages the necessary conflict between economic liberty, the promise of which is reinforced by newfound democratic pluralism, and persistent cultural constraints in the name of the traditional social order. More importantly, we want to show that *in G&L, a cultural 'logic of consumption' bypasses economic concerns in order to enable a reworking of family life for its tongzhi readers.* This logic of consumption generates a community of desire that is weakly, if at all, tied to class politics.

Conclusion

Western theories of identity politics, particularly those developed in cultural studies and cultural sociology in recent years, conceive of the social sphere as the site of multiple, intersecting political struggles in which a critical sense of visibility matters, especially as it proffers the possibility for social transformation (see for example Erni, 1996; Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1992; Seidman, 1993). Yet making identity visible is both about contesting history and about the remaking of the social sphere. The former question calls for a political challenge of historical relations of domination that have produced various forms of 'otherness' through erasure of cultural memory and historical violence. The latter question concerning the rearticulation of the social sphere attends to the strategies and tactics of 'difference', of how difference disrupts the normative surface of everyday life. Works that address sexual minorities and how they disrupt gender, sexual categories and practices, for instance, contribute to the re-signification of the social sphere, especially the media (e.g. Clark, 1993; Doty, 1993; Doty and Creekmur, 1995; Fejes and Petrich, 1993).

The rapid political transformation in Taiwan in the post-martial-law era presents a particularly relevant context for a discussion of the identity politics of visibility. The political possibilities opened up by the proliferation of previously invisible groups demonstrate the problematics of 'otherness' and 'difference' briefly outlined above. 'Weak groups' (*ruoshi tuanti*) represent both outcasts marked and marginalized from the centre of power, and a social category whose meaning depends entirely on its relation to, its difference from, other categories. In this article, we have drawn largely on a theory of difference in order to examine whether, and to what extent, gay cultural consumption can re-signify homosexuality and disrupt notions of normalcy in Taiwanese society. We have analysed such re-signification and disruption in relation to, and not outside of, 'heteronormativity' (Warner, 1993) and capitalist formation.

In the West, queer visibility today is a highly contested term. Recently, this negotiation of the relation between queer cultural visibility and consumerism has been manifested in many different ways in the USA.¹⁶ Yet, how we struggle with visibility depends on how we conceptualize queer marginalization. In the USA, the social and political subjugation of sexual minorities emanates from specific historical formations producing various discourses of stigmatization. Religion, class, race and bio-medical science are the primary discourses that mark queerness as deviant from 'the normal'. The situation in Taiwan is quite different. Confucianism, or alternatively, 'traditional culture' (*chuantong wenhua*) is the ideological backdrop regulating social and political life in Taiwan. It is against the weight of a set of traditional, conservative cultural norms that the emerging political consciousness of the Taiwanese *tongzhi* must be understood.¹⁷ The stigmatization of queers in Taiwan, therefore, must be understood in its own context. Rather than the religion-based, class-inflected or medically pathologized definitions of homosexuality in the USA, queers in Taiwan are marginalized through their fundamental deviation from the (heteronormative) traditional family-centred social order deeply informed by Confucianism. In this way, significant social change for queers in Taiwan requires a disruption of that traditional social order.

In *G&L*, the marshalling of gay cultural sensibilities in an effort to rethink the family space in fact exposes the arbitrariness of 'traditional culture' and helps to reconfigure it into a more cosmopolitan mode. Here, the link between family and sexual alterity is made possible, where homosexuality finds a possible space of existence, even constituting a modernizing factor. The magazine forges a new intersection between gay sexuality and the Taiwanese nation-state implied by the strong 'family tradition', even when this intersection is found within the framework of consumer culture. This peculiar condition renders young Taiwanese *tongzhi* a kind of social emblem for a new Taiwan. Collectively referred to as '*xinxing renlei*' (the 'newly rising humanity'), the youth of the 1990s and beyond are well educated, hip, fashionable and informed about the outside world. Yet they are still wrangling with their financial dependence upon their parents and with their ideological relationship to traditional family life in a rapidly changing society. Tu Wei-ming (1996) has argued that the whole Taiwanese society today is confronting the generational cleavages between old and new times. *G&L*'s emphasis on the split between the family and individual, economic and sexual freedom must therefore be understood in the context of these larger changes. As a cultural production making a specific mark at this historical moment, *G&L* projects *tongzhi* as 'glossy subjects' whose commodified visibility tests the limits of a society poised for a new sexual imaginary.

