

**Using Visual Ethnography to Address Sexuality, HIV and AIDS, and Chinese Youth**

**by**

**Ran Tao**

**Department of Integrated Studies in Education**

**Faculty of Education**

**McGill University, Montreal**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Worldwide, young people are the most vulnerable population to the HIV infection. In China, college students have been identified as the latest addition to the AIDS high-risk group due to their practices of unsafe heterosexual intercourse. Effective intervention work to protect these young college students needs to be based on a better understanding of the socio-cultural dimensions of the transmission of HIV/STIs (sexually transmitted infections) among them, and on an adequate conceptualization of youth sexuality in terms that go beyond the bio-medically-oriented and positivist explanations.

This dissertation is a qualitative study of the sexuality and the embodied experiences of college students in China in relation to HIV and AIDS that uses visual-based participatory action research methodologies. In 2007, a photovoice project was initiated with 25 first-year students (10 male and 15 female), 18-19 years of age, in a university located in an urban area of China. Photovoice blends photography, research, education, and action not only as a strategy for collecting data for this qualitative exploration but also as a means of intervention and education by engaging the study participants in social issues related to HIV and AIDS, sex, and sexuality. Other qualitative methods such as in-depth qualitative interviews, focus groups, and participant observation also were used to provide triangulation, and thus, to obtain a complex picture of the sexuality and bodily experiences of college students in China.

Data from the study suggest that young Chinese students hold somewhat contradictory attitudes toward traditional Chinese and Western sexual discourses, and therefore experience a state of tension when trying to decide whether to embrace Western ideas of sexual liberalism or to comply with traditional Chinese sexual norms, and whether to adhere to traditional sexual morals or attempt sexual liberation. The study also finds that the sexuality and bodies of young people, especially those of young women, are persistently constrained within the disciplinary confines of conventional sexual morality. However, young people seek to construct sexual meanings and permissive moral standards that serve their own needs of bodily liberation and autonomy. This study informs sexuality education and HIV prevention, and provides stimulus for further research on youth and sexuality in the current Chinese contexts of radical societal transformations and globalization.

## RÉSUMÉ

Les jeunes apparaissent comme étant le groupe de population le plus vulnérable au VIH et au SIDA au niveau mondial. En Chine, ce sont les lycéens, qui parmi les jeunes, ont été identifiés comme un groupe à haut risque particulièrement touché par le SIDA et les relations hétérosexuelles non-protégées. Un travail de prévention effectif devrait se baser sur une meilleure compréhension de la dimension socioculturelle de la transmission du VIH et des MST (maladies sexuellement transmissibles) parmi eux et sur une conceptualisation adéquate de leur sexualité, ceci en allant au-delà des approches biomédicales et positivistes.

Cette thèse fait la description d'une étude qualitative de la sexualité et des expériences de lycéens chinois par rapport au VIH et au SIDA en utilisant une méthodologie par actions participatives et observations visuelles. En 2007, un projet de photo-voix a été mis en place parmi 25 étudiants de première année (10 hommes et 15 femmes), âgés de 18 à 19 ans, dans une université située dans une région urbaine chinoise. La stratégie visuelle « photo-voix », qui mêlent la photographie, la recherche, l'éducation et l'action, a été employée non seulement comme une stratégie pour la collecte de données mais également comme moyen d'intervention et d'éducation en impliquant les participants dans des problèmes sociaux liés au VIH et au SIDA, au sexe et à la sexualité. D'autres méthodes qualitatives comme les entrevues approfondies, les groupes ciblés et l'observation des participants ont également été utilisées dans le but d'obtenir une triangulation et, par là même, un portrait complexe de la sexualité et des expériences charnelles de lycéens chinois.

Les données recueillies suggèrent que les jeunes chinois font montre d'une attitude contradictoire envers le discours traditionnel chinois et celui de l'Occident. De cette contradiction découle une situation de tension entre le désir d'adhérer aux idées sexuelles libérales de l'Ouest et celui de respecter les normes sexuelles, et entre l'adhésion à la morale traditionnelle et la volonté d'émancipation sexuelle. L'étude révèle également que la sexualité et le corps des jeunes, particulièrement celui des jeunes femmes, est constamment contraint à l'intérieur du cadre de la morale sexuelle conventionnelle. Cependant, les jeunes cherchent à se construire une identité sexuelle et des standards moraux permissifs qui servent leurs propres aspirations de libération sexuelles et

d'autonomie. Cette étude se veut également informative sur l'éducation sexuelle et la prévention contre le VIH et offre des pistes de réflexions pour des recherches futures sur les jeunes et la sexualité dans le contexte chinois contemporain emprunt de transformations sociales radicales et de mondialisation.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

AIDS has been recognized worldwide as a disease of young people, since young people aged 15-24 account for an estimated 45 percent of new HIV infections worldwide (UNAIDS, 2008). Women are much more vulnerable to acquiring HIV from men during sexual intercourse than vice versa, with twice or higher the risk of infection (*Statistics: Women and HIV/AIDS*, 2008). China is home to nearly 20 percent of 10- to 20- years olds in the world (Hunter, 2005), and it follows the general pattern of HIV infection among young people in the global context. As Zhang Weiqing, the Minister of the State Population and Family Planning Commission, claimed in 2003, approximately 60 percent of HIV infections in China are estimated to occur in young people aged 15-29 (*Xinhua News Agency*, 2003). A report released in 2004 by China's Ministry of Health, which traced the development of the HIV and AIDS epidemic in China, revealed that HIV infection has been transmitted from relatively localized high-risk groups to the mainstream population, and is increasingly targeting young people, especially young women, through unsafe heterosexual intercourse (*Sohu news*, 2004; *Giving more concern to women*, 2004). Thompson (2004) also observes that the HIV and AIDS epidemic spreading through unprotected sex is on the rise among Chinese women as compared with increases among their male counterparts.

According to Mao Qunan, spokesman for China's Ministry of Health (Wang, 2005), in light of the growing incidence of unprotected sex, college students—who represent one particular group of young people—have been identified as the latest addition to the AIDS high-risk group. This group of Chinese youth also has been singled out by specialists in public sexual health as being at particularly high risk for sexually transmitted infection (STI) and HIV infection due to physiological and social factors (Wong & Tang, 2001). Other researchers (Yzer, Fisher, Bakker, Siero, & Misovich, 1998) have found that in other areas of the world, many of those who currently are diagnosed with HIV and AIDS probably were sexually infected when they were in their early years of college. Thus, the

college years are a time when STIs/HIV infection are highly likely, a period when students are becoming sexually active and are inclined to engage in multi-partner sexual behaviors, since they lack independent economic resources that support stable sexual relationships. However, despite more than 20 years of activism, policy, and programming in response to the vulnerability of young people to STIs/HIV, sex education and intervention work have been inadequate to protect them from the risk of infection. Something is missing in our intervention efforts to avert a global HIV epidemic (Boyce et al., 2007). Therefore, a main concern of this study thus is to uncover and explain the gap in the existing response of sex education programs to HIV and AIDS in the Chinese context through focusing attention on compelling issues with regard to the rethinking and reconceptualization of sexuality education and HIV intervention programs.

My focus on the sexuality and embodied experiences of Chinese youth evolves out of my concern to critically reflect on the issues related to these experiences within the context of the immense social and cultural transformations in contemporary China. This concern is inspired by my witnessing the emergence of a sexual revolution among China's young generation, which is motivated by an intensifying globalization, as well as the crisis of HIV and AIDS that victimizes a growing number of young people. This research study also arises from my personal concern and emotional connection with university students in China, with whom I have worked and kept a close relationship for five years. Their potential vulnerability to STIs/HIV, resulting from a failure to practice safe sex, conflicts with my observations of the mainstream of young university students in China. This is a promising young generation, curious and diligent in their academic pursuit, ambitious about the future, and well organized to achieve their life goals. However, a huge discrepancy exists between their open, "seemingly normal" life and a hidden sexual life, between what they know about sex and how they actually practice sex. As is implied by the alarming rate of STIs among this young generation, this "gap" phenomenon motivates my interest to explore these young adults' sexual subjectivities, conceptualizations, knowledge, and practices. Moreover, since I attended university in China and was a member and insider of this community, I also am concerned with the kinds of change and transformations occurring in the current college students' sexual beliefs, values, and

behaviors as compared to those of my generation who grew up in the 1980s and even earlier periods of modern China. This present study helps to address sexuality as contextualized social construction, an unstable and complex continuum. As Allen (2005) suggests, personal motivations and research practices are inextricably linked to wider social processes and structures, and are intellectually supported by research communities. My exploration of the sexuality and embodied practices of present-day Chinese youth is theoretically and empirically underpinned by the international and local academic communities concerned with youth sexuality and HIV and AIDS, human sexuality in general, body studies, and other related research.

Research, education, and intervention work are invested particularly in areas and regions remarkably affected by HIV and AIDS, such as South Africa, Uganda, Rwanda, Southeastern Asia, and South Asia (Mitchell, de Lange, Moletsane, Stuart, & Buthelezi, 2005; Mitchell, Walsh, & Moletsane, 2006; Airhihenbuwa & Webster, 2004; Blanc, 2004). Based on their investigations with young people, specialists in youth and HIV and AIDS recognize the limitations of the “one size fits all” approach to HIV prevention that draws on a homogenized understanding of masculine and feminine behavior across youth living in diverse geographical locations (Campbell & MacPhail, 2002; Mitchell, Moletsane, Stuart, Buthelezi, & de Lange, 2005). As Peltzer, Pengpid and Mashego (2006) argue, sexual behaviors are socially embedded practices, “relational, contextual, cultural, political, economic, historical, symbolic and discursive” (p. 1). Without a better understanding of the socio-cultural aspects of HIV and AIDS transmission, we fail to understand how to make the best intervention. Similarly, Weiss, Whelan and Gupta (2000) contend that interventions to increase the adoption of protective behavior must be based on an understanding of the socioeconomic context of the lives of young women and men; of the sexual meanings in their culture; and the gender dynamics in the household, community, and in intimate relationships. By drawing on this scholarship of sexuality and HIV and AIDS and intervention efforts, this present study performs an in-depth inquiry into the social, cultural, and historical meanings of sexuality, gender, and HIV and AIDS among China’s youth, and into their bodily practices that are discursively shaped by various social practices.

Moreover, in recognition of the inadequacy of the prevention work done on HIV, which has been in process for more than 20 years and dependent on biomedically-driven approaches to HIV and AIDS (Campbell, 2003; Boyce et al., 2007), current researchers call for innovative conceptual frameworks and methodological approaches to address the HIV epidemic. For example, Reid (2004) raises a challenge to the existing HIV and AIDS programs that emphasize abstinence and faithfulness, accusing them of helping “to further marginalize progressive and creative attitudes towards sexuality in HIV prevention, which might address behavioural and motivational complexities informing sexual risk” (as cited in Boyce et al., 2007, p. 13). Boyce et al. (2007) point out that “a limited conceptualization of human sexuality in HIV and AIDS work constitutes the major barrier to effective HIV prevention worldwide” (p. 2). They argue that a more prominent position should be given to sexuality so to properly respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and to stimulate major conceptual innovation:

... to enable HIV and AIDS work to move on from limited, biomedically-oriented, positivist approaches towards paradigms that address sexuality as it is conceived in cultural construction, symbolic value, subjective meaning, embodied practice, erotic or non-erotic intent, gendered negotiations and power relations (Boyce et al., 2007, p. 16).

A reconceptualization of sexuality education and HIV and AIDS intervention through a paradigm that gives rise to the meaning and symbolic value of sexuality is urgently needed to effectively respond to the ongoing crisis of STIs/HIV and AIDS among young people in China and beyond. By taking up this concern and challenge within the context of the dynamics of sexual discourses/knowledge and power relations, my research study is devoted to (re)figuring and theorizing youth sexuality in the age of AIDS and STIs/HIV prevention, and to seeking greater insights into young people’s (hetero)sexual understanding and values as social constructions, sexual subjectivities, knowledge, and bodily practices.

While this study draws on the research of youth sexuality and HIV and AIDS in the international context, it also considers these issues with respect to the particular local, social, and scholarly contexts of China. Across Chinese societies, despite a lengthy

history of sexual culture and rich erotic literature (Ruan, 1991), sex and sexuality is culturally stigmatized and adequate discussion and intellectual accessibility is constrained. In contrast, in the West during the last few centuries, an immense and ever-increasing number of discourses are devoted to sexual subject matter—its exploration and control (Padgug, 1999). Nevertheless, over time in China, especially during the reform era—marked by fundamental changes in economic systems, and dramatic social and cultural transformations brought about by the economic reform and increasing globalization—the exploration of formerly constrained subjects and issues including human sexuality has been encouraged. Moreover, similar to the Western and African contexts in which the alarming pandemic of the sexual transmission of HIV has engendered a major boost for sociological, psychological, and anthropological research into sexuality (Altman, 1999), the fear and concerns about AIDS have legitimated and provoked new theorizing and social inquiry into sexuality and related issues (Pan, 2006; Ng & Heaberle, 1997; Li, 2006; Jeffreys, 2006).

An ever-increasing number of academic and popular discourses on sexual subjects are evidence of a renewed interest in studying sexuality. The discourses that focus on Chinese sexuality describe the radical changes occurring in people's sexual lives and culture. For example, Evans (1995) and others observe that a new sexual culture is being constructed among Chinese youth in urban areas since the 1980s as a result of the tensions between Chinese traditional norms and modern ideas concerning sex. A sexual revolution also has been identified among urban Chinese youth with respect to five major indicators of change in the nature of sexuality as noted by Western scholarship (Pan, 1993), which include the extent of openness of public knowledge of sex, the nature of sexual conduct, the nature of sexual relationships, the sexuality of women, and the status of sex in mainstream society (Reiss, 1990, pp. 85-87, as cited in Pan, 2006, p. 22). However, in the growing body of work on sexuality within the Chinese context, a systematic socio-historical and cultural approach to sex and sexuality among contemporary young Chinese people—the most vulnerable population to HIV infection—is lacking; thus, this absence must be addressed by substantial scholarly investment. This present study seeks to fill this gap in our understanding of youth sexuality

constructed within Chinese cultures, and also aims to enhance our knowledge of sexual cultures and the social life of present-day Chinese youth. Moreover, HIV policy and education, and individual understanding about the risks of HIV and the safety precautions against its infection are shaped by the social and cultural constructions of HIV and AIDS and sexuality (Richardson, 2000). This present study about sexuality, bodies, and HIV and AIDS as social constructions can inform the sexuality education and HIV prevention programs in China, and may also have implications for these same concerns in other cultural landscapes.

Finally, this present study on youth sexuality in the Chinese context is a challenge to the bias and rigidity of EuroAmerican-centered perspectives, which tend to privilege Western ways of organizing sexuality (Weeks, Holland, & Waites, 2003) and produce distinct representations of the Western body (sexuality) and the non-Western-body (sexuality). Often, this distinction represents the Western body as superior in strength, maturity, and complexity to an inferior non-Western-body (Mills & Sen, 2004; Said, 2001). Thus, this study provides insights through both an emic lens as a Chinese academic, and an etic lens as a traveling doctoral student presently residing in North America. In response to academic discourses that simplistically attribute the identified sexual revolution among China's young generation as a straightforward product of Western influences or that assert that China's sex life mimics that of Western Europe (Sigleys, 2006; Ng and Heaberle, 1997), this present study emerges from my concern for thinking critically about questions of sex and sexuality and the embodied experiences of young people within Chinese cultures, as well as other related issues. Sexual reality is variable and changes across societies, genders, and individuals, although certain sexual forms such as love, intercourse, and kinship are common to all human societies (Padgug, 1999). This rich diversity of sexual expressions, identities, and activities across cultures, societies, and in various times ought to be acknowledged and understood (Kimmel & Plante, 2004). In this regard, my study addressing Chinese sexuality seeks to enhance an understanding of sexuality in the local setting, and to enrich the discourses of sexuality in the international community of this area.

## RESEARCH FOCUS AND QUESTIONS

Striking increases in the heterosexual transmission of HIV/STI among young adults—particularly among young females—make it critical and exigent to “put sexuality (back) into HIV/AIDS” (Boyce et al., 2007, p. 1) and to address sexuality and its embodiment as contextualized in given socio-cultural landscapes. Thus, my research attempts to discover and explore with young adults—particularly college students in an urban area of Mainland China—their lived experiences in relation to sexuality in the context of the STI/HIV and AIDS epidemic. I seek an in-depth understanding of sexual attitudes, ideas, values, and bodily practices that can help to inform sexuality education and HIV intervention programs in China and beyond. In China, limited research exists that addresses the sexuality, gender issues, and HIV and AIDS infections of ordinary young people, particularly research that offers an “up-close” analysis of the related socio-psychological and cultural processes. Thus, the purpose of my study is to do a socio-historical and cultural analysis of the physicality, sexuality, and HIV and AIDS of young people in the Chinese context by accessing these young people’s own meanings and understandings of these subjects. In addition, my study also is an effort to discover more about the bodily practices of young Chinese people, especially young women, in the current contexts of the immense social and cultural transformations occurring in China, the growing globalization that allows the importation of various new and liberal sexual ideas, and the alarming spread of STIs/HIV among young people.

The objectives and concerns of my research can be summarized by the following questions:

- (1) How do college students conceptualize sex and sexuality and HIV and AIDS: how do they describe their experiences, feelings, and understandings with regard to sexuality and STIs/HIV and AIDS?
- (2) How is sexuality, and HIV and AIDS actively constructed by young people in college in particular contexts and through various discursive practices?
- (3) How do various sexual discourses—including traditional sexual ideologies and Western notions of sexual liberation and sexual freedom—act upon the bodies of

young people, particularly young women, and influence their bodily behavior related to sexuality?

(4) How can this work inform different ways of looking at sex education?

As their phenomenological nature implies, my research questions move away from a biomedically-oriented and positivist<sup>1</sup> perspective on sexual attitudes and behaviors. This theoretical shift moves my choice of research methods towards those that can provide research participants with opportunities to convey and constitute the meanings they make of their own experiences (Tolman & Szalacha, 1999).

## **FRAMING THE STUDY**

The present study is concerned with a number of key issues and concepts, relevant to the Chinese context, as they are rethought and retheorized by using sociological, historiographic, and poststructural frameworks. While I explore these key issues and concepts in great detail in the following chapters, in this introductory section, I clarify the major terms or main framing concepts that constitute the theoretical underpinnings of my research and my arguments.

### **Sex and sexuality**

Sexuality is a pivotal concept in this research, by and with which other issues, questions, and concepts are evoked and intricately interwoven. In this section, I initially explain this

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<sup>1</sup> To clarify what I mean by positivism, I compare it to postpositivism. Positivism is a philosophical position that holds that a reality exists out there to be discovered and understood, whereas postpositivism contends that reality can never be “fully apprehended, only approximated” (Guba, 1990, p. 22, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 9). Thus, in a positivist world view, as Trochim (2002) explains, science is seen as the way to uncover the truth about reality through observation and measurement; whereas postpositivism relies on multiple measures and observations in an effort to capture as much of reality as possible. The postpositivists also believe that all observations are theory-laden and that scientists are inherently biased by their cultural experiences, professional training, views of the world, and so on. Hence, they call for the use of triangulation across multiple perspectives, which are imperfect and fallible, to gain a better understanding of reality.

central concept both in terms of its sociological and poststructural implications, and I follow this explanation with discussions of the relevant concepts and terms that cluster around it. To shed more light on the understanding of “sexuality,” I contrast it with the term “sex,” which in some situations is used interchangeably with sexuality. “Sex” refers to:

the biological characteristics that define humans as female or male. While these sets of biological characteristics are not mutually exclusive, as there are individuals who possess both, they tend to differentiate humans as males and females (WHO, 2002).

As defined in the preceding quotation, sex refers to a biologically intrinsic attribute that divides people into males and females. Given that human beings are “doubly determined by a permanent (but not immutable) natural base and by a permanent social mediation and transformation of it” (Padgug, 1999, p. 19), sexuality encompasses richer and more complex meanings than sex. As clarified by Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe and Thomson (1999), sexuality is understood as not only sexual characteristics and:

sexual practices, but also what people know and believe about sex, particularly what they think is natural, proper and desirable. Sexuality includes people’s sexual identities in all their cultural and historical variety. While sexual intercourse is a meeting of bodies, these bodily practices are given meaning by ideas and values, and are situated in social relationships (p. 458).

This explanation leads me to the realization that researching sexuality is more than just looking at sexual activities; rather, it is an investigation of the sexual beliefs, subjectivities, values, and identities constructed within culturally specific contexts. Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe and Thomson’s (1999) understanding of sexuality also points out that physical sexual acts are loaded with certain social significance and subjective meanings, depending on how they are defined and understood in a given culture and historical period (Vance, 1999; Boyce et al., 2007). Similar to this definition of sexuality that stresses the importance of a contextual understanding of sexual ideas, beliefs, understandings, and sexual practices, another definition developed for the World Health Organization (WHO) also emphasizes sexuality as a socio-cultural construct:

Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex,

gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors (WHO, 2002).

The present study of the sexuality of young people in relation to HIV and AIDS within present-day Chinese contexts focuses on the cultural and historical specificity of youth sexuality. It analyzes sexuality as a social construction and as “the historically specific outcome of intellectual and cultural processes” in Chinese contexts (Boyce et al., 2007, p. 7). A historiography of the contemporary understandings about sexuality helps to provide a lens to look at the sexuality of present-day Chinese youth both as historically continuous and as constantly evolving. This historical overview of Chinese sexuality in modern times contributes to a deeper understanding of how sexuality is constructed and developed in contemporary Chinese society.

Sexuality is not only a cultural construction but also an embodied practice in terms of the performative aspects of sexuality (Boyce et al., 2007). This understanding of sexuality as an inclusive category encompassing sexual conceptions and bodily activities emphasizes the complex relationships and interactions between discourse and practice. In the present study, I explore how the various and competing sexual discourses (mainly the ingrained sexual norms and the new, liberal ways of perceiving sexuality that are imported from the West) function and act upon young people’s bodily experiences, resulting in the establishment of complex, conflicting, and contradictory forms and expressions of “sexual hybridity that speak both to the past and to the present” (Aggleton, Kippax, Mane, Parker, & de Zalduondo, 1999, p. 1).

## **Gender**

It is impossible to address sexuality without taking gender into account, since the ways we view sexuality are intimately interwoven with the constitution of gender (Johansson, 2007). A similar point made by Schwartz and Rutter (1998) suggests that gender is a

fundamental explanation of how people learn about and interpret sexuality, and further gender is the most significant dimension of sexuality given that “gender relates both to biological and social contexts of sexual behaviour and desire” (p. 2). In light of the close linkage of gender with “sex,” to the extent that in some cases both are used interchangeably as synonyms (although erroneously), gender often is defined in contrast to sex, in a way similar to the juxtaposition of sex and sexuality. Litosseliti (2006) defines sex as a physiological construct referring to: “biological maleness and femaleness or the physiological, functional, anatomical differences that distinguish men and women,” whereas gender, a cultural or social construct, “refers to the traits assigned to a sex—what maleness and femaleness stand for—within different societies and cultures” (p. 12). The socio-cultural quality of gender is also manifested in a definition from WHO (2002) that understands gender as “the socially constructed roles, behaviour, activities and attributes that a particular society considers appropriate for men and women.” The gender differentiation of roles and behaviours socially ascribed to men and women tends to give rise to gender inequality. For example, gender norms in many societies dictate that a woman’s role is to focus on the private sphere of home and family, in which as wife and mother, she exclusively attends to the running of the household and the raising of the children and heirs; whereas by contrast, a man is assigned the gender role of being a participant and actor in the public domain.

Within and across Chinese societies, female sexuality and gender are constructed through the mechanisms of male power prescribed in social norms: masculinity is privileged as controlling, strong, and active against a femininity that is constructed as its opposite. For example, Chinese women did not gain legal rights to protect their equality and monogamy until 1950 when the Marriage Law was implemented, which abrogated the feudal marriage system that regarded men as superior. Two years later, the Electoral Law gave women the same rights as men to vote and to stand for election (Hall, 1997). Over time in China, more opportunities and a broader scale of choice and freedom opened up to women, although in practice, they do not always achieve full equality. In a climate that embraces gender equality and advocates that women “hold up half the sky” in Mao Zedong’s terms (Hall, 1997, p. 11), women should be increasingly empowered to make

decisions about their sexual lives and practices, including negotiating the use of condoms and the rejection of sex. However, the current phenomenon of young women becoming the most vulnerable group for HIV infection through unsafe sex raises many unanswered questions. Why are the present-day young females who grew up in a society that appreciates gender equality and female power still prey to STIs/HIV due to unprotected sexual activities? Does the male power that is so profoundly implanted in traditional heterosexual norms still work efficiently to push women into performing unprotected sex? Or are young women ready to give up their equality to become desirable in the eyes of men, to replay their traditional role of being subordinate, quiet, and obedient to please their male partners? As Hall (1997) observes, a number of Chinese women in the 1990s were willing to revert to their traditional gender role to attain higher living standards and to gain the freedom of fashion and style by way of the financial support of privileged males. This phenomenon warrants further investigation of gap between the developing awareness of mainstream young women concerning the independence and autonomy afforded to them through opportunities for higher education and jobs, and the reality that these same young women would consciously revert to traditional femininity norms, and engage in passive, unsafe sex to please their male partners.

Looking at gender as “a useful category of historical analysis” (Scott, 1999, p. 57) and “a fundamental explanation of how people learn and interpret sexuality” (Schwartz & Rutter, 1998, p. 2), the present study engages in a historical, feminist, and critical exploration of the social construction of femininity and masculinity within Chinese societies. In the recent context of increasingly seeing gender “not simply as lived, but as performed through the re-enactment of what are viewed as the essential characteristics of both sex (male and female) and gender” (Weeks, Holland, & Waites, 2003, p.44), the present study attempts to discover how and why young females choose to perform the powerless and passive femininity that their male partners expect in the private realm of sex and sexuality, while also playing the roles of competent women employees, bosses, and comrades in the public sphere.

## **The body**

A salient concept that is intimately and intricately associated with the discussion about sexuality is the body. As Foucault (1980) argues, pleasure, desire, power, and coercion are woven together to form something we call sexuality, and all this is experienced and perceived by and through the human body. The body, as the entity going through and perceiving all human experiences and social processes, is further articulated by Foucault as the “inscribed surface ... totally imprinted by [the] history” of the destruction of the body (Foucault, 1977, p. 148)—the history of the various regulative and destructive practices that train and shape human bodies. By taking a look back at the human histories that to different degrees and in different forms are infused with the discipline, normalization, and destruction of the female body, we easily can see the female body as a site of “practical, direct loci of social control” (Bordo, 1997, p. 91) and male domination. In this regard, in the feminist inquiry model of Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe & Thomson (2003, p. 84), female flesh is also seen as “a social site” in which femininity is constituted through the discursive disciplinary practices of sexual and gender normalization within the regime of hierarchical power.

Within the traditional and modern Chinese contexts, the Chinese female body is profoundly marked by ideological constructions of femininity that are emblematic of various historical periods with different, in many cases nuanced, rules articulating and governing gender inequality. While living with the impact of this coercive machinery of patriarchal power and male-dominated culture over a prolonged span of time, Chinese women have been forced to submit to the disciplinary practices of state control and surveillance that regulate them as docile bodies. They tend to frame themselves within the gendered rubrics formulated by institutional authorities, and self-normalize their sexuality. Borrowing Johansson’s (2007) argument, Chinese women have become their own controllers through self-oppression. Regardless of the advent of new, modern eras in which women have social rights and equality with men, new forms of discipline and control that accompany the rise of the new conceptions of social and political liberty emerge and are directed against the body (Foucault, 1977), “invading the body and seeking to regulate its very forces and operations” (Bartky, 1997, p. 129). Always situated

in the core of social repression, the female body, even today, rarely transgresses the fetters of gender oppression, which is acknowledged as “an amazingly durable and flexible strategy of social control” (Bordo, 1997, p. 91). The docility of female bodies remains automatically habitual and may undermine women’s conscious politics, social commitments, and striving for change (Bordo, 1997).

In the present study, I analyze the Chinese female body as the surface inscribed with the history of sexual repression and gender inequality, and as a changing entity with which Chinese women have lived in various ways throughout traditional and modern Chinese history. Inspired by the Foucauldian view that argues that the whole contemporary apparatus of sexuality is a historical invention (Weeks et al., 2003), the present investigation—by a prominent focus on the bodies of present-day young Chinese women—seeks to discover how sexuality is discursively constructed in a contemporary Chinese society in which independent female identity is advocated, and at the same time, in which female bodies are persistently restricted and suppressed by the male power embedded in the Chinese culture. I also am concerned with how present-day young Chinese women experience and confront new forms of repressive sexual morals that arise with the social and political changes occurring in contemporary Chinese society. In light of the twinning of resistance with discipline and control (Foucault, 1977), this present study also is interested in exploring how young women seek ways to resist and free themselves from bodily constraints and suppression.

### **Youth agency**

This study frames youth sexuality and its relationship to HIV and AIDS within the Chinese context by assuming that youth are social actors possessing sufficient capability to constitute their own meanings of their lived realities, and sufficient agency to take action and instigate social change. Within a conservative framework, the concept of youth is related to a natural biological phase in the life cycle between childhood and adulthood, a transitional period of “learning,” “apprenticeship,” and “training” to become an adult. This “transition” suggests a journey “from one state to another in the personal aspects involving the movement through puberty and adolescence towards sexual, emotional and

intellectual maturity and in the social aspects involving the movement from dependence to independence” (Spence, 2005, pp. 47-48). During this transitional phase, young people are perceived as learners subject to risky and dangerous activities such as sexual practices, while also learning to adapt to the demands of adult guidance and surveillance. Likewise, youth subcultures, which are formed during the uncertainties of moving between childhood and adulthood, are perceived as collective trouble making, and the result of youth’s inadequate socialization into their “proper” position in society (Hodkinson, 2007). Such a conservative conceptualization of youth and youth cultures justifies a variety of control mechanisms for young people, and puts them in the position of being “disenfranchised and processed through an education system in which they are deprived of full access to economic and political rights” (Tyyska, 2005, p. 7) and in other power relations between parents and offspring, and adults and children. The institutionalized powerlessness of youth results in “many problems that young people face and are finding difficult to confront and change, due to the rules and boundaries set by adult-led social institutions, including the family, the economy, and the state” (Marquardt, 1998, as cited in Tyyska, 2005, p. 6).

As a response to this conservative reaction to youth and youth cultures, new critical theoretical approaches to youth and youth cultures have emerged in the last two decades. Young people are increasingly respected as social subjects with a potential for independent citizenship, and youth subcultures are understood in rich ways as expressions of youthful creativity and productivity (Mitchell, 2006a), and as means toward an independent identity (Buckingham, 1994). In this reconceptualized framework, being young is privileged over becoming an adult (Spence, 2005), and youth agency is valued as a dormant force and potential power to be motivated to confront and seek solutions to the problems that young people encounter and live with. The conceptual underpinning that underlies my approach to looking at young people, their identity, and cultures evolves out of the critical theorization of youth and youth cultures. Based on the understanding that young people are productive social (and sexual) agents, this qualitative study gives priority to Chinese youth’s visions, perceptions, meanings, and lived experiences of corporeality and sexuality. In this present study, I regard young

people as being capable of employing the opportunities opened up to them to seek knowledge and experience, and to develop their own meanings of their realities and subcultures. This respect for the agency of young people leads to my use of a visual research method, photovoice, in which cameras are provided to young people to encourage them to capture and constitute their own understanding of sex and sexuality, HIV and AIDS, and related issues so to facilitate their potential, productive agency for an action-oriented agenda.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS**

This study as a whole documents my process of engaging a group of twenty five young people—all college students at Central China Normal University (CCNU) in the province of Hubei, China—to examine their own sexuality. I taught at CCNU until 2003 and returned in 2007 to collect my data, which was an opportunity for me to look back or to look again at the social context for young people in contemporary China. By using participatory visual methodologies such as photovoice, along with small group discussions, I asked my participants to visualize their understanding of sexuality, gender, HIV and AIDS, and other relevant issues in the era of AIDS through photography, and thus, actively engaged them in social problems and issues such as STIs/HIV and AIDS.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

In this introductory chapter, I contextualize the problems which stimulate my inquiry; situate the study in international and local communities; highlight some personal concerns that prompted this research; and present my research focus, objectives, and questions.

Chapter Two engages in a reconceptualization of the cultural and historical meanings of youth sexuality, and of youth as a distinct category in the modern Chinese history in which youth are playing an influential and positive role. A comprehensive and overarching understanding of the experiences and meanings of youth in different social and political circumstances helps to enhance our knowledge about the group identity that

Chinese youth actively construct in a millennial age, and how they define their sexuality, sexual practices, and identities in relation to HIV and AIDS. The literature review examines existing research in the area of youth sexuality, sex education, and HIV and AIDS in China as well as in the global context. The chapter also discusses how school sex education is designed and implemented in modern and contemporary China, its limitations, and how it can be accommodated to HIV and AIDS prevention. In the concluding section of this chapter, I address the implications and challenges arising from a better understanding of youth sexuality and sex education in relation to the ongoing crisis of the STIs/HIV epidemic among young people in China.

Chapter Three deals with the theoretical and practical aspects of the visual methodologies that I use in my study. Initially, I discuss my ontological and epistemological assumptions in a poststructuralist framework, by which I justify my application of the methodological framework, methods, and analysis of my research. Next, I address how these visual methodologies are a powerful approach for conducting a social inquiry of youth sexuality in relation to STIs/HIV and AIDS. More significantly, I explain how visual methodologies, as participatory tools, can provide the vision and impetus to encourage young participants to engage with the social issues related to the spread of STIs/HIV, and thus help them to clear the path for broad social change. I also raise critical issues such as the ethical concerns and interpretive challenges often related to the use of visual methodologies in social research.

Chapter Four focuses on “doing fieldwork.” In this chapter, I describe the “research as social change” (Schratz & Walker, 1995) intervention that I set up as an extracurricular intervention with a group of twenty-five students. I also highlight the practices of reading visual and verbal texts.

In Chapter Five, I present Part One of my research findings. These findings reveal the beliefs and understandings of my young Chinese participants concerning their physicality and sexuality. I describe the bodily experiences of young people, particularly, young women, that are influenced and acted upon by diverse—traditional and new—sexual

discourses, which converge and conflict in present-day Chinese society. Given that “sexual meaning is a hotly contested, even political terrain” in which various groups exert a disproportionate influence on sexual discourses and ideology (Vance, 1999, p. 49), this chapter is concerned with the ways in which young people as social actors seek to create their own versions of sex and sexuality and produce their own sexual discourses. This chapter also is a backdrop for the Part Two findings presented in Chapter Six, which focus specifically on sex education and HIV and AIDS interventions.

Chapter Six deals with Part Two of my findings. I focus specifically on sex education and HIV and AIDS interventions in the context of the status and expectations of young people. These two aspects of the investigation are based on my participants’ own learning experiences related to school-based sex education, and so I also discuss the other sources of sexual knowledge available to them to provide more thorough information that may be potentially used to modify sex education programs and to create more effective HIV intervention programs.

Finally, Chapter Seven summarizes the study and identifies its implications. I also discuss the limitations of the study; its contributions to new knowledge; and suggest ideas for further research in the field of youth sexuality, gender, and the body in relation to HIV and AIDS.

## **CHAPTER TWO: HIV AND AIDS, YOUTH SEXUALITY, AND SEX AND HIV AND AIDS EDUCATION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

As noted in the previous chapter, the primary aim of this study is to capture and explore what sex and sexuality means to the lives of present-day Chinese youth—especially their sexual understandings and subjectivities—so to inform the rethinking of the existing school sex education programs in China, which currently are ineffective in combating the phenomenon of the alarming transmission of STIs/HIV among young people. Sexual beliefs and practices are social and historical constructions (Holland et al., 1998); even sexual desire itself is seen by radical constructionists to be the continuously evolving product of human culture, transmitted not through our genes but through language or the coded behavior of others (Simon, 2003; Vance, 1999). Thus, a major task of this study is a historical and cultural inquiry into how young people in a variety of social contexts perceive the meanings of sex and sexuality. Therefore, this chapter traces a Foucauldian-style genealogy of the Chinese concepts of youth, to and with which the meanings of the sexuality of young people is attached and entwined, over the period of the late imperial era and the reform era of modern China.

The chapter begins with a brief overview of how and why HIV and AIDS is emerging as a severe social problem among Chinese young people, particularly young women, in an effort to contextualize the epidemic in China. Then, to locate the study of youth sexuality in relation to HIV and AIDS within the arena of academic inquiry, a review is presented of the academic and empirical work that has been invested in areas of sexuality, Chinese young people, and STIs/HIV and AIDS. Next, the shaping influence of gender and social norms on sexual experiences, and the vulnerability of youth, especially females, to STIs/HIV is discussed. The chapter then traces the evolution of socio-cultural conceptions of youth and youth sexuality throughout modern Chinese history. An outline is presented of the history of school sex education in modern era China—including the arising of social demand for systematic sex education for young people and the ensuing development and practice of school-based sex education—as a framework for discussing

the insufficiencies and limitations of existing sex education, giving attention to what needs to be done to improve the situation. By reviewing this history, the main task of this chapter is to provide a context for thinking about the changes in the social meanings of the sex and sexuality of young people, and the changes in sexuality theory, methodology, and themes in both Chinese society and research priorities.

## **THE AIDS EPIDEMIC IN CHINA: A CRISIS AMONG YOUTH WITH YOUNG WOMEN EMERGING AS THE MOST VULNERABLE GROUP**

This first section of this chapter describes the process of how HIV and AIDS has emerged as a disease of young people in China, and provides a review of the theoretical and empirical studies, as well as intervention work, that have been done on youth and sexuality in the context of HIV and AIDS prevention in China.

### **Brief overview of the development of HIV/AIDS into a social problem among youth, and China's response**

When the HI virus was identified and spread like wildfire across North America, Africa, and Europe in the early to mid-1980s, the continent of Asia was like a vaccinated land, seemingly free of the threat, with almost no infections diagnosed even among high-risk groups, such as drug users, sex workers, and men who have sex with men (MSM) (Grmek, 1990). Nevertheless, within a decade, the spread of HIV to and across Asia accelerated at an alarming speed to such an extent that it exceeded the growth of the disease in Africa, a continent which has been ferociously engulfed by the virus (Hunter, 2005). In China alone, approximately 650,000 people were living with HIV in 2005; this number is predicted to rise to 10 million by 2010 (UNAIDS, 2006). In retrospect, the history of the invasion and spread of HIV in Mainland China can be delineated by four distinct phases (HIV&AIDS in China, n.d.).

The initial phase of the spread of HIV in Mainland China, from 1985 to 1988, is marked by a small number of AIDS cases in coastal cities, which are diagnosed among either foreign travellers or Chinese citizens returning from travel overseas (China Ministry of

Health and UN Theme Group, 1997, as cited in Zaccagnini, n.d.). The first AIDS death reported in China is an Argentine tourist from the United States who traveled to Beijing in July 1985 (Settle, 2003). Next, four hemophiliac patients in Zhejiang are identified as being infected with HIV through imported Factor VIII (Bureau of Hygiene & Tropical Diseases, 1986; Settle, 2003). According to Zeng Yi, chief of the Chinese AIDS research program, due to the specific people who were infected with AIDS and the transmission mode identified at the time, China's ordinary population perceived AIDS to be a disease of foreigners, "a foreign threat" (Schweisbeg, 1988, as cited in Settle, 2003). According to a statement by Chen Minzhang from China's Ministry of Health, the chance was small that Chinese people would become infected with HIV because homosexuality and promiscuity—reported as the main causes of the HIV spread—were a "limited" problem, illegal, and contrary to Chinese morality (Settle, 2003).

The second phase (1989-1993) of the spread of HIV began with the identification of the first indigenous HIV cases among 146 drug users in Southwest Yunnan of China in October 1989. This abrupt leap in the number of the infected was seen by some researchers as the first sign of an epidemic (Settle, 2003). Within the following two years, HIV was reported to be spreading across 10 provinces and regions at a striking speed as was warned by Dai Zhicheng, Ministry of Public Health: "AIDS has not only arrived in China, but is also spreading fast" (*Xinhua News*, 1990). Nonetheless, a large proportion of HIV infection in China until 1993 was imported or transmitted through sexual contacts with foreigners: many of the infected were identified to have been infected in Thailand or other countries in Southeast Asia or Africa (Zhang, Li, Li, & Beck, 1999). At the time, AIDS as well as drug addiction was thought to be the consequence of contact with the external world or the West, and thus was named *aizibing* (爱滋病), the "loving capitalism disease."

The third phase (1994-2000) is an alarming spread of HIV beyond Yunnan Province, a high-risk AIDS region. A considerable number of cases are reported among drug users and commercial plasma donors from a number of regions. By 1998, HIV infection is reported in all 31 provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities. While drug users

still account for 60-70 percent of the reported HIV infections, transmission through heterosexual transmission was increasing steadily to 7 percent (China Ministry of Health and UN Theme Group, 1997). In response to the serious situation, the State Council launches “The Medium and Long Term Plan for AIDS Prevention and Control” in November 1998. The overall aim of this plan is “to set up a multi-sector collaboration under the leadership of the government, to publicise HIV/AIDS and STIs prevention and treatment information and to control the prevalence and spread of HIV/AIDS” (*Kanabus, n.d.*).

The year 2001, a breakthrough year in China’s history of AIDS, marks the start of the fourth phase of the HIV and AIDS epidemic in China. A number of key events occur in this year. A new plan, “China: Plan of Action to Contain, Prevent and Control HIV/AIDS (2001-2005),” is published in June 2001, breaking China’s nearly 16 years of silence about the epidemic. Later that year, a series of campaigns are launched by the government, nationwide or within certain regions, to raise people’s awareness and knowledge about HIV. These campaigns include the release of stories and testimonials surrounding AIDS, the production of a television drama about AIDS, and the first official marking of World AIDS Day on December 1<sup>st</sup>. In 2003, the proposal to double the AIDS budget (US\$12.5 million) of the Health Ministry is approved, and a pilot programme is set up to provide AIDS treatment and prevention to people in 100 counties in central China (Settle, 2003). In the meantime, China strengthens its educational programs for adolescents in the areas of sexual health, AIDS and STIs awareness, blood transfusions, and drug abuse. From 2003 onwards, elementary and middle schools in China incorporate AIDS prevention and drug abuse prevention programs into the curriculum. During 2004 and 2005, the “Four Frees and One Care Policy” is implemented in high risk areas of the country, such as provinces of Henan, Yunnan, and Guangdong—“Four Frees” means to provide free anti-HIV drugs and free voluntary counselling and testing to AIDS patients, free drugs to HIV-infected pregnant women to prevent mother-to-child transmission, free HIV testing of newborn babies, and free schooling for children orphaned by AIDS; “One Care” refers to the care and economic assistance provided to the households of people living with HIV and AIDS (*Kanabus, n.d.*).

However, despite these recent advances in education and intervention efforts, HIV exploits every means to transgress the boundaries of at-risk groups, and finds its way to the regular population through an increasingly dominant transmission route—unprotected sex. In China, the HIV and AIDS epidemic primarily infects two groups of people: intravenous drug users in high-risk regions such as the provinces in southwestern China, and the low-income residents of rural areas of Henan province in Central China who sell their blood and plasma to commercial collection centers (China Ministry of Health and UN Theme Group, 1997). However, the proportion of HIV infection that occurs through another transmission mode, sexual contact, is estimated to be on the rise from 5.5 percent in 1997 to 11 percent by the end of 2002 (Nations Theme Group on HIV/AIDS in China, 2003, as cited in Thompson, 2004). More recent evidence shows that the epidemic spread through unprotected sexual practices continues to grow (Zhang, Li, Li, & Beck, 1999; Ma et al, 2006). According to the latest statistics of 2006, unsafe sex, second to intravenous drug use, is seen as a key mode of HIV transmission in China, (*Xinhua News*, January 25, 2006). What is worse, as noted earlier, the HI virus has affected China's younger generation, particularly young women. As Heise and Elias (1994) argue, young women in non-industrialized countries (and in China) tend to play passive, obedient, and ready-to-please-their-male-partners roles, while young men are more likely to initiate and control sexual interactions and decision making, under the influence of social, cultural, and economic forces that result in gender differences in sexual experiences and expectations. Unequal power dynamics restrain young women's ability to adopt STI/HIV preventative behaviours, which leads to their vulnerability to infections. Additionally, as in other developing countries, limited counselling service and education is available to young people, especially in rural areas of China, which could help them overcome negative social norms and develop a healthy approach to their own sexuality. In the meantime, according to Thompson (2004), China's HIV and AIDS prevention efforts are far from adequate in the face of the striking epidemic; not enough broad and targeted interventions have been implemented to emphasize the dangers to young people, particularly young females.

Recently, however, young people's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS has fuelled concerns

from institutional leaders who recognize the importance of empowering young people as agents in “taking ownership” of the problem. Subsequently, they have organized and launched a series of HIV and AIDS education and intervention workshops targeting young students. A news report point outs that by 2005, 100 percent of colleges and high schools in China have used the “Prevent Against AIDS” curriculum (*Xinhua News*, January 18, 2006). On April 12, 2006, a joint effort by UNICEF and the China National Committee for the Care of Children made history by prioritizing HIV prevention and health care for young people and children in China. Fifty new AIDS Youth Ambassadors—all aged between 12 and 24—made a pledge to commit to work for the promotion of awareness and the empowerment of their peers through the dissemination of knowledge about HIV and AIDS. This campaign encourages children and youth to “learn, share, and care” in face of the HIV epidemic: to learn 10 key facts about HIV and AIDS, to share that information with friends and their communities, and to care for children and families affected by the disease. This effort is a significant step forward in HIV and AIDS education and prevention work, and is critical to turning the tide of the HIV/AIDS pandemic by making children and youth the top priority in the fight against AIDS, by strengthening their ability to protect themselves, and by engaging them as a positive force to fight HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS, 2003).

Nevertheless, to confront the reality that young people remain in grave danger of HIV infection, and the disturbing evidence of the low awareness of Chinese children and young people about HIV and AIDS as revealed in a recent UNICEF survey (*Xinhua News*, 2005), a strong commitment should be made to ameliorate the existing sex education programs and HIV and AIDS intervention work targeting young people. As well, the HIV crisis among young people affords opportunities and impetus for further academic investment in theoretical and methodological explorations of youth sexuality, embodiment, gender, and other relevant issues in relation to HIV and AIDS.

### **Youth sexuality, sex education, and HIV and AIDS in China: A review**

Striking increases in the heterosexual transmission of HIV among China’s young adults has captured the scholarly attention of educators, public health professionals,

sociologists, sexologists, and psychologists in China. Although not abundant over the past 20 years, research addressing the sexual behaviours, attitudes, and emotions of Chinese youth has been conducted in various areas of China to gather evidence for academic and practical input. Studies undertaken to examine the sexual attitudes and sexual behaviours of college or university students in Beijing, Hong Kong, cities in Hunan, Jiangsu, and other provinces (to list just a few) reveal a low level of sexual knowledge among this population, and call for the design of sex education programs in response to the rapid spread of STIs and HIV (Gao, Lu, Shi, Sun, & Cai, 2001; Chai, 2004; Qi, 1992). Given that Chinese college or university students are sexually active at a rate lower than their counterparts in Western nations—which are obsessed with a concern that starting HIV and AIDS education and prevention program at the university level is too late—Huang, Bova, Fennie, Rogers and Williams (2005) suggest that it is appropriate and timely to target college age Chinese youth for sex education efforts. Nonetheless, in light of the current situation in which Chinese university students are becoming sexually active earlier and are more at risk as a consequence of rapid change, partly due to the modernization of China, their vulnerability to sexuality transmitted diseases and HIV is bound to increase (Ma et al., 2006). As Lam, Shi, Ho, Stewart and Fan (2002) suggest, a plan is needed to educate Chinese youth at different developmental levels about their sexuality, given their increased exposure to sexual experiences. It also needs to be noted that research over the past 10 years in North America—which is also applicable to China—has shown that traditional knowledge-based curricula increase students' understanding, but do little to change their actual sexual risk-taking behaviour (Haignere, Culhane, Balsley, & Legos, 1996). This phenomenon accounts, at least partially, for the failure of school-based programs of sex education that have been used for decades. In response, new health education curricula should not only attempt to impart knowledge but also emphasize problem-solving, communication, refusal, and negotiating skills (Kirby, Barth, Leland, & Fetro, 1991).

Many AIDS studies show that an increase in sexual knowledge alone may not affect behaviour; rather, a number of physiological, social, cultural, and economic factors interact to influence the health of communities and individuals (Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1991; Patton, 1997; Weiss et al., 2000; Thompson, 2004). Attending to the social and

cultural dimensions of the HIV and AIDS epidemic among Chinese youth is critical. As Jones (1999) claims, “very few people today would argue about the importance of culture in understanding how HIV is transmitted and very few AIDS policy makers or educators would deny the importance of being ‘culturally sensitive’ in their work” (p. 161). In the West for decades, the significance of cultural approaches to HIV/AIDS research and intervention has been recognized, and consequently, these cultural perspectives have greatly increased the understanding of HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention (Crimp, 1988).

In China, research addressing the relationship of cultural influences to STIs/HIV prevention, although limited, is developing into a fruitful base of knowledge to further explore the cultural aspects of STIs/HIV and AIDS in the Chinese context. Ip, Chau, Chang and Lui (2001) highlight the growing demand for culturally sensitive sex education programs in relation to HIV/AIDS prevention, programs that need to be incorporated into the total cultural system of a given country. Zhang et al. (2004) emphasize the importance of considering the cultural aspects of young people’s perceptions regarding sex and condoms, and the conflict between traditional Chinese values and modern influences with respect to the sexual behaviour of Chinese youth. Findings from a comparative survey study of university students in China and the United Kingdom (Higgins, Zheng, Liu, & Hui, 2002) suggest that culture exerts a strong impact on young people’s attitudes about love, marriage, and sex—consistent with Lam et al.’s (2002) research—but predict that the current cultural differences in the sexual attitudes of these groups will decrease in light of the changes in the sexual attitudes and behaviours of Chinese youth, due in part to the Westernization and modernization of China. The research of Higgins et al. (2002) conflicts with a former 1991 survey of the sexual behaviour and attitudes of first-year university students in Shanghai and Hong Kong, which reveals a limited Western influence on these Chinese youth, and suggests that the effect of Westernization or modernization is dependent on and varies with the nature of the imported Western culture and the form of and standards for sex education (Fan et al. 1995). The discrepancy of the studies conducted in the 1990s and the early 2000s seems to suggest an increasing influence of Western culture on the Chinese youth’s sexual

construction and behaviour of Chinese youth. In Chinese society, under the current overwhelming importation and penetration of Western ways of perceiving corporeality and sexuality via the mass media and the Internet, an argument and prediction is made that claims that the sexual attitudes and behaviour of Chinese youth are now on the Western track (Ng & Heaberle, 1997) so that China's sexual life will increasingly mimic that of Western societies (Braverman, 2002, as cited in Sigley, 2006).

However, Higgins and Sun's (2007) more recent survey of the attitudes of 1,100 university students from various parts of China towards sexual behaviour and marriage yields no clear evidence that Chinese youth are adopting liberal Western sexual behaviours. Rather, they still hold fairly traditional values. Chinese family morality—which is well embedded in the culture and traditional views of sex and marriage—remains strong and constrains young people from liberal sexual practices.

The discrepancy in the research highlights the need for more evidence about changes not only in sexual attitudes but also in the sexual behaviours of the more representative samples of young Chinese people—such as those educated city dwellers who are already adopting Western social attitudes—in the current Chinese contexts of radical socio-economic changes and increasing media saturation. Pan Suiming (1993), a leading sexologist in China, recognizes the existence of a sexual revolution in China that is marked by radical changes in sexual attitudes and behaviour, especially of China's younger generation, but denies the popularly accepted view that this revolution is a straightforward product of “Western influences,” attributing it to the progressive evolution of Chinese family structures (Pan, 2006). Parish, Laumann and Mojola (2007) also identify a significant transformation in the sexual behaviour among Chinese men and women in their 20s and 30s through comparing population-based data for China with similar studies from other societies, finding that these changes are indicative of “a more complex narrative than a mere retelling of a Western-style sexual revolution” (p. 750). The contradictions of differing research findings signal the complexity of the interactions of cultural and contextual factors (either from the traditional Chinese culture or from the Western European culture), young people's sexual subjectivities and behaviour, and HIV

and AIDS in contemporary Chinese society. As Parish et al. (2007) observe, “many details about the complex nature of the sexual revolution underway in China remain to be unraveled” (p. 751).

To date, with regard to the research methodologies used to address youth sexuality and gender issues related to HIV and AIDS, few studies have examined the cultural meanings of sexuality and HIV and AIDS in Chinese society (Zhang et al., 2004; Jones, 1999; Wang & Van de Ven, 2003). Those studies that do exist are predominantly based on quantitative methods such as surveys and structured or semi-structured questionnaires. The results obtained through these kinds of quantitative inquiries may be limited because sexuality is so personal and cannot be adequately explored by asking pre-determined questions (Huang & Uba, 1992). Appeals have been made to use qualitative methodologies to gain insight into the ways in which young men and women formulate their responses with respect to their sexual attitudes, values, and practices (Morrissey & Higgs, 2006; Ip et al., 2001; Gilmartin et al., 1994). Critical of the limitations of survey methods for studying the sexuality of female adolescents, Tolman and Szalacha (1999) develop a different research agenda by incorporating qualitative, phenomenological methods with quantitative methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of adolescent girls’ experiences of sexual desire and emotions. In outlining the range of methods used by qualitative researchers to gather data related to HIV and AIDS, Power (1998) gives prominence to the role of qualitative research as a significant contribution to our understanding and response to HIV and AIDS, and insists that more ethnographic and anthropological studies should be done to further increase knowledge about the issues surrounding HIV and AIDS.

Apart from the important role of qualitative/ethnographic research in illuminating the meaning of lived experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), more significantly, it also gives a voice to people who are normally neglected and disenfranchised (Tersbol, 2004) by enabling them to convey the meanings they make of their experiences and to break their customary silence about, for example, their sexuality (Tolman & Szalacha, 1999).

Qualitative/ethnographic research methodologies enable young people to narrate their

stories, which portray their problems, needs, and interests, all important factors to incorporate in effective sex education programs (Aggleton & Campbell, 2000).

Essentially, this body of literature suggests that further research is needed through qualitative and ethnographic inquiry into the complexity of youth sexuality—sexual attitudes, beliefs, values, behaviours and emotions—which should be contextualized in the society and cultures that (urban) young Chinese people inhabit. Therefore, the goal of my ethnographic study of Chinese college students and HIV and AIDS is 1) to explore the sexuality and embodiment of college students in urban areas of Central China through an analysis of their personal perceptions of the meanings they make of their lived experiences related to sexuality and HIV and AIDS; 2) to build up a detailed picture of the sexual beliefs, attitudes, and values of these young people so to capture and interpret their understanding of sex, sexuality, and HIV and STIs; their conceptions of condom use and of risk and danger in sexual practices; and their approaches to relationships and sexual behaviours within these relationships; 3) to examine the impact of gender roles in relationships and sexual practices on the STI/HIV transmission among young adults; 4) to inform sex education and HIV intervention programs for young people in China.

## **IMPACT OF GENDER AND CULTURAL NORMS ON YOUNG WOMEN'S VULNERABILITY TO STIS/HIV**

The emerging body of work on gender, youth, and HIV and AIDS noted elsewhere by Patton (1990) and Aggleton, Ball and Mane (2000) is a useful “entry point” for looking at gender disparity in the patterns of HIV infection among China’s young people. A number of physiological, social, cultural, and economic factors interact to influence the health of Chinese women. While the biological differences—anatomical differences—make the transmission of the virus through sexual contact far more efficient from men to women than vice versa, the socially defined differences—unequal power relations—between the two sexes are fertile ground for unprotected sex among young people, which leads to the striking susceptibility of young Chinese women to infection through unsafe heterosexual behaviours. This phenomenon is similar to the situation of women in other HIV-affected

countries (UNAIDS, 2003). Central to the conventions of heterosexuality in China is a fundamental inequality between women and men; male power control over relationships or marriage makes it difficult for women to reject sex or negotiate condom use, which puts them at risk.

China is a predominantly conservative society, its traditional culture shaped by Confucianism, a male-centered doctrine that does not accord women a status equal to that of men. In the traditional patriarchal and patrilineal China (Bond, 1996; Giskin & Walsh, 2001), the man is privileged prominently as the Master of the household, tribe, village, town, kingdom, and the whole nation. Queen Wu Zetian, who reigned for decades, is the one exception. Otherwise, the role of woman is defined as “an appendage,” dependent on man and subject to male authority throughout her life. According to “the Three Obediences,” repressive social practices ascribed to female morality and virtue as articulated by Confucian ideology, a woman is supposed to “obey her father when she was young, her husband when she was married, and her son in her old age” (Gallagher, 2001, p. 9). Wifely deference and submission is highly appreciated in the Confucian value system as is illustrated in a common folk saying: “If you marry a chicken, stay with the chicken; if you marry a dog, obey the dog” (Gallagher, 2001, p. 91). The celebrated subservience of women to men is grounded on a general Confucian view of women as incompetent and worthless. The value of a woman lay in little more than her capacity for procreation—of a male offspring—to continue her husband’s kinship line. In older age, when a woman became a mother and mother-in-law, she potentially gained honour, and with that honour, came power within the family structure.

Traditional China was a highly family-orientated society in which the family is conceived by Confucian philosophy to be a basic and central structure of the foundation of society (Gunde, 2002). This prioritizing of the family contributes to the prominent position of marriage and the maintenance of succession through the male line within the framework of the family. Inheritance and descent through the male line within a family belittles women’s existence and significance in the household. She serves merely as a “reproduction tool”: she can be abused and abandoned if she is unable to give birth to

children, especially males. In these circumstances, the gendered power relation between husband and wife, male and female, positions women and their bodies as inferior as objects. Given the historical and cultural endurance of Chinese traditions dominated by Confucian values, present-day Confucian ideology that positions women as inferior to men permeates all aspects of human life in contemporary China (Bond, 1996). Culturally assigned gender roles that position women as receptive and subservient to their male partners restrict and suppress the sexuality and bodies of present-day women, which then reinforces female sexual passivity and male dominance in a relationship (Peltzer et al., 2006). This situation leaves women with little power to reject unwanted sex; to negotiate condom use; and to determine when, where, and how sexual activities occur. As Holland et al. (1998) claim, the dominant discourse of femininity—as the opposite of and inferior to masculinity—through which young women make sense of their sexual selves directly undermines their sexual safety. In other words, women’s inability to take control of their own sexual practices puts them at a heightened risk for HIV infection.

The persistent power of Confucian doctrine within Chinese societies, serving to construct and consolidate the patriarchal fabric of society, also has led to a lengthy silence about sexual subjects in China, as well as to women’s ignorance about sexual matters. As Hsu (1981) suggests, the essence of Confucian philosophy, in brief, is to celebrate social hierarchy and social harmony. In the Confucian scheme of hierarchy, various social roles are prescribed: roughly speaking, men are superior to women, parents to children, and rulers to subjects. To achieve the stability and maintenance of this hierarchical framework, Confucius accentuates the importance of the role(s) each individual should play in the intricate web of interpersonal relations. As Confucius himself remarked, “Let the ruler act as a ruler should, the minister as a minister, the father as a father, and the son as a son” (as translated and cited in Gunde, 2002, p. 38). As shown by this Confucian claim, each individual is a part of a social hierarchy and is required to be conscious of his or her position in this social configuration, and thus act in conformity to social expectations and norms. In addition, for the fulfillment of social stability and social harmony, Confucianism advocates the reciprocity of the dichotomy—that is, rulers are obligated to guide and enrich their subjects, men to cherish and protect women, and

parents to love their children. In the Confucian world in which the solidity and continuity of a collective unit is extolled, any behaviours or ideas that might do harm to the collective interest are discouraged or repressed. Sexuality—sexual desire, impulses, behaviour, and sexual ideas and values—always central to social and political control (Foucault, 1980) is highly restricted and disciplined in Confucian society. Any “transgressive” sexual practices and views are deemed as immoral, deviant, and dangerous to the enterprise of a household, or more broadly, a nation. Hence, even today, sex remains a taboo subject among the Chinese public in many areas of China. Ignorance about sexual matters resulting from the silence that surrounds them enhances the likelihood of the vulnerability of young females to STI/HIV infection.

In centuries past, Chinese women have been restricted and suppressed within the confines of fixed gendered roles and norms that constrain female sexual agency and bodily freedom. With the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, women gain social and political equality with men, and are liberated from the position of being “among the most restricted and oppressed on the earth” (Hall, 1997, p. 1). The 1950 Marriage Law, among the first laws promulgated and implemented by the communist state, breaks with tradition by abrogating the forced arranged marriage that was considered as proper in traditional Chinese society, and by getting rid of the feudal marriage system that privileged men as superior to women (Woo, 2006). A new system of equality and monogyny is put into practice, empowering women to freely choose their partners and to initiate divorce proceedings. With the implementation of the Electoral Law of 1953 (Hall, 1997), Chinese women also are enfranchised and gain the same political rights as men. Even though women have not achieved complete equality in practice, they have far more freedom and opportunities than in the past. For example, present-day girls and young women have equal access to education and more free choice in many life situations than their peers in the past, mostly owing to the one-child-only policy (Fong, 2002).

However, despite all the previously mentioned advances in women’s political rights, marriage, and education, a large number of women and girls, especially in patriarchal

rural areas, still lack social and economic power to confront their positioning by hegemonic sexualities. Similar to women in many parts of Africa, they have little access to sexual decision-making or equality either in a sexual partnership or the legal, medical, and social-support structures, which could promote rapid and positive changes to bring about safer sexual practices (Patton, 1990). Moreover, the dominant influence of the male-oriented Confucian dogma that has permeated Chinese culture for over 2,000 years contributes to the willing acceptance and internalization of gendered ideology by women. Besides, the mass media, which define the modern era in which we live, are also a key cause of the reproduction of patriarchal relations between the sexes, seducing women into a false consciousness with which they go along uncritically (Hermes, 1993). All these factors interact to undermine women's capability to negotiate and take control in their sexual practices. Sexuality and sexual practices among women are seen as decisive in the spread or limitation of HIV/AIDS and crucial to understanding the impediments to safer sexual practices (Holland et al., 1998). Thus, it is critical to facilitate young women's agency by helping them to construct a new consciousness of the body and sexuality so to pave a path for their autonomy over sexual behaviours and life situations. In response to the rapid increase in the proportion of women to total HIV cases in China in recent years due to the power of traditional gender norms to shape these women's sexual behaviour (Zhou, 2008), the empowerment of women's sexual agency and the engagement of them as an active force in HIV and AIDS prevention are two of the most effective strategies against the pandemic (UNAIDS, 2003).

## **YOUTH IN CHINA: REFIGURING CULTURAL CONCEPTIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND YOUTH SEXUALITY**

Discussions of present-day Chinese youth's sexuality in relation to HIV and AIDS would be insufficient without a close look at the evolution of youth as a "group cultural category" in Chinese history, and an examination of the conceptions of youth sexuality constructed across a range of social settings in modern China. This revisiting of the past during which young people were actively involved can add breadth and depth to an

exploration of how Chinese youth have developed to what they are today; how they understand and define their sexuality, gender, body, and HIV and AIDS, which has emerged as a social problem for them; and how they are addressing this rising problem with respect to their future individual and social advancement. In what follows, it is apparent that Chinese youth play key roles as chroniclers of history and social change, and as both the recipients of culture and the active participants in its construction (Giroux, n.d.)

Culture shapes people as a single species: children, adolescents, and youth are historically contingent concepts defined in different ways by different cultures (Geertz, 1973; Ariès, 1950; Dikotter, 1995). A distinct inconsistency in defining “youth” in different historical periods and in varying cultural landscapes across the world is identifiable in the various discourses about youth. Despite the initial definition of youth as an age group between 15 and 25 set by the United Nations in 1985, which was the International Year of Youth (Brown, 1990, as cited in Tyyska, 2005), the category of youth tends to be used in the West in ways that are flexible and progressively distinguishable from that of children. For example, to specify the physiological and psychological nuances of Western youth, Galambos and Kolaric (1994) divide the life phases of youth as “young adolescents” (10-14), “teen” (15-19), and “young adults” (20-24), whereas “children” is used as an umbrella term to cover those who are not adults. In the Eastern usage of these age categories, in China for instance, the term “children” commonly refers to individuals under the age of 18; boundaries of teens and adolescents are blurry and overlap. In China in the past, the specific category of youth was used for the age group 18-30, but has been expanded to refer to those young people aged 18 to 35. The concept of youth used in the southern hemisphere is varied in response to specific local populations and cultures, and youthful categories generally start as early as age 5 and extend to age 35 (Allatt, 2001). This remarkable variety in the category of youth across the world signifies both the fluidity and diversity of these age categories shaped by specific cultures.

Without a conscious recognition of the variety and diversity of the category of youth in different cultures, social science research on youth has focused mainly on young people

in the United States and Western Europe (Holm & Helve, 2005). However, a growing number of scholars throughout the world who study youth populations in divergent cultures have realized the inadequacy of using a West-dominated homogenizing perspective to define the specific age categories of youth. In general, they have shown a preference to define youth as “not a particular age range” but as a “social status” (Marquardt, 1998, p. 7) in the social processes “whereby age is socially constructed, institutionalized and controlled in historically and culturally specific ways” (Wyn & White, 1997, as cited in Tyyska, 2005, p. 4). An examination of Chinese youth as they are constituted, and as they have evolved, in a range of Chinese social contexts and cultural terrains helps researchers to understand these youth as a social status in contemporary China, and thus, to shed more light on our understanding of present-day young Chinese people, especially their social and sexual identity and agency.

### **The Birth of Youth in the Early Republican Period**

In the early twentieth century, the structure of Chinese society dramatically changed. The revolution of 1911 brought to a halt the imperial system that had dominated China for more than two thousand years. In its aftermath, innovations and reforms were implemented throughout various aspects of Chinese society. Chinese students studying in the West were exposed to the Western embrace of reason, science, and democracy, which also was embraced by China’s educated elite. Young intellectuals freed themselves from the fetters of feudal ideologies and engaged enthusiastically as a positive force in social activities and movements. With the rapid rise in social status and political power of young people, “youth” became a widespread category of analysis in the wake of the New Culture Movement (1911-1924) (Dikotter, 1995). Prior to the Movement, “boundaries between childhood and youth have often been blurred, and young people were not always thought to belong to a separate age of life with specific psychological characteristics” (Dikotter, 1995, p. 146). The term *qingnian* (youth) had existed before the establishment of Republican China (1911-1945), although it was restricted to males aged sixteen to thirty, and excluded young females, since they were expected to marry as soon as they reached sexual maturity. With the progress of the New Culture Movement, young women are increasingly involved in collaboratively working with their male peers, and the scope

of “youth” is expanded to include young women. Youth as a social construct in Republican China encompasses the specific connotations defined by that era, a time when significant social changes are transforming traditional China to a modern China. The image of young people—energetic, passionate, and hopeful—exactly mirrors a newly-born Republican China. Chen Duxiu, the Leader of the Movement, in his “Call to Youth” in 1915, encourages youth to be the pushers of human and social advancements, and compares them to:

early spring, like the rising sun, like trees and grass in bud, like the newly sharpened blade. It is the most valuable period of life. The function of youth in society is the same as that of a fresh and vital cell in a human body. In the process of metabolism, the old and the rotten are incessantly eliminated to be replaced by the fresh and living (Chow, 1960, pp. 45-46, as cited by Dikotter, 1995, p. 148).

In this regard, “youth” becomes “a powerful symbol of regeneration, vitality and commitment to modernity: it was invented as standing for reason, progress and science,” which was the slogan of the New Culture Movement (Dikotter, 1995, p. 147). Youth is perceived as the transitional phase of human development marked by striking biological growth and changes that transform a young person into a mature adult. As Chen (1960) suggests, youth serves the same function in social advancement. Youth could play a fundamental role in subverting a backward social system and in building a new nation out of an old one that was constrained by Feudal Confucianism. The enthusiastic engagement of youth in the social and political activities of the New Cultural Movement positions them as a powerful driving force in social development. Since then, youth have emerged as a distinct social category and have served as a decisive force in societal change in modern China. As Jin (2002) argues, the era of the May Fourth Movement—a historical event marking the commencement of the New Cultural Movement—laid the foundation for China’s “youth century” and marked the birth of youth as modern intellectuals.

The New Cultural Movement aimed to liberate people from the rigid bonds of Confucianism and to create a democratic world fostered by the spirit of reason and science. In the wave of this revolution, open discussions about and expressions of sexuality rocked the large cities of early Republican China, and thus challenged the sexual order assigned by Confucianism (Dikotter, 1995). In a Confucian world, sex is by

no means equated with pleasure; rather, the focus of sex is to provide male offspring. Sexual desire and emotions had the potential to shatter the “harmonious” hierarchically-organized relationships in the family, and hence were deemed abnormal, shameful, or obscene. Human sexuality is suppressed and thwarted, and sex remains a social taboo. After the 1911 revolution, the radical and critical reflections of Chinese intellectuals about sexuality encourage the public to openly talk about sex. Literary writers, under the guise of medical science, expose their personal sexual experiences to the public; young intellectuals clamour for sexual equality; educationalists campaign for the enlightenment of youth through sexual instruction; and social improvers undertake a reform of the sexual habits of the nation (Dikotter, 1995). A democratized liberation of human thought occurs amongst common people in particular urban areas of China, and people accept scientific, healthy attitudes towards youth sexuality. Sex education becomes a necessary aspect of positive youth development. Medical discourses at the time describe youth as the adolescent stage characterized by distinct physiological and psychological features such as “emotional turbulence, mental imbalance and accelerated physical growth” (Dikotter, 1995, p. 147). The young person is portrayed as possessing a bundle of passions in biomedical terms of “impulses,” “instincts,” and “energy,” which need to be properly disciplined and guided through education (Dikotter, 1995, p. 147). Biological discourses on youth provide scientific narratives about the internal mechanisms of adolescent bodies. With the emergence of youth as a separate biological stage and specific social category, the young are recognized for the first time in modern China as “moral persons, legal individuals and psychological beings” (Dikotter, 1995, p. 150).

### **Youth in the Maoist era (1949-1976): “Small screws” in the national machinery**

Youth as a group identity is uniformized and highly standardized in Mao’s era, a time defined by severe class struggle and by the collective pursuit of the communist ideal. During this period, the “individual” is dead, and “youth” exists only as a collective code, a group, physically and spiritually. Maoist ideology suppresses and smothers any individuality of a person, especially when individual thinking and acts go against the collective need. During the catastrophic period of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the late period of Mao’s years, the spirit of reason and democracy embraced by youth in

early Republican China is abandoned to so-called national needs. People, young and mature, are brainwashed and monitored to be screws in the national machine. Anyone who speaks out with a different voice is imprisoned, and some are tortured to death. The Cultural Revolution leaves an indelible trace of agony and humiliation in many hearts, and profoundly hurts the dignity of the Chinese nation.

Mao and the Communist Party under his leadership recognize the significant power of young people in the social movement, and shrewdly recruit them through education and manipulation into the “revolutionary army” under his supervision. Like Chen Duxiu, Mao refers to adolescents or youth as the morning sun, as the symbol of energy, warmth, and hope. Long before its takeover in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party set up a Youth League in the 1920s to absorb young people and facilitate their agency in social and political movements, which later took an explicit form during the New Cultural Movement. After the communist victory in 1949, they rename the Fourth of May celebration to “Youth Day.” Young people are expected to strongly commit to the communist cause and devote themselves to national needs by sacrificing their individual needs. In the coercive political climate of those days, the spirit of collectivism is propagated and extolled to an extreme, as is reflected in the following statement made at the time:

Very obviously, we should base choice on the needs of the state and the collective and obey organizational allocation. Our nation is undergoing reconstruction in a planned manner. ... Here we can see that collectivism and only collectivism is the correct way to manage the relations between individuals and the collective. The principle of collectivism requires us to put collective interests in the first place, and individual interests second. When there is conflict between individual and collective interests, the latter should prevail. In case of necessity, we may sacrifice with no hesitation individual interests, even individual lives, in order to protect collective interests (Hubei, 1958, I, p. 113, as translated and cited in Cheng, 1994, p. 65).

Young adults during the Maoist decades believe that it is honourable to follow national needs and work as “a small screw”—uniform and spiritless—in the national machinery. Mao’s anti-individualistic and pro-collective ethos is deeply rooted in the Chinese tradition (Cheng, 1994) in which a greater emphasis is placed on family responsibility and obligations as well as on community goals and needs over those of the individual.

Solomon (1971) characterizes the social orientation of the Chinese tradition as one of dependency: “The Chinese emphasis on social inter-relatedness, on the basic importance of group life, and on submission of the individual to collective interests, stands out as a fundamental cultural difference (p. 4). Apparently, Mao developed the collectivism that the Chinese always had valued, but he also abused it.

However, the international socio-political circumstances of the Mao years may help to explain the formation of Maoist ideology and policy. When the People’s Republic of China, a new communist country, was established, capitalist countries in the West showed their hostility by initiating a severe economic blockade. To ensure the survival and development of this communist nation, the new government imposed and reinforced obedience, conformity, and cooperation on people, while their individual needs, interests, and voices were ignored, marginalized, and devalued in favour of the collective interests. Throughout the 1950s, “principles of hard work, frugality, and collective enthusiasm for the ‘new China’ dominated images of marriage and family life.... Gendered tastes in hairstyle and dress were coerced into a monotonous uniformity of shape and color” (Evans, 1997, p. 2). Women are de-feminized into gender-neutral beings: throughout the country women dress in solid blue, grey, or brown loose-fitting shirt and pants, which provide little suggestion about their sexual orientation, especially since the slightest suggestion of sexual interest is considered evidence of bourgeois individualism and deviant from the normal path of the communist value system. During the Cultural Revolution, the regulation and discipline over women’s dress, as well as their personal lives, closely parallel the discipline and regulation of women in Traditional China. The institutional policy of suppressing any discussion of sexuality and forbidding any materials related to sex makes sex and sexuality a taboo subject with the public. During this time, common people believe that sexuality is a substance that originates in the West and should be confined there, and that attention to matters of sex can undermine the collective welfare of the communist development.

### **Youth in the post-Mao time from the late 1970s to early 1980s: The awakening of self**

The ten-year Cultural Revolution was an unmitigated disaster for the Chinese nation, producing a destitute culture and an economy that was close to collapse (Jin, 2002). Individual voice, thought, and spirit were devalued and suppressed in the collective pursuit of illusory national needs, and individual values were undermined through an educational process of “the spirit of the rust-free screw” and selflessness. Mao’s death marked the end of the Cultural Revolution and the end of his Era. Nonetheless, the fundamental ideology of his time, which imprisoned people’s minds and suppressed their humanity, lingered. In this situation, the call for ideological liberation is launched by intellectuals and supported by the new leaders of the country.

This growing democratic climate evoked the younger generation’s self awareness and revolutionized their understanding of self. The process of self examination is confusing and painful when young people are introduced to the rational and realistic world in which the ideals they believe in and this reality are in considerable conflict. However, gradually, young people begin to recognize the value of human existence as being a social construction. This process contributes to the formation and development of the younger generation’s values of “self-struggle, self-perfection, self-realization” (Jin, 2002, p. 26). At the beginning of the 1980s, the mainstream ideology accepted by most Chinese youth is still biased toward “centering around the society” and “national interests have the highest priority” (Jin, 2002, p. 26). At that time, young intellectuals, who represented the modern youth in China, are concerned about the development of politics, the economy, and culture in real life, and show a strong individual commitment to these concerns. However, they also begin to care about and learn how to realize their individual value through an active involvement in social activities, and to balance collective and individual needs and interests. Progressively, during this time, the concept of individualism emerges among the young Chinese, and is further developed in the decades that follow.