Notes

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1. A comment on our use of *hanyu pinyin* romanization system in the article. It should be noted that *G&L's* reporting and advertisements are virtually without exception written in Mandarin-style Chinese. That is, the magazine uses conventional Mandarin grammar and vocabulary so as to reach as broad a range of Chinese speakers as possible, including people in Taiwan, Hong Kong and (potentially) mainland China. Our use of *hanyu pinyin*, which is based on Mandarin pronunciations, is in keeping with the magazine's own Mandarin usage. Moreover, while other romanization systems exist (e.g. Wade-Giles, the Yale system, etc.), the PRC-propagated *hanyu pinyin* has become the most widely used and recognized system in the world, taught in American universities, Hong Kong, Singapore and even recently in many of Taiwan's language schools. We therefore hope that using the system to represent Chinese characters will allow us to reach the broadest possible range of English readers who may also be readers of Chinese. Moreover, while Mandarin is based on the Beijing dialect and has been politicized in Taiwan, due to its propagation by the KMT, there is no 'indigenous' form of romanization that we find suitable for an international reading audience. Various branches of Taiwan's own central government utilize at least three different systems, a situation that only further complicates any effort to find a 'Taiwanese' romanization system for Mandarin.
2. For the first year and a half, *G&L* had no competition in the market. In fact, sales were so steady that its parent company, Re Ai Publishing Company, began producing a second magazine named *Glory* in January 1998. *Glory* targets only the gay male readers, a result of male readers' demands for an all-male magazine. The company has no plans to produce a comparable spin-off for its lesbian readers, which in essence duplicates the blatant imbalance of coverage of gay male and lesbian concerns in *G&L* itself. Also in January 1998, a second gay and lesbian glossy named *Together* was published in Taiwan. But, according to *G&L* editor, Michael Chiao, since the sales figures of *Together* are four to five times less than that of *G&L*, it does not constitute a major competition.
3. There is only a handful of studies on gay and lesbian social movements in the Asian context. Examples include Gian (1998) and Ni (1996), both of whom discuss the questions of 'agency' and 'community' in such a movement in Taiwan, and Zhou (1997) who gives an 'anti-colonial' reading to the formation of queer identity politics in Taiwan, Hong Kong and China. For a study of Japanese gay and lesbian movement, see Lungsing (1999). As for studies of images of *tongzhi* on Taiwanese television, see Lin (1999). See also Lungsing (1995) for an analysis of a Japanese gay magazine called *Barazoku*. His analysis focuses only on personal ads in the magazine (particularly those ads looking for 'marriage' by gay men in Japan).

4. According to the World Bank (1998), Taiwan scored a Gini coefficient in 1995 of only 31.7. Taiwan in the 1990s was one of the Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs) in the East Asian region. Once a recipient of American aid in the 1950s, Taiwan now contributes economic and disaster relief aid to its Asian neighbours, as well as being a major foreign investor in countries such as the Philippines, China, and Malaysia. Enjoying an average annual growth rate of 6.6% between 1991 and 1995, Taiwan is now a leading producer of high-technology goods (US Department of State, 1997). More recently, the country's strong economy indicates its ability to cope with the devastating earthquakes that began on 21 September 1999.
5. The government's refusal to allow Magic Johnson to enter Taiwan in October 1995, due to his HIV-positive status, attracted much media attention (Tian, 1996). As late as 1996, the blame for AIDS was still placed on homosexuals. The national government's Health Department 'educated' the Taiwanese to believe that '[h]omosexuals are the only high risk group. They are self-destructive and will live painfully and die painful deaths'.
6. Some notable examples include Ang Lee's internationally acclaimed *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), Zhuang Huiqiu's *Chinese Homosexuals* (1996), *Nupengyou* ('Girlfriend,' a bimonthly magazine started in 1994), Zheng Meili's *Nuer Quan* ('The Girl's Club,' 1997), Li Zhonghan's *Wode Airen shi Nanren* (1998), Zhou Huashan's *Post-Colonial Tongzhi* (1997) and *G&L Magazine*. The debut of *G&L*, as reported in the mainstream magazine *The Journalist*, signified the moving of homosexuality from the fringes of media to mainstream visibility.
7. In July 1997, about 40 to 50 gay men were detained on Chang De Street – just outside the 'gay park' in central Taipei – photographed and threatened with exposure to their families. This police harassment incident was widely reported in the Taiwanese gay and straight media and caused an explosive debate about gay civil rights in Taiwan. Only one and a half years after the Chang De incident, a squad of policemen on December 1998 raided AG Club, a gymnasium and sauna well-known for its gay clientele, in downtown Taipei. They also arrested two men found caressing one another in a small, private compartment and proceeded to force them to re-pose their caress so that their photographs could be taken as evidence to support the police's charge of 'obscenity in public' (see IGLHRC, 1998).
8. Beginning in the October 1988 issue, 'Mommy Bear' was later replaced by 'Big Sister Bear.' Using a family reference continues *G&L*'s focus on the family. The idea of the big sister also resonates well with gay culture in Taiwan, since the big sister/big brother figure (*ganjie, gange*) brings with it the status of '*guolainen*' (someone who's been there). Their advice on love and sex is therefore especially appreciated.
9. Some typical examples he cites (which are also found throughout *G&L*'s personal columns) are: 'Hoping for a true feeling, a true love'; 'If you also believe in destiny, let us fulfill ours'; 'Waiting to share my world with you, and yours with me'; 'Looking for a shoulder to rest my head on', and so on.
10. This uncertainty takes form in the pages of the October 1998 issue, in which two of the three major parties' candidates for Taipei mayor are interviewed