## **Youth in the age of market economy**

In the 1980s dramatic changes occur in China, brought about by the “open door policy” and a series of economic reforms. The fundamental transformation is the shift from a planned to a market economy. The emergence of self-employment, the autonomy of staffing in many industrial and commercial units, and the substantial demand for employers contribute to the changes in the order of life in this socialist society and to the new orientations in the ideologies of young adults. As Marr and Rosen (1998) argue, the perspectives of Chinese youth today, to a considerable extent, are a product of the surge of China towards a market economy, and the simultaneous opening to diverse foreign influences. It is true that social, political, and economic transformations exert a profound impact on the formation and transformation of the ideology of young people. In general, these changes can be presented in three aspects.

First, the 1980s reform led to the formation of the concept of choice and the enhancement of individualism among Chinese youth. The increasing role of the market in the economy creates multiple opportunities, chances, and choices with respect to occupations, education, and life. The incorporation of the market element into the socialist economy contributes the change in the way that young adults look at a job. For the first time in China for over 40 years, young adults have choices (Cheng, 1994).

In the 1980s, young people in China enjoy more choices in the multiple aspects of their lives than their parents did during the Maoist period. The educational and occupational opportunities of their parents—young adults in the Maoist era—were much more directly tied to or influenced by opportunities provided by the state (Cheng, 1994). At that time, students are instilled with strong ideologies that privilege collective interests over all others. Graduates feel honoured to be assigned to anywhere the nation needs them to go, so they can demonstrate their wholehearted commitment to the revolutionary goals articulated by the Chinese Communist Party. The famous motto in those times—to be a “rust-free screw” in the great machine of the state and to serve the nation as needed—is the overarching principle guiding young adults’ choice of education and occupation. They have no individual choices, and proudly conform to the national needs. A decade later,

young graduates have more choices: even though a proportion of the working posts are still provided by the state, graduates can reject them and choose other options. The more flexible opportunities for choice “goes against not only the socialist tradition of expecting individuals to abide by national needs, but also against the cultural tradition of the prevalence of community expectations” (Cheng, 1994, p. 63). This individual choice flexibility challenges the collectivism embraced by Confucian ideology, and promotes a spirit of individualism, which is valued in Western education but was absent in education in China for over 40 years of Mao’s rule. These changes experienced by young adults “bred a new generation of Chinese citizens who would in turn bring fundamental changes to the society” (Cheng, 1995, p. 63).

Second, young adults in the 1980s have more power to influence issues they are concerned about, and have more ways to voice their concerns. The growing agency among young people in China is manifested in the evolution of the Youth League. In traditional China, Confucianism offered abundant counselling on how to prepare young people to serve the state as well as the family. Heads of the Chinese Communist Party also regarded the proper socialization of young people as a legitimate concern of the state (Marr & Rosen, 1998). For this purpose, the Communist Party establishes a mass organization for young people—the Communist Youth League—in 1920 long before its taking state power in an attempt to facilitate and exploit young people’s power in social and political movements. The core function of this league is “to serve as a transmission belt between the Party and activist youth and to recruit, indoctrinate and test prospective members of the Party” (Marr & Rosen, 1998, p. 146). In the early years, membership in the League is difficult to obtain, since it is hotly contested by many energetic and progressive young people. Led by the Communist Party, the Youth League reaches out to the school system, state enterprises, government bureaus, the military, and the mass media; and serves as a guide for, or surveillance of, young adults. Young people’s voices are never heard individually but are “spoken out” through the narrow channel of the League. Over the decades, as youth awareness grows with respect to democracy, individualism, and the self, the Youth League loses its monopolistic position in the supervision and monitoring of China’s youth; young adults’ enthusiasm for membership

in the League is on the decline. For example, young students in colleges or universities find ways to—and are allowed to—establish a variety of clubs and associations in the school. The League continues to influence these associations by providing financial support and personnel, but students are entitled to manage them and to have their voices heard through diverse channels.

Third, with the deepening of reform in China and its opening to the world, conflicts of various kinds surface mainly around the differences between Chinese and Western culture and values. As the various schools of modernist thought are introduced to Chinese youth, they come to accept and appreciate Existentialism, Functionalism, democracy, sexual liberation, and other liberal ideas. The younger generation in China are forming multi-faceted value orientations. Nevertheless, an obvious trend emerges: they are becoming materialistically biased. For example, a 1986 survey on college students' ideologies reveals that a good percentage of students believe that "the value of life lies in contribution to the society while getting paid at the same time"; this percentage rose from 47.7 percent in 1986 to 70.1 percent in 1988 (Cheng, 1994). In the 1990s, the development of the market economy enhances young adults' individual awareness, while their materialistic and functionalistic value orientation becomes more and more apparent. As Jin (2002) suggests, the cooperative awareness of youth gradually shifts toward an orientation to abandon political reality and go after practical gains. A survey of college students in four major cities in China reveals that "a sense of reality and a strong urge for sensory satisfaction made the college students of the 1990s consider their current interests while weighing different choices" (Jin, 2002, p. 31).

As the communication between Chinese and Western cultures deepened after the early 1980s, Chinese youth, especially in urban regions, were increasingly exposed to Western life styles through the mass media, commercial advertising, and other channels. Reports indicate that a growing number of young adults became sexually active during their adolescent years and prior to marriage, at a time when they had an insufficient understanding of love and sex, and were even ignorant about the basics of sexual health (Evans, 1997). However, a systematic dissemination of knowledge about sex or the

psychotherapeutic services available to them did not exist. In such circumstances, young adults, girls and young women in particular, are vulnerable to pain and suffering—physical and psychological—from unexpected pregnancy and sexual abuse, which can continue throughout their adulthood. Some young people even became sexual criminals due to their ignorance about sex. As Weiss et al. (2000) point out, an ever growing body of data collected in the developing countries of Africa, Latin America, and Asia show that early sexual initiation and unprotected sexual activity lead to tragic social, economic, and health consequences.

### **China's millennial youth in the context of globalization**

Socialist China in the late 1990s was undergoing considerable changes that were manifested predominantly as economic development. Various forms of transformation arose from this economically driven change, among which the changes in the educated youth of China's millennial generation were particularly conspicuous. These changes are expressed through a popular youth culture in China, which projects the distinct impact of globalization (Moore, 2005; Marr & Rosen, 1998). Western popular media—films, music, television, magazines, and novels—saturated with Western values are allowed into the urban areas of China; the Internet connects young people to anywhere in the world. Globalization provides China's youth with a broad vision to gain a better understanding of China, the world, their peers in other hemispheres, and themselves. Compared with the young generation of the mid-1980s and the 1990s, China's millennials embrace and value to a greater extent individualism and freedom, and express many more individual, than social, goals and agency (Li, 2006). Furthermore, the current form of individualism and agency of the millennial youth is remarkable in that it has become mainstream rather than being restricted to obscure or specialized corners of society (Moore, 2005).

Young adults in contemporary China seek to be distinctive beings with unique appearances—and more remarkably, individual spirits—rather than small rust-free screws absent of any individual quality. They score high on the freedom scale with respect to self-made decisions and choice—for example, rather than their parents deciding what job they should do, these young adults make their own choice. They see their pursuit of

romantic relationships as profoundly individualistic acts, and as signals of their independence and maturity. In the past, dating and forming romantic relationships were prohibited in China by Confucian-influenced families and, more recently, by the dictate of the state and by the teachers who helped to maintain these prohibitions (Moore, 2005). However today, neither teachers and parents nor the general public interfere much in the romantic attachments of young people, especially on college or university campuses. Many parents do not identify with the individualistic values glorified by their children, values that actually “stand emphatically opposed to the collectivist spirit promoted among young people during the Cultural Revolution who are the parents of the millennial generation” (Moore, 2005, p. 357). Nonetheless, the presence of conflict between the values of the two generations does not necessarily mean that the parents would want to bring back the coercive collectivism of the Maoist years; instead, they appreciate an appropriate amount of freedom for their children, but not too much. Thus, the discord that occurs between parents and children in present-day China seems to be amicably resolved, and the youth rebellion can be described as a mild generational shift (Moore, 2005).

Of all parental complaints about the young, the most remarkable is their disapproval of their children’s attitudes and views about love and relationships, and their early engagement in boyfriend-girlfriend relations, which involve sexual activities. The increase in unprotected sexual behaviours among young people makes the parents anxious and puts young women at risk of STIs/HIV infection. College students have emerged as the new addition to the high risk group for STIs/HIV as noted earlier. According to the residency regulations of colleges and universities in China, all students are required to reside in dormitories on campus during the weekdays, although local students may sometimes find excuses to stay at home. The majority of students come from other provinces and attend universities or colleges far away from their family home. After completing three years or more of high school study—overloaded with assignments, exams, pressures, and competition—this particular group of young adults enter the relatively free environments of university or college, and for the first time in their lives are beyond the reach of parental inspection and supervision. A number of them immediately set up boyfriend-and-girlfriend relationships, a new experience forbidden

previously in high school by parents and teachers, to show their independence and maturity, and some become involved in these relationships due to loneliness or peer pressure. Research shows that an increasing number of young students in China are involved in unsafe premarital sex (Chai, 2004). Moreover, the first few years of college are identified as often a time for sexual experimentation and sexual irresponsibility (Sheer & Cline, 1994). In this situation, due to the lack of knowledge about sex and public health, some students are unfortunately infected with STIs. In addition, due to a lack of counselling about the depression and pain that can follow the failure of a relationship, these students become involved with multiple sex partners. They frequently change partners and engage in unprotected sexual practices, which put them at high risk of infection.

## **SEX EDUCATION AMONG YOUTH IN MODERN CHINA**

This section, a brief overview of the efforts undertaken in school sex education and HIV intervention in China, helps to situate my research and sheds light on the limitations of these efforts and what needs be done for future development.

Since the rise of evolutionary theories in the late nineteenth century, social reformers including Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao have reiterated the importance of disseminating scientific knowledge about human sexuality and reproduction among the general public, since they believe that sexual enlightenment is a bright light on the path to national wealth and power (Dilotter, 1995). To encourage social renovation, modern intellectuals and elites in Republican China argue that the revival of the social group relies on self-discipline and restraint of sexual desire and behaviour, and so they use medical science as a rational guide to the regulation of sexuality (Dilotter, 1995, p. 2). Youth or adolescents whose characteristics are defined by scientific biomedical terms like “impulses,” “instincts,” and “energy” are problematized as a social issue. Proper discipline, guidance, and education were assumed to be the paths to helping these fragile adolescents. In addition to the recognition of the importance of sex education, major universities and institutions financially sponsored by the government, overseas Chinese

entrepreneurs, and urban elites of the coast conducted investigations into human sexuality and reproduction (Dilolter, 1995, p. 3). During these years of Republican China, a wide variety of popular texts, including books about medical remedies, family handbooks, teach-yourself manuals, and so on became easily accessible and served as textbooks for young adults.

During the 1950s, the early decades of the Maoist era, discussions of sex are allowed and encouraged among the general public. Although a formal program of sex education is absent in schools, the publication of a considerable range of materials about sexuality explicitly addressed to a young readership provides a public forum—limited though it was—for the elucidation of issues considered to be essential to the healthy development of young people (Evans, 1997). The presence of magazines such as *China's Youth* and *Women in China* as well as articles about health, hygiene, and sexual health symbolizes the official recognition of the legitimacy of young people's interest in such matters (Evans, 1997). At the time, medical discourse on sexuality is considered scientific and correct, and is regarded by young readers as educational texts, along with other less systematically constructed discourse such as literature and film, as important sources of information concerning sexuality. An influential booklet entitled *Knowledge of Sex* (Wang, Zhao, & Tan, 1956, as cited in Evans, 1997) is published in urban areas of China with an aim to give young people a “correct understanding of sex” as the basis for understanding “questions of love, marriage and the family” (as is claimed by the preface of the booklet). Wang, Zhao and Tan (1956) remark that “Traditional views of sex as ‘obscene and shameful’ created ‘tension and misunderstanding between two people and also impaired sexual satisfaction” (p. 1-2, as cited in Evans, 1997). Such open discussion of sex and sexual information not only breaks the silence and taboos surrounding sexuality but also challenges the conventional principles of sexual morality, although the impact of the free publication of sexual knowledge is limited to an urban-based audience. However, unfortunately, the discussion about and practice of popular sex education is cut off when the Cultural Revolution breaks out in China. Then, the subject of sex is labelled with the following adjectives: “bourgeois,” “decadent,” and “lustful.” Ironically, proposals by a dozen medical scholars and educators for sex education programs “were

condemned as resulting from the corrosive influence of bourgeois ideas” (Ruan, 1991, p. 173).

At the end of the Maoist era, China enters a phase of Spring in the history of modern China, into a more democratic and more open era. The need for sex education programs emerges, prompted by a number of pressures. First, population growth is a serious social problem, and so young people need information about the use of contraception. Second, some renowned Chinese medical professionals argue that sex education could potentially help to diminish the increasing incidence of teenage pregnancy, juvenile sex crimes, and the spread of STIs (Ruan, 1991). Third, the Chinese people are more concerned about their personal sexual lives “as a result of the opening policy of receptiveness to Western cultural influence, and a simultaneous increase in personal freedom” (Ruan, 1991, p. 175). Thus, sexual knowledge to help improve the quality of sexual life of the Chinese people is needed. Urged by those pressures, a more systematic school-based program of sex education is progressively integrated into the school curriculum.

Initially, sex education programs are introduced into the school curriculum in 1981 in Shanghai (Ruan, 1991). The incorporation of sex education courses in Shanghai high schools proves to be a significant beginning, and later, these model courses are instituted in schools in other provinces. In early 1986, 40 Shanghai secondary schools introduce an experimental sex education course for mixed classes in the 12-13 age group. More than teaching knowledge related to population control and contraception, the new courses aim not only to help students understand the physiological and psychological changes they are experiencing but also to teach them about sexual health and sexual morality. These experiments in sex education are so successful that six months later, nearly 1,000 secondary schools institute sex education programs in schools, and 13 provinces make sex education courses part of their standard school curriculum (Ruan, 1991). In addition, provincial and national conferences are held to deepen the development of sex education; the China Sex Education Research Association is constituted in 1985, composed of educators and family planners; and studies of attitudes towards sex are conducted (Evans, 1997). The importance of the incorporation of sex education into the formal school

curriculum also is recognized by the government. China's State Council claims that sex education programs would soon be established in secondary schools nationwide (Ruan, 1991). Additionally, the State Family Planning Commission decides to position sex education high on its agenda for key projects of the seventh Five Year Plan (1986-1990), and creates a plan for training high school sex education teachers (Evans, 1997).

Even though sex education is integrated into the formal school curriculum, discussions concerning sex education always have been controversial since its initial implementation in China. When is the appropriate time for the provision of sex education to students—during junior high school, earlier, or later? Should the pedagogical approach be co-educational or single sex? What kind of information and advice should be included? Equivocal ideas about sex education discourage the full and deep implementation of sexual education among Chinese students. Moreover, other barriers—for example, protest from a number of parents, teachers, and conservative high-ranking officials, and consequently, a lack of administrative support—stand in the way of the wide-spread implementation of sex education (Chai, 2004). Due to these circumstances, particularly in rural areas, sex education exists in name only in the curriculum, and furthermore, even if some schools want to offer sex education, only a limited number of trained sex-education teachers are available. Under the pressure of the need to prepare for entrance exams in “normal” subjects such as Chinese, Literature, Mathematics, Physics, sex education courses are marginalized and ignored in most schools.

However, the need for a formal program of sex education in China as well as worldwide seems tragically obvious considering the serious HIV and AIDS epidemic among young adults in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. AIDS is recognized as a global crisis with young people emerging as the most vulnerable group; likewise, young adults in China are hit particularly hard by these infections. A series of education and intervention efforts have been adopted since 2004, as mentioned previously, to achieve a positive health impact.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

First, just as HIV and AIDS raises the status of venereology in medical research, the threat of the sexual transmission of HIV raises the status and significance of sociological, psychological, educational, and anthropological research into sexuality (Altman, 1993). Sex education is considered as the most effective and efficient means to curb the STIs/HIV transmission among young people (UNAIDS, 2003). Although sex education has been incorporated into the formal and informal curricula of secondary schools in China for decades, questions still linger: Why is it that the awareness of sexual health remains low among young students, and why is it that they knowingly engage in unprotected sexual activity that places them at a particularly high risk of infection? It is apparent that effective sex education is not just an issue of providing knowledge about sexual health, encouraging the use of condoms, or discouraging premarital sex. It is widely agreed that the dissemination of knowledge about safer sex does not ensure that young students will put what they know into practice.

How can comprehensive sex education take account of the social and cultural environments in which it will be implemented? A fundamental gender inequality ingrained in contemporary Chinese society leads to unsafe sexual activities, in which young women commonly have little access to free choice and negotiation. Against this reality, the designers of effective sex education programs need to consider issues of the resistance to the conventional notions of masculinity and femininity, power, and female agency. The integration of these complex issues into a comprehensive sex education program is a challenge for specialists and educators. However, some relevant research can provide some insightful recommendations. For example, Weiss et al (2000) and Aggleton and Compell (2000) argue for the importance of inviting young students to voice their needs about sex education. In sex education, both young women and men need information about physical and sexual development, and STIs and AIDS. However, they also need opportunities to ask questions and to discuss these issues—concerning their sexual feelings, relationships, and concepts of sexuality—among themselves, with the opposite sex, and with adults. Such opportunities are critical to helping young women to overcome the negative social norms that restrict their role in sexual interactions, and for both female and male students to developing a healthy and positive approach to their

own sexuality.

Moreover, the design of sex education programs for present-day young people needs to consider the impact of the sexual cultures on the Internet on young people's sexual attitudes, conceptions, and behaviours. In the current context of the digital sexual revolution occurring in cyberspace, accessible to people across the world (Herdt & Howe, 2007), Chinese youth, in the absence of an effective sex education at school and at home, visit online sexual communities for sexual information, entertainment, and sexual services. These new and complex online sexual cultures exert a profound impact on the ways that young people see and practice sexuality, and pose challenges to sex education programs and sexuality studies.

## **CHAPTER THREE: VISUAL METHODOLOGIES**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The selection of methodological approaches being employed in research is in complex ways linked to and shaped by ontology (beliefs about the world) and epistemology (ways of knowing about the world) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). These three main and interrelated activities, namely ontology, epistemology, and methodology, form what we call the research paradigm or interpretive framework of qualitative inquiry (Com, 2007). As explained by Com (2007), ontology as the study of being is responsible for distinct aspects of qualitative research, for considering what there is or what exists; specifically, it deals with the nature of reality that is to be studied, and what can be known.

Epistemology is the study of knowing, and specifies the nature of the relationship between the researcher (knower) and what can be known. Simply put, epistemology focuses on what we can know about what exists. Methodology refers to “how the researcher may go about practically studying whatever he or she believes can be known” (Com, 2007, p. 4). Ontological and epistemological positions have implications for research design and the use of methodologies in research (Huff, 2009). In this chapter, I talk about my ontological and epistemological assumptions, which shape my use of visual approaches and other qualitative methods in this study. Subsequently, much discussion is devoted to the use of visual methodologies in this study and, more specifically, the use of a visual-based participatory methodology, photovoice. A photovoice project engages a group of Chinese college students in collaborative photography, which enables them to capture their conceptions and understandings of issues related to sexuality and HIV and AIDS.

In this photovoice project, photography was used as a representation of knowledge and as a site of cultural production, social interaction, and individual experience of social reality (Pink, 2001; Banks, 2001). In the context of seeing youth as cultural producers (Buckingham, 1993, 2000), the photographic images that young people produced in this photovoice project are considered and analysed as representations of their experiences

and perception of reality related to sexuality and AIDS, as cultural texts documenting their sexual understandings and conceptions, and as sites of social interaction in which they engaged with other research participants. Furthermore, given that “research can do many things: education, train, bridge and lead to action” (Morris, 2002, p. 8), my research, drawing on a “research as social change approach” (Schratz & Walker, 1995), seeks to use artistic forms—collaborative and ethnographic photography—as a vehicle to work with young people to engage them in social issues related to the spread of STIs/HIV. In so doing, my research contributes to an action-oriented agenda, which blends research, popular education of sexuality and HIV and AIDS, and action to respond to the alarming transmission of STIs/HIV among young people. In this sense, photography achieves more than a passive documentation and reflection of the texture of sexual and cultural life among Chinese young people. More significantly, it provides the vision and impetus that promotes individual empowerment, and broader social change and development.

Given that the visual method, photovoice, has been used significantly not only in the recording and discovery of social reality but also in the promotion of an action-oriented agenda, it is discussed in this chapter both as a powerful mode of representation and communication and as a participatory tool mobilizing participants’ engagement in social issues and generating action and social change. Moreover, critical issues related to the use of visual methodologies are also included in this chapter, including my ethical concerns, interpretive challenges against the data analysis, and the limitations of these visual strategies.

## **RATIONALE FOR THE USE OF VISUAL METHODOLOGIES**

Any discussion of using visual materials in the research process should begin by considering the researcher’s underlying ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions, since they orientate the way that we conduct our studies (Prosser & Schwartz, 2004). Drawing on this view, the discussion about using visual methodologies in this research starts with a presentation of my ontological and epistemological beliefs.

### **Grounding methodology in my ontological and epistemological worldview**

Social reality, everyday life, is constructed in and through human perceptions, and is determined by the perceiver, or alternatively the subject or the actor, who engages in the life world and has his/her particular experience and understanding of it (Madison, 2005). By taking up this phenomenological position that considers the phenomena that constitute experience as the products of the activity of consciousness itself (Husserl, 1931), I appreciate the contribution of human subjectivity to the production of knowledge or the meaning of reality, believing that the “truth” of social reality is not that which lies out there in some objective world waiting to be discovered, but rather, is the construction of humans who experience and apprehend the world through subjective and interpretive activity. Meaning is “always a matter of human understanding, which constitutes our experience of a common world that we can make some sense of” (Johnson, 1987, p. 174). As an individual biographically and socio-historically situated in social life, a person’s perceptual enactment of reality is grounded on his/her particular lived experiences and understanding of reality. This single, individualized construction of reality is increasingly valued and put under study in qualitative research. As Flick (2002) claims, “the era of big narratives and theories is over: locally, temporally and situationally limited narratives are now required” (p. 2). Given the fact that a phenomenon is experienced and perceived by the multitude of social beings engaging in it, a common reality can be constituted and symbolized in varying ways, manners, and modes. No better-or-worse judgment is to be imposed on these distinct constructions of reality; each of them is seen equally meaningful and constitutive of the complexity and plurality of human life and human interaction. Moreover, reality as the construction of the lived experiences of individuals and groups, is not fixed but is instead temporal, everchanging, and processive; it is subject to the changing of specific social-historical or cultural contexts. As Johnson (1987) claims, “...what counts as knowledge is always a contextually dependent matter” (p. xiii). As a consequence, the perceptual accounts of individuals and groups are in a state of change and instability. However, individualized, socially and historically specific constructions describe and contribute to a rich, complex, and substantive picture of social reality and human interactions. For the purpose of further clarification, I venture to borrow Guba and Lincoln’s (2004) explanation to sum up and augment my ontological

belief; realities of the world:

are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature, and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions. Constructions are not more or less “true,” in any absolute sense, but simply more or less informed and/or sophisticated. Constructions are alterable, as are their associated “realities” (p. 26).

Social reality is the product of thought or mind (Sciarra, 1999) and is constructed in human understanding. Realities of the life world are actually multiple versions of social subjects’ perception and understanding of their lived experiences of the world. As Berg (1995) contends, reality becomes an interpretation of various definitional options, since realities are dependent on particular ways that individuals and groups constitute the meanings of their own experiences of a common reality.

This hermeneutic worldview leads me to choose qualitative research methods to explore the experiences and understandings of Chinese youth with respect to sex and sexuality in the age of AIDS. This investigation of Chinese young people’s realities associated with sexuality and AIDS is an effort to construct their interpretations of the life experiences that they have lived in relation to sexuality and the HIV epidemic. Set in such an interpretivist or constructionist paradigm, the qualitative study I have conducted is a process of reproducing or reconstructing the knowers’ (the social actors’) perception and interpretation of their realities. In Ferguson’s (1993) terms, it is an interpretation of other people’s interpretations, or “a type of second-order interpretation” (p. 39). As Schwandt (2000) argues, an interpretivist, qualitative inquiry involves seeking an understanding of how people make sense of their worlds, and reconstructing the interpretations of people engaging in social actions. Given that social actors make use of signs, symbols, and social structures to make sense of their life worlds and that the most common system of symbols is language (Berg, 1995), the interpretivist, qualitative researcher engages in reconstructing actors’ interpretations of their life experiences as are communicated in various modes of language (verbal, visual, and others). In this present qualitative study, a group of Chinese college students were given cameras to use visual language to construct their understandings of their lived experiences in relation to sexuality and HIV and AIDS.

What I attempted to do as a qualitative inquirer is to reconstitute their interpretations of their life experiences related to sexuality and AIDS based on my analysis of the visual as well as the verbal data I collected that represented their understandings. This “second-order interpretation” (Ferguson, 1993, p. 39) that I constituted serves to construct the knowledge or meanings of realities experienced by young people as actors in reality.

After presenting my ontological beliefs about the nature of reality, I explain my assumptions about the relationship between the inquirer and the known, between the researcher and reality, that is, my epistemological stance. A researcher’s epistemological assumptions play a critical role in shaping her choice of research methods as they are a central aspect of the selection of the qualitative methods of inquiry and the overall practice of qualitative research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004). I discuss my epistemological stance by a cursory revisiting of the history of interpretivism, which I used to frame my study. In the early years, interpretivism perceives the inquiry into social subjects’ understanding of life worlds as “an intellectual process whereby a knower (the inquirer as subject) gains knowledge about an object (the meaning of human action)” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 194). As championed by Dilthey and Husserl, this objectification of what is under inquiry requires the interpreter to remain in a state of being “unaffected by and external to the interpretive process” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 194), or in Husserl’s terminology, to bracket one’s own subjective factors such as hypotheses, expectations, and assumptions in an effort to achieve an objective understanding of what is under inquiry. However, Heidegger and Gadamer among other postmodernist philosophers challenge these disinterested attitudes of inquiry as being idealized and unattainable. Heidegger and Gadamer, two major representatives of philosophical hermeneutics, assert that it is “impossible to escape the subjectivizing influences of language, culture, ideology, expectations or assumptions” of the interpreter (Rennie, 1999, p. 6). As further articulated by Denzin and Lincoln (2000), the inquirer and what is under investigation are interactively linked: the researcher cannot conduct her enquiry and present her findings while suspending her values, traditions, and assumptions from her daily and academic life. The researcher is gendered, biographically situated, and professionally trained, and so inevitably brings an interpretative community to her inquiry, which encompasses

particular historical research traditions and professional development. In other words, all these personal factors are incorporated into the research practice, and contribute to the formation of a distinct point of view that the researcher takes when conducting her inquiry. The researcher's individualized point of view shaped by subjective factors makes an objective observation almost impossible.

The requirement that the inquirer (the interpreter) bracket her personalized and subjective factors, so she can use a neutral gaze to make an inquiry is a problematic concept for many theorists. For example, Bourdieu (2000) asserts:

[N]othing is more false, in my view, than the maxim almost universally accepted in the social sciences according to which the researcher must put nothing of himself into his research (as cited in Reed-Danahay, 2005, p. 1).

The gaze of the researcher “filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.19) is affected by the researcher's subjectivity and positionality. This gaze, which is linguistically, socially, culturally, experientially, and gender based is by no means a clear window into the observed. However, this “subjective” nature of qualitative research incurs criticisms and provokes questions and debates concerning the validity and accountability of qualitative inquiry.

In response to the accusation that qualitative researchers are “journalists, or soft scientists” and their inquiry is “unscientific, or only exploratory, or subjective” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 7), feminist researchers look into the nature of “scientific” knowledge production, which is portrayed as “value-neutral, objective, dispassionate, disinterested, and so forth” (Harding, 1987, p. 182) and find that science itself is a social product. By examining various scientific methods of social investigation, feminist researchers find that scientists are “socially situated human beings with partial vision, and that no scientific method ensures access to some incontrovertible truth” (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 44). Echoing this point of view, Bleier (1984) notes that it is impossible for science to be a neutral, dispassionate, value-free pursuit of truth, since “science is a social activity and a cultural product created by persons who live in the world of science as well as in the societies that bred them” (p. 193). In a word, subjectivity is never

abandoned by scientists in their inquiry of the so-called scientific truth.

Given that social researchers (and researchers in the natural sciences) cannot discard their subjectivity and volition, it becomes critical to seek ways to gain a better understanding of people's experiences of reality so to reconstitute valid accounts of social life. While the kind of understanding that qualitative researchers pursue is "participative, conversational, and dialogic" as defined by philosophical hermeneutics (Schwandt, 2000, p. 195), the qualitative researcher should be "more like an actor in a situation with other actors (the researcher participants)" and allow herself to be "taken up into the world of the participant" (Sciarra, 1999, p. 43). In such a situation, the qualitative researcher manages to enter the inside by immersing herself in the social contexts and minds of her participants so to gain better insights into their experiences and interpretations of reality. To achieve a profound immersion in the social contexts and thoughts of my study participants, I use participant observation and in-depth qualitative interviews as major means of data collection. These two methods provide me the roles of observer, actor, and insider, and allow me to observe participants' behaviours and access their thoughts and emotions. This strategy facilitates my effort to obtain greater insights into participants' life experiences related to sexuality and AIDS.

Moreover, I employ the visual method of collaborative photography, which engages my participants in the process of discussing and negotiating a commonly shared understanding of their experiences through photography and team effort. The engagement in collaborative photography helps to deepen my participants' thinking and understanding of their experiences of reality. In addition, it offers them the means of "realizing themselves" both through recreation, a fun activity that gives them opportunities to feel their emotions and thoughts more intensely (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 14), and through experiencing their own power to constitute their own meanings of stigmatized matters via an artistic medium. In this present study, the engagement of young people as photographers helps them to achieve a deeper thinking about and understanding of what they want their images to represent and of themselves as social actors and meaning-definers of their own life experiences. This visual strategy also makes it possible for the

researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' interpretations of their life experiences by providing the researcher with a lens through which to look into how the participants see, define, and interpret their worlds. Seeing through the eyes of young people serves to situate the researcher in the vision and thought of her participants, and helps her to achieve a deep immersion into their contexts and minds. In other words, the use of visual methods promotes the understanding of both parties, and leads me to a better understanding of young people's interpretations or understanding of their lived experience related to sexuality and HIV and AIDS.

Moreover, as noted earlier, the understanding that qualitative researchers seek of their social actors' interpretation of reality is "conversational and dialogic" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 195). Qualitative research is an effort to constitute a valid explanation of people's interpretations of their experienced realities. However, people's understandings of reality, or any one phenomenon, are diverse and, in many cases, conflicting, since each person's understanding is individual, experience-based, and specifically contextualized. To grasp the richness and complexity of social reality, according to hermeneutic perspectives such as Gadamer's (1975), the qualitative researcher needs to present the inconsistent discourses of their participants' understanding of reality, and invite them into a dialogue by juxtaposing them as intertexts referring to one another. In addition, the researcher also engages in the dialogue, conversing with the discourse-makers (participants) by providing his or her own text of reading the participants' texts. In my study, I display my participants' photographic images with accompanying captions to create an anchoring base or a platform to invite the engagement of other discourses, such as verbal texts from my participants' interviews and focus groups, as well as my texts of analysis and reflection on my participants' texts.

The juxtaposition of participants' verbal and visual texts with that of the researcher's (analysis, comments, reflections, fieldnotes) contributes to the formation of a conversational dialogue. This juxtaposition also invites the readers of these texts to offer their own readings and feedback. In this way, the understanding that qualitative inquiry pursues is "produced in that dialogue, not something reproduced by an interpreter

through an analysis of that which he or she seeks to understand” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 195).

In conclusion, the hermeneutic and interpretivist worldviews that I hold lead me to use the visual ethnography approach, which involves using visual methods and other qualitative research strategies including in-depth extended interviews, focus groups, and participant observation for data collection, so I can reproduce or reconstruct my participants’ understandings and meanings of the realities they experience.

## **THE USE OF VISUAL METHODOLOGIES IN RESEARCH**

Visual research methods include the use of visual technologies and images (Pink, 2001). Recently, visual media such as photographs, films, and video are increasingly used as genuine forms and sources of data for research purposes (Flick, 2006). Based on the nature of the production of visual materials, Banks (n.d.) classifies visual research methods into three broad activities in relation to the researcher: “making visual representations,” “examining pre-existing visual representations,” and “collaborating with social actors in the production of visual representations.” My study involves the practice of the third classification as I engage young Chinese people in collaborative and ethnographic photography to empower them to produce visual representations of their understandings and interpretations of their life experiences in relation to sexuality and HIV and AIDS. With the growing prominence given to the visual in the social sciences, visual methods are employed and experimented with, resulting in a range of distinct but interrelated visual methodologies that include “photovoice, video and photo documentary, visual art-making, material culture and performance, approaches that can be used as modes of inquiry, modes of representation and modes of dissemination of findings” (*What is visual methodology*, n.d) as defined on the IVM (International Visual Methodologies for Social Change) Website.

### **Photovoice**

Photovoice, the primary visual tool used in my research, originates from the collaborative

efforts of Carolyn Wang and M.A. Burris in late 1990s. Photovoice is a community-oriented participatory research methodology, significant in its blending of a grassroots approach to social action. This visual strategy is theoretically underpinned by critical consciousness, feminist theory, and documentary photography, and empirically, it is a visual participatory tool used in participatory action research (PAR) projects, such as Wang's Yunnan Village Women's Reproductive Health and Development Program (1998) and later the Youth Violence Prevention Project (2001). Based on the idea that "people are experts in their own lives" (Wang, Morrel-Samuels, Hutchison, Bell, & Pestronk, 2004, p. 911), community participants with the least access to people who make decisions that affect their lives (e.g., policy makers, specialists, and professionals) are provided with cameras, so they can document and communicate about the social problems and issues that most concern them. This grassroots approach helps to amplify the vision and experience of the participants by providing those who might be hesitant to speak an alternative visual means to express and voice their thoughts about social issues. Group discussion, an important step that follows the photograph-making stage, helps to promote dialogue among community members about important social issues and problems that are represented in their photographic images. The final step, which is to present the problems and issues that community members consider important (and sometimes suggestions for solutions) to policy makers and other privileged people, aims to ultimately exert an impact on the enactment and implementation of public policies.

As noted earlier, in part, I use visual methodologies in my ethnographic inquiry as instruments for my participants to document and gain a deeper understanding of their social world and life experiences by "putting people in the picture" (de Lange, Mitchell, & Stuart, 2007) and so that my participants can "see for themselves," two approaches reflected in the body of work of the IVM project (*What is the I.V.M. project?* n.d.). In addition, I also use visual methodologies to contribute to the deepening of my understanding of the observed by allowing myself to see the world through the perspectives of my participants. As such, research involving the application of visual tools is a process of inquiry for both the researcher and the researched. Furthermore, the use of visual methodologies involving the practice of photovoice helps to promote an

action-oriented agenda, making this qualitative research an inquiry that combines research, popular education, and social change.

### **A powerful mode of representation and communication**

The use of the visual in this ethnographic study addressing HIV and AIDS and sexuality among Chinese youth provides my participants with a new and nonverbal language to visually or artistically tell, portray, and expand their life experiences in relation to sexuality and STIs/HIV and AIDS—stigmatized subject matter in Chinese society. As such, there are a number of key components.

### ***A vehicle for youth to narrate in more than words***

Sexuality remains a social taboo in contemporary, predominantly conservative China. During interviews, research participants are inclined to give reserved or socially accepted answers to questions regarding sex and the human body. The authenticity and accuracy of participants' concepts and emotions surrounding this taboo subject can be lost due to their constraint of their own free expression (Huang & Uba, 1992). However, visual forms of narration can compensate for this loss, and also expand participants' vision and experience in relation to the issues under investigation. Cameras provided to them serve as vehicles to convey their genuine and underlying views about sex and sexuality among young people. Photography, like painting, is the expression of what is impossible to express in direct speech, and wise observers can benefit by savouring the image of things and developing a sympathetic response (Butler, 2001). Thus, the visual approach offers my participants an alternative means of imparting what they see in more than words. Moreover, images have the power to “disrupt” and “excavate” silences (Brink, 1998, as cited in Mitchell, Walsh, & Moletsane, 2006, p. 103) as is well illustrated by the projects involving the use of visual arts-based participatory methodologies in a variety of contexts such as South Africa, Swaziland, Rwanda, and Canada. For example, a project set up in South Africa (Mitchell, Walsh, & Moletsane, 2006) illustrates the virtue of using visual-based participatory methodologies to engage young women to explore the themes and concerns associated with the taboo subject of “gender violence,” so they can more openly express their reflections visually or artistically, and thus shatter their long-

standing silence about this violence. Likewise, the visual mode of representation and narration, as practiced in my study, secures a more free and profound expression about sexuality and HIV and AIDS among young Chinese adults, which results in a breaking of the ingrained silence imposed on these taboo subjects.

### ***A nonverbal language to portray and expand participants' perception of realities***

Throughout human history, images always have been used to give form to concepts of reality. For example, over the past one and a half centuries, the effect of photography, accepted as an effect of reality, has been felt throughout modern life; the photographic medium is one of the most important and influential means of expressing the human condition (Wright, 1999; Collier & Collier, 1986). Photography provides access to various details about all aspects of human life and activity purely through our encounter with photographic images and with the ways that the camera can define the world. This fundamental connection between visualization and the organization of human existence and experiences is emphasized in John Berger's (1977) famous comment that "seeing comes before words ... and establish our place in the surrounding world" (p. 7). In present times, a universal phenomenon prevails throughout the world—increasingly, we are living in visual cultures: popular culture is largely image-saturated, and the visual is the texture of human life. Abundant research in cultural studies and other fields also reveals the importance of visual forms in mediating and constituting human experiences and human relationships (Banks, 2001). In the present study, participants were given cameras to enable them to use a visual vehicle to translate various aspects of their existence in the context of HIV and AIDS. With cameras in hand, cameras that function as impartial clarifiers and modifiers of human understanding (Collier & Collier, 1986), my participant photographers capture, portray, and expand their perception and understanding of the world under the threat of the HIV pandemic.

### ***A democratized mode of self-expression***

Reality amounts to the interpretations of one's perceptions of the world. Seeing is a way of interpretation—selection, abstraction, and transformation—and seeing is an approach to the cultural construction and the production of knowledge of social reality (Jenks,

1995). Wright (1999) observes that by using the medium of photography, a multitude of photographers select the characteristics and visual qualities of their reality that enable them to conform to their own cultural traditions, rather than to be obedient to those imposed or demanded by the authority. In this sense, photography can provide photographers the power of free expression. Thus, by engaging in photography, my young participants are able to construct their accounts of how they see and what they experience in the current contexts of the HIV crisis, largely free from the power dynamics between the researcher and the researched, and between the adult and youth. This democratized mode of free expression and self-expression allows the voices of my participants to be privileged (as opposed to the voices of the researcher or the adults who work with them) and to more freely emerge. In addition, their inner thoughts and emotions also find representation in their visual images. The application of visual tools in this study offers my participants a vehicle through which they can narrate stories based on their own understanding of the world through their own lenses, whereas as an adult researcher, I gain greater insights into how young people see and interpret their own concepts of social realities.

### ***Lens through which the researcher gains in-depth understanding***

Over the last three decades, qualitative researchers have realized the significance of images to enhance understanding of the human condition (Prosser, 1998). Photographs are much more than a simple record of what appears before the lens; rather, they should be “regarded and evaluated as industrial products situated in a broader historical and cultural context” (Wright, 1999, p. 69). Photographs are signifiers of subcultures that their photographers inhabit. The photographs produced by the young people involved in this present study are visual cultural texts that embody the sexual culture of young adults and explain youth sexuality in contemporary China. Analysis of these visual images helps me to construct accounts of the present-day experiences and perceptions of young people with respect to the relationship of their sexuality and AIDS. Moreover, photographic images have the potential to plumb the depths of their photographers’ human condition, and can reveal to viewers not only the facets of human existence to which they may not have been aware, but also the interior life embodied in an easily intelligible photo

documentary of great psychological insight (Wright, 1999). The photographs made by my participants to represent their perceptions of the complex and stigmatized issues of sexuality and HIV and AIDS may tell stories that I am unable to access through other channels, and reveal their inner thoughts, emotions, and untold experiences with regard to these issues.

Furthermore, my participant's visual products are lenses to see through their eyes, which facilitate a better understanding of present-day young people in China and their conceptualizations of sexuality and other issues. As Berger (1977) states, "Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other sights" (p. 10). These photographs helped me explore how my participants used visual language to construct their accounts of the social world. The objects, people, and scenes that they chose to relocate in their "particular sights" (in their photographs) to symbolize their understanding reveal rich meanings.

The images produced by my participants also help to set up a dialogue between image-makers and viewers, who include myself and the other participants. The photographs are a site of social interaction among the people involved in the discussions about them. Through these dialogues, a further understanding of what is represented and what surrounds the photographs is achieved, and thus, new knowledge arises from the social interaction and discussion involving diverse perspectives and voices.

To date, visual-arts-based methodologies have been applied effectively in HIV and AIDS research related to youth and gender issues, as well as in HIV/AIDS prevention programs across the world to facilitate the agency of youth in the fight against the HIV epidemic. For example, a study involving teachers and community health workers (Mitchell, de Lange, Moletsane, Stuart, & Buthelezi, 2005) uses photovoice to explore how participants look at stigma in their lives. It proves that photovoice is a particularly useful tool for reflexivity and self-study in that teachers are placed in a position of "seeing for themselves" rather than being told what the issues are. In another study that uses photovoice (Mitchell, Walsh, & Moletsane, 2006), a group of South African girls use

cameras to document the ways that they see gender violence in the context of HIV and AIDS. This visual medium not only provides an opportunity for the researcher to “see through the eyes of young people” by focusing on what they chose to represent visually in relation to “feeling safe” or “feeling not so safe,” but also helps to prepare youth for action and social change. In the following section, I discuss photovoice as a participatory tool to engage participants in social issues concerning sexuality and HIV and AIDS, and to help them instigate action and social change.

## **TOWARD AN ACTION-ORIENTED AGENDA: USING VISUAL METHODOLOGIES AS A PARTICIPATORY TOOL**

In the social sciences, a great deal of interest exists with respect to using visual and participatory elements for research designs that have a built-in “research as social change” orientation (Mitchell et al., 2005; Martin, 2004). In the present study, I test out visual methodologies not only to record and discover social reality and knowledge, but also as participatory tools for taking action and generating broader social change.

### **My research in collaboration with youth as a participatory study**

In the face of a worsening phenomenon in which young adults increasingly are vulnerable to STI/HIV, I recognize the significance of conducting a study as a response to social change and as participatory action research (PAR). PAR is a form of research that generates knowledge claims for the purpose of taking action to promote social change and social analysis; it combines social investigation, education, and social action to define and address social problems, particularly among marginalized and oppressed groups (Balcazar et al., 2004; Greenwood & Levin, 1998). Szala-Meneok and Lohfeld (2005) define PAR as “one of several transformative practices that combine research, popular education, and action designed to benefit a disenfranchised group” (p. 53). A central tenant of PAR is that it not only aims to empower unprivileged individuals to enhance their ability to control the circumstances of their lives more effectively and to keep improving this capacity, but more importantly, it aims to facilitate higher order

social, organizational, or political change (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Drawing on the PAR frame, I design my study to focus on the concerns of young people whose agency previously is ignored, so they can increase their citizen power and voice within the research process as well as in the communities in which they live. I expect that their engagement in the research process—identifying a problem, collecting and analyzing information, sharing it among themselves and beyond, and acting on the problem to find solutions—will be a transformative act for them. Through their participation in my research study, I expect that they will improve their HIV awareness, and learn new information and skills about how to protect themselves from STI/HIV infection; take advantage of networking and support opportunities; develop self-confidence in their learning processes and actions; make more appropriate choices in their sexual behaviour; and take control of their own life situations. With respect to the research process as a learning act, participants can learn “for empowerment and democratization” (Elden & Levin, 1991, p. 17), and the reestablishment of the power and control to deal with the social issues that affect their lives further and ultimately promotes broader social and political transformations.

Balcazar et al. (2004) emphasize that the empowerment and democratization of research participants is based on an egalitarian, respectful, sincere, and open relationship and partnership between the researcher and participants. Research is a political act in which power as a principal factor exerts an impact on research design and practice (Morris, 2002). The long-standing power imbalance between the trained researcher and the researched concerns participatory action researchers who believe that knowledge is produced in conversation and negotiation between the researched and the researcher. In a PAR study, research participants (called “subjects” in traditional research) participate actively in the whole process: from inception and design, to data collection and analysis, through to the presentation and dissemination of results and beyond. At each research stage, the researcher and the participants most actively involved negotiate how to move the project forward. In these situations, participants engage in the study not only as subjects but also as partners and researchers. In a secure and democratic climate in which participants’ voices and agency are valued and activated, participants are inclined and

encouraged to express more clearly, freely, and loudly their concerns about social issues and to seek their solutions.

Giving young people the role of protagonists to address social issues that affect them paves a path for self-empowerment, change, and action. Aggleton and Campbell (2000) argue that effective prevention work and education responding to HIV and AIDS must incorporate the interests, needs, and voices of young people. Mitchell, Reid-Walsh, and Pithouse (2004) also claim that prevention programs “from the outside” (as privileging adults, donors, specialists, and others) are doomed to failure unless youth are given a voice in the policy dialogue about issues regarding their own health. By drawing on these significant research experiences, I design a PAR project to actively engage young people to take control of the various stages of the research, so they have ample opportunities to speak in their full and loud voices, and then ultimately take action for positive social change. I employ visual arts-based methodologies, specifically photovoice, to encourage my participants to act as “recorders, and potential catalysts” (Wang & Burris, 1994, p. 175) of issues and problems related to HIV and AIDS. Much empirical research has shown that visual arts-based methods work effectively to engage participants in social issues such as HIV and AIDS, since the visual and artistic expression of these social problems and issues can trigger further reflection and generate action (Mitchell, Walsh, & Moletsane, 2006). The visual documentary of a PAR project offers itself as art, as resource for change and action, and as a research strategy (Lykes, 2001).

### **A “research as social change approach” and visual methodologies**

This present PAR study in collaboration with young people draws on Schratz and Walker’s (1995) theory of research as social change, which also sees research as a social process and as potentially educational and transformative for those involved in it. Schratz and Walker (1995) demystify the research process by emphasizing its social and personal nature, claiming that research “is not a technical set of specialist skills but implicit in social action and close to the ways in which we act in everyday life” (p. 2). Given that research and practice, academe and social life are inextricably interrelated and interrupt each other in complex ways, Schratz and Walker (1995) advocate the use of

research as a means to improve our ability to read situations and to evaluate and extend our practice, and as a way to respond to and intervene in social problems and issues that mean the most to those affected. Research should provide those actively involved in it with new possibilities for change and action. Schratz and Walker (1995) map out a variety of qualitative research methods that can be used not only to help the researcher gain greater insights into what is under study but also to engage the research participants in the transformative process. Among these qualitative research methods, Mitchell (2006b) identifies a range of visual research methods (i.e., photography, mapping, and drawing) as being suggestive of pathways for change.

### **Visual methodologies as a participatory tool**

In the present qualitative study involving the use of photovoice, I explore the representational and interpretative possibilities that the visual arts can offer qualitative inquiry (Mitchell, Moletsane, Stuart, Buthelezi, & de Lange, 2005), as well as the possibilities of using visual arts-based methodologies as tools for education and intervention in relation to the social issues of sexuality and HIV and AIDS. I attempt to understand how visual methodologies can be used as a participatory tool that engages participants in the social issues of HIV and AIDS, empowers them in the fight against the HIV epidemic, and instigates action and social change. By using photovoice as a research and participatory tool in a study with young people, I discover the advantages and potential that this visual strategy can offer.

### ***An affordable and manageable tool***

The use of photography as a research method and a participatory tool is realistic and affordable. Since cameras are easily accessible commodities for the Chinese and do not demand a particular talent for photography, picture taking has become part of the everyday routine for many Chinese families. With the increasing availability of digital cameras in the urban areas of China, digital photography has become a practice of great fun and convenience through which people can produce pictures without the expense of developing film; they can just upload their photos to their computer. Some of my participants had a lot of experience with digital photography, and those without

experience were certainly capable of learning how to handle the equipment. As Ewald (2001) observes, based on her long-term experience working with thousands of children, even children are quick to learn how to handle a camera, and are able to make photographs of what they see and imagine in accordance with their own sense of composition. My research participants and partners are university students who had no difficulty using photography to construct their accounts of the social world.

### ***Facilitating youth's engagement as cultural producers***

In the context of youth as “cultural producers” (Buckingham, 1993, 2000), young people's active engagement in visual production helps them to expand their vision and deepen their understanding of their life experiences related to sexuality during the crisis of AIDS. As Willis (1990) argues, young people's use of “cultural media,” such as television, camera, video, and magazines is an essentially active, dynamic, sensuous process in which they creatively seek “to establish their presence, identity and meaning” (p. 2). David Buckingham (1993; 2000) also recognizes young people as creative audiences and producers of media who gradually establish their gender and self identity while consuming or producing media. During the process of the media production in this present study, young people saw, selected, abstracted, and created visual accounts of their perception of the world by harnessing their creativity as agency to widen their vision of the world and social issues like HIV and AIDS. Another reason to include visual approaches to address youth sexuality and HIV and AIDS is that visual methods can offer a set of genres, texts, images, and representations that can facilitate young people's interest and engagement in the research. The photographic media with diverse genres and forms are instrumental in motivating young people to see, think, and write, and in enriching the skills and understanding they already possess.

### ***A tool for individual empowerment and social change***

Visual methodologies can be used as a tool for both individual empowerment and broader social change (Mitchell, 2006). Empowerment is a form of strategic intervention that involves the harnessing of the creative energies of those who previously may have been seen as “victims,” such as women, children, youth, and poor people (Baylies & Bujra,

1995). Visual-arts-based participatory methodologies can mobilize the creativity of participants as agents for active engagement, change, and action. Based on her investigation of various art projects addressing HIV and AIDS in South Africa, Martin (2004) asserts that the visual arts can make a difference in the response to the HIV pandemic through inspiring participants' creativity as an agent for representation, action, and social transformation. As applies to my research, visual art is meant to promote young people's involvement in the research process by allowing them a space in which to visualize their conceptions and experiences; to map out the issues associated with the spread of STIs/HIV among them; to seek solutions; and to disseminate information and call for action among their peers, communities, and the broader society. As such, the visual form functions not only as a facilitator for young people's engagement in the PAR process—and in HIV and AIDS prevention activism—but also as a powerful vehicle for them to voice their own concerns pertaining to STIs/HIV transmission.

The empowerment of young women remains critical in the context of the striking gender differences in the patterns of HIV infection among young people in China and around the world. While women are more biologically vulnerable to HIV infection than men, socio-cultural norms advocating gender inequality tend to deprive them of the awareness and purposeful action to take control of their own sexual behaviour and life situations, which makes them more vulnerable to the HIV epidemic. Since young women are the population most vulnerable to HIV and AIDS, curbing the tide of the HIV pandemic requires a transformation in gender relations as much as it requires miracle cures. Thus, the empowerment of women is both a strategy and a solution. In the present study, empowering women participants involved engaging them in media production and enabling them to voice their views and concerns about their sexual beliefs, sexual and social identity, and women's vulnerability to STIs/HIV. I modeled this study on a collaborative video project called "Girls Speak Out" in South Africa (Mitchell, Walsh & Moletsane, 2006). The young women in this study were provided with the equipment and skills they needed to shoot short videos to talk about what they felt to be important in their own lives. First, through group discussion, they determine what are the most crucial issues of safety and violence in their own lives. Then, through a collaborative effort in

seeing, selection, and facilitated discussion, they develop a seven-minute video to express their feelings and concerns about sexual violence. This study reveals that the young women's active engagement in this collaborative video documentary contributed to their understanding of their own living environments, to the shattering of the silences about gender violence, and to the amplification of their voices. In this instance, making a video documentary is not merely a process of art production, but also self-study and self-empowerment. In the photovoice project I set up among college students, I engage women students (as well as male students) in collaborative photography as a channel for them to speak their voices. Hall (1993) claims that "participatory research fundamentally is about the right to speak" (p. xvii). Photovoice fulfills the task of giving voice to participants through artful engagement. I also use collaborative photography to facilitate participants' creativity as an agent for reflection, self-study, and action.

Visual-based participatory methodologies have proved successful in the empowerment of youth in a variety of HIV and AIDS prevention programs and studies. The project *Gendering HIV/AIDS Prevention*, which probes the possibilities of using popular culture/media in the HIV/AIDS prevention program, reveals that youth culture artists (in photography, hip hop, graffiti, and so on) play a powerful part in AIDS activism (Larkin, Mitchell, Walsh & Smith, 2001). Another project, *the Soft Cover Project* (Mitchell & Walsh, 2001-2003), uses a youth-based participatory approach, involving young people in the media production of their own creative artifacts (i.e., graphic novels, photographs, and rap poetry) to enable them to speak about their understanding of sexuality and AIDS. This strategy of promoting young people as producers of popular culture/media regenerates their enthusiasm to fight HIV and AIDS and raises their awareness about prevention.

### ***Connecting youth affected by AIDS***

With HIV and AIDS becoming a global crisis among young people, visual methodologies are powerful tools that young people and children from diverse cultures can use to present, communicate, and share their stories, feelings, and life experiences in relation to HIV and AIDS. Moreover, the visual is a medium that transcends cultural differences

(Collier & Collier, 1986). All people can “naturally” understand photographs by virtue of the ability of cameras to replicate visual perception (Wright, 1999). In this regard, photography constitutes a “universal language.” In the context of the radical increase in communications between people around the world, photographic images help to dissolve cultural differences in comprehension and facilitate the exchange of information among various peoples. This phenomenon accounts for the worldwide popularity of exhibitions that display photos, drawings, and video documentaries addressing HIV and AIDS, exhibitions that are produced by artists from specific geographical locales but which touch the hearts of audiences worldwide, despite the linguistic and cultural barriers (Martin, 2004).

Communications among young people across the globe also are made possible by advanced technology, which mobilizes their engagement in media production, and helps them to share their ideas and emotions by enabling them to post their works in an internationally accessible cyberspace. With the increasing availability of digital cameras and camcorders, nonprofessionals can easily participate in media production. To share their visual work, they can upload their digital images in a matter of seconds onto Websites or transmit them by e-mail. This convenience makes media production an easy-to-do thing and great fun. By virtue of high technology, young people on one side of the globe can easily visit the AIDS Websites posting the media products made by young people on the other side of the globe. This visual mode of communication—that enables the integration of texts and images, still or moving—helps to build a substantial social network among young people and children around the world. In this regard, visual-based participatory methodologies unite youth, children, women, and other groups of people affected by HIV and AIDS, and contribute to establishing a dialogue by which they can share and communicate their understanding of their perceptual world under the threat of HIV and AIDS. At the international community level, connecting all the young people who are affected by this worldwide threat and who are actively involved in cultural/media production helps to promote young people’s understanding of themselves as individuals as well as a collective in relation to the HIV and AIDS crisis. In much of their work that focuses on children and youth, organizations such as UNESCO and UNAIDS are looking

for innovative ways to use cultural/media production to facilitate their fight against HIV and AIDS and to create effective HIV intervention programs.

Even though research that uses visual methodologies cannot solve the problem of STIs/HIV transmission among young people—which is a complex interaction of biomedical, socio-cultural, political, and economic factors—visual arts-based methodologies have the power to engage young people as agents of action and social change. As a participatory tool, visual-arts-based methodologies can be used to build action strategies among participants; and as a research tool, they can help to widen the researcher's understanding of the realities experienced by the researched. In a PAR study, the use of visual methodologies makes it possible to conduct research both as a scholarly endeavour and a practical effort towards action and social change.

## **CRITICAL ISSUES IN THE USE OF THE VISUAL IN SOCIAL RESERACH**

In recent years in the social sciences, visual approaches and methods have gained a growing prominence: visual research methodologies as well as visual data are increasingly incorporated into the process of social investigation and analysis (Flick, 2002). Visual images are considered as valid as other forms of data in ethnography (Pink, 2001), and visual documentation is recognized as part of research triangulation, alongside other forms of representation, which contributes to building a rich, detailed picture of the social world (Harper, 2005). However, even though I recognize the value of the visual data gained from my qualitative study of the photographs of my young participants, I also raise some critical issues arising from my employment of visual methods and my analysis of my visual data.

### **My ethical concerns**

Matters of ethics, which are significantly embedded in the specific research contexts in which ethnographers work (Pink, 2001), are an ordinary part of social inquiry that warrants adequate concern at every stage of research. The use of visual methodologies in social research makes the related ethical issues far more complicated. Based on my research experiences, I discuss my ethical concerns about the use of the visual in my

study. First, the use of photography in research should be appropriate to the customs of the local (visual) culture; in other words, the photographic techniques should not be sensitive to local practices. Otherwise, the use of a camera as a representational and research tool would not be acceptable or contribute to a research study. Wuhan, the city in which I conducted my fieldwork, is a major metropolis in China where the use of cameras (digital) has become a routine practice for many families to capture the important moments of their lives, and to record the traces of change in their domestic and broader social arenas. Photography plays an active role in documenting the private memory and public history of local peoples. In this context, the employment of visual methodologies in the research setting is acceptable and appropriate.

Second, with respect to the research agenda, it is of great importance to include an ethical education for the participants involved in photography. In their independent practice of photography, they need be ethnically conscious of their process to avoid creating any anxiety or harm to the people included in the photographs. To minimize the risk, I raised ethical issues in photovoice workshops and reiterated them before my participants started taking their photographs. I reinforced the idea that my participants should always ask the permission of potential photo subjects, and take pictures of objects and scenes where possible. Third, since visual research materials are usually jointly produced and owned by the research team, it is necessary, as advised by Pink (2001), to clarify the rights of use and ownership of the photographic images before the research team engages in collaborative media production so to avoid ethical problems such as the appropriation of visual materials without the consensual permission from the whole team. Finally, I adhere to the “giving something back” principle, which also is applicable to visual ethnography (Pink, 2001, p. 44). While seeing this principle as a way to fulfil reciprocity—empowering my participants through engaging them in the photovoice project addressing HIV and AIDS—I also consider other ways of giving something back to the participants who have been actively involved in the project (see Chapter Four).

### **Interpretive challenges**

The interpretive challenges that emerge with a visual inquiry are critical issues worthy of

note. As a reader of the visual images produced by my participants, I grappled with the gap between the representation of the image-maker and the interpretation of the viewer. The young participants of my study took the photographs that serve as documentary evidence and visual accounts of how they make sense of their social world. However, how can my gaze, the gaze of a socio-culturally and historically situated and value-laden adult, woman researcher pass into the inner world of these youth and grasp what they wanted the images to represent through my analysis of their images? My concern about the distance between the interpretation of the viewer and the original meaning the photographer gives to their visual texts originates, in part, with the famous polarized antagonism between Klein the photographer, who made the photograph, and Barthes the theorist who interpreted the photograph. Some time later, I was relieved to realize that it is normal to worry about the loss of the integrity and individuality of a text when it is interpreted (Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985). Also, it is normal that no one can attain a value-free objective interpretation (Gadamer, 1975). Johnson (1993) explicates Gadamer's view about interpretation and the impossibility and undesirability of objective interpretation by saying:

... as Gadamer has argued, even if it were possible to occupy an eternal standpoint (which it is not), this would utterly destroy the very conditions that make it possible for us to understand anything at all. For it is precisely our tradition—through language, institutions, rituals, accumulated experience, symbols, and practices—that gives us the means to understand what we experience. To extract ourselves... would strip us of the resources for experiencing anything meaningful (p. 228).

With this in mind, is it ever possible for an interpreter, laden with subjectivity and a biased gaze, to reconstruct the valid meaning that the photographer has constituted in his/her image?

Hermeneutics recognizes this problem of interpretation that arises from the gulf between the reader's horizon and the horizon in which the text lies, particularly in the situation where the reader's pre-understandings constrain him or her from an accurate sense of what the text "says" (Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985).

In the case of my visual analysis, I was surely bound to my culturally and historically

determined horizon, and the reading from this “affected” gaze separated me from the original intent and contents of the images. However, the likelihood exists that interpreters can make valid textual interpretations (Gadamer, 1975). As Sawin (2004) explains, based on her reading of Gadamer, the interpreter needs to break through the barriers that separate him or her from the text through an engagement in a conversation or dialogue with the text. In an echo of Gadamer’s view, Bakhtin claims that getting involved in discourse is to engage in dialogue (Sawin, 2004), and Paul Ricoeur also argues that the meaning of a text can and should be arbitrated by the conflict of opposing interpretations (Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985). These master philosophers come to a consensus pertaining to the practice of interpretation—that the reconstruction of valid textual meaning entails abandoning one single authoritative reading and inviting multiple voices. Drawing on the preceding arguments, I sought diverse readings of the photographs I collected in the study, which include the interpretations of the photographers, viewers, and myself. I follow a similar approach to that of Lather and Smithies (1997) who construct the accounts of HIV-positive women by juxtaposing the multiple stories and voices of these women into a montage that weaves a complex text of their experience of HIV and AIDS.

In my interpretative practice of analysis of the image data, I faced another challenge concerning how to make a holistic reading of all the aspects reflected in the images. Any visual image, which is the product of pointing a camera at the world, contains all the optically visual characteristics of that world within the confines of the frame and the capabilities of the lens (Collier, 2001). Some of the content of the image is even beyond the photographer’s awareness. However, given that all of the elements of an image may be important sources of knowledge through analysis (Collier, 2001), how can an interpreter identify them all and sort them out? In effect, this is challenge about how to honestly and responsibly address as many aspects of an image as possible.

Finally, the use of visual data as important sources of knowledge in my study raised another challenge concerning the validity and legitimacy of images. Debates surrounding this question are ongoing. For example, Beaumont Newhall (as cited in Wright, 1999), a

photographic historian, values any photograph as a document if it encompasses useful information about what is under study, whereas discordant voices, especially those within the social sciences and humanities, “disciplines of words” (Mead, 1995, p. 3), say that images only play a supporting role. In this present study, I do not join in the debate, but I believe that various forms of discourses—ranging from a piece of writing to any cultural artifact such as a picture, a building, or a piece of music—are various modes of communication and representation. They all are ways to embody people’s understanding of the human condition and society. A qualitative and ethnographic study of social reality should incorporate multiple semiotic forms of text as either data or tools for research, and to achieve triangulation or bricolage of research methods and data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Kincheloe, 2004).

Even though I recognize the significance of visual methodologies and visual data to qualitative inquiry, I also recognize their limitations. For example, visual methods often require more expense and technical expertise. The ethical concerns and sensitivity of visual-based research complicate the more common ethical issues involved in social research, and require a much deeper understanding of research subjects, their relationships, and the norms of the research setting (Gold, 1989). However, as I discussed previously, the use of visual methods has its strengths and brings vigour to a study, which also provides an alternative way to apprehend the meaning of the social world. No single research approach manages to fully construct an accurate narrative of social life and human interaction. Therefore, in this present study, I employ visual methods, while also adopting other approaches of qualitative inquiry in the hopes of capturing the complexity of the sexuality and sexual culture of urban Chinese youth within the context of their experience of the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

Furthermore, I see visual methods not merely as visual records; rather, they also are methods that can encourage collaboration, participation, and reflexivity. Apart from being a method for data collection, the application of visual methods is a process of creating and representing the knowledge that is based on my own experiences as an ethnographer using visual strategies. The visual-based participatory methodologies that I use in my study are not merely methodologies but also approaches to experiencing and interpreting

youth sexual subculture and society, and to promoting the individual empowerment of young people and broader social change.

## **SUMMARY**

In this chapter, I discussed my ontological and epistemological assumptions that shaped my decision to adopt a visual methodology, photovoice, as my primary research approach, along with other qualitative research methods that I discuss in Chapter Four. Apart from being a strategy to collect research data for a qualitative inquiry, photovoice also can be used as a participatory tool to profoundly engage its participants in social issues such as HIV and AIDS/STIs and to empower them in the fight against the epidemic. In addition, I also raised some relevant critical issues associated with the use of visual methodologies, such as ethics and interpretive challenges.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: ON CONDUCTING THE FIELDWORK**

In the previous chapter I mapped out a broad agenda for what has come to be called “visual methodologies for social change” (de Lange et al., 2007), noting some of the ethical and methodological challenges within this work. Chapter Three serves to set the stage for conducting the actual fieldwork as described in this chapter. This chapter is meant to be read as a personal and methodological narrative of the fieldwork I conducted at CCNU between February and August, 2007. It chronicles my “going home” but also being a lecturer in my former university and a visiting researcher. In this chapter I attend to the overall design of the fieldwork, a photovoice intervention with a group of college students in one Chinese university, following from the work of Stuart (2007) and others who have used a “research-intervention” approach. I also talk about how I worked with the visual and verbal texts.

### **RETURNING HOME**

The study took place at Central China Normal University (CCNU), a university where I taught in the English Department for five years and where I retain strong links. For three years, I was lecturing on the core course “Intensive Reading” intended for the first-year students of the department, while being entrusted with the duty of being supervisor of one class composed of 25 to 30 students each year. For the latter two years, I was doing the same kind of work but with third-year students. This non-teaching task required me to give considerable concern to the study and private life of these young adults, who resided in school dorms situated on campus and most of whom could not afford time and money to go back home more than twice a school year, for winter and summer vacations. I was frequently approached by my freshmen students with their problems. These ranged from the difficulty in adapting to a new university life and in getting on good terms with peers to keeping balance in study and part-time work. They would also share with me their reflections on and excitement about such new experiences as being university students out of parents’ governance and being grown-ups required to be responsible for all they do. I was more a friend, an elder sister and an attentive listener than being a teacher and

supervisor. The five years' experience of working in CCNU allowed me to build up a profound emotional bond with the students as well as with my colleagues.

Therefore, in some ways going back for my fieldwork study in CCNU was a type of "coming home" as Butler (2000) describes it; in other ways, though, the study meant setting up new relationships. Since my departure from China in 2003, this four-year absence in witnessing and experiencing radical social changes in China and transformations of young university students in response to the contextual alternations has made my former understanding of young people "out of date" and the close relationships somewhat "distant". Furthermore, as Maxwell (2005) argues, the relationships that a researcher builds up with those she studies and other people involved are an essential part of her methods to the extent that they would either facilitate or interfere with the research process and influence the ultimate research findings. Hence, it was necessary to set up new relationships and renew former relationships in my fieldwork. Based on the information gained from several scholars who had conducted AIDS-related research in China as well as a director in charge of HIV projects in China that I encountered in the XVI international AIDS conference held in Toronto in 2006, I needed to get permission for research from the institution of CCNU and the English Department. Once I arrived at the research setting, I visited the administrators who were responsible for processing my application in the School of Foreign Language and in its affiliated English Department. I explained to them in detail the purpose of my study and submitted Letters of Request both in Chinese and English to them. By virtue of the significance they assumed of my work related to HIV and AIDS and my former linkage with the school, I encountered no obstacle to the permission of doing fieldwork and working with first-year students of English Department in CCNU.

To forge good relationships with young people involved in the project, I had to admit that I also took advantage of a temporary teaching position of lecturing on a one-semester Extensive Reading Course being afforded by English Department. This five-month working contract as an unofficially-appointed teacher offered me a kind of authority-and-non-authority identity, which significantly facilitated the development of my fieldwork

there. On the one hand, the identity of a substitute teacher helped to minimize the teacher/student power dynamics over my relations with young people, imposing limited pressure on them in deciding to engage in and withdraw the project. In such situation, it could largely be ensured that the participants would participate in and stick to this project out of their own volition and would play contributing roles for the sake of their interests. Moreover, it also contributed to setting up a trusty relationship in which participants would share their underlying thoughts and emotions with me when the teacher authority or power was diminished. On the other hand, this teaching position though temporary in instructing one course encouraged participants to actively engage in class involvement and in after-class activities related to the project.

CCNU is a key normal university directly subordinated to the China's Ministry of Education and located in Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province, China. Students, normally aged 18-19 from across the country are admitted to CCNU every year based on their performance in the annual Entrance Exam. According to the residency regulations of the university as well as many others across China, all the students are required to reside in the dormitories within the campus during the weekdays though local students may find excuses to stay at home sometimes. The majority come from other provinces and live far from their families. This particular group of young adults has just experienced a three-year or longer high school study, overloaded with assignments, exams, pressure, and competition, abruptly entering to the university, a free environment and out of parental inspection and supervision for the first time. A number of them immediately set up boyfriend-and-girlfriend relationships, a new experience forbidden previously in high school by parents and teachers, to show their independence and maturity. Some of them get involved as a consequence of loneliness or peer pressure. In recent years, an increasing number of young students in China have been reported to engage in unsafe premarital sex (Chai, 2004), and the first few years of college have been identified as often a time for sexual experimentation and sexual irresponsibility (Sheer & Cline, 1994). However, outside of pilot projects mainly in urban areas, students in China receive little formal sex education beyond abstinence promotion in schools and have limited access to reproductive health counseling and services at university (Kaufman & Jin, 2002). Several

identified HIV infection cases of students in other universities in Wuhan have been reported and even more nationwide. For example, the first university student who was tested HIV positive and was brave enough to publicize her stories was a female sophomore student in a university in Wuhan, located not far from CCNU. Students' vulnerability to HIV/STIs has gained concern from the administrations and educators of CCNU and those of other university in Wuhan. HIV intervention efforts have already been implemented: "Prevention against AIDS" curriculum has been used; activities in and out of the curriculum held in the attempt to increase knowledge about sex and raise HIV awareness among them; pamphlets, leaflets, and fact sheets, and radio programs about the transmission mode of HIV and other information spread and launched radio stations in the community. All these intervention efforts help pave the way for my participatory study which set out to blend research, education and action to address youth and HIV and AIDS.

I was allocated three English classes with approximately thirty in each. These were my potential participants. But two classes of students were invited to my introductory session of the project. The exclusion of the third was due to my personal preference for the students in the other two who were generally more active and engaging in class discussions. The earlier period of the semester was used for the building-up of mutual trusting relationships between these youths and me. They needed time to know more about me, my personality, background, and academic and personal experiences while I needed time to observe and frequently talk with them for picking up appropriate "samples" for the project. The establishment of mutual trust and rapport was achieved through both in-class interactions and after-class conversations. On both occasions, topics about youth sexuality and HIV and AIDS were introduced to prepare for a further exploration in the ensuing project engagement. My "deep" contact with these young adults provided me with opportunities to acquire a better knowledge of what present-day young people in China are interested in and concerned about. That knowledge could help me in organizing the workshops among them and setting up more mobilizing questions to be asked in interviews.

In order to motivate participants' active engagement in workshops and interviews as well as in class discussions, I tried to minimize my role of teacher, researcher, and adult through creating a relatively democratic environment in the classes I ran and during our research activities. Students, for instance, were encouraged to speak out on anything that came to their minds in response to reading questions set up for the testing out of their reading proficiency. No authoritative answer was favored; multiple readings and interpretations were invited. In so doing, students got used to this way of communication and participation, and were able to engage themselves in free group discussions. This was of great importance in photovoice workshops as well as in sharing thoughts and narrating stories during interviews.

## **RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS**

As noted above, the potential participants were the students of two classes in my charge of teaching. Participants were recruited on the principle of voluntary participation, and were fully informed of the nature, purpose, methodologies, process of my study. In order to provide sufficient information related to the study as well as giving potential participants opportunities to raise questions, the informative session was organized and held in a spacious classroom for over three hours from 6 pm to 9 pm early in the semester. The potential participants were informed in detail of the objectives, process, significance of the intended research and were provided explicit explanations about the activities they would be required to participate in interviews, focus groups, and a series of photovoice workshops involving their collaboration in photography. As well, they were informed of how they would be able to benefit from participating in the study: they would be offered the opportunities to both learn more about working with the visual and to engage in a PAR study process which would be a learning and transforming experience for the participants. Specifically, they would learn more information and skills about self-protection from STIs/HIV; develop a higher awareness of HIV and AIDS and public health; and cultivate self-confidence in learning sexual knowledge and acting for change of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. In light of the complexity and sensitivity of the subjects under my inquiry, and of the power imbalance between researcher and

researched (Holland et al., 1999), I reiterated the voluntary nature of the study, the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants' identities, and the fact that they could withdraw at any time.

Parallel to the oral presentation about the intended study, a written version of information was distributed to the prospective participants as well as invitation letters and consent forms. Forty-two students signed the forms. Those who declined to participate due to the following reasons: (1) feeling reluctant to touch on such private sexual matters, (2) having difficulty affording time for the engagement, and (3) being unable to fit in with our workshop schedules. However, virtually everyone attending the introductory sessions expressed their great interest in and strong commitment to social issues related to HIV and AIDS. Among the forty-two students who signed consent forms, twenty five adhered to all the workshops, participating in the activities in the workshops and photography in the intervals among them. In total, the group was composed of seventeen young women and eight young men. This represents the proportion of female to male students in the English Department of CCNU. In each class of approximately 30 students, female students took up 80 percent.

## **CONDUCTING THE WORKSHOPS**

In setting up the extra curricular workshops, I was inspired by the work of Jean Stuart (2007) in South Africa. Stuart in her study organized a series of six workshops among thirteen pre-service teachers with the aim of exploring with them the use of visual arts-based methods to address HIV and AIDS. Visual arts-based tools such as photography and drawing were used in the workshops to capture the participants' perceptions of HIV and AIDS and to construct messages for their peers, in so doing to test out the possibilities of using a visual arts-based approach in education to address HIV and AIDS. Parallel to the purpose and process of collecting research data for the qualitative exploration, the six workshops were also designed and implemented as intervention through engaging the participants in the process of democratic social interaction between the researcher and the participants and among the participants themselves. The

workshops involved the use of visual methods of photography, identified by Schratz and Walker (1995) as a favorable tool for doing research as social change. The workshop functioned as a process both for qualitative research and for an action-oriented agenda.

Drawing, then, on Stuart's (2007) "research as intervention" and Schratz and Walker's (1995) "research as social change" approaches, five photovoice workshops were organized weekly over a period of a month and a half: all sessions occurred after regular school hours and each lasted approximately two hours. Each session occurred in a classroom equipped with multi-media technology, to ensure the clear display of photographs to the participants.

### **Workshop One: Getting started: Calling attention to the prominence of visual expression and introducing photographic techniques**

A good beginning is critical. The vital importance of this initial workshop lies in the fact that the good running of it would arouse the participants' interests and enthusiasm in an active engagement in the follow-up workshops. Given that photography counted as the central activity requiring all the participants' collaborative involvement in the workshops, I took it as a compelling part of the initial session to emphasize the prominence of the visual, the power of visual expression, in contemporary modern life. Drawing the participants' attention to the salience of the visual in life, I hoped, would evoke their keenness to capture their perceptions of their life experiences of reality with the mode of visual language. To achieve this purpose, I prepared a forty-minute powerpoint presentation explaining various visual modes of drawing, photographs, and video that were commonly used to represent and constitute messages. It was meant to give a general idea of visual forms of communication. Initially, two pictures of cave drawings retrieved from the Internet were displayed on the big screen to illustrate that images had been utilized to give form to one's conceptions of reality since the beginning of human history. Then, in order to relate the use of the visual to the students' everyday life, focus was given to the discussion of the photographic medium as among the most important means of expressing human conditions (Wright, 1999; Collier & Collier, 1986). I showed a

family album composed of seven photographs recording the life traces of the mother of a friend of mine, Ying, a woman who is over seventy years old, have got through a range of immense social movements and transformations in modern China. It was meant to demonstrate how changes of broader social arena could be tracked down in individual family albums, a kind of common objects loaded with genealogical history and heritage possessed by families. To further draw the participants' concern to the growing incorporation of the visual into young people's globalized life, I illustrated the fact that mass media are highly and increasingly visual with examples of the Internet, e-magazines, and online newspapers as they profoundly participate in their lives. The presentation ended with a call for the participants' use of cameras to construct their accounts of life experiences and realities they lived.

According to the promised reciprocity of teaching the participants knowledge of working with the visual as accented in the informative session, I felt that I needed to invite a skillful photographer to the workshop. However, rather than involving a professional photographer, I found my way with student's help to contact the Head of Students' Society of Photography of CCNU, a senior student of the university. Regardless of being an amateur without any formal training in photography, he had accumulated rich experiences of producing various types of photographic images, organized a number of exhibitions of images produced by club members across universities in Wuhan, and had won prizes in some competitions. I chose this young man to be the instructor of photovoice workshops for a number of reasons. First, his personal experience of developing from a self-studying amateur and of teaching new members of their society about photography would help him grasp what participants needed. Second, being of the same generation as the participants would facilitate the interactions of the instructor with them and activate the learning climate, and in so doing, maximize the participants' learning potential. Third, the financial constraint of this project could not afford to hire a professional. Last and most importantly, this young man was very supportive of our project, showing great interest in engaging in it. Upon participants' feedback and their active interaction with this "elder brother" as they addressed him intimately, inviting this young man as the skill instructor in the project proved to be an excellent choice.

In the initial workshop, the instructor talked about common difficulties that participants might encounter in photography and provided tips and practical advice to deal with problems such as how to organize objects, things, and people in a picture, how to give focus to a particular object(s) or person(s) in a picture, and how to handle ethical issues as associated with the inclusion of persons in the picture. The instructor also presented some of his work as illustrations to provide further explanations. Twenty-five photographs presented by the instructor offered a rich collection illustrating various ways of photographic constitution of meanings through taking pictures of things, objects, scenes, and people. Each shift of one photo to another on the screen was responded with the audience's cheers of joy and admiration. Most participants wrote in their reflections that this workshop provided to them with techniques they needed in photography and expressed a kind of awakened yearning for using cameras to communicate meanings.

Being almost ignorant of anything about photography, I have learned some basic techniques in today's workshop. I came to know many things: for example, about how to highlight certain themes through photography, how to retrieve meaningful information from photos, and how to catch bright points from details. Through Ms. Tao's presentation, I got to understand how people use speechless photographs to convey inner feelings and emotions and to record historical changes. I had a strong sense that pictures are more expressive and reachable to the viewer's hearts than words. (female student)

Honestly, I did not like photography, but today I have an urge to buy a camera to capture beautiful things and touching scenes in life. I have gotten used to what I heard of and knew of, but from today's workshop, I hope I could seek to know and understand the world with my own eyes. My suggestion to the project is that the more cameras, the better because everyone of us has distinct ideas and thoughts. I can't wait for the next workshop. (male student)

In this workshop, I got to know basic techniques of the use of cameras and felt a

kind of pressure, pressure which required me to play a contributing part. I like this project very much. It involves some untouchable but fairly important subject matters in our lives. Due to various reasons, we feel ashamed to talk about them and have seldom taken initiative to get to know them. The participation in this project gave me an opportunity to advance my understanding of them and will be a beneficial experience to me. I am looking forward to the following workshops. (male student)

This workshop is like an eye-opener to me. I have never known that pictures can convey so many messages and could be so powerful. I feel really excited as well as curious about photography. I expect to know learn more about it and take photographs that express my own views and feelings. But to be frank, although having an elementary knowledge about photography, I am not confident enough to consider that I can use the camera well and take good-quality pictures. (female student)

The successful running of the first workshop as evidenced in participants' reflection notes laid a good foundation for the ensuing sessions. However, also in their reflections, one overwhelming message surfaced that a number of students doubted their ability of photography and of making visual representations of HIV and AIDS as it was "*such a new, far-away-from-our life, and complicated topic*" as defined by a participant. In response to participants' feedback to the initial workshop, I needed to organize the ensuing workshop in ways that help to reduce participants' worries and frustrations about their capacity for photography. To achieve this, two points deserved special concern in my preparation: engaging them in the collaborative practice of photography and setting up thematic topics for their visual production that could mobilize their thinking, discussion, and collaborative photography.

### **Workshops Two and Three: Warm-up: Practicing photovoice with the prompt of “feeling strong/not strong”**

The design of these two workshops drew on my own experience of taking course *Visual Methodologies for Social Change* with Dr. Claudia Mitchell at McGill in 2005 and borrowed the prompt of “feeling strong/not strong” used in that course. This prompt was also employed in some of her photovoice projects in South Africa, Rwanda, and other African countries working with a group of local young people (Mitchell et al., 2005b). The feeling of being strong/not strong is sensed and experienced by everybody in life and allows them all to have something personal to share in a collective discussion. This prompt also proved significant in motivating young people’s reflections on their lived experiences, life situations, and problems they met and concerned and mobilizing youth agency to speak out their voice concerning their needs, interests, problems and issues they attached importance to. Modeling on a three-hour class of photographically addressing “feeling strong/not strong” at McGill, these two workshops were organized in three parts: group discussion (Workshop Two), taking pictures (in the interval of a week between both workshops), and presentation and further group discussion (Workshop Three). Each section of the three, which took place within three hours of a graduate class at McGill, was expanded in my fieldwork because engagement in a photovoice project was a novel experience to the participants. They needed a longer time to “experience” each stage of the process. It was also required by participants who wrote in their reflection notes asking for more time especially for the second stage of photographing.

Workshop Two began with a kind of motivational speech of fifteen minutes in an attempt to mobilize all participants to make visual representations through their own lenses of their perceptions of feeling strong/not strong as they experienced in life. I emphasized that everyone in the classroom was the protagonist of their own life world and had sufficient ability to constitute their own meanings. Also accentuating the nature of photovoice projects as a collaborative work involving the individual input of thinking, discussing, and negotiating with others for the production of a collective work, I then encouraged every participant to contribute to the collective endeavor. To enable everyone to have a

part to play in the group, twenty five participants were divided of their volition into five groups, each of five members. Three groups were of mixed-sex, the other two of single-sex (one of females and the other of males).

For the first stage of group discussion (Workshop Two), participants were asked to finish three tasks working collaboratively: exploring and noting down emerging concepts about “feeling strong/not strong”, narrowing down a range of concepts to several key priorities through a voting process, and coming up with an elementary idea of what to include in pictures to represent the priority concepts. The prompt “feeling strong/not strong” elicited heated discussion among members of each group. Walking around each group, I took the chance to join in as a listener and observed that virtually everyone was ready to share their personal experiences and views. A number of concepts surfaced in the process of recalling former experiences, sharing, and identifying such as concepts of cultural heritage, tradition, friendship, unity, and hope for “feeling strong” and concepts of loneliness, betrayal, overload of homework, and consumptional temptation for “feeling not strong.” The process of getting abstract conceptions represented in images—that is, including objects, things, people, or scenes—challenged them but broadened their imagination and deepened their thinking and rethinking of those concepts arising from each participant’s reflections and articulation. The group discussion of Workshop Two organized for the achievement of the three tasks invited every participant into the process of recalling, sharing, negotiating, and reaching a consensus and encouraged all them to talk and communicate with their members. With a preparatory plan of what and how to photograph in order to express their feelings of being strong/not strong, each group was given a digital camera, which would be entrusted to them for a week. Workshop Two ended with the raising of ethical issues related to photography, which they would put into practice.

During the first phase of group discussion, I noticed that single-sex group discussion and mixed-sex group discussion demonstrated distinct characteristics of discussion mechanism. In the former, members tended to identify with each other’s ideas and resonance was easily reached among them because gendered norms shaped the life

experiences and views of each gender group, resulting in a kind of commonly shared perceptions and understanding of reality in each group. By contrast, mixed-sex group discussion tended to be longer, involving frequent shifts of conversational turns from male to female or vice versa. Perspectives from masculine and feminine stances converged and provoked interesting and in-depth responses and discussion. Such characteristic differences of single-sex and mixed-sex group discussion were also shown in focus group discussion. I also noted that participants, especially young women, were inclined to join in a same-sex group when facing sensitive topics such as sex, sexuality and HIV and AIDS. As shown in the group organization for the follow-up workshops addressing sexuality and HIV and AIDS, the participants re-formed groups, two of which were each composed of six or seven young women leaving out young men. No matter what type of group they would join in, a safe and comfortable environment was what they needed, in which they could say and share whatever they wanted.

A week later, all the groups came back to Workshop Three with the pictures they had taken and presented them in the powerpoint display. Some groups presented individual photographs attached with captions while some groups used a series of photos to form a visual narrative. Some salient themes emerged among their pictures of “feeling strong/not strong”. What provoked these youths’ sense of being strong included cultural heritage, friendship, and unity while what made them weak were memories of high school years overloaded with homework, betrayal, loneliness, to list a few.

The presentation of images among the groups provided a site for the participants to get a better understanding of their peers, lives, and themselves. Moreover, these photographs offered themselves as convincing evidence proving their own ability of photography and using cameras to capture their perceptions of reality. Many participants expressed surprises and appreciation about photographs produced by other groups or individuals.

Today was the first time we presented our own pictures. Some of them made me feel overwhelmed – they were stunning! One photo with a grey, dark backdrop depicted a depressed guy sitting against the wall, a basketball lying aside. This

picture showed me a kind of visual power. At the first sight, I thought there must be stories behind it. (male student)

Wow! I did not expect that they were so good. Each picture they took has a wonderful story behind, but in my eye, each picture can convey a different version of interpretation. Everyone of us has a different life and holds a unique opinion of the world. Such distinction and variation makes it necessary to listen to others sincerely and to learn from others. (female student)

I like these workshop activities very much. Today I talked a lot. I felt myself on way to knowing how to analyse pictures and how to convey ideas through pictures. I am sure I can do better in this project. (female student)

After the photo presentation, the participants went back to group discussion involving their reflections on their peers' images. This warm-up photovoice practice got the participants through the process of group discussion, taking pictures, presentation and group discussion, preparing them for the next workshop in which they would get involved in discussion of sensitive topics of sexuality and HIV and AIDS and photographing their perceptions and understandings of these socially stigmatized subject matters. This warm-up exercise helped build up participants' confidence and interests in photographic constitution of their understandings of the realities they experienced.

#### **Workshop Four: Exploring perceptions of sexuality and HIV and AIDS**

After going through the process of group discussion, taking pictures, presenting pictures and group discussion as they did in Workshop Two and Three, participants came to have a clear idea as to what they would do in the following workshops. But what challenged them was the sensitivity of the topics of sexuality and HIV and AIDS that were to be addressed in the ensuing workshops. As noted earlier, sexual subject matter carries a social stigma within Chinese cultures that renders talk about them uncomfortable and restrained. Consequently, what concerned me was that participants would constrain

expression and communication in group discussion, feeling reluctant to uncover their underlying views about the sexual topics. In the meantime, however, potential participants' reflection notes as they had submitted after the informative session helped diminish my worries and concerns. As written by some participants, they voluntarily engaged in this project primarily because they saw the exigency of disrupting the silence on topics surrounding sex and erasing the shame and fear upon HIV and AIDS.

With a feeling of uncertainty and anxiety, I stepped into the classroom. I noticed that participants reorganized the groups as mentioned earlier. Most young women were sitting together keeping their counterparts away; two "big" single-sex groups of six or seven young females each were formed. As a consequence, one mixed-sex group including the two young females was left and the rest of male participants formed two single-sex groups. In sight of young females and young males separating themselves from each other, I seemed to sense a kind of tension in the classroom arising from the sensitivity and untouchability of the topics to be broached on the public occasion. When I introduced the topics to be discussed in each group, a few young women and even men lowered heads avoiding eye contact with me—as opposed to what they usually conducted in class: sitting straight looking at me. Apparently, they were unaccustomed to such public scenes in which stigmatized topics of sexuality and HIV and AIDS were opened up and promoted for further exploration. As one participant wrote in her reflections upon the informative session introducing in details the nature of this project,

This project will bring a novel experience to me and probably to others. I have never had experience of speaking about such private topics of sexuality nor listening to others talk about them in public except that teachers instructing relevant courses might have touched them a little bit. I am not a feudal-mined person, but I doubt if I have enough courage to sit with others talking about them. (female student)

In recognition of the anxiety shared by some participants, I took some measures to minimize it in attempts to engage everyone of them in the group discussion. First, they were free to organize a group with those they personally felt comfortable with. Second, I

prepared several guiding questions to be presented on the screen as assistance, if necessary, to lead their discussion.

1. What stands out for you when you think of HIV and AIDS? How do you make sense of HIV in your life?
2. In the context of STIs/HIV alarmingly transmitting among young people through the route of unprotected sex, what do you think about sex and sexuality of young people, to be more exact, of college students in China?
3. What do you think about pre-marital sex among young people in China?
4. What do you think would be the most effective ways to raise young people's awareness of HIV and AIDS and to dissuade them of unsafe sex?

No more than four questions – two respectively on HIV and AIDS and on youth sexuality though both subjects were intertwined – were asked in order not to limit their discussion. Each group was asked to have one participant take notes of what they were discussing and responding to each other.

Walking around the groups and joining in, I noticed that once the topics were brought up, participants would actively involve themselves in the discussion, ready to share their thoughts and raise questions and issues they concerned. In the environment that invited everyone to speak out their underlying ideas, a topic could be expanded and deepened in the dynamics of group discussion. For example, one group made comparison of human existence in relation to sexuality between the Chinese and the Westerners from traditional China and Spartacus times in ancient Greece to the present. Speaking from their own life experiences and very position of being in the transitional phase from childhood to adulthood, participants came up with many interesting thoughts and views that adults could hardly access unless seeking such opportunities of listening to them. My participation, though merely as a curious listener, in participants' group discussions offered me a precious opportunity to get a better understanding of present-day Chinese youths, their views about reality and about themselves. On the part of the participants, they also took this workshop as a beneficial experience that allowed them, for the first

time, to articulate their views of such sensitive subjects, be listened and responded by their peers, and access others' thoughts. A participant wrote in his reflections:

I need say "Thank you, Ms. Tao" for inviting me into this project. This is a very interesting, new, and unforgettable experience to me. AIDS is a social issue that most people feel hesitated to talk about because it is associated with sexual matters and because those infected mostly are either disgraceful people such as drug users and prostitutes or poor people like in country villages of Henan Province. Social communities have barely given concern and caring to them. Being a young university student, I had thought that AIDS had nothing to do with me as it was so far from my life. But the shocking statistics Ms. Tao presented in her speech woke me up and led me to the realization that AIDS is becoming the problem of us young adults. Today, talking with my classmates about this social problem and sharing our own thoughts about sexuality was such a wonderful experience. I felt that everyone would open heart, share, and be listened to. We did not formerly merely because we were not given opportunity for this. I was very much struck by my group members' viewpoints and reflections that deeply provoked my thinking. (female student)

Group discussion went on for an hour and a quarter and was asked to halt for leaving time for raising issues related to photography participants would conduct in the week to follow.

For the last twenty minutes of the workshop, we reviewed ethics in using photography to address the sensitive and stigmatized topics of sexuality and HIV and AIDS. Led by the instructor, in Workshop 1, several main points were made at the end of the discussion such as: always asking permission of potential photo-subjects, taking pictures of objects and scenes (not just people) where possible, and asking permission of team members for exhibiting the collaborate work. In subsequent to the discussions on the ethical issues, digital cameras were distributed to five groups, one for each, and would be kept in the group for a week, during which they took 10 or more pictures of their conceptions of sexuality in the crisis of HIV and AIDS, the challenges and solutions in addressing HIV

and AIDS, and other relevant matters. For the nature and significance of the collective photography they would engage in, it was reiterated that the participants needed to work in a group setting taking pictures and interpreting pictures, thereby learning together as a group. As well, each group was asked to make notes of each picture: Who took it? Why?

### **Workshop Five: Working with the photos**

This session drew on the files that the students had sent to me by email with their photos and their captions. I also had every group's photos developed printed out prior to our gathering for this workshop in hopes that hard copies of photos would be more convenient for the participants to work with in selecting and organizing into photo stories or other forms of narratives. Before distributing the prints to each group, I explained to them what they would do with the photos. They needed to select a set of photos that could be used to produce a visual narrative or, alternatively, concentrate on a limited number of photos they had taken to probe into the concept(s) surfacing from the photos. The latter option was for the single-sex group of males who had taken merely four pictures but intended to use them to focus on one aspect or theme related to the HIV and AIDS pandemic. All the groups were required to work out a short paragraph as the explanatory text attached with either the photo narrative or individual photos.



Figure 1 Working with Photos



Figure 2 Working with Photos

After having the printed photos in hand, each group engaged in a process of close reading of their photographic images. This involved selecting, categorizing, and organizing visual

narratives or working on a couple of photos they had taken and producing accompanying captions. Reviewing photos and working on them in a group setting brought not only fun but helped generate new interpretations of photos emerging in the course of group discussion, as commented by a participant.

This was a great fun talking on the photos, our own work, and trying to retrieve meanings from them. I found that using photos could help us discover more and deeper meanings and broaden our horizon of seeing things. Take our group for instance, we gave certain kind of interpretation to a picture as we were photographing it, but many different versions of interpretation arose in our group discussion. (female student)

Echoing this participant's response, many others recognized the significance of using images to constitute their understandings of sexuality and AIDS. Through the process of turning abstract concepts into something more concrete and tangible as represented in the photos, they felt their perceptions further probed and ways of making meaning challenged. Moreover, they were fascinated by the power of images that could mobilize their inspiration and imagination to discover a rich variety of representations being conveyed by one single picture.

After working collaboratively in organizing and providing interpretations to photo narratives or stories, each group presented their work by displaying photos on the screen and explaining them. I noticed that these young people were proficient in computer technology and in powerpoint presentation. Three groups made presentation of their visual narratives, respectively entitled "AIDS in Our Eyes", "Getting Involved in HIV Prevention", and "the World and us". The first group told an inclusive story of AIDS with fifteen photos covering a range of aspects associated with this social issue from their perception of the HI virus, social factors shaping the HIV transmission, life situations of the infected in Chinese society, and young people's responsibilities for social change. The second group used eight photos creating a photo narrative visualizing the transmission modes of HIV, low awareness of AIDS among the general population in China, and

misconceptions of HIV and AIDS. The third group showed eight pictures which did not serve to embody one or two particular concepts, but these photos communicated young people's emotions of feeling lost but trying to orient themselves in this world. For the remaining two groups, one brought up specific discussion on university students' sexual behaviors and the STIS/HIV pandemic by presenting four photos of couples of young man and woman on campus who looked physically intimate. The other focused on the topic of the ineffective policing and HIV transmission in entertainment sites by displaying one photo of a local police station and three of a karaoke bar located near to the university. Every group's presentation was responded with the audience's warm applauses.

The session then moved to the next important stage, group discussion, which aimed to further mobilize the participants' involvement in social issues related to HIV and AIDS and deepen their understanding of sexuality by putting them in a free, democratic environment. Open discussions and reflections on the visual work they had produced and viewed were highly invited in the group dynamics. I observed that a range of new subject matters were arising in their discussion such as the use of condoms, gender, homosexuality, the impact of this project, human rights, and social justice. Intrigued by a photo depicting a row of rural-to-urban migrant workers sitting in a populous region of the city for job opportunities, heated discussion occurred within the groups and beyond surrounding issues and problems of migrant workers and prostitution as well as these people's human rights.



在我们身边有一群被忽视，被边缘的人。他们看上去卑微又无助，但是他们应该也有希望。我们能为他们做些什么？

Figure 3 Migrant Workers: A Marginalized Population

*There is a group of people around us who are ignored and left aside to the margins of society. They look abject and helpless, but there should still be hope for them. What can*

*we do for them?*

A number of participants expressed concern about the life situations that this grassroots class of people was in. Many of these people left rural villages for better lives in urban areas, but remained at the bottom of society, surviving on a slim payment. To soothe life pressure and satisfy physical needs, they visited entertainment sites buying sex at the risk of contracting STIS/HIV. It was shared in the group discussions that on the one hand, migrant workers' rights for sex should be recognized while on the other hand, their vulnerability to the infections would contribute to bigger social problems and warranted social concern and governmental intervention. Provoked by this discussion, one group brought up another related topic, the development and problems of the commercial sex industry in reform-era China. Taking up the concern about the current circumstances where sex trade, though illegal, was yet easily accessible to various social groups—including institution officials, white-collar employees, university students, and migrant workers, participants proposed that the government should legitimize sex trade in certain sites and make effective intervention in unsafe sexual practices in the trade.

As demonstrated in the examples mentioned above, group discussion on the visual texts helped engage participants in discussing social issues and problems related to HIV and AIDS and deepen their understanding of social reality. As one participant said, seeing the world through the photos they themselves produced brought them new ways of thinking about social reality and broadened their vision of it. Participants' feedback of their experience of participating in this project using visual arts-based methodologies will be further discussion in the last chapter of implication for further study.

## **CONDUCTING ONE-ON-ONE QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP**

Qualitative interviews attempt to collect data by asking people questions pursuing the typical goal of qualitative research of exploring the interviewee's individuality and seeing the world through his or her eyes (Corbetta, 2003). There are three basic approaches to

collecting qualitative data through open-ended interviews, which include the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach, and the standardized open-ended interview. Each involves different type of preparation, conceptualization, and instrumentation (Patton, 1990). Given the merits of the general interview guide approach in both situations of individual interviews and focus groups and in efficient use of limited time as in my case, I opted for this method of qualitative interviewing. As explained by Patton (1990), the general interview guide approach involves outlining a set of issues or questions that are to be explored with each respondent in advance of the interview. The issues in the outline need not be taken in any particular order while the actual wording of questions to elicit responses about those issues is not determined prior to the interview. As such, the interview guide simply serves as “a basic checklist during the interview to make sure that all relevant topics are covered” (Patton, 1990, p. 280).

As noted above, this general interview guide approach has a variety of advantages as it is used in my study. First, in terms of the sensitivity of sexual matters to be talked in the interviews, the interview guide rather than fixed pre-settled questions would not only provide me a kind of flexibility to raise questions and adapt them to the actual situation I am in with various kinds of responses of the interviewees but also help keep me in the track adhering to the core issues in my inquiry. The flexibility could allow for the establishment of a conversational style in which participants feel relaxed and safe to have their deep emotions emerging while our conversation goes on with the focus on a particular subject(s) that has been predetermined. Besides, it offers a free scope for me to ask, explore, and probe questions that elucidate and illuminate particular subjects. Second, tailoring the types of questioning to the individuality of twenty-eight interviewees involved in my study might risk the failure to gain a full, accurate picture of how interviewees perceive and interpret their realities as a result of insufficient attention given to “trivial” issues which yet are important. However, a merit of the interview guide lies in helping make interviewing across a number of different participants more systematic and comprehensive by delimiting in advance the issues to be explored (Patton, 1990). Third, the interview guide approach is especially useful in conducting group interviewing: it can keep the interactions focused but allowed individual perspectives and

experiences to emerge (Patton, 1990). Last, as mentioned earlier, the interview guide assures the best use of the limited time available in the interview situation as in my case.

To develop a set of interview guide questions appropriate to my study, I began with a question that the qualitative researcher should ask herself before the design of research as suggested by Janesick (2003): what do I want to know in this study and, specifically here in my case, what do I want to know in the interviews and focus groups? Based on this principal, overarching question, a series of specific questions were prepared to attend to various facets of general subject matters of sex, sexuality, HIV and AIDS, and Chinese youth as they are intertwined in this study.

1. What do these young people know and believe about sex? How do they think about premarital sex among young people?
2. What is it like to be living in contemporary reform-era China experiencing immense socio-cultural transformation and allowing the entering of Western notions of sexual liberation and sexual freedom as conflicting against Chinese sexual values? What are the differences between the lived experiences of youths in relation to sexuality in the present and those of young people in pre-reform times?
3. How do they understand HIV and sexually transmitted diseases? How do they make sense of HIV/STIs in their lives?
4. How do they make sense of the young body in the context of STIs/HIV epidemic?
5. What are their conceptions of risk and danger in sexual activity?
6. What are the avenues of resources through which they gain information and knowledge about sexuality and HIV and AIDS?

Serving as the guide for the interviews in my study, these questions were developed into more specific questions to be asked in various ways of wording and orders in different situations of interviewing different persons as noted earlier.

Focus groups were also conducted in my fieldwork to probe into participants' sphere of life in relation to sexuality and AIDS by juxtaposing multiple perspectives. In the group

dynamics discussion is able to better reveal the intensity of feelings and facilitate comparisons among different positions. As Corbetta (2003) claims, interaction—particularly among members of a group—may produce deeper discussion, thereby aiding the researcher’s understanding. Two collective discussions were conducted in my fieldwork: each involved six students, one single-sex group of female and the other mixed-sex group. During the focus group discussion, I led the discussion and did my utmost to bring out all aspects of the question, inviting all the voices out. The interview guide questions used in one-on-one interviews were applied to the focus group discussions (see above).

## **WHAT COUNTS AS DATA?**

Data used in this research came from a variety of sources. Principal sources included the following:

1. Photographs: A collection of 54 photographs that participants took to represent their perceptions of HIV and AIDS and sexuality and 60 photographs participants took to represent “feeling strong/not strong” in the photovoice workshops, as well as 60 photographs I took in the research site as visual data of participant observation.
2. Written explanatory texts and captions<sup>2</sup>: A paragraph, in some cases a long passage, that participants wrote about each photograph they produced.
3. Transcribed qualitative interviews<sup>3</sup>: Twenty eight young people, sixteen young

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<sup>2</sup> The participants were required to provide captions and explanatory texts both in Chinese and English. Given English was not their first language, they expressed anxieties that the English versions could not communicate in a full sense what they wanted to say. In such a situation, I made some editing of their English versions where necessary based on the Chinese versions, but did my utmost to keep what was original there. I then let them review the edited versions, which highlighted the edited areas by juxtaposing it with their original ones. After making revision of the versions I had attempted, they gave back to me the texts they thought could best convey their views.

<sup>3</sup> All the participants except one male student received interviews in Chinese. I translated the transcribed interviews in ways that could as closely as possible represent what they

women and twelve young men, received one-one-one interviews. Among them, fourteen were the participants in the photovoice workshops while the others were first-year students either from other schools of CCNU or from other universities. Fourteen out of twenty five workshop participants were chosen for the interviews in terms of their willingness to engage in the personal conversations. The other interviewees from beyond English Department of CCNU were recruited into the research by virtue of the assistance of workshop participants who disseminated detailed information of the study among friends in various universities in the city and got those who were interested linked up with me. With the interviewees' permission, every interview, mostly lasting two hours, was recorded in MP3 files.

4. Transcribed focus group: Two focus group discussions, one in a single-sex group of six young women and the other in a mix-sex group of three young men and three young women were respectively conducted in a classroom in the afternoon after class. Each lasted approximately two hours and both were recorded into a MP3 player with their consent.
5. Video: Participants' photo presentations of their perceptions of sexuality and AIDS in Workshop 5 were captured on video. This video data was reviewed and analysed to explore the way visual arts-based methodologies were used in the project to help mobilize young people's engagement in cultural production and in social issues.
6. Written texts of participants' reflections on workshops: At the end of each workshop, the participants' were required to write down their reflections, feedback, or suggestions of the workshop. In total, I had 116 pages.
7. Field notes, fieldwork journals, and reflexive memos: Observations I made in the research site either during workshops or interviews and focus group discussion or beyond were recorded in my field notes. Besides, I kept fieldwork journals for my

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would communicate.

reflections on what I observed, on the running of workshops and interviews – what needed to improve for the next and how, and on participants' reflections on workshops.

## **ANALYSIS OF VISUAL AND VERBAL DATA**

Challenges arise as soon as the field researcher begins to compile information: the big one comes from the multiplicity of data sources and forms (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data in my research were collected from a variety of sources as noted earlier such as photographs, transcribed audio-taped recordings of interviews and focus groups, writing-up of my raw field notes, diaries and memos, and participants' written reflections on each workshop activity. They were roughly classified into two forms: visual and verbal. To handle the two distinct types of qualitative data from field research, I chose different analytic approaches to extract meaning from their contents and to identify the presence or absence of meaningful themes, common and/or divergent ideas, beliefs and practices of social life (David & Sutton, 2004). For the analysis of visual data, I used semiotics and discourse analysis in order to seek young Chinese people's sexual meanings and understandings that are represented in the photographs they have produced and explore these sexual conceptions as social constructs in Chinese contexts. As a kind of complement or intertexts to visual data, verbal data are processed drawing on the analytic approaches to text-based qualitative data as described by Miles & Huberman (1994) and Strauss and Corbin (1990). Emerging themes and concepts that were identified and coded in both visual and verbal data were then compared, contrasted, and then categorized under a number of thematic subjects. It needs to be noted that analysis of qualitative data that involves, briefly put, retrieving meaning, identifying themes and concepts, and then organizing and categorizing is not a one-directional sequence of steps but an iterative process of re-reading and further analysis of previously coded data (Maxwell, 2005; Lee & Fielding, 2004). After repeated comparison, differentiation, and classification, findings from my data analysis were presented through looking at (1) young people's sexual conceptions and understandings, which are also addressed as social construction; (2) female bodies as social sites and constructs; (3) representations of HIV and AIDS among

young people and their demand for sexuality and HIV and AIDS education. As to be demonstrated in the ensuing section, I analysed the data in both forms by referring them to each other. This way of reading data results in the constitution of a net of intertexts in which texts different modes interact and converse among one other, which generates the emergence of new knowledge and critiques.

### **Working with photographs**

Photography has a long tradition in social research (e.g., anthropology and ethnography) (Flick, 2002), where images are analyzed either as records of reality or as evidence of how the image-maker(s) have constructed reality (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001). In this study which aims at constituting present-day Chinese youth's conceptions and understandings of sexuality and HIV and AIDS through the use of a visual strategy, I treat photographs produced by the participants as representation of their interpretation (construction) of the realities they have lived in relation to sexuality in the context of the HIV epidemic. With the idea that young people are "experts in their own lives" (Wang et al., 2004, p. 911) and they have "a complex stock of knowledge" (Flick, 2002, p 80) about their life worlds, I see these photographs as important sources of knowledge revealing their life experiences related to sexuality and HIV and AIDS and the fabric of youth (sexual) culture in contemporary Chinese society.

A plethora of methods of visual analysis have been productively practiced and explored in social inquiry (Rose, 2001; Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001). The choice of an appropriate method of analysis is dependent "on the nature of the project in which it is to be used, on the visual material that is being investigated, and on the goals of the research project" (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001, p. 5). The photovoice project I set up, which is visual and qualitative, seeks to conceptualize contemporary Chinese youth's perceptions and beliefs with regard to sex, sexuality, and HIV and AIDS through analysis of photographic images produced by young people and accompanying verbal texts. As noted earlier, constraint on talk of sex, sexuality, and HIV and AIDS, topics associated with a cultural stigma in Chinese society, accounts for, at least in part, the employment of visual

method in this research. With recourse to an alternative language, the participants captured particular things, objects, scenes, and sometimes people into their photographs to symbolize and communicate their subjective responses to these sensitive topics. In order to retrieve rich information from the images, I need to adopt a mode of analysis in which photographs produced by the participants are treated as a site of meaning-making in which signs serve to provide knowledge of the producers' conceptions of sexuality and HIV and AIDS. Signifiers, what have been captured in the photograph (e.g., objects, scenes, and people), are read in a logical association to reconstitute reliable accounts of the image-makers' sexual understandings and subjectivities.

In face of the photographs produced by young people, which were loaded with rich meanings, I asked myself two fundamental questions: what do images represent and how? And what underlying ideas and values do the signifiers stand for? The first involved an effort to identify the signifiers while the latter to grasp the signified. These two questions, one of representation and the other regarding "hidden meanings" of images, are exactly what the visual semiotics of Roland Barthes inquires into (Van Leeuwen, 2001). Barthes's semiotic analysis involves the inquiry for two layers of meaning: the first layer of denotation, which is about "what, or who, is being depicted here?" and the second layer of connotation, which is concerned about "what ideas and values are expressed through what is represented, and through the way in which it is represented?" (Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 94). The pursuit of answers to these two questions led my analytic practice of reading the visual representations produced by participants.

Apart from looking into young people's conceptions and understandings of sexuality and HIV and AIDS, this study is also concerned with young people's embodied experiences, seeking to discover how sexual discourses (traditional and modern) act upon their bodies and shape their bodily practices. In recognition of participants' photos as evidence of how they construct their realities and how their life experiences are shaped by knowledge/discourses, I saw photo analysis, complemented by analysis of other data, as a way to trace down how sexual ideologies exert impact upon young people's bodies and sexuality. Discourse analysis is the analytic strategy I mainly employed to investigate

young people's embodied experiences under the influence of sexual discourses.

Discourse analysis is a broad term used across disciplines from linguistic, sociological, and social theory perspectives, encompasses many different and overlapping approaches to discourse (Litosseliti, 2006). Applied in this study, discourse analysis is understood in social and critical theory frame as ways of seeing and experiencing the world from a particular perspective. Discourses are manifested in texts and work to “represent, maintain, reconstitute and contest” certain viewpoints and values of social reality and social practices (Litosseliti, 2006, p. 3). In this regard, discourse can be defined as “a set of statements” that come to construct and stabilize particular versions of the world (Potter, 2004, p. 608), which can be articulated through a variety of medium such as images, verbal texts, and also through the practices that these media permit (Rose, 2001). In this study, discourses produced by the participants via the medium of photographs, verbal expression and claims as articulated in interviews, and other means such as their bodily and social practices as either discussed in interviews and focus group or observed by the researcher were put under analysis in attempts to explain and explore these young people's vision of seeing sex and sexuality. The version(s) of thinking about sex and sexuality that these youths constructed through various medium of language, which conflict against institutionalized discourses formulating youth sexuality as well as breaking from those held by older generations in China, demonstrate these young people's requirement for strong, distinguishable social identity. The discourses they created to define youth sexuality in their own right thus is seen in this study as both “constructed and constructive” (Potter, 2004, p. 610). Also set in the model of visual analysis, bodies of young women were investigated as a social construct to see how institutionalized disciplinary discourses powerfully work upon the bodies, bringing restrictions upon young women's bodily and social practices.

Visual constitution of social meaning involves three modalities of the image's production, or in other words, three sites at which the meaning is made: the site of the production of an image, the site of the image itself, and the site where it is seen by various audiences (Rose, 2001, p. 29). My exploration of Chinese youth's conceptualization of sexuality

and HIV and AIDS through analysis of the images they produced gave significant concern to the latter two sites. The former site of the image matters in that my investigation seeking for young people's sexual understandings that are represented via photography relies on a close reading of the images themselves to trace down their hidden thoughts and views. These underlying meanings under my inquiry are predominantly embedded in and are to be arising from the site of images. Importance given to the site of audiencing is attributed to the collaborative role that the researcher plays in reproducing or reconstructing the researched's understanding of their realities through providing her interpretation of the researched's understanding, as noted earlier in Chapter Three. In this regard, the process of audiencing, of viewing and making sense of the images produced by the researched on the part of the researcher, is important and constitutive of the reconstitution of that knowledge in my inquiry.

### *Semiotics*

Semiotics, the science of signs, arose with the twentieth-century "linguistic turn" in the realm of social sciences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), which demonstrated a revival, in social research as well as in other fields, of analytical devices associated with literary texts in the humanities being used to make sense of images, individual psychology, society, and other issues (Schirato & Webb, 2004). A sign, most simply put, is something that makes sense in the mind of someone, something combined with the signifier and signified, linked mentally (Manning, 2004). Semiotics examines how meaning occurs in signs—which are identifiable as words, pictures, sounds, shapes, colours, smells, artifacts, performance (such as gestures and body language) (Tomaselli, 1999) and, broadly, as anything that "stands for" something else (Chandler, 2002, p. 2). Semiotics is concerned with meaning-making and representation in many forms (verbal, visual, audial, and many others) (Chandler, 2002, p. 2). Drawing on this semiotic framework I treated and read all these data—the participants' photographs, the accompanying captions, objects (such as the condom and the state-installed the condom-vending machine), and in some cases, participants' bodily and social practices—as signs.

My analytic efforts focused on seeking multiple layers of connotative meanings. Connotations refer to a range of higher-level meanings residing in symbolic signs (Tomaselli, 1999; Rose, 2001). Given that topics being addressed in this study are culturally sensitive and stigmatized, participants tended to use symbolic signs to constitute their meanings and understandings of sexuality, the body, and HIV and AIDS. The symbolic sign (or the symbol), as explained by Manning (2004), is

a type of sign in which the expression refers to something else in an arbitrary fashion, or is embedded in cultural context such that without this context it has either richly ambiguous meaning or is merely a nonce symbol signifying nothing (p. 575).

My interpretive practice involved first identifying symbolic signs carrying a rich body of meanings and then making analysis of them by contextualizing them in Chinese cultures in order to conduct an accurate interpretation. Visual texts are rich and multi-layered in meaning production and possess huge narrative potential and expressive power to convey emotions, ideas, and attitudes (Krauss, 1992). Questions arose for us as the reader and the researcher of how to deal with a multitude of meanings emerging in the process of photo reading and how to use them (or choose part of them) for the reconstitution of reliable and understandable accounts of what the participants have originally encoded into the images.

Gombrich (1996) provides assistance to handle the “anarchy of polysemy” (Manning, 2004, p. 576) arising in the course of image reading. “The chance of a correct reading of the image,” he suggests, “is governed by three variables: the code, the caption, and the context” (p. 45). The code in the semiotic domain refers to the “way signs, language, writing, sounds, and style are strung together” (Tomaselli, 1996, p. 31). It needs to be noted that individual signs are of limited value in sense-making unless they are connected as a totality with other signs to construct a coherent meaning. Since meanings arising from the logical structure of signs make sense when signs are linked together according to socially agreed rules, codes are thus also understood as “patterns according to which information is arranged by the maker of messages” (Tomaselli, 1996, p. 32). Drawing on

these points, my semiotic practice involved first identifying signs and subsequently reading them in relation to one another as in a unit or pattern in an effort to create logical and understandable accounts and interpretations.

The second variable, the caption, also helped to shape my decoding of participants' visual texts. The words in reference to visual texts help to "anchor the meaning, and then to relay it—to direct readers in which meanings are privileged, and which are to be ignored" (Barthes, 1977, p. 38, as cited in Schirato & Webb, 2004, p. 99). In this sense, the captions lead the viewers directly to what the image-producer(s) would encode into the images. In my study, the captions that participants provided to accompany images gave explicit, though usually brief, explanations of, for example, the purpose of choice of given signs and meanings they encoded into. These explanatory texts greatly assisted me in locating my interpretation and reconstituting reliable accounts. Also seeing participants' captions as signs, I made analysis of the texts in terms of the diction of words, syntax, and meaning-production.

The third variable, the context of the image, refers to the historical and cultural environment within which the image is both produced and perceived (Tomaselli, 1996), and in which the communication between the producer and the viewer is made (Schirato & Webb, 2004). Concepts and ideas represented by signs are always culturally embedded (Manning, 2004). The analysis of signs thus entails the consideration of the situation of producer subjectivity and intentions within their context. In my cultural reading of signs and texts produced by the participants, I took into serious account the cultural and historical contexts within which the images were made in an effort to describe and explain young people' sexual conceptions and subjectivities contextualized in given social status and cultural frames.

While the governing of these three variables, the code, the caption, and the context, contributes to a valid reading of an image as above discussed, my interpretation was made with great importance given to the coherent structure of signs on which social narratives were constituted, the careful reading of captions offered by the producers upon

which my interpretation was anchored, and to the socio-cultural status and contexts within which the image was made and viewed.

### ***Discourse Analysis***

Discourse analysis is understood in a variety of ways and developed in a range of disciplines—notably linguistics, sociology, social psychology, philosophy, communication, literary theory, and cultural studies (Potter, 2004; Litosseliti, 2006). Generally speaking, discourse in these fields is treated either as linguistic units composed of several connected sentences and utterances or as texts with patterns and rules of coherence, while some sociological analysts understand it as conversational interaction with certain social functions (Poynton & Lee, 2000). From a social and critical theory perspective discourse manifests cultural ways of thinking and doing from a particular perspective (Antaki, 1994). Discourse construction can thus be understood as a way or process of constituting and reinforcing particular versions of the social world. In this sense, discourses are “inherently ideological in that they put forward certain viewpoints and values at the expense of others” (Litosseliti, 2006, p. 49). It can be evidenced in the fact that official discourses on youth sexuality dominate and marginalize discourses that young people themselves have constructed about their sexuality in contemporary China. However, rather than taking this situation for granted, young Chinese people seek for the legitimacy of their own definition and conceptualization of youth sexuality through appropriation of already legitimate discourses (official, medical, and popular literature), and negotiation, as discovered in this study. Given the ideological power of discourse, young people’s demands for voice and strong identity, as well as those of other marginalized groups such as women, can be communicated and achieved through discourse construction. As DeFrancisco and Palczewski (2007) claim, discourse/language is more than a tool used to transmit information or a mirror to reflect reality; it is also constitutive of that reality (Litosseliti, 2006) which the discourse-maker or language-user would construct based on his or her own perception and experiences. The construction of that reality is an ongoing process of representing, maintaining, negotiating, and interacting with dominant discourses.

In this study, I also draw on the poststructuralist sense, especially, Foucault's version of discourse to explain how mainstream discourses of sexuality (traditional sexual ideologies) construct knowledge and work to restrict and repress female sexuality throughout Chinese history and till the present. Discourse in Foucauldian analytic model, as Rose (2001) explains, refers to

groups of statements which structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking. In other words, discourse is a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it (p. 136).

Discourse is more than a medium of language merely conveying transparent and disinterested information; rather, it is saturated with power, working to shape the way it requires a thing be thought of and the way we act on the basis of that thinking. In other words, discourse is a form of disciplinary practices, operating upon the formation of subjectivity and leading human subjects into certain ways of thinking and acting. The dominant discourses on sexuality in Chinese society has been constructed and developed into powerful social norms, which serve to regulate the bodily experiences of people, especially women. Furthermore, people self-discipline in conformity with sexual norms. In Chinese society and societies in other areas of the world, discourse is constructed in various modes (verbal, visual, audial, and tangible such as objects) and social practices. In this study centered on the exploration of Chinese youth's sexual conceptualization, I make analysis of a special sexual object, condom, to look at how traditional sexual discourse/knowledge is constructed and transmitted through this object and is brought upon bodily practices of present-day Chinese youth through their interaction with this object.

I talked about the two methods of visual analysis separately but used them in a mixed way in an effort to explore more fully the range of meanings encoded in the images. The benefit of mixing methods lies in that it "allows a richly detailed picture of images' significance to be developed, and in particular it can shed interesting light on the contradictory meanings an image may articulate" (Rose, 2001, p. 202). Multiple, competing interpretations arising from the reading of images also represent the complexity of sexuality, HIV and AIDS, and related issues under my study. This requires

the use of mixing methods to help yield richer meanings.

### **Working with verbal data**

Doing qualitative research involves talking to those who are researched as well as observing and interacting with them on different occasions. Apart from setting up photovoice workshops, my fieldwork research involved formal interviews which were audio-taped, informal conversations not recorded verbatim, observation and participation (e.g., in AIDS-related activities launched by the school) which were selectively recorded in field notes, research journals, and memos. The transcriptions of interviews, notes, and other forms of verbal data gathered were first coded and recoded at different levels of analysis, ranging from descriptive, interpretive, to inferential, drawing on Miles and Huberman (1994). The category of descriptive codes in my analysis included accurate transcripts of interviews, my detailed fieldnotes and journals, and students' reflections on workshop activities. Given that the discipline and rigor of qualitative analysis depends on presenting solid and thick descriptive data (Geertz, 1973; Patton, 1990), much hard work was devoted to this level of analysis. The second type of codes, interpretive codes, is more explanatory, involving commenting and reflecting on the descriptions, explaining the findings, and developing themes and concepts. The third class of codes, pattern codes, is even more inferential and explanatory. Emergent leitmotifs or patterns that I had discerned in individual events and relationships were illustrated and arose in coded segments of data. Main themes that helped organize my findings primarily emerged at this level of analysis. The process of coding and recoding ran through my fieldwork research extending to my stage of writing up of thesis, in which I still frequently returned to the data to see if the constructs, categories, explanations, and interpretations made sense, and if they reflected the nature of the phenomena under my study.

In addition, I also found helpful Strauss and Corbin's (1990) inductive coding techniques, another analytic strategy dealing with text-based qualitative data, similar to Miles and Huberman's (1994). Briefly put, during the process of analyzing verbal data, I gathered initial data, wrote them up, and reviewed them line by line; then marked categories being generated beside the paragraph; and subsequently reviewed the categories, which would

yield more inductive categories. The employment of this analytic strategy helped facilitate the emergence and development of themes and concepts that contributed to my understanding of what is under study. In most circumstances, I engaged in a mixed use of both analytic approaches, seeking a systematic, rigorous consideration and analysis of text-based qualitative data.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter serves to delineate the overall design and carrying out of my fieldwork at CCNU. It presents a detailed “doing fieldwork” process from my entering the research site, building up rapport with the gatekeepers and others involved, recruiting participants, organizing photovoice workshops, conducting qualitative interviews, focus groups, and participant observation, and collecting, categorizing, and analyzing data. In terms of data analysis, I explain what analytic methods and how I have used them to work with the visual and verbal data I gathered.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS 1: REPRESENTATIONS AND EXPRESSIONS OF SEXUALITY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

A main concern of this study was to explore present-day Chinese youth's sexual conceptualizations, values, and practices and to look into how such understandings can inform sexuality education and HIV and AIDS intervention targeting young people. Young people have become the most vulnerable group to STIs/HIV in China and worldwide. This chapter serves as Part One of findings, which reveal and illuminate Chinese youths' beliefs and understandings of sexuality and physicality. This study also explores the actual bodily practices of young women in contemporary China and especially examines the ways their embodied experiences are constrained by traditional norms and influenced by their sexual conceptions and by the interaction between Chinese and Western sexual discourses. This chapter forms a backdrop for the second part of the findings presented in Chapter Five emphasizing sexuality education and HIV and AIDS interventions.

### **REFIGURING SEXUALITY**

Sex and sexuality has long been labeled as "obscene, deviant and dangerous" within traditional Confucian ideologies. These sexual ideologies, which aimed to debase human sexuality in order to put human bodies and sexuality under discipline, were appreciated and further developed in Maoist ideologies as argued earlier. Under the influence of the Maoist doctrine that emanated from Confucianism, a collective phobia of corporeality and sexuality was entrenched in modern China and is still prevalent in contemporary China in many ways. However, these dominant, ingrained sexual ideologies, as revealed in the findings of this study, tend to lose their reign over the younger generation in present-day Chinese society. These young people are inclined to understand sexuality in the essentialist sense and give it a legitimate position if it is conducted within morally

acceptable confines.

### **Sexuality recognized as human attribute and integral part of human life**

In response to the question “what do you think about sexual impulses and drives?” raised in each interview, every one of the interviewees, male and female, categorized sexual drives and desires into human instincts and attributes, regarding them as natural and normal—in contrast to the traditional definition of sexual desires as evil thoughts. Two women frankly shared their own experiences of feeling sexual urges while watching and reading some erotic scenes and chapters, to illustrate their views.

I sometimes feel myself sexually aroused by certain episodes of movies. I think everybody, all girls our age have such kind of experience. It is quite normal and innate to humankind. Those who deny such experience pretend to be unsophisticated and “pure-minded”. They are just performing that. But I am sure every one of them shares this with me.

While seeing a man and woman conduct some intimate activity on TV, I feel myself urged and sometimes I have sexual fantasies, picturing what I might be doing in such a situation with my boyfriend when I have one in the future.

These two interview scripts are not intended to prove that these young Chinese women have experiences of physiological reactions to sexual stimulus; this is the medical professionals’ task, for which I am not qualified. My purpose lies in what is suggestive of both young women’s undisguised frankness in uncovering their private reactions and feelings, that is, talks of sexual responses and emotions are no longer an untouchable area. Rather, they can be accessed through and in the young women’s open attitudes, where sexual arousal and urges are considered as normal and natural human attributes. Moreover, their depiction of their own bodies as sexually responsive and active reflects a dramatic transformation in young people’s sexual conceptualization as well as the emergence of sexual and self awareness in which their bodies and sexuality tend to be

liberated of traditionally ideological constraints and repressions. Apparently, these young women's sexual ideas conflict with those of prior generations, who view sexual desires and urges as shameful and evil and see female bodies as passive and fragmented sexual objects.

Students who have grown up in metropolitan cities and in a relatively liberal environment tend to take up sex and sexuality—not merely sexual desires but sexual engagements—as natural and acceptable. A male participant from Shanghai shared his view with me as follows:

Sex is an act running through the life process of an individual as well as human history. It is intrinsic to mankind. The fetus has been observed to conduct masturbations within the mother's body. *Dora: Analysis of a case of Hysteria* by Freud also documents that little boys and girls very often touch and stroke their premature sexual organs for pleasure. Pursuit of pleasure is human nature. As claimed by a Greek philosopher, without sexual pleasure, how could I make quest for truth? Sex is the basis of human existence and experiences.... With respect to sexual culture, we cannot deny that it is a significant, integral part of human cultures.

Taking up the essentialist stance that sees sex as a fundamental natural, biological phenomenon and an important source of pleasure for humans, he gave his opinions about sex education. School sex education should be reconceptualized and redesigned with an aim of teaching young people how to conduct sex in healthy and safe ways. The existing sex education system simply condemns premarital sex and takes every effort to prevent students from it by advocating sexual abstinence and deterring premarital intercourse among the students with severe punishments.

Participants, shaped by particular habitus, held distinct understandings of and attitudes towards sex and sexuality. In general, those from small towns and cities possessed more conservative sexual views, sticking more firmly to traditional norms and values. A young

man, for example, who was brought up in a small county in a northwestern province of China, expressed rather negative attitudes towards premarital sex and sex in general as contrasted to those held by the young man from Shanghai, although he also recognized the normality of sexual drives and urges as human attributes. Nonetheless, he condemned the acts of having these instincts satisfied by conducting sex and accused such acts of being bad and abnormal.

Sexual desires are normal but sexual practices are **definitely, completely** abnormal. To have sexual instincts actualized would bring harm to yourself, your partner, and children as a result of your sexual practices. Besides, it may cause diseases like AIDS. If you got AIDS, your whole life would be ruined, I think.

He recounted a tragic story that he heard from his college teacher in a course named *Politics and Ethics*, in which a young woman was raped by her boyfriend, had to marry him due to the social pressure of premarital virginity, but finally left this man she did not love for another country, leaving their child behind with the man. The student iterated the authenticity of this story, which his teacher used to initiate the lecture on the first chapter “What is Love” of their textbook. I had no way to access the original account of the story, but apparently it was cited as an example by the teacher to illustrate the destructive consequences that premarital sexual involvement may bring about to a relationship. Premarital sex in a relationship, the teacher expected to communicate, results in nothing but harm and hurt to the relationship and to the couple as well as their child. Premarital sex proves to be, in this “real” story as the teacher emphasized, the fundamental source that leads to the family tragedy and it is incompatible with true love. This message the teacher intended to convey was exactly what this student received and took in. Nonetheless, the teacher’s citation of the tragic story is problematic in the fact that rape is an act of sexual violence instead of a regular sexual behavior. The teacher’s mixture of both, deliberately or otherwise, serves to deter premarital sexual behaviors among the students by emphasizing the tragic ending, which seemingly results from sexual engagement before marriage. However, regardless of the teacher’s good intention of dissuading students from activities of premarital sex, such a deterrent offers little help to

the healthy construction and development of young people's sexual conceptions and identities, although it might help to restrain a limited number of students from engaging in sex—simply by frightening them off with tragic stories. Moreover, this kind of deterrent approach to sex and ethical education does little more than foster the sense of shame and fear culturally associated with sex and sexuality, keeping young people from a scientific and healthy understanding of corporeality and sexuality. In the meantime, it cannot manage to prevent college students, who are sexually active, from sexual engagement, as evidenced in the interview with the same young man who recounted the tragic story.

It is not rare, or I should say, it is common for college students to have sex. I have heard that some seniors in our department cohabit with their partners in off-campus rented apartments. They are ruining their lives, I think. It is abnormal and immoral.

This young man raised his voice when touching upon the topic of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), saying

I was very angry when I, for the first time, got to know about STDs in our biology class. I couldn't understand why and how persons get infected by these disgusting diseases. I was angry about these persons' ugly behaviors.

As demonstrated in his remark, the young man equated sexual practices to sexually transmitted diseases. In other words, it is dirty, shameful sexual practices that cause the spread of STDs. Sex is simply bad. I sensed his strong antipathy to not merely premarital sexual practices but sexual behaviors in general, although he recognized the legitimacy of sexual desires. From a traditional sex educator's perspective, this student should be a model and a "successful product" of the abstinence-oriented sex education system. In response to the question as to how he usually dealt with his sexual impulses, he said:

I usually shift my attention to something else like reading newspapers, doing sports, or telephoning my former classmates. I have a lot of good friends including girls. I

am on good terms with every one of them in our class as well as those in my former class of the high school, but I would not get myself involved in a relationship. I cherish friendship, but think it a childish behavior and a waste of time to make a girlfriend in college. I want to concentrate on my study and want to be a successful man.

What this young man did and said conforms to the teacher's education and expectation—diverting his attention to other “healthy” activities such as sports, reading, music, and making friends in every effort to subdue his sexual urges. As I observed in the research site, this young man was a publicly-recognized “good student”, ambitious, eager for knowledge, popular among students and teachers, and never involved in a relationship (Engagement in a relationship was forbidden among first-year students as formulated in the department regulations). As an outstanding student, he was elected as head of the Students' Union of the department. The abstinence-based sex education seems to function well with this young man in the sense that he manages to suppress his sexual impulses by shifting to other more “healthy” and “meaningful” activities. But what about a large number of other young people who are not so “excellent” and “strong-willed” to keep themselves from sexual involvement? Besides, can this really work—simply requiring young people to be sexually abstinent and demanding them to shift their attention away from sexual activities to “more healthy” activities such as reading and sports? Can the abstinence-oriented sex education contribute to the healthy construction and development of young people's sexual psychology and sexual identity even though it might manage to prevent a limited number of students from sexual engagement? As my interview with this young man went further, it was revealed that this model student took it as unacceptable for his future wife to initiate sex and would not forgive her except for the first time; he regarded it as a rule that the man should dominate every aspect of a relationship and of social life; he assumed thirty-five as an age by which he might be able to obtain a doctorate and consequently an acceptable age when he would get married and begin his sexual life. He would strive to clear away any obstacles including sex from his destination of becoming a university professor, the expectation of his parents and grandparents. In this young man's view, as explicitly manifested, sex was understood as a

barrier to the realization of his life goal, something bad on the way to his success. To sum up, several points concerning Chinese youth's perception and understanding of sexuality emerged. First, the prolonged silence on sex and sexuality is being interrupted among young people including women, who are becoming more open to talks on sexuality. This disruption of the sexual taboo would pave the way for further discussion and recovery of their concerns, problems, needs, and interests related to sexuality, as required by effective sexuality education (Aggleton & Campbell, 2000). It also facilitates attempts to address pressing concerns and issues with regard to youth sexuality in current social contexts (Elders, 2002). Second, China's younger generation is developing an essentialist, rational understanding of sex and sexuality as compared to prior generations who regard sex as, by nature, simply bad, shameful, and necessarily depreciated and subdued. The common sharing of biomedical notion of seeing sexuality as natural and normal among young people serves as a foundation for the development of a full sense of sex and sexuality, despite the fact that the vision of seeing sex as a harmful and dangerous force in bodies prevails among some youths and, more broadly, the general population in China nowadays. It prepares for the construction of a healthy understanding of sexuality among young people not merely in biomedical terms but seeing it as "a source of pleasure" (Luker, 2006, p. 9).

### **Beauty and female sexuality**

As revealed in students' interviews, they are inclined to perceive sexuality as a normal and natural attribute of human beings; thus, the derogative and shameful spin culturally associated with it comes to lose its power among these youths. More than that, a kind of appreciation of the beauty of (female) sexuality is emerging and is embodied in the photos presented below which were produced by a group of female participants.



Figure 4 and Figure 5 Beauty and Female Sexuality

花儿在人们心目中总是美丽而纯洁的，可是有多少人会将美丽的百合视为人的生殖之花？恐怕大多数人不会这么想。

*Flowers are always regarded as beautiful and pure. When gazing at a beautiful lotus, how many people come up with the idea that the flower is like a human reproductive organ? We may venture to say most of us have never thought in this way.*

Participants' explanation: *In the left picture, a pink lotus elegantly leans against the Meta sequoia trunks, floating along water quietly. Graceful and noble, lotuses are always considered as holy flowers in Chinese culture: the ancient Chinese admire the lotus as God's flower. It signifies holy spirits that cannot be affected by dirty and evil thoughts. Noble-minded men in history thus are always compared to pure flowers, especially lotuses.*

*In our opinion, sexuality is just as natural as flowers. Existence is meaningful. If people did not perform sexual practices, human species would end with extinction. Sexuality is a very common biological quality of human beings. It is as beautiful and pure as the lotus. We would use a common phenomenon to elaborate from another aspect on lotus-like sexuality. We all have favorite flowers. Shall we appreciate these flowers the way we admire sexuality? Let's look at the picture, in which the lotus lives on water. Imagine, if human beings live without the performance of sexual behaviors, in the long run, we will vanish from the earth. If we avoid admitting the existence of sexuality as human attributes, this is nothing noble or moral. It is a blind and ignorant act. We have lived*

*within the asphyxiating restrictions of so-called morality and our own hypocrisy, which defines sexuality to be shameful and simply bad. Our humanity is suppressed; our life has lost its entirety and vigor because of the lack of the simplest and truest pleasure which only sexuality can bring about. The over-suppression of sexuality only leads to our suffering and sometimes, even more serious consequences. So it is high time we free ourselves and change our attitudes towards sexuality. It doesn't mean we abandon moral rules; instead, we do need to abandon some of the conventions. Let's stop uglifying human sexuality. What we need is a sensible and healthy view about it.*

*Casting a passing glance over the two images, the viewer would be immediately captured by the beautiful, flourishing lotus centered in both pictures. The bright and white flower in the left picture is backdropped with a fluster of dark-colored, withered and decayed stems and is also poising on a fresh green lotus leaf and water. The signs of the stalks, the lotus leaves (one piece being vigorous-looking and the other shriveled alongside the same withered stalks), and water are laid out in this image to spotlight the blossoming lotus in its prime. The dark-colored, filthy-looking stalks remind us of corrupt things and ideas that have been culturally labeled to sexuality, which is embodied by the flower. Set among the filthy stalks, the lotus is by no means contaminated; instead, it remains clean, pure, and beautiful. The beauty and the true meaning of sexuality can never be affected, ruined by derogative labels imposed upon it. The green leaf and water supporting the vigorous life of the lotus signify the sense that sexuality itself is nothing dirty and shameful but natural and healthy. If treated and viewed with appropriate and correct attitudes, sexuality can remain in its own sense and develop in vigor. In contrast to the first picture, the pink lotus in its prime, which is set up on clean water and surrounded by a couple of green leaves, is used to embody a kind of sexuality that is treated and understood in a healthy way. The signs in the right image are arranged interconnectedly to constitute a picture in which sexuality is viewed and dealt with in a correct context, which in turn contributes the vigorous blooming of the flower.*

The participants' explanatory text going with the two photos is relatively long, shifting in meaning, and somewhat confusing in the mixed use of metaphors. For example, the

flower (lotus) is first used to symbolize (female) sexuality and then refer to a human being while water is compared to sexuality. The students' grappling with the delivery of the message here suggests that they have difficulty in articulating their thought on complex subject matter such as sexuality. It also seems to show that these participants have seldom been provided with a chance on school-based occasions and elsewhere to voice their views about sexuality, an area pinned with stigma in Chinese societies. But as implied, they are eager to share their ideas and understanding of this topic and have much to say if only being given the chance.

As shown in the participants' explanation, the participants directly compare the lotus to the female genitalia—what a courageous and extraordinary simile! It is a common case in Chinese literature that flowers are analogized to beautiful girls or women, but they are rarely likened directly to woman's private parts. The participants' choice of the lotus to delineate their conceptions of female sex organs (signifying female sexuality) reminds me of similar terms collected in a dictionary such as “flower”, “daisy” and alike, euphemistic expressions used by some lesbians to refer to the female parts (Drenth, 2005, p.17). This dictionary was compiled in the 1960s, when Western women were given opportunities to select or coin words and expressions to constitute their own conceptions of female sexuality in order to distance themselves from male-dominated sexual liberated ideology (Drenth, 2005). This event resulted in a rising awareness of female sexuality, body, and self among women at the time. Likewise, this photovoice project, I expect, can allow young women (and men) being involved to use visual language to constitute their own perceptions and understandings of sexuality issues. Thus, it serves the same purpose of empowering young people, especially young women.

The students' use of a flower to signify the female genitalia reflects their celebration of the essentialist views of sexuality as well as appreciation of female sexuality. The claim of “Existence is meaningful” reinforces their existentialist conception of sexuality and the legitimacy of sexuality as natural, beautiful, and noble as the lotus. As mentioned above, it is a rare case in Chinese culture that a flower is directly analogized to the female procreative organ; the willow, instead, with its extraordinary reproductive power of

asexual multiplication, is endowed with religious expectations and emotions that its procreative abilities would be transplanted into human bodies for the perpetual continuation of mankind. In common cases, a woman who preserves her chastity for her (future) husband or a man who remains sincere in a corrupted environment is eulogized as the lotus, a flower growing out of mire but free of its contamination. This bold association between human sexuality and the lotus, as noted above, suggests a kind of overturning of contemporary young Chinese women's attitudes towards and ideas about sexuality against those of their counterparts in prior generations. Their representation of sexuality as the beautiful, natural, pure, and noble flower poses challenge against conventional Chinese sexual values in which sexuality is defined as obscene, deviant, and harmful. It implies an emerging clash between the new and liberated sexual conceptions that young women are increasingly taking and the conventional sexual beliefs aimed at repressing female sexuality and bodies that were internalized by the older generation in the country. Besides, the utilization of the lotus as the signifier of female sexuality is appropriate in the fact that flowers are indeed the reproductive organs of plants in a biological sense.

Their unusual employment of the lotus with its floral beauty and connotation of nobleness referred to the female organ also suggests a rising awareness of female sexuality and a stronger identity among these young women. In retrospect, there is a prolonged history of depreciation of women in Chinese societies as articulated in Confucian doctrine. For example, a Confucian tenet "only women and villains are hard to be raised" (唯女子与小人难养也), similar to Plato's categorization of women to children, slaves and brutes (Spelman, 1999), explicitly indicates the disrespect for women. This unfair treatment of women can also be illustrated by a number of Chinese characters with an appendant "女", which refers to "being female" and serves to bring negative and derogative sense to the combined words, such as 娼(prostitution), 嫌(dislike), 婪(greedy), and others. These two examples offer us glimpses into how women were socially inferiorly situated in traditional China. As discussed in Chapter Two, they were not independent individual beings but appendages to male-mastered family units. Female sexuality was meaningful merely in the domain of procreation to ensure family

succession and perpetuation. Otherwise, (female) sexuality was devalued and denied as a threat to the maintenance of the family unit and the nation. However, as communicated through the photos, the participants elevate women and female sexuality, which demonstrates an emerging consciousness of women as independent, strong beings and the sense of pride in being such beings.

In the face of the potential involvement in a relationship and bodily intimacy, a number of female participants prefer individual detachments from it, and assume it a barrier to their personal academic development and other aspects. As they observe:

I am not against premarital sex, but I prefer to keep myself away from the involvement in it and a relationship. I have my life plan and will make my efforts to achieve it. College years are important to me and I will not invest them, or part of them, in a relationship. When in the future I am ready, when I am established in a job and career, economically independent, then I'll think about forming a relationship with a guy. (female student)

I don't think it a clever idea to engage in a relationship during college time. Speaking for myself, academic work and voluntary work in a couple of school-based associations have taken up almost all of my time. Finding a boyfriend and hanging out with him consumes time and kinda wastes time. I will not do it. But I accept premarital sex. I am quite all right with it if girls around me have sexual experience, but for myself, it is not gonna happen. I will not allow myself to do it. (female student)

Apparently, different from their counterparts in traditional and modern China, whose bodies were constrained and coerced within rigid and strict sexual norms built on Confucian and Maoist ideologies, present-day young people have more self-control of their own bodies but willingly restrain bodily freedom for better individual development. The constraint of female bodies in the former case is a forced, coercive act while in the latter, bodily restriction is voluntary and self-chosen.

A growing sense of independence, autonomy, and self-development among young women nowadays is manifested in their bodily practice of self-restriction.

Talk of sexuality is often associated to the subject of love because love includes sexuality though sexuality is not love (Fenchel, 2006, p. 31). My participants' perceptions of sexuality is often related to their conceptions of love and a loving relationship.

### Sexuality and love



Figure 6 and Figure 7 Sexuality and Love

不相爱的人结合，就象绳子扭到一起，不管怎么样，都是强求的，表面的，而且是空虚的。不相爱的人的结合是悲哀的，这样真正爱着他们的人就和他们真正远去了，成了两条平行线。所以，在没有真正爱情的时候，是绝对不能随便和别人发生关系的。要对爱自己和自己爱的人负责，更要对自己负责。

*The couple united without love is just like a pair of twisted ropes. No matter how hard they are combined together, their union or marriage is forced, superficial and empty.*

*The union of the couple without love is a sad thing, as their true Mr. or Mrs. Right will leave from their life, just like a pair of parallel which cannot meet each other. So we should not have casual sex with others without the true love. Take responsibility for both those who love us and those we love, and more importantly for us ourselves.*

A group of five young women provided these two photos, which are symbolic and rich in meaning. As explained in the caption, a pair of entwined ropes are symbolized as a couple of lovers whose relationship is not based on mutual emotional associations but on other factors, for example, money, power, and social positions. Such kind of combination,

in the students' view, is doomed to failure. They used the two pictures to express their appreciation of romantic love and its crucial role in a relationship. A kind of feelings of keenness for a relationship established exclusively on "*true love*" can be sensed between the lines of the caption. But how is true love conceived among young people? And how is sex related to true love?

A genuine, trusting relationship should be constructed on love, a strong emotional attachment between the lovers; the otherwise relationship based on something but love is "*superficial, empty*", and meaningless. This piece of message conveyed through and reinforced in the first part of the caption suggests the dominance of the romantic love complex over young people's views of love and relationship. In the precondition of being involved in a loving relationship, sex is acceptable and permissive. In the opposite situation, sex is illegitimate in a relationship without intense feelings of affection as they "*should not have casual sex with others without the true love.*" This sexual belief sounds morally appropriate in that sex behavior in a loving relationship is acceptable, and sex without love is bad and problematic. However, such a view of sexuality that gives love a fundamentally important position in a relationship serves to buttress the romantic love complex among young people, elevating feelings of love as spiritually pure and noble. Sex, physical engagement, it implies, is merely acceptable and meaningful when it occurs in a relationship upon true love—otherwise, it is an irresponsible and harmful behavior. Such differentiation between sex as something physical and emotionless and love as something spiritual and noble structures and solidifies young people's problematic sexual attitudes in which love as in the noble spiritual domain is "pure and good", while sex as a bodily practice is "less worthy, reprehensible and simply bad" (Johansson, 2007, p. 101). This problematic sexual belief dominated by the romantic love complex also contributes to young people's unconditional acceptance of sexual practices, safe and unsafe, within a relationship of romantic love, which would lead them to unprotected sex and put them at risk of STIs/HIV infection.

The problems and potential danger with young people's sexual beliefs are also demonstrated in the interviews with them. I observed an eager expectation of the

idealized love relationship among a large number of female participants, who had had no experience of being in a relationship. There were a range of factors that shaped their longing for the engagement in a relationship: a strong feeling of affection towards a man, curiosity, loneliness, envy of those in a relationship, and peer pressure. As shown, emotional links were named first by virtually every one of the women interviewees as the generator of the onset of a relationship. In expectation for a romantic love experience, the majority of them recognized the possibility of engaging in sex when the time is appropriate—for example when they are convinced that the young man really loves her, he is nice and trustworthy, or their relationship is stable. Looking at their youthful eyes glittering with excitement and expectations, I could not but wonder if they were able to identify what true love is, although I never doubt the active role young people can perform in controlling their lives.

The romantic love complex has been a dominant cultural Gestalt in traditional China and is still promoted today. Young women in contemporary China are exposed to a large body of literature (e.g., popular romance novels written by Qiong Yao) portraying relationships soaked in sweet love, where there are limited touches of realistic problems with a relationship such as unexpected pregnancy and partner's disloyalty. These negative aspects of a relationship are overridden by the passionate portrayal of a deep romantic attachment between both partners. Moreover, TV dramas starring good-looking young actors and actresses, primarily imported from Korea or produced in mainland China and Taiwan, which are characterized by the idealization and oversimplification of the romantic love relationship, are promoted in China's market in order to magnetize the female audience. Chinese girls and young women, as the main consumption population, devote much of their leisure time to viewing these dramas, being fascinated no more than by charming appearances of actors and actresses and simplistic plots exalting romantic love. In these TV dramas (e.g., *Meteor Garden* and *Full House*), the idealized and simplistic depiction of romantic love tends to lead young women viewers to the formation of an immature and naïve vision of a relationship. Young women and girls without a clear understanding of love and sexuality and without sufficient sexual knowledge, if they get involved in a relationship, are easily coaxed into (unprotected)

sexual behaviors and make themselves vulnerable to the infections. As a young man comments,

Young women are simple-minded. Many of them are. I have seen too many such women. They are easily cheated into sex by their boyfriends. In a relationship, young men for sure are in the position of controlling and actively doing what they want. If a man wants sex, no more than three times, he will make it happen through, say, setting up some romantic scenes, saying sweet words, and using tricks, even though his girlfriend is unwilling to at first. (male student)

This young man was an active member in the Society of Sexual Psychology in CCNU, greatly interested in issues of youth sexuality. As the monitor of his class, he was trusted like a brother or a close friend by his colleagues, who were inclined to share inner thoughts and secrets with him. He said that he was outraged by the irresponsible behaviors of young men who were engaging in casual sex, but felt effortless to wake up those unsophisticated and credulous young women around him.

I present the below transcript of part of an interview with a young woman to give another side of story about how young females look at sexuality and love. This young woman expressed her yearning for a romantic love experience and frankly said that, in the future, she would not use a condom for the first time she had sex with the man she fell love in with because that material object would somehow ruin the beautiful, spiritual quality of romantic love.

I do not deny the protective functions of condoms. On the contrary, I think condoms are quite useful and helpful in keeping the users from infections of many kinds. But it just makes me feel uncomfortable to use it in the process of love making with my boyfriend or husband—at least I will not use it for the first time....Why? cos love is noble and romantic and having bodily intimacy with the guy that loves you and you really love is a means of the realization of the love between you both. The use of the condom would kind of harm it.... Anyway,

definitely I will not use it ... at least for the first time. (female student)

This young woman, like many of her peers, knew clearly the three modes of transmission of HIV and espoused gender equality in life, but might put herself at risk by rejecting the use of a most effective measure to keep her body safe. It is because romantic love, she and they believe, is at a spiritual, superior level, and should not be spoiled by any inferior, material substances.



性就好比恋人真正相交的十字路口，它是爱的最高体现。如果两个人不能结合，他们就不会真正意义上了解对方。所以，对于纯粹的恋人们，性是表达爱意和灵魂相交的神圣途径。但是他们同样也需要向对方负责，也就意味着他们应当尊重彼此，适当地控制自己的行为 and 感情。有些人在发生关系以后，就去寻找下一个相交的十字路口，发生另一段关系。如果全社会都是这样混乱，那么像 AIDS 这样的疾病就会通过这一个个的十字路口传播，这种疾病就无法控制，人类也就会终究走向灭亡。

Figure 8 What Does Sex Mean?

*Sexual intercourse is like a crossing as presented in the photo: two lovers convene and fuse in one point. It is the highest embodiment of love. Without physical intimacy, the couple cannot fully know each other. So to pure lovers, performing sexual acts is really a sacred way to express love and the communication of their souls. Besides, they should also be responsible for each other—that means, they should respect and be faithful to each other and control themselves in some aspects. If, after having sex, they (or either of them) just go ahead, searching for the next “crossing” with another person, if the whole society goes this way, venereal viruses such as STDs and HIV will spread out with instances of unprotected bodily contacts as symbolized by the crossings. In such circumstances of chaos as a consequence of the lack of moral restrictions, the end will never come to the transmission of the virus, but to the existence of humankind.*

As displayed in the picture of a basketball court, two lanes that extend in vertical directions, converge and get crossed with each other are used to symbolize the life paths

of man and woman from different backgrounds who encounter, develop a relationship, and engage in sexual practices. The participants use the crossing point of both lanes to signify the corporeal intimacy of the lovers, which they see as the natural development of a romantic love relationship. Compared with the preceding picture, this one serves to claim the participants' acceptance of sexual practices involved in a pre-marital relationship. Further, they emphasize the necessary and significant role that physical intimacy can play in a love relationship as displayed in the caption: It is a necessary way to "fully know" each other in love, and further divinize bodily contact as "a sacred way to express love", and even further extol it as "the highest embodiment of love".

Being away from China for four years, nevertheless, I had expected that there would be a striking change in sexual views and sexual attitudes of present-day Chinese youth as a consequence of dramatic societal alternations (economic, political, and socio-cultural) in this country in a reform era. They would hold a more open and liberated view towards sex and sexuality. However, the participants' bodily conception in which physical intimacy is seen as an integral experience in a relationship and is divinized as the highest form of love was totally beyond my anticipation. It needs to be noted that this picture accompanied by the caption was provided by a single-sex group of female participants. These young women's liberalized and revolutionized ideas of corporeality and sexuality offer themselves as a signal revealing a clash between the younger generation's sexual conceptions and those of the younger generation three decades ago, let alone those of young people in the Maoist era of the 1960s. Young adults in Maoist times were firmly regulated and disciplined—and consciously disciplined themselves—within the highly restrictive sexual ideologies, a direct and further succession of Confucian doctrine of sexuality. Four decades afterwards, young people, children of the younger generation in Mao's era, have broken with the sexual beliefs that their parents have been sticking to, showing appreciation of a new sexual discourse that liberates bodily repression and gives rise to the physical realization of romantic love.

As displayed in the participants' explanatory text, excessive credit is given to the emotional associations of the lovers: romantic love is largely celebrated and divinized by

these young women. Their enthusiastic celebration of spiritual love has contributed to the formation of a kind of logic that spiritual love justifies a romantic love relationship and then justifies sexual engagement in such a relationship. Furthermore, the divinization of spiritual love goes far and leads to the divinization of physical intimacy in the relationship as evidenced in “*So to pure lovers, performing sexual acts is really a sacred way to express love and the communication of their souls*”. The participants see physical intimacy as a means, a sacred way, to make spiritual love realized. In the process of sexual intercourse, physical unisons serve the union of souls.

Apparently, the participants’ view of love and sexuality is highly problematic and dangerous in that it justifies the sexual involvement of young people in a love experience and encourages them into physical intimacy assumed by them as a necessary way to express and realize spiritual love. The infections of STDs and HIV would take place and be transmitted through unprotected sex among the young people involved in a relationship.

Besides, a kind of divide and/or mixture of spiritual love and physical love emerge in the participants’ caption. The dichotomy of spiritual love and physical love evolves out of the binary opposition of mind and body embedded in Chinese cultures, partially built upon Buddhist doctrines, in which a human being is considered as a vulgar body housing a divine soul. Spirits outlive the flesh body and will persist perpetually in the world after the body gets decayed to nothing after death. In parallel, this appreciation of the soul over the body can also be found in Plato’s famous discussion of beauty and love in his *Symposium*, which ends up with a celebration of the soul privileged over the body (Spelman, 1999). Beauty, as claimed by Plato, is something that transcends any particular body or thing and spiritual love between people is a kind of beauty to be celebrated. Spiritual love, or the communication of souls, between people, is more “lovelier and less mortal” than the “enjoyment of flesh by flesh,” which is a “wanton shame” (Symposium, p. 209). Buddhist beliefs share Platonic ideas in this regard, holding this soul/body dichotomy in a considerable favor of the former.

Under the influence of the mind/body dichotomy ingrained within Chinese cultures,

contemporary young Chinese people embrace the divinity of spirit and soul, admiring and longing for spiritual love in a relationship. However, unlike the older generation, who clings to traditional sexual norms in which the corporeal—from which sensual and sexual pleasure is derived—is devalued, young people nowadays tend to form a different conception of the physical body. As shown in the above caption provided by young students, they have recognized the significance of the body and come to appreciate it in the way of divinizing it. Young people are seeking to redefine the physical body, a cultural stigma, in favorable terms, although their way of reconceptualization is problematic in terms of the risk that their divinization of spiritual love and physical love would lead them to: engaging them into unsafe sexual practices. I take up a two-folded perspective to look at the issue of young people's refiguring of the body. On the one hand, it is significant to see that present-day Chinese youth seek to construct their own meaning of the physical body and give prominence to the body through the way of divinizing and celebrating physical love. Their effort of constituting their own understanding of the body serves to liberate them from the repression of restrictive sexual norms. It also needs to be noted that on the other hand, the divinization and celebration of physical love gives justification for sexual engagement in a relationship. It would push young people into sexual practices and put them at risk for STIs/HIV infection in the absence of effective sex education and HIV and AIDS prevention programs .

The participants have been aware of the risk of the infections resulting from sexual intercourse involving multiple partners as reflected in the accompanying caption. They highlight the importance of adhering to the social morals of monogamous sexual behaviors by envisioning a terrifying, catastrophic picture of mankind—its extinction as a consequence of causal sexual conducts. They use the steel railings in the picture to represent either the moral confines, within which they think partners in a relationship should restrict themselves, or the boundaries of a relationship, to which partners should be loyal. However, the participants also need to realize that it is not a rare case that women get infected within a stable marriage or relationship from their single partners as revealed in much research on women and HIV and AIDS in Africa (Compbell, 2003). A faithful single partnership, in some cases, cannot guarantee a safe sexual life free from

the infections of HIV and STDs.

Subsequent to the preceding section which centers on constituting accounts of young people's conceptualization of sex, sexuality, love, and the body, the next section shifts the focus to their embodied experiences, especially those of young women, through a socio-cultural analysis of female bodies, the very entity perceiving and experiencing sexuality. While human bodies have been explored as the surface imprinted by male-dominated history (Foucault, 1979) and a practical, direct locus of social control (Bourdieu, 1977, as explained in Bordo, 1997, p. 90), the bodies of young Chinese women in this study are read as a social site upon which a variety of sexual and bodily discourses/knowledge exert influences. This thesis is mainly concerned with two kinds of knowledge of corporeality and sexuality, which are conflicting: restrictive Chinese sexual norms and Western discourses of sexual liberation and sexual freedom. In recognition of sexuality as a social construct, I make an attempt to study the social construction of present-day young Chinese women's sexuality as an unstable, contested process through looking at how conflicting sexual discourses (traditional Chinese sexual ideologies and Western ways of seeing sexuality), which interact and compete, are brought to act upon young women and shape their sexual conceptualization and their bodily practices.

## **READING WOMEN'S BODIES AS A SOCIAL SITE**

Informed by feminist studies of heterosexuality and cultural studies that treat the physical body as a social site (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 2003), this study understands the female body as a surface on which the predominant social codes of hierarchies and moral rules are inscribed. Over a lengthy period of more than 2000 years, China has been under the sovereignty of patriarchal hegemony; the bodies of Chinese women have remained the direct loci of social control (Bourdieu, 1977) and patriarchal oppression. Though in contemporary China, a country evolved out of old social and ideological systems, where women's emancipation and gender equality have been set privileged in social and political agenda, female bodies remain repressed and disciplined but in a much less restrictive manner as compared to what traditional women have endured. As revealed in this study, young women's bodies are forced into the cultural

machine of gender normalization and discipline. Young women consciously docilize themselves according to the mainstream sexual values that see an ideal female sexuality and bodies as passive, chaste, and compliant to social rules. This finding might conflict with a recent prevailing media representation of young Chinese female bodies as highly sexually liberated and also be against a wide identification of the occurrence of a sexual revolution among China's younger generation in mass media and academia.

In this section of study, nonetheless, I seek to discover and constitute the accounts of the actual lived, embodied experiences of young women in relation to sexuality in contemporary Chinese contexts. I am especially concerned with reading female bodies as a social site upon which Chinese sexual norms exert strong influence and increasingly, Western sexual discourses, which have been allowed into China since the onset of the reform era, also work. In current Chinese contexts of growing globalization, various sexual discourses converge, compete, and interact with Chinese sexual knowledge. Such interaction between or among diverse sexual discourses act upon the bodies of young people and shape their bodily practices. In this regard, I also see female bodies as a medium of youth sexual cultures (Bordo, 1997) in present-day Chinese society.

### **Popular representations of the young female body as sexually liberated and out of control**

The younger generation in contemporary China has recently been portrayed as “crazy and out of control” in sexual behavior, as strikingly contrasted to prior generations, in western media such as a newly-made documentary *China's Sexual Revolution* by two Canadian journalists traveling to Beijing, Miro Cernetig and Josh Freed (Richmond, 2007). These two seasoned photographers were reported to have ventured into “dark” sites such as nightclubs with covert video cameras, and in so doing managed to disclose a realistic panorama of the striking sexual revolution under way in contemporary Chinese society. This documentary was shown on the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) television network in November 2007 and immediately stirred up responses of shock and doubt in the Chinese community and broadly, the Canadian community. The audience

was substantially amazed by the bodies of present-day young Chinese adults, constituted as sexually liberated and unrestricted.

China's domestic media also joined in the practice of demonizing young people, depicting them as indulging in casual sex, either by providing some alarming statistics about high percentage of premarital sex among young people (sometimes from unconvincing sources) or presenting some extreme cases and stories. However, my experience of participant observation and intensive interviews with students in a university in China provided me a different and more complex picture. It reveals that young adults were unable to enjoy or abuse the bodily freedom to the extent as represented by the media; instead, most of them, especially female students, restrain themselves from behaviors beyond moral boundaries. It is interesting to find that these young women chose to uphold and hoped to reserve traditional values in face of modern ideas and notions of sexual freedom. I need to highlight here that I do not mean to suggest that the media portrayal is unreal and fabricated, but attempt to call for attention to the complexity of issues related to sexual status and sexual ecology of Chinese youth. It warrants in-depth and comprehensive examinations of youth sexuality, bodies, gender, identity, and other related matters.

I do not deny the fact that present-day Chinese women are enjoying much more bodily freedom than those in the past as manifested: their various and free choices of hair and attire styles, mobility and ability to leave home for career thereby allowing greater scope for them to resist the familial demands of early marriage and motherhood, voice heard on occasions, and sexual practices beyond the traditional moral boundary of exclusively legitimate marital sex. Moreover, the sexual attitudes and behaviors of young Chinese women are observed to have altered radically as compared to those of previous generations (Pan, 2006). In the circumstances of increasing globalization, western-style sexual values are exerting a significant impact upon young adults' sexual understandings. However, all these changes do not mean "anything goes" as Johansson (2007) comments on present-day western youths (p. 40). Foucault (1980) reveals that sexuality remains an arena in which rules, norms, and regulations are changing and transforming in form and

nature in response to varying historical times. Contemporary Chinese society is experiencing its belated “sexual revolution”, which brings to Chinese citizens opportunities of accessing different ways of viewing sex and sexuality and practicing sexual liberation. Nonetheless, new forms of institutionalized regulation, discipline, and coercion over the general population arise in response to new social circumstances. Besides, old disciplinary social rules and practices do not dissolve but persist, maybe powerfully, in the new social circumstances. As observed by Pan, Parish, Wang, and Laumann (2004), many traditional assumptions especially about female sexual behavior remain unchanged in contemporary Chinese society. An echoing view also holds that traditional values of chastity and virginity are still highly regarded (Farrer, 2002). In such a complex and contradictory social landscape, in the face of conflicting and contesting sexual discourses and new and old forms of regulation, young Chinese people have their own meaning and understanding of sexuality and embodiment.

### **The practical lives of the female body perceived and experienced by young people**

Participants used the two photographs juxtaposed as presented below to highlight the restriction that they experienced in relation to sexuality in quotidian lives.



Figure 9 and Figure 10 What do We Actually Experience in Relation to Sexuality

这两幅照片是一种对比。左边的松树自然原始地生长，却看起来丑陋。右边的球形观赏树虽然迎合了人们的审美观，却被修建而无法自然生长。右边的树看起来美丽，正规，一直，符合标准，但是却缺少个性。人类内心的本性包含许多欲望，比如说性冲动和贪念，就像左边狂野原始的树枝。从本质上说，我们希望能自由释放我们的欲望，但社会道德阻

止我们这样做。因此，我们必须适应社会的原则，来促进自身超我的价值，满足本我的意义。我们看起来是正常的，有道德的，高尚的，就像是右边整齐一致的树，但是我们背弃了自身原始的驱使和真正的意愿。

*The two photos are presented here in comparison and contrast. The left pine tree is natural, wild but not beautiful, while the round-shaped trees on the right have deliberately been pruned in accordance with one's beauty appreciations. They look beautiful, formal, uniform, and standardized, but lack characteristics. Human beings have id in inner mind, which contain many instinctive desires such as sexual impulses and lusts, just like the wildly growing branches of the left tree. Internally, we want to freely let out our expressions of these desires while social morals keep us from doing that. In such conditions, we must behave ourselves in conformity to the socially ascribed principles to follow up our superego and to have our ego fulfilled. We seem normal, moral, and noble like the right uniformly trimmed trees, but we betray our innate drives and genuine feelings.*

Two types of trees, one growing naturally and the other purposefully trimmed, are juxtaposed to signify two states of human sexuality: the original sexuality in the natural situation, which is characterized as spontaneous and unruly; and the normalized, regulated sexuality worked upon by external repressions. Freud's iceberg theory which formulates the interactions of id, superego, and ego (see Cervone & Pervin, 2008) is utilized by the students to further describe their conceptions of sexuality. The struggles and negotiations between id and superego show the conflicts, sometimes irreconcilable, of sexual urges-driving conducts and social morals set up to restrict and discipline the unruliness of sexual drives and desires. The combat between both forces tends to end up with the surrender of the former id to the latter superego—and with the actualization of the ego. The disciplinary force that is deployed by superego derives from the outer repressions such as normative and moral restrictions but is customarily internalized by the subject to abide by it. This kind of mechanics of power of restriction and repression from outer to inner and/or vice versa acts upon the human body and results in a socially permitted and normative body, which appears uniform and standardized under the coercion of disciplinary practices in the participants' view. Besides, their effort to locate sexuality in the battlefield of id confronting superego for the formulation of their sexual

conceptions reveal tensions that reside in their inner world as well as the exterior, social domains where these group of sexually active young adults inhabit. Internally, their sexual instincts and drives remain dormant or simply lurked under control of disciplinary forces while lack of counseling services and effective sex education programs intended for young people results in frustrations, anxiety, and depression among them. Such consequent feelings and emotions of the participants can be sensed between the lines of the caption offered by them. Sentences in sequence, for example, with similar syntax but conflicting and contesting sense, “we want to freely let out ..., we must behave ourselves..., we seem normal..., we betray our innate drives...”—they can be read as a sign of their ambivalent sexual views, forced submission to the disciplinary practices and unwilling acceptance of having their innate attributes coerced as this coercion means a betrayal of their genuine will. These paralleled and competing sentences sharing and highlighting the subject “we” constitute a manifest account of the experiences of “our” lived bodies under the tensions between natural, legitimate sexual instincts and repressive forces of unwilling self-discipline and social surveillance.

Moreover, the sense of ambivalence regarding the notion of sexuality that emerges among these young adults can be evidenced by their use of adjectives to describe their sexual concepts: natural, wild, but not beautiful—as contrasted against those portraying the disciplined and normalized beings as beautiful, formal, and uniform, who in the meantime are viewed as standardized and lacking characteristics. Social morals and regulations, in these young people’s view, on the one hand, help to make civilized, formal beings; on the other hand, these disciplinary practices of restricting human sexuality are seen to be the acts of violating and betraying genuine corporeal activities and emotions. Such contradictions and complexity reflected in the students’ descriptive caption help to reveal the bodies of young Chinese adults as a site of tensions, conflicts, and struggle as identified by Bordo (1997); it also indicates that these young people are left in a state of being insufficiently concerned, instructed, and assisted in areas of the development and education of youth sexual psychology and sex education.

Analysis of both the participants’ visual and verbal texts suggests that these young adults’

perceptions of their embodied experiences in social reality, which endure disciplinary practices, conflict with media portrayal of young bodies in present-day China as liberated from traditional morality and sexual norms. The discrepancy between practical experiences of the bodies and the media representations is further illustrated in my in-depth interviews and focus group with the participants. Despite the fact that Chinese mass media are replete with images of a sexually tolerant society free of feudal fetters, buttressing the illusion that women enjoy sexual freedom to the equal degree with men, the students' personal accounts and perceptions of their lived experiences in our interviews present a different and more complex picture.

But in the neighborhood where I reside, people are still feudally conservative as nothing seems ever changed. They firmly cling to the traditional idea that girls should be pure and chaste. For adolescent girls and unmarried young women in a kind of sensitive and troubling period, we seem kind of being watched on and spied upon. If a girl or woman is unfortunately involved in premarital sex and even worse, gets pregnant, she will become a disgraced protagonist in various versions of stories recounted in each family to warn the daughters. I had a neighbor, whose daughter in her early twenties fell into such a bad situation – she got pregnant and had to have an abortion in a hospital. In a surprising speed, the news spread across our district and far beyond. The girl's parents felt so ashamed that they felt unable to raise their heads and face others and so did the girl, who imprisoned herself indoors all the time. This true story ended in the girl's escape to another city where maybe her relatives reside, to continue a regular life. My family felt for the girl, but my mom, from time to time, mentions or alludes to that girl as a negative example to alert me to the risks although very often in a suggestive way.

(female student)

Another interviewee in the focus group shared a similar story:

I agree. It seems that the wind of sexual freedom and liberty as described in media has not yet reached my community. People sometimes talk about certain stories in a

newspaper or on TV about the protagonist engaging in pre- or extramarital sex and seems all right about that. But if such a thing really happens to a girl or woman in our community, they then would gossip about her and despise her as well as her family. Those long-tongued housewives tend to blame the scandal on the woman and call her “slut” while the man, the other important participant in this event seems usually free of any charges. (female student)

As is implied in the interviews, the assumption that young Chinese women are embracing, enjoying, and practicing Western-style sexual liberation, as detailed in media reports showing the casual sexual adventures of young, unmarried Chinese women, masks the reality. The high value placed on female chastity and virginity is culturally ingrained among the general public and continues as strict restriction over female engagement in sexual relations, as contended by Pan (2006). Moreover, as is shown in these interviews, the ways these patriarchal enforcers—parents and neighbours in a particular community—respond to sexual conducts and issues contribute to retaining and enforcing culturally imbedded patriarchal standards that serve to discipline female sexuality and bodies. In the subsequent section, a further exploration of young female bodies—the freedom they practice, discipline and restrictions operating over them, and their resistance—is made to give a “real-life” picture of lived, embodied experiences of female bodies in present-day China.

### **Paradoxes of corporeal freedom and repression: (the intelligible body and the practical body)**

The contesting relations of body representation and body practices reflect the state of tensions between how female bodies are culturally constructed and how they are actually experienced as well as the complexity of experiences of embodiment in contemporary Chinese contexts. To look at the complex status of the bodies of young women in contemporary Chinese society of globalization resulting in the convergence, conflicts, and intersection of various sexual discourses, I draw on Foucault’s (1979) concepts of the “intelligible body” and the “useful body” (p. 136). The intelligible body “includes our

scientific, philosophic, and aesthetic representations of the body—our cultural conceptions of the body”, norms of body practices, models of health, and so forth (Bordo, 1997, p. 103). These bodily representations may also be seen as “forming a set of practical rules and regulations” through which the living body is “trained, shaped, obeys, responds” becomes, in short, a socially adapted and “useful body” (p. 103). Rather than conceiving of body representations and body practices as two discrete realms, Foucault (1977) gives prominence to the shaping influence of cultural representations of bodies acting upon people’s embodied experiences and in so doing, the practical body comes into being. In other words, as contended by Heinrich and Martin (2006), the structures of body knowledge enacted in cultural representations of embodiment, to a large extent, produce the very bodies that social subjects experience in everyday life.

Foucault’s theoretical assumption of “intelligible body” and “useful body” is applicable to the reading of the Chinese custom of binding women’s feet to the shape of lilies that signifies a sexualized ideal of femininity. The origins of footbinding date back to the Sung dynasty (AD 960-1279), when a Chinese prince, Li Yu, appreciated the walking style of his concubine, Yao Niang who appeared as if “skimming over the top of golden lilies” (Hutchins, n.d.). Built on this privileged man’s unnatural taste in beauty, the “lily footed” woman became a model for Chinese women then and afterwards till the Qing Dynasty. A pair of lily-like feet as a desirable image of the female body, based on privileged Chinese males’ aesthetic ideas, was constructed as an aesthetic and culturally appreciated representation of the idealized female body, the intellectual body. This image and representation of female body constituted a particular body knowledge that works to train and produce the useful (practical) body of Chinese women then in the sense that woman since an early age was forced by her parents to have her feet bound in the form of “three-inch golden lotuses” in efforts to follow the socially favorable representation of the female body. Footbinding from girlhood then came to become a social, practical rule for women at the time. The conformity to this social rule made a woman more desirable in the marriage market and prepared her for a higher social status; otherwise, she was punished with ending up as a poor spinster in a socially abandoned state. Obviously, this traditional practice of footbinding cannot be seen as a simple fashion statement; it is a

custom that started out to define beauty, but ended up defining the state of the society. This fragment of the boundfoot body is a “text of culture” (Bordo, 1997, p. 90), depicting a phallogentric social order in that era of China, which kept women weak, limitedly mobile, and out of power. The made, “useful body” in Foucauldian terms, the damaged, crippled female feet, is a practical, direct locus of male-dominated social control and a surface inscribed with patriarchy and hierarchies of traditional Chinese societies.

As is implied in the Chinese custom of footbinding, the intellectual body, the cultural, aesthetic representation of female bodies, shapes Chinese women’s lived experiences of bodies (Heinrich & Martin, 2006), contributing to the production of the practical body that Chinese women then experienced in quotidian life. Moreover, women’s painful experiences of footbinding led them to the formation of “embodied subjectification” (Zito, 2006, p. 23), through which gendered social life is organized and women become simultaneously objects and subjects. In other words, women in traditional China were slowly “invited” to take up the subject position and their gendered roles through the painful bodily process of squeezing their feet in binding clothes (Zito, 2006).

A look at the bodies of women in traditional China and through the interaction between the intelligent body and the practical body can also apply to the examination of young female bodies situated in contemporary Chinese society, in which traditional sexual and body discourses conflict with and interact with those from the outside world. Since the commencement of its economic reforms and its re-entry to the global economy in the 1980s, China has opened its doors to the outside, exposing itself to the influence of foreign cultures. The door-opening has brought China beneficial outcomes such as the importation of advanced methods in the sciences and economic management, but it has also resulted in the influx of foreign cultural elements—for example, in the sexual realm, Western notions of sexual freedom and sexual liberation. The importation of Western sexual notions and ideas concerned and exasperated the Chinese Party-state authorities over its detrimental influences on socialist morality and potentially, socio-political stability as commentated by Sigley (2006). In response to such a contradictory situation, Sigley further states, the Chinese state continued to push for the full development of a

market society while officially condemning notions of sexual freedom and sexual liberation as challenging and undermining Chinese values and morals. However, with the deepening of the reform process, new spaces for the public discussion of sex and sexuality are created and lead to people's gradual transformation in sexual ideas and beliefs. This was alongside the recently emerging crisis of HIV and AIDS especially among young people. In such situations, the Chinese Party-state came to the realization that the official policy of simply condemning and banning the "corrupt" foreign sexual ideas in attempts to maintain the dominant ideological position of moral Puritanism in China has worked ineffectively either in keeping social and political stability or maintaining a safe environment for minors and young adults. Hence, rethinking and refiguring issues of sex and sexuality in the light of radical transformations in Chinese culture and society is activated and promoted in various sectors of institutions, academia, and schools alike.

In such a climate that allows reconsiderations and reconceptualization of sexual issues in contemporary post-reform era of China, multiple representations and images of female bodies complement each other in richly various, sometimes contradicting versions of body discourse, publicly available. They include the traditional conception of female bodies idealized as chaste and virgin, scientific reading of young bodies as sexually active in physiological and legitimate terms, and media images as sexually liberated and free. The multiplicity of varying and competing representations and images of female embodiment contributes to the unstable state of the intelligible body, which can be either highly restricted under gender domination, or legitimately sexually active, or even sexually free out of moral confines as represented in the above mentioned documentary *China's Sexual Revolution*. Obviously, sexual norms entrenched in the culturally ingrained conception of women as sexually passive and obedient are challenged by new, distinct body knowledge and discourses that see women as sexual subjects. The dominant position of sexualized ideal of femininity within Chinese culture is confronted with new notions that advocate gender equality. Drawing on Foucault's (1979) argument that representations of corporeality can be seen as forming the structures of body knowledge that functions to train and shape the very practical bodies, it can be suggested that the

plurality of the intelligible female body representations account for the formation and presence of diverse and contesting lived body cultures among young women in present-day China as well as fractal manifestations of their identities. The complex contexts that these female bodies reside shapes and helps to constitute various particular embodied realities of present-day young Chinese women. The complexity and mobility of the experience and situation of female bodies in post-reform China, centered in this section of my study, helps to illuminate bodies “not as transparent, stable objects of analysis, but rather as variable knowledge formations constructed through historically specific regimes of discourse and social discipline” (Heinrich and Martin, 2006, p. 7). It can also demonstrate that the body and its socio-cultural world are always in a mutually corresponding and constitutive relationship (Price & Shildrick, 1999, p. 19).

The diversity and contradiction of lived body cultures among young Chinese women and men can be evidenced in ethnographic accounts of the embodied experiences of young people involved in my project. Some young women felt themselves still highly restricted within gendered social rules and codes as discussed earlier while some, especially young men, seem taking in Western notions of sexual liberation and sexual freedom and put them into practice, as is illustrated in the script of interview that follows.

I have a roommate who has rich sexual experience like changing girlfriends very often with whom he has had sex, having sexual contacts with ... women (here, he tried to avoid using prostitutes) in entertainment sites, and maybe one-night stand sex. He sometimes shares his experiences and stories with us in our dorm at night when we lie in bed and shows us how to use condoms and which brands of condom feel best. (male student)

Some women students also experienced their college life in ways that were new and revolutionized to their elder generations. A young woman who several participants mentioned in the interviews was described as special among the first-year students: good-looking, popular among young men, active in shifting boyfriends, open in sexual ideas, and probably involved in sexual practices with her boyfriends. Unfortunately, my short-

term stay in that university did not provide sufficient time for me to build up a relation of rapport with her for an in-depth talk. But it is not a rare case in the university where I set up my project and other universities across China that young female bodies transgress the restrictive bounds of sexual norms. A number of senior female students are reported to have rented apartments out of campus and cohabited with their boyfriends. But speaking from my experience of interviewing and observing young people in the college, restricted embodied experiences, especially of women students, dominantly constitute the narratives of those involved in the project.

As I have discussed earlier, many participants have recognized that social transformations in people's sexual beliefs and values are taking place at a macro and progressive level. For example, now the Chinese have Western-style dating, radio call-in programs offering sexual advice, more freedom to try and enjoy various forms of sexual activities and pleasures, a commercial sex industry, to list a few manifestations. However, as noted by a male interviewee who grew up in a family of medical doctors, society is moving in the direction of becoming more open and more liberated. However, his elders including his parents are by no means tolerant to new ways of thinking about physicality and sexuality and their "transgressive" behavior outside traditional patterns. It demonstrates that older Chinese concepts of body and sexuality ascribed by Confucianism and entrenched in Chinese society linger in contemporary China, continually exerting a powerful impact on female bodies even in urban regions. In a general social climate where western body discourses are imported and publicly accessed through mass media such as movies, TV programs, Internet, printed texts, and other channels, social disciplines and coercions arising from strict traditional values, nevertheless, function to continue intervening in and restricting the lived experiences of young women in China. A young woman shared with me her life story about a highly conservative but typical Chinese family composed of a girl, a strict father teaching Chinese in a high school and a gentle, traditionally conscious mother, working as an accountant, where talks about sex and sexuality were never broached. An experience of studying in a co-educated boarding high school allowed her to escape her family for a relatively lively school life. Students inhabited an incredibly sexually liberal climate to the extent that male students blew up condom balloons and

played with them in the classroom. As a student of sciences, she gained access to some systematic knowledge and information about human bodies and sexuality, which prepared her for a teacher role in her college dormitory of explaining to her “naïve” roommates the process of sexual intercourse and the measures to avoid pregnancy if attacked by a rapist. But this same woman expressed her strong frustrations and depressions of her family climate, as opposite to her school life. The contrasting atmosphere of her familial and school spheres led her to try to find various excuses in order to remain on weekends in the school which was only an hour’s ride from her parents’ home. But distance from her parents and the small township in which residents were as conservative as her parents could not help her out of the domination of disciplinary and surveillance power derived from traditional norms. As the storyteller notes:

Sometimes I would make a boyfriend and experience a loving relationship... and possibly get involved in sex. But I know I can’t do that. Social pressure keeps me from that. I think I am an open-minded woman. I accept pre-marital sex, which is allowed for others other than myself. I cannot let this kind of thing happen to me. If I did it and my parents and neighbours knew it, I would bring shame onto my parents and of course myself. If worse, I got pregnant, I would have to die. I can expect the consequences.... So I know what I should and must do and will cling to what social rules have been formulated for being an unmarried woman. You know, gossips and pressure could kill people, so I have to keep myself from troubles. (female student)

Although living in the college dorm beyond the direct governance of her parents and other disciplinary forces, the young woman still felt herself within the panoptic gaze of disciplinary authorities such as her parents and neighbours in this regard and submitted herself to the self-management and self-surveillance of her body. This self-monitoring, in Foucault’s (1979) view, is the second stage in the process of disciplinarity and normalization whereby people’s bodies are disposed to behave in a manner consistent to what social codes and rules describe to be normal, moral, and good. This process is meant

to train people to be the objects of their own gaze, constantly monitoring and adjusting their bodies, actions, and feelings (Schirato & Webb, 2004). As is demonstrated in this young woman's narrative, her body has entered a machinery of power that explores it, manipulates it, and (re)arranges it (Bartky, 1997) and thus become a docile social body succumbed and habituated to external regulation and repression although such obedience is not out of her will.

With my further interviewing of this young woman as well as with other participants, a disciplinary rule which positions a high value on female chastity and virginity demonstrated itself as persistently dominating and restricting female bodies in contemporary China.

I have a female friend. She once survived a car accident but was left with injuries to her body, like her hymen. She came out of the hospital with a medical report describing in details all those injuries. We sometimes joke about the report, teasing that she is able to do whatever she likes, exempted from the restriction of guarding her virginity. If asked about her loss of virginity, she may show the report to whoever inquires, the guy who would marry her and his family members. Actually, we all hope that we could be deprived of such fetters, but the force of each individual dwarfs the social power. I really feel weak in the face of it. (female student)

The culturally constructed belief that having a pristine hymen is regarded as the mark and evidence of female virginity and chastity still works as a social rule regulating and disciplining female bodies. Female virginity, within traditional Chinese values, is seen as synonymous with cherished qualities as "innocence, purity, goodness and unblemishedness" as similar in Christian value of chastity (Drenth, 2005, p. 60). In this sense, the hymen is far more than a corporeal membrane; it is rather an embodied symbol of virtues ascribed to a good woman in Chinese culture as noted earlier. As implied in such social ascription, virginity to an unmarried woman is highly valued as the most precious "property"; the woman's possession of it until the wedding night is deemed an

admirable and compulsive rule to which every unmarried woman ought to conform. On the contrary, the loss of it, no matter whatever reason, would be a disaster or tragedy befalling the woman and her family as no man would marry such an incomplete, dirty woman. Apparently, guarding the completion of her hymen till the wedding night is deemed a responsibility of the woman and a guarantee for her marriage life. To celebrate such virtues of female chastity, a series of books, *Legends of Tough Women* (烈女传), in Confucius's era, was compiled with Confucius's proposal and under his supervision, which collected the recounts of a number of strong-minded women in a range of historical periods in traditional China who saw their virginity/chastity more important and precious than their lives. For example, a woman was recorded to have sacrificed her life to the protection of her chastity in the fight against a villain and another who remained a virgin widow since a young age of fifteen till her death, thereby managing to adhere to the Merit: being faithful throughout life to her husband. This collection of stories was made as the eulogy of female chastity and widely circulated among women at that time, meant to set up models for them to follow up with. To enhance the extolment of these virtues ascribed to a "good" woman, a kind of monumental structure named Chastity Structure was erected in busy areas around people's residential regions for the memorial of those women with such significant glory. This way of immersing subjects in contact with discourse, images, and objects that transmit institutionalized, disciplinary knowledge of female bodies and sexuality, as explained by Schirato and Webb's (2004), would lead to their inclination to constantly scrutinizing and monitoring their bodies, actions, and feelings in conformity to socially regulated rules.

The enacted structure signifies a traditional Chinese body conception that reinforces male domination and the objectification and inferiorization of female bodies; this gendered discourse of power relations have acted upon the social bodies of Chinese women for thousands of years to produce their female subjectivities that take for granted male superiority and gender oppression over woman. Today, many Chastity Structures have been destroyed and the remaining ones serve as nothing more than historical artifacts. However, from the young woman's as well as other interviewees' similar recounts, it can be argued that the Chastity Structure remains standing within many people's sexual

subjectivities in present-day China.

Aside from the persistent repression of traditional sexual norms on young women, the education system, the central social institution that Chinese youth confront, has never abandoned its attempts to control youth sexuality through prohibitive rules and threats of punishment or expulsion from schools (Farrer, 2006). Though it has been argued that Chinese institutional authorities have seen the need to allow new ways of thinking about sex and sexuality, this does not mean that they are meant to abolish or let loose the previous disciplinary rules and practices of policing people's sexuality. As articulated in Bartky's (1997) reading of Foucault's critique of modern society, the rise of new conceptions of political liberty is "accompanied by a darker countermovement, by the emergence of a new and unprecedented discipline directed against the body" (p. 129). However, discipline and repression is always twinned with resistance (Foucault, 1979). The section that follows deals with the discussion of governance and discipline conducted by the Chinese educational system and of new ways of resistance emerging among young people in present-day China.

### **Resistance to the repression and governance**

In the reform era of China which spans between the early 1980s and the present-day, the Chinese school system has continued to police youth sexuality in ways that would seem intrusive and strict to Western youth as argued by Farrer (2006). Male and female students in high schools are required to behave themselves within the regulated boundaries such as keeping distance from each other as a precaution against the occurrence of "premature love", a term referring to dating during adolescence when a burgeoning interest in sexuality and romance presumably has outstripped emotional, physical and social maturity" (Evans, 1997, p. 75). Without rules of such severe restriction on interactions between male and female students, the university system is entitled to setting particular regulations and standards for student behavior. In the university where I conducted my fieldwork, the first-year students in the English Department were not allowed to engage in a relationship. They were not allowed to

possess nor use computers at the dorm, though computers were available at the school's labs. Moreover, the students' supervisor appointed selected student cadres to make regular inspections of the students' dorms, in most cases, at nights, to see if every inmate, particularly female, spent the nights in the dorms. Those absent were required to give reasonable excuses; otherwise, they would be punished according to the formulated regulations. The rules were set up, according to an administrator in charge of students affairs, on the grounds that first-year students were seen as insufficiently mature to be able to balance study and romance and the lack of self-restraint among students would lead to the spoiling of their academic progress if access to the internet could avail without restriction. The dorm inspection, apparently, was to minimize the possibility that students, especially females, had chance to stay out over night at the risk of engaging in sexual practices. It cannot be denied that the good-intentioned university authorities have made endeavor in the management of students in the hope of protecting and preventing them from risks of involvement in "inappropriate behavior." But to the "good-intentioned" governance, how do students respond and resist?

*"It is so unfair and ridiculous. We are grown-ups not kindergarteners. I am sick of such ways of keeping us under surveillance."* said one of the male participant interviewees in public and among other students. He also told me that his dream was to open up a privately-managed university to be run outside the Chinese institutionalized educational system, in which students would be given sufficient trust and respect rather than repression. This open way of challenging the existing educational system and authority tends to put a group of rebel students at risk of punishment. Another young man involved in the study was unfortunately caught using his laptop in the dorm and his disobedient act of defending himself and confronting the supervisor led him to a severe penalty. This punishment was also, at least partially, attributed to his overt challenge to the not allowing-engagement-in-love rule by bringing his girlfriend, who came to visit him from Shanghai, to a students' gathering in the presence of the supervisor. Such ways of open resistance that incurred trouble and punishment were considered "not clever" in a participant's words and consequently circumvented by the majority who appeared obediently abiding by the regulations but sought ways, usually covert, for transgression

and more freedom.

Reacting to the educational authority's "good-intentioned" but somewhat crude governance and discipline, most students chose to resist in ways of evading open confrontation against the school. For example, despite the rule forbidding love affairs among first-year students, some including my interviewees engaged secretly in dating and seeking boyfriends or girlfriends. Other participants informed me that at least five young women and two men involved in this project were in a relationship while others were seeking such experience. But most of them kept it unknown from the school authorities such as their supervisor, scheduling their dating activities off campus at weekends. School restrictive practices and regulations upon the students tend to become relatively more lax with juniors and seniors. For example, despite the official formulation that prohibits sexual behaviors among college students, a number of seniors across various schools of the university in which I conducted my fieldwork cohabited with their partners off campus in rented apartments. These students who violated the school regulation usually did not risk severe penalty such as expulsion from school unless apparent disgraceful and scandalous events such as pregnancy were uncovered. In current Chinese context of easy availability of occasions beyond the school surveillance for sex and of contraceptives such as condom and pills to be purchased, as well as the easy access of abortion, it was increasingly rare for students to be caught having sex or found pregnant. Furthermore, it is also noticeable that the educational system and broadly the state government tend to alleviate control over people's sexuality in the situation of sex being increasingly seen as personal business and an emotional issue (Pan, 2006). For example, in 2005, China's Ministry of Education officially gave permission for marriage to university students and thus allowed sex among those in marital bonds but most universities kept in effect the long-standing rules against sex or premarital sex as a defense of the official sanctioned code of premarital chastity (Farrer, 2006).

To gain more scope and opportunity of struggle and resistance to governance and discipline from the school and institutionalized society, young people seek to construct their own meaning and ethical standards of sexuality. Taking a look back at the evolution

of “youth” as a social construct in Chinese history, as discussed in Chapter Two, youth have developed, in brief, from a particular social group who was characterized as sexually energetic and ruthless. Consequently, the group is assumed to be in need of adult guidance and governance as in the early twentieth century of the China republic. Today, this group has become a distinguished group with growing awareness of individualism and autonomy in pursuit of strong identity in present-day China. Although it is still the case that the existing school-based sex education remains conceptualized on the assumption that youth are pre-adults in need of adults’ assistance and leadership and sexuality should be contained in legal and moral order while sexuality being recognized as a natural form of human expression that should not be repressed (Jiang, Du, Zhang, & Li, 1988, as cited in Farrer, 2006), young people actively engage in efforts of redefinition and reconceptualization of their sexuality and moral standards based on their own understanding, need, and interest, seeking to eliminate social and moral restriction on young people that require premarital virginity. In seeking for the legitimacy of their sexual ideas and standard, they have gained recourse to three main sources: authoritative medical discourse which constructs human sexuality as essentially natural; rights discourse that sees sex as a personal choice and right; and romance story-telling, popularized within the mainstream readership in Chinese society, which overplays the nobleness and divinity of a loving relationship.

Young people’s appropriation of medical discourses as justification for their sexual views can be exemplified in their articulation of relations of love and sexuality as discussed earlier. All the interviewees including those holding rather conservative views about notions of sexual liberation and sexual freedom recognized the normality of sexual impulses and desires to humans; based on this essentialist notion, sex or premarital sex was further claimed by most of them to be a normal and acceptable human quality and practice, as expressed in

Sex is a normal human behavior. A person who is not sexually urged and driven, he needs to see a doctor. (male student)

I think sex before marriage and cohabitation among people over 18 should not be taboo any more. Sexual drives and desires are fundamental human attributes; practicing them, having sex is a natural and normal thing. (female student)

More than taking up sexuality as a human attribute, some participants gave prominence to the pleasure that can be acquired from sexual engagement as a significant human experience, claiming by using a quote from a German philosopher “*Without sexual pleasure, how could I make quest for truth?*” to mark the importance of sex in human life. Evidently, young people use the essentialist view that identifies sexuality as a basic human quality as a kind of departure point or theoretical foundation to further develop their sexual beliefs and understandings in attempts to construct new permissive ethical standards allowing premarital sex.

Moreover, a number of participants claimed sex as “*a basic human right*” or “*a private business*” in defense of their sexual beliefs and codes.

Since sexuality, sexual drives and arousals are natural human attributes, having sex should be a basic right for adults, people above the age of 18, to be human. They have rights and freedom to execute that right. (male student)

Premarital sex to people over 18 should not be put under social attack. To do nor not to do is a personal business instead of a moral question. For those who would wait till they are ready, till they get married, it is a kind of choice. But for those who would have sexual experience earlier, it's another option. They should not be accused of, like, “morally corrupt” in the social court. (female student)

As demonstrated in these statements, young people seek for the legitimization of premarital sex by defining sex as a citizen's rights. Their claim to sexual right also reflects the emergence of youth agency in seeking an independent identity as well as an increasing awareness of citizenship among them.

In addition, they have found supporting evidence in culturally dominant romance story-telling that embraces loving relationships by elevating the nobleness of loving emotions between the partners. Such romantic story-telling figuring in the narration of popular romance novels, television dramas, and films are highly appreciated by a large readership disproportionally composed of girls and women. In this narrative pattern, spiritual love is highly celebrated, resulting in the divinization of a relationship or partnership founded on emotional associations and loving feelings and further the divinization of what is involved in this pure, sacred relationship including bodily intimacy. As is display in the caption of Figure 5, sexual intercourse preconditioned in a loving relationship is seen as “the sacred way to express love and the communication of their souls” and “the highest embodiment of love” as presented earlier. Apparently, physical love is justified and even embraced in the name of spiritual love. Popular narration of romance that elevates the purity and divinity of spiritual love provides young Chinese people kind of supporting grounds for their sexual conceptualization in which sexual practices are seen as acceptable and necessary in a relationship built on spiritual love. This kind of romantic story-telling pattern may serve as a source offering young people evidence for the legitimization of premarital sexual engagement in their efforts to contravene sexual discipline and repression; nevertheless, such story telling is problematic in its tendency to encourage and defend young people’s sexual involvement, protected or otherwise, in a love partnership, leading them to the risk of being infected with STIs/HIV.

Another kind of romantic story-telling that details and celebrates physical and sensual love has emerged in the Chinese book market. Such romance stories with sexually explicit contents challenging long-standing sexual standards and social morals stirred up Chinese society with the publication of two pioneering works *Shanghai Baby* (Wei, 1999) and *Sugar* (Mian, 2003). The former gave a rich sexual and sensual portrayal of the woman protagonist involved in multiple love affairs while the latter dealt with a young woman’s experiences in sex and drugs. The avant-garde, controversial sexual narratives brought to the two women writers the title of “writers writing with or about one’s body” (Lu, 2008). The books were condemned as “obscene and pornographic” while some critics appreciated them as significantly embodying Chinese woman’s sexual awakening

and rebellion against sexual restriction and repression. Although these controversial books were banned by the Chinese authorities, pirated copies were easily available to and became influential among young people, presenting themselves to young people as stories of “individuals claiming their ‘natural rights to be free from an oppressive state’” (Farrer, 2006, p. 102). Participants in this study named the two books and others as ones being important in influencing their ways of thinking and rethinking sexuality, gender, and other issues. As the former type of roman story-telling that highly appreciates spiritual love, this kind of explicitly-depicted sexual stories advocating physical, sensual experiences can provide to young people alternative ways of seeing sexuality and claiming sex as a citizen right and in so doing, motivating among them the awareness of sexual subjects and sexual citizens. It would also bring young people into the risk of STIs/HIV infection, who engage in unsafe sex without the command of sufficient sexual knowledge.

Furthermore, in seeking resistance to school-based oppressions, Chinese youth have found a variety of spheres in which to form sexual conceptions and standards in their own right. As demonstrated in this research, the circle of close friends functions as a main site in which both women and men in gender-separate groups shared stories to learn and argue about the relative goodness and badness of relationships and came into being the principle substance of moral discourse among youths (Farrer, 2006) while neither school nor home provides them a free communicative space to talk about sexual matters.

Much of my knowledge about sexuality came from my best friends, whom I very often drop a line to or phone. We share most private talks about making boyfriend, sex, etc and these topics are talked to the degree and in ways that they could not be possibly touched at home or in school. I feel safe and comfortable with my friends about such private talking. (female student)

We have four roommates in the dorm and two are seniors. They have boyfriends and share with us two their experiences involved in relationships, mostly sexual. Seeing them as elder sisters, I seldom feel hesitant in asking questions surrounding

sex and sexuality. But usually sexual topics are talked in joking ways, which, I guess, could secure our talk and remove away our embarrassment or shame. I enjoy this kind of “close” conversation, from which I’ve learned things I could not from school. (female student)

I have some close friends who are my former middle school classmates. We often hang out like a team at weekends or on vacation when we go back home from different colleges. We share private things, talking about girlfriends, sexual experience, sensual responses to sex, and so on. (male student)

Informal, gender segregated groups are powerful contexts for learning (Thorne & Luria, 2004), gossiping, sharing, and developing sexual thoughts and understandings. Besides, the Internet offers young people a sphere in which to speak with a wider public about their sexual ideas, emotions, and “premarital sexual ethics in ways that sometimes directly oppose official policies” (Farrer, 2006, p. 111). Disguised with fictitious identities, young people have found the Internet to be a secure place to communicate and express their sexual views as illustrated in my interviews with young people.

I usually keep private thoughts with regard to sexuality to myself. But when I am hooked up to the Internet and become a fictitious member in that community, I turn into a different guy, a “Real me”. I feel safe to expose my opinions about sexuality, about sexual matters, and about nearly anything that may be condemned “bad” or “immoral” by teachers or parents. In return, I am rewarded with helpful and interesting information I can not access in school though some is frustrating. (male student)

The Internet also allows these young adults an easy avenue to Western sexual discourses and those of other cultures through channels of films, websites, novels, and other media. For example, a number of my interviewees mentioned a once popular television drama in North America, *Friends*, which disseminates a Western sexual concept that sees sex “*as common and normal as eating and sleeping*” as remarked by an interviewee. This drama

has officially been banned from the Chinese audience but is available in the Internet or in some video shops. Viewers of this TV drama expressed their fondness for it, recognizing its influence in the formation and transformation of their sexual conception and subjectivities.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I use visual and verbal texts to give an idea of how the students looked at issues of sexuality, love and relationship, body, and other relevant issues, and explain how the bodies of young people, especially those of young women, are acted upon by various sexual discourses dominant in present-day Chinese society, which convene, compete, and interact with one another. As revealed in the findings, although present-day young Chinese people hold more liberated sexual beliefs and are less bodily restricted than prior generations, pre-existing structures and discourses in Chinese society determine present-day practices of young people. Especially for young women, traditional sexual norms that put high value on premarital female virginity and chastity persistently act upon female bodies and restrict female sexuality. Nonetheless, developing a growing awareness of social actors and citizens, young Chinese people seek to construct their own meanings and ethical standards of sexuality that serve their interests and needs and allow them for freer embodied practices. Such effort signifies young people's resistance and struggle against social discipline and governance. In the next chapter I will turn my attention to showing how this work also can inform sexuality education and HIV and AIDS interventions also through reading of visual and verbal texts.

## **CHAPTER SIX: DATA ANALYSIS 2: HIV AND AIDS PREVENTION AND SEX EDUCATION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the previous chapter I used the photographs taken by the participants as an entry point to talking about young Chinese people's perceptions and understandings of sex and sexuality and their embodied experiences, and thinking about how such information helps us to gain greater insights into human sexuality and bodies as social constructions. Having this preceding chapter as the backdrop, in this chapter I expand the discussion into a consideration of HIV prevention and sexuality education based on my textual analysis of participants' photographs and interviews about their conceptions of HIV and AIDS and their experiences and expectations of sex education, as well as on my experience of participant observation. Cultural constructions of AIDS and HIV infection, Richardson (2000) argues, invoke and constitute particular ideas about gender and sexuality, and they exert significant influences on the formation of HIV policy and health education as well as on individual understanding of risk and safety.

The first part of the chapter is devoted to a description of young Chinese people's conceptualization of HIV and AIDS, which reflects their views about various aspects of this social problem, such as social stigma attached to the disease, gender and HIV infection, and youth and the epidemic. A better understanding of these social aspects through the lenses of young people can provide information for the modification of the existing sex education and HIV prevention programs targeting young people. As Aggleton and Campbell (2000) argue, the incorporation of young people's problems, needs, and interests plays a significant role in mapping out sexuality education programs. The analysis of my participants' visual images of HIV and AIDS, verbal data gained via in-depth interviews with them, and my participatory observation notes can help me to constitute an account of the existing sex education programs with young people, and their own expectations and suggestions for the programs.

The latter section of this chapter engages in a discussion of condoms/condom use in Chinese cultures and how condom use relates to STIs/HIV prevention in Chinese contexts. Despite the fact that condom use is the best protective strategy against fear and shame associated with STIs and AIDS (Lipton, 2005), the infections are still on an alarming rise predominantly resulting from young people's unsafe sexual practices. In this regard, it is necessary to explore cultural meanings of condoms and condom use, and, more specifically, how Chinese youth look at condom use and conceptualize safe/unsafe sex in attempts to discover why they abandon (or not) uses of condoms in their sexual encounters. To examine cultural meanings associated with the condom in Chinese culture, I read the condom as a cultural artifact that transmits and constructs social memories of corporeality and sexuality across a range of Chinese social settings and eras. The sexual discourses/ideologies as stored in the social memories are frequently brought upon the bodies of young people nowadays, exercising influences on their embodied experiences. This retrospect of the evolving meanings of condom use in Chinese societies also helps to readdress the concept of sexuality as asocial and cultural construction (Caplan, 1987).

## **REPRESENTATION OF HIV AND AIDS AMONG YOUNG CHINESE PEOPLE**

Since the discovery of the first case of AIDS syndrome in 1979, people's knowledge and understanding of AIDS have primarily been relying on two resources—biomedical discourses, that is, scientific facts about AIDS, and popular discourses, i.e., what we are told about AIDS in mass media. However, given that the social dimension of AIDS is far more pervasive and central than the biological one, our social constructions of HIV and AIDS are based not upon objective, scientifically determined “reality” but upon what popular discourses tell about this reality (Treichler, 1988, p. 35). Echoing this point, Crimp (1988) also argues that people know AIDS only through and in the practices that “conceptualize it, represent it, and respond to it” (Crimp, 1988, p. 3). As illustrated in this study and also revealed in other relevant studies (Walsh-Childers et al., 1994), Chinese youth's conceptualization of HIV and AIDS has been largely shaped by media representation, in the context of mass media and the Internet being the main channels for health and AIDS information to Chinese youth.

China's mass media have represented HIV and AIDS in the ways of always associating it with the images of AIDS patients in the late stage of the illness, usually male African and Southeast Asian from, for example, Thailand, and with disturbing bony body sculptures covered with scratches of decayed skin lying in bed and awaiting hopelessly the arrival of death. With the HI virus entering China and affecting villagers in Hunan province, who traded their blood for money, AIDS stories told in mass media then have become more focused on this particular group of people, as well as on other high-risk groups such as injected drug users and sex workers. In the more recent context of an increasing identification of HIV infection among the general population, media texts come to address HIV and AIDS as a threat to which everyone is vulnerable. My participants' perceptions of HIV and AIDS have been largely determined by the media representation of it. In response to the question "what the term 'HIV and AIDS' conjures up to their mind, they named either a dying skinny patient from areas highly affected by HIV and AIDS such as Africa and Southeast Asia, an HIV infected newborn, a Chinese HIV-positive peasant suffering social discrimination and prejudice, or an IV drug user in Yunnan Province, a high-risk region in China. Some responded to the question by giving a kind of "scientific", "official" definition of AIDS such as "*It is an incurable disease transmittable through bodily liquid, blood, and the route of mother-to-infant*" or a more personalized one "*It is a terrible, lethal disease. You get it and you are sentenced to death*". Misconceptions—for example, HIV can be transmitted through casual contact or by the bite of a mosquito did not demonstrate themselves as prominent in the interviews. However, some students expressed concern about such possibilities despite the fact that virtually all of them had the knowledge of HIV transmission modes. Some categorized into the at-risk groups those who traveled abroad and who had frequent contact with foreigners, and expressed surprise at the current phenomenon that HIV and AIDS has become a social problem in China. This was, at least partially, due to the influence of the cultural (media) construction of AIDS as "a foreigners' disease" during the early years of the AIDS epidemic in China as noted in Chapter Two.

A pronounced response from my participants about their perceptions of HIV and AIDS is that HIV and AIDS is associated with social stigma. Most participants came up with

stories they had heard of people living with HIV and AIDS in China, who usually suffered from the discrimination from the social communities. The participants showed great sympathy for this special social group, and thought it “*unfair*”, “*disturbing*”, and “*shameful*” to treat these marginalized people. They also expressed a strong commitment to offering help and to bringing about social change. Their sympathetic and responsible feelings about the infected can be demonstrated in a high percentage of photos, twenty one out of forty six, which my participants made to address the themes of stigma, social discrimination, and social responsibilities that they thought young people should take on. To provide a better sense of how my participants look at HIV and AIDS, I present below a wide of range of aspects associated with this social problem as represented by my participants in their images. These aspects and issues include the participants’ perception of the virus, social stigma with HIV and AIDS and the infected, the inner world of the infected, and social factors that shape the epidemic such as gendered social order causing women’s vulnerability.

### **What is HIV and AIDS about?**



*It looks as ugly as HIV (provided by a mixed-sex group).*

Figure 11 An HI Virus



背后的荷叶代表了社会主群体, 表示每

个人都找到自己的位置, 在社会中蓬勃生长. 而 AIDS 患者却紧闭自己的叶子, 因为他认为自己携带病毒, 可能传染给他人, 再加上自己的敏感与自卑, 于是逐渐远离社会主群体. 而下方的一只手把荷叶拽出, 表示社会也不接纳 AIDS 病人, 想让其远离社会主体. 内外的压力迫使 AIDS 患者走向了社会的边缘, 缺少社会的关怀, 于是陷入无尽的黑暗。。。。。

Figure 12 Discrimination and Self-discrimination

*This cluster of lotus leaves stands for a social community, in which every member needs to find his/her position as a foundation for a better life and flourishing development. However, people living with HIV and AIDS, signified by the folded-up leaf, isolate themselves from the community for fear of getting others infected with the virus they are carrying and more significantly, as a result of their sense of self-abasement. In the meantime, the mainstream society is unwilling to accept AIDS patients, offering scarce concern and care but pushing them away from the main social body, as symbolized by the hand pulling the stem of the self-closed leaf away from the cluster. Pressure from inside and outside forces people living with HIV and AIDS to the margin and a hopeless situation. (provided by a mixed-sex group)*



**生命的禁区:**对很多感染 AIDS 的患者而言, HIV&AIDS 就是生命的禁区, 一旦涉足就再也无法回头, 失去了健康美满的生活。同样, AIDS 患者对社会大众也是一个禁区。在当今社会, 很多人排斥, 鄙夷乃至害怕这一禁区。就像图中的空地, 旁边如此热闹, 它却如此寂寞, 与世界格格不入。谁又能意识到, 一个不小心, 我们也会落入这寸草不生的被遗忘的世界呢? 所以, 想要改变这绿洲里的荒原, 让我们试着用爱来滋养这片禁区, 让它重显生机!

Figure 13 A forbidden Area

*HIV and AIDS is a forbidden area of life. Once a person steps in the area, he/she cannot find a way back to the normal life, losing opportunity of living a healthy and happy life. Likewise, people living with HIV and AIDS are like a forbidden area to the general public, carrying labels of social stigma, shame and fear. They are discriminated like this scratch of the grassless land, enclosed off from the surrounding grassland and strikingly separated from the rest of world. Isn't it the case that everyone of us is subject to HIV infection and remains in the danger of stepping in the grassless, barren land? To turn this*

*wasteland to an oasis, let's moisten this forbidden zone with liquid of love and hope.*  
(provided by a mixed-sex group)



封闭的心灵之窗:透过这扇闭着的已生锈的铁窗,我们仿佛看到AIDS病者或HIV感染者的心灵。在当今社会,特别是在中国,极大多数这样的不幸者自我封闭,不愿意把自己的不幸告诉别人,不愿意得到别人的帮助。他们自己把这种不幸看作为一种耻辱,因此将自己的心死死地锁着,不与外界联系与沟通。我们渴望帮助他们打开心灵枷锁,让他们感到人们是友好的,世界是美好的。

Figure 14 A Self-enclosed Window

of Heart

*Most of the AIDS patients keep their infection secret. Their heart is just a dark room, their soul imprisoned in it. So I took this picture to express my feelings about people living with HIV and AIDS. The bleak room behind the rusty iron window as in the photo reminds me of the inner world of people living with HIV and AIDS in China and across the world, who feel ashamed to speak out about their infected situation and ask for help and treatment. They keep themselves in the dark, bleak room with a small window, which sunlight seldom visits. They live solitarily, locking up their inner hearts and unwilling to talk with people who would offer help. But we'd like to help open their self-enclosed windows of heart and support them in getting through HIV and AIDS. We would let them know that people around them are kind and caring and their lives will be beautiful.*  
(provided by a female participant)



Figure 15 and Figure 16 Rebirth

**新生:**新生的绿芽茁壮地生长, 终会成为参天大树, 寓意一种希望, 一种顽强的生命. AIDS 患者得到社会有效的帮助和关注, 逐渐克服内心的自卑和敏感, 内心逐渐充满信心, 萌发新的希望. 当然这并不容易, 所以社会需要对他们报以最大的支持和帮助, 他们依然是社会的一分子, 需要大家共同的关注.

*The newly-born buds, destined to be a towering tree, symbolize hope and a strong life. If acquiring concern, care, and efficient help from society, AIDS patients will gradually overcome their inner sense of shame and get refilled with confidence and hope. It is not easy to help them achieve this, but society needs to offer the most amount of assistance and backing to these members of this community.(provided by a mixed-sex group)*



Figure 17 and Figure 18 Alienation

**隔阂:**AIDS 患者一个人坐在板凳上, 背对美丽的景色, 面对灰白的世界. 人们在远方坐着, 三三两两, 唯独他, 孤单一人. 他试图与世人接触, 他留出了位置, 希望有人坐在他身旁, 但始终孑然一人. 我们要做的, 就是去帮助他, 从切实的行动做起, 也许, 他们就在我们的身旁.

*With his back towards a beautiful green grassland, a person living with HIV and AIDS is*

*sitting alone on a bench facing a bleak world, which is signified by the grey concrete ground. Persons in pairs or groups are seated away from him, leaving him in solitude. Attempting to socialize with others, he has left room in hope of others' joining in, but unfortunately he is always left alone. What we need do is go close to him, befriend and help him with our actions. Maybe, he is around us. (produced by a mixed-sex group)*

As can be seen in the above images with accompanying captions, HIV and AIDS means far more than a virus or a disease to Chinese youth. Rather, it connotes a wide range of social aspects and meanings related to HIV and AIDS. Verbal data from my interviews with my participants demonstrate a shaping influence of media discourse on public knowledge and opinion about HIV and AIDS. Photographic images, which reveal the common social response to HIV and AIDS, stigma, social injustice, and the worrying status of the infected, manifest the insufficiency of intervention work in China. To this phenomenon, Chinese youth have a strong awareness of social responsibility to engaging in social work, providing care, and promoting social change.



Figure 19  
A Risky Site of STIs/HIV Transmission  
*(produced by a single-sex group of young men)*

Entertainment sites are a high-risk place for STIs/HIV infection in China as sex workers commonly have a low awareness of condom use. Even though some of them would have safe sex, most clients reject the use of condoms.



Figure 20 and Figure 21 Young Lovers on Campus

走在校园里，经常看到成双成对的情侣。他们尤其喜欢夜间躲在树丛里。他们看上去沉浸在爱河里。他们视身体的接触为一种爱的表达，会时不时地拥抱，接吻。如果进一步发生性行为，他们会有自我保护意识吗？近年来，不少报告反映了年轻人的性卫生意识低下。如果他们感染上性病或艾滋病，那是多么不幸啊。他们会被剥夺美好的青春。我们认为提高年轻人性卫生意识，使他们免与感染的唯一方法是：系统传播性知识，提高他们的自我保护和责任的意识。

*We very often encounter pairs of young lovers on campus, especially in hidden groves at night. They appear immersed in sweet love. Taking bodily intimacy as a sign of love, they frequently caress each other, hug, and kiss. But do they have the awareness of self-protection if they go further and engage in sex? Recent reports have revealed the low awareness of sexual health among young people. What if these young couples get infections of STIs and HIV? They will be deprived of a colorful and youthful life they are enjoying now. It would be the only way to help young people from sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS and decrease the number of the infected among them: that is, disseminating systematic sexual knowledge and promoting their awareness of self-protection and sense of responsibility. (provided by a group of young women)*

My participants took this pair of pictures to represent the vulnerability of college students to STIs/HIV in order to raise the awareness of safe sex among them.



Figure 22 and Figure 23 Statues of Lion and Lioness

图左为母狮子, 图右为公狮子, 中国古代男尊女卑, 但自古追求阴阳和谐, 并不突出雄性的地位, 是一种道家的思想. 当今社会, 女性地位已有很大提高, 但实际上, 很多情况下女性仍处于被动地位, 如工作, 工资及其他男性占主要支配的领域中. 而男女的不平等也是 AIDS 蔓延的一大推动, 因此消除男女不平等, 是帮助解决 AIDS 问题的一个途径.

*A pair of stone lion (on the right) and lioness (on the left) can be commonly found standing before traditional Chinese buildings. Man was privileged as superior to woman in traditional China, but Taoist doctrine also prevailed that appreciates the harmony of Ying and Yang, femaleness and maleness, without giving priority to the latter. In present-day society, women's social position has been greatly improved, but in many cases, gender equality has not been achieved in, for example, payment, job opportunity, and some male-dominated occupations. Gender inequality remains a main propellant of the spread of HIV and AIDS; to diminish and eliminate the inequality between both sexes, consequently, is a solution to the AIDS problem. (provided by a mixed-sex group)*

The statues of male and female lions were commonly standing in front of an official bureau or a pretentious house whose owner was socially privileged in old China or even in some areas in contemporary China. This group of female participants used this pair of gendered objects to illustrate the great impact of the ingrained hierarchical ideology upon the Chinese society. Since the construction of a New China in 1949, man-woman equality

has been legislated. Women then were given equal rights to men in work, education, and voting. However, the hierarchical Confucianism embedded within the Chinese culture justifies and consolidates the persistence of gender inequality in contemporary China. In face of the fact that gender norms still operate and influence people's health, a number of my participants suggested that we embrace another cultural heritage—Taoism—a philosophical school parallel in time to Confucianism. Taoist doctrines advocate a harmonious union of and balance between the competing yet complementary features of masculinity and femininity. The participants thought that Taoism, as valued among China's precious cultural traditions, should be used as cultural recourses to affect and shake the ingrained man-dominant ideologies, to which many people are adhering. The participants recognized the prevalence of gender inequality on many social occasions in contemporary China, although women's social position in China is significantly elevated, even much higher than that in other Asian countries. This indicates a strong awareness of gender equality and self-esteem among young Chinese women. As illustrated, most of them held a strong sense of "I am the owner of my body":

I will surely reject it (sex) if I don't want it.... What if my boyfriend insists on that? Then...he is not a good guy cos he does not care about my feelings....That shows my decision not to have sex with him is right.

I will not be forced and coerced into sexual practices because we are equal in the relationship. If he loves me and cares about me, then he should not do that.

Likewise, male participants regarded their partners in the relationship as respectable and equal in position.

Yes, I respect her feelings. If she refuses sex, that means she is not ready yet and then I will not push her into it. Otherwise, that will hurt her feelings ... and our relationship. I can wait.

I have no experience of involving in a relationship, but I think the relationship

should be set up on equality and mutual understandings.

Two out of eight male participants spoke about their sexual experiences. One young man got involved in sexual practices with his girlfriend whom he had known for eight years. The other young man had his first sexual encounter initiated by one of his female high school classmates. In the first case, a long-term friendship developed into a relationship, which later involved sex. It happened some day three months away from the time the young woman took off to Australia for an undergraduate education. The young man “asked” if they could have sex. His girlfriend rejected it as she felt herself not ready for sex. A month later, they had their first sexual experience in the young man’s home, using a condom. It was the best brand of condoms the young man could find in Shanghai, the city he resided in, after his navigating the Internet for information about condoms. The other young man was sexually involved with a female classmate of his who initiated sex for the first time, though they were not in a relationship. Later he had sex with this young woman a couple of times even after he established a relationship with another young woman. Each time they used a condom provided by the young man. This young man, however, had never had sex with his girlfriend because he cherished the relationship and then constrained himself from sexual engagement with his girlfriend.

I love my girlfriend although she is not pretty, but I feel good being with her. We have not had sex till now....We had some close behaviors like kissing, cuddling ... I controlled myself every time we might go further. I do not want to involve her into sex too early....

These two young men had free access to sex knowledge at home. The former was introduced to books on youth sexual health by his father, who brought him a series of books and put them on his desk without saying anything. The latter young man had such kind of books available at home as his father and grandfather were medical doctors. My interviews with young people as well as my observations tell that those young adults who had a good grasp of sexual information could deal with their relationship, involving sexual behaviors or otherwise, in better and healthier ways.

Young women's awareness of autonomy over their own bodies is also reflected in my interviews with them as demonstrated below. Virtually all of the participants, female and male, identified the naturalness and legitimacy of young adults' sexual drives and impulses. Further, two young women admitted that they would initiate sex if they want to.

Yes, I will. Why not? If I want that, I'll do it. [Aren't you afraid of being thought of casual or cheap?] No, I am not. I want to do it with my boyfriend, not other guys. I think he understands.

Under the condition in which the majority of female participants and many other people thought it as the "guy's thing" to initiate sex, these two young women's attitudes are significantly meaningful—though the proportion is low. It signals a gradual awakening of female sexual consciousness that has been suppressed and kept dormant for thousands of years. But now young women come to break with the gender roles imposed on women in Traditional China as well in Maoist era, as sexual objects, reproductive tools or as asexual beings. An awareness of being sexual beings is emerging among them. Young men in urban China also come to accept and appreciate such profound changes in young women. When asked what they feel if their girlfriends initiate sex, the majority of young men took it as natural and acceptable as young women's sexual drives, they believe, are as common as their own. This transformation in Chinese youth's sexual ideas reveals that a kind of individualized and freedom-orientated sexual value is being constructed among urban youths in contemporary China. However, it still needs to be noted that in the macro context of contemporary Chinese society, gender disparity is prevailing. In this situation, the empowerment of women as active agents in their sexual experiences and life situations remains a significant strategy to curb the spread of STIs and HI virus.

### **Personal risk of HIV/AIDS**



青春是一朵绽放灿烂的纯白月季，她从不缺活力与激情。魅力从她身上散发，永远那样吸引人们的眼球。而当青春的纯白染上了污渍，她便再也快乐不起来了。她萎缩了，躺在那里，暗自神伤。这对青春之花来说是残酷的。她不再享受阳光，也不屑吸收养分。她的叶子开始枯黄，花瓣开始凋零。她一步步走向死亡，她无奈，我们也为自己的无能为力叹息，为青春叹息。艾滋病毒正像这些污泥，玷污了纯白的青春。

Figure 24 Youth Affected by HIV

*Youth is a flourishingly blossoming rose, white and pure. She abounds in vigor and vitality, radiating the light of youthful life. But when the pure white flower is contaminated by dirt, happiness departs from her. She is lying there, withered and spiritless, sad and depressed. It is so cruel to this flower of youth – she does not any more enjoy the sunlight or nurture herself by absorbing nutriments. Gradually, her leaves are getting yellowish and shrunken, the petals saggy. She is stepping towards death, doomed and aidless. We can do nothing but sigh for our inability to offer any help or for the eclipse of youth. The HI virus, like the filthy mud, spoils the purity of youth. (provided by a group of young females)*

A group of female participants took this picture to express their sympathy and a feeling of helplessness in the face of young people's high vulnerability to HIV and AIDS. A sharp contrast was set up, as shown in the caption, before and after the contamination of the flower, the infection of HIV. It highlights the disastrous effects that the HI virus brings on a young life: all the hope for a bright future is gone with the infection, and the meaning for an ongoing life lies in a desperate waiting for the arrival of death. The participants' pessimism and despair of the infection and the infected reveal a common feeling of fear, shame, and stigma with HIV and AIDS and with people living with HIV and AIDS. In my interviews with young people, terms such as "so terrifying", "lethal", "fatal", "destined for death" and "as if being sentenced to death" were frequently used to describe their conceptions of AIDS. Moreover, depictions of bony legs, patches of decayed skin,

and sunken cheeks of the infected people recurred in their accounts of HIV and AIDS. Many of my participants understood AIDS in a “scientific” way that AIDS is an incurable disease but allows ten years or more to go if an infected person is treated well. But in China, a wealth-poverty polarized country, its poor social welfare security fails to cover millions of the unprivileged people, who include the majority of people living with HIV and AIDS such as impoverished peasants getting infected through selling blood and sex workers. They cannot gain the same kind of the state-sponsored medical treatment nor care as those infected in developed countries can. Their families, then, are pushed into the abyss by unaffordable treatment expenses, debts, and despair. In such a situation, none of those affected can see a sparkle of hope for their future. For them, the remaining life is just shrouded in shame, regret, hate, and fear. Furthermore, their and the general populations despair and fear surrounding HIV and AIDS is reinforced by the mass media as noted earlier.

AIDS-related media reports in China tend to describe the infected as among the at-risk group including injected drug users, sex workers, and MWM (men who have sex with men), despite the fact that HIV is alarmingly transmitting among the general public through a predominant route of unsafe sex. The frequent association of HIV and AIDS with the stereotyped risk group helps to reinforce the misconception that the high rate of HIV infection among this group of people is a punishment for their engagement in immoral and deviant behaviors. As demonstrated in my interviews, participants classified people living with HIV and AIDS according to the ways they got infected and then gave varied attitudes.

I feel strong sympathy for the babies who got infected from their moms and those unfortunately infected with blood selling. But for drug users and those infected through immoral sex, ... they do not deserve my compassion. (shared by both a female and a male student)

My participants took distinct love-or-hate attitudes towards those living with HIV and AIDS based on their moral judgments. They attributed the infection of the risk groups to

their individual irresponsible practices, without taking account of social factors and circumstances which contributed to these people's vulnerability. Young people's unrealized of the complexity of social issues related to HIV and AIDS would lead to a consolidation of stigma associated with the stereotyped risk group and those having got infected. As Grover (1988) argues, the concept of risk group as constructed and stabilized in popular discourse creates and discriminates the risk group not only epidemiologically but socially and politically, whose functions are "to isolate and condemn people rather than to contact and protect them" (p.28). As illustrated in the above caption, the participants used terms such as "contamination", "dirt", and "filthy" to condemn HIV and AIDS and those got infected through "immoral" and "deviant" behaviors.

The reinforcement of a risk group as highly vulnerable to HIV and AIDS also leads to a low awareness of HIV and AIDS and a tendency among young people to characterize HIV and AIDS as a disease of "other". Despite an alarming rise of infection among the general population, especially among young people, virtually every participant said that there was no chance for them to get infected because they had seldom engaged in "immoral" behaviors nor approached the risk group. This belief was buttressed by the fact that none of them personally knew someone who was infected with HIV. As a female participant said,

I have rarely sensed the existence of AIDS in my life or worried about the potential danger I might have because AIDS is far away from me and people around me. I have never heard of any of my friends, or friends of my friends, or friends of my friends' friends who contracted HIV.

In contrast to the "distance" feeling about HIV infection, many of my participants expressed concern of sexually transmitted infections, which they thought could transmit through more routes than HIV infection such as sitting on a contaminated toilet or swimming in an unclear public pool. A few of them also showed concern about contracting HIV through tainted blood transfusion. However, "a sense of distance"—the idea that people are "protected from AIDS by geographic, cultural and moral separation

from those at risk” (Walsh-Childers et al, 1994, p. 20)—remains prevalent among my participants.

This sense of distance is also recognized by Campbell (2003) in her project research in Africa. As she describes it, the “othering” of HIV and AIDS

serves as a psychological defense, protecting the individual from anxiety through externalization of the threat on to identifiable out-groups such as homosexuals or commercial sex workers, resulting in a sense of unrealistic optimism about one’s own vulnerability (p. 123-124).

In the context of AIDS becoming the disease of young people worldwide and nationwide, China youth’s sense of unreasonable optimism about their immunity to HIV infection as strengthened by popular discourse would lead them to a high possibility of being infected. Given that a feeling of personal vulnerability to HIV infection may lead to translating sexual knowledge into behavior change (safe sex) (Campbell, 2003), promoting young people’s sense of HIV and AIDS should be an important part of HIV and AIDS education.

## **SEXUALITY EDUCATION AND HIV INTERVENTION**

Sexuality education remains the most effective means to curb the STIs/HIV transmission among young people in the absence of any affordable medical cure of HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS, 2003). “Sexuality education” is increasingly used to take place of “sex education”. This noticeable switching use marks a progressive evolution of the concept of “sex education” in the past decades. The earlier notion of sex education which, in a conventional and literal sense, refers to a kind of education which limits the promotion of people’s understanding of human physiological features and public health knowledge, has given way to a more comprehensive conceptualization of sexuality education which gives concern to aspects of “gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction,” all of which correspond to the way that sexuality has come to be understood today (Herdt & Howe, 2007, p. 1). In Chapter Two, I have already

describe what of kind of trajectory school-based sex education has go through during the past decades since its initial implementation in modern China. In this chapter, I focus on the status of school-based sexuality education in reform-era China, based on what my participants have revealed about their learning experiences related to sexual education in school settings.

### **Channels of information and knowledge about sexuality accessible to Chinese youth**

The young adults participating in this study, aged 18-19, are the generation who was born and grew up in the 1990s, approximately ten years since the onset of the economic reform in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is in the early years of the reform era that the first identification of HIV infection was identified in China. Since then, the STIs/HIV infection has been spreading beyond at-risk regions and from high-risk groups to the general population as noted earlier. What kind of sexuality education programs and intervention work have been designed and implemented in various school levels in China over these three decades? The findings from my study are alarming: out of twenty-five students, four have had a course called “Physiological Health” in either secondary or high school levels, while the rest has not had any kind of such course except a textbook entitled “Physiology and Health” during their approximately ten years’ learning experience from kindergarten to college. It was the common case that schools distributed textbooks but replaced the classes for “Physiological Health” in curricula with more “important” ones such as Chinese, Mathematics, and Physics, or they gave responsibility to students for a self-study of the textbook. In my memory of sex education I received in China, I gained from the course nothing except a book with the same title that was issued to me at the beginning of my secondary school year in the late 1980s. We had no teacher for this course and then were asked to read parts of the book after school. A decade later, there seems to have little modification for school-based sex education. Most of my participants, however, have had opportunities to get involved in short-term school- or community- organized activities or campaigns aimed to raise HIV and AIDS awareness among the students in the forms of distributing brochures about AIDS and sexual knowledge, engaging students in professionals-delivering lectures disseminating relevant

information, and inviting students into a survey investigation with a double purpose of disseminating sexual knowledge in response to HIV and AIDS.

For the students whose schools opened up sex education courses, information and knowledge about human sexuality were delivered exclusively in the biomedical model. One student said that his teacher had offered in class explicitly scientific explanations of human reproductive organs and their physiological functions. The other three had a shared recall of their learning experience: their teachers talked about the physical transformations of boys and girls in adolescence but skipped the “sperm meets egg” part, leaving the “embarrassing section” for an after-school reading. As demonstrated, a sex education course was either absent or was offered only in a small proportion of schools, where, however, a basic level of sexual information such as the process of sexual intercourse is kept untouchable in class. Most female participants receiving my interviews had little knowledge of how sexual intercourse is conducted. The young woman who took the teacher role of providing sexual information to her roommates in the dorm as mentioned earlier said, *“isn’t it terrible that they have no idea what sexual conduct is. If unfortunately one of them is attacked by a rapist, she does not even know how to protect herself.”* The shame and stigma associated with sexual matters constrains teachers from an open talk on sex with the students, leaving them ignorant and at risk of getting pregnant or getting infections.

School sexuality education, Allen (2005) argues, is one of the few places that the students receive officially sanctioned messages about sex and sexuality. Nonetheless, this crucial, trusty channel of knowledge provision and construction for students is either entirely or partially blocked up to the Chinese students, who, consequently, have to turn to other informal sources such as media and the Internet. In terms of home-sited sex education, the findings from this study show that only two, one female and one male, out of twenty eight youths receiving my interviews have received home sex education from their parents when they were in adolescence. The young woman described her mother as different from the mothers of her friends in the sense that she was fairly open-minded to talk about sex with her daughter and tell her daughter what a girl needs to be careful of.

The young man's father did not talk with him face to face about sex but, instead, chose to buy a series of books on adolescent sexuality intended for young readers, and left them in his son's room. This father avoided direct talk on sex with his son probably because he thought of himself not qualified enough to offer sexual knowledge or more probably, as the young man said, because his father felt it embarrassing to introduce the topic of sex in father-and-son conversations. The rest of the participants received little home sex education, and for most of them, any topics surrounding sex were deliberately avoided at home. As Huang et al. (2005) observe, parents and teachers still avoid discussing sensitive topics such as premarital sex, contraception, and abortion in present-day China, where radical socio-cultural transformations have occurred.

In the context of the absence of school-based and home sex education, Chinese youth usually go for media and the Internet for sexual information and knowledge. As discovered in this study, young men acquired from digital media large numbers of documentaries, porn films, and television programs containing vivid portrayals and explanations about human sexuality. Young women usually gained sexual information from medical magazines, hospital-issued magazines, literary novels, and western films. A women's hospital located near to the university where I did my fieldwork issued magazines free of charge to young college women on a regular basis.



Figure 25 and Figure 26 Free-charge Magazines Introducing Sexual Information

The contents of the magazine presented above were rich and appealing, ranging from catchy but informative stories based on patients' experiences of unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infection, and other problems and issues related to woman health, the readers' inquiry column in the form of a doctor answering questions raised by readers, and the doctor's advice section giving concern to sexual pleasure