about their position on gay issues (see 'Chen Shuibian', 1998). The DPP candidate, incumbent mayor (and now newly elected President) Chen Shuibian, responded favourably to the questions posed regarding the political and civil rights of Taiwanese *tongzhi*. Chen, however, declined to answer these questions: (a) 'Mayor Chen, you once said you do not 'oppose' homosexuals but neither do you 'encourage' them. Could you explain that statement?'; and (b) 'If you discovered that your son or daughter were gay, how would you deal with the situation?' (p. 18). Particularly given his status as the incumbent mayor, Chen's failure to respond to these two questions did not alleviate the anxieties *tongzhi* feel about their status in Taiwanese politics. His lack of a response to the question posed with regard to the family context also heightens the schism between the public and private spheres.

11. The practice of 'collective coming out' indeed stages an important step toward the formation of a queer space of citizenship. As Chang (1998) explains, 'In a place like Taiwan, where the family structure is compact and personal space extremely limited, the individual coming out adopted by lesbians and gays in places such as the United States never appealed to their counterparts in Taiwan. Collective coming out, on the contrary, satisfies local sexual dissidents' longing for "speaking out" in public and tactfully avoids their being tracked down at the same time' (p. 289).
12. For more discussion of the relationship between cultural tradition and economic prosperity in Chinese societies, see Tu et al. (1992) for the insightful observations made by Thomas Gold, Tu Weiming, Benjamin Schwartz, and others (pp. 74–90).
13. For ethnographic evidence of the relative freedom of lesbians, see Ke (1996). We feel it important to also note, however, that this position is strongly refuted in the more extensive ethnographic research of Zheng (1997).
14. *G&L* has a serious imbalance of coverage of gay male interests and lesbian interests. This is an issue that has troubled the staff of *G&L* from its inception (interview, 1998). Many of the magazine's readers feel dissatisfied with the share of attention lesbians receive. Antagonism between gay male and lesbian readers often arise in the letters to the editor and is reflected in lower sales to women (which may or may not be due to the imbalance of coverage mentioned here). The perceived lack of attention to lesbian issues is repudiated by some male readers, who feel that women's photos are, in their words, 'disgusting' and do not want to have 'their' magazine 'include so much about lesbians'. Yet in reality, the magazine devotes a much smaller amount of space to lesbian photos, stories and concerns than that which gay men receive. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, the vast majority of advertisements in *G&L* are geared solely to promoting services and goods to gay men. The perception is that lesbians do not constitute a market worth targeting.
15. Take briefly, for instance, three sites that have shown us the political ambivalence of queer visibility: in AIDS fundraising events, which were first iconized in the use of the Red Ribbon, and then embedded in product

endorsements, 'pride' events and celebrity-driven charity activities; in the practices of Queer Nation, whose tactics of infiltrating public sites of consumption aimed at re-territorializing them for queers, but which also fed the public's appetite for the shocking, the spectacular and the freaky-exotic (see Hennessy, 1995); in the 'Ellen phenomenon' on American prime-time television, which served up the figure of middle-class, white and explicitly depoliticized lesbianism as the model of queer acceptability. In each of these cases, visibility remains an ambiguous tool for affecting social change. Moreover, once the images of gays and lesbians are sufficiently fetishized as 'lifestyles' they can be packaged and sold back to gay and lesbian consumers as ostensibly 'liberatory' goods.

16. The ideological underpinnings of Taiwanese society today cannot be done full justice in this article. For an illuminating discussion of the interaction between Confucianism and *chuantong wenhua*, and the ways they are played out in the political, social, religious and economic realms of Taiwan today (see Tu et al., 1992).

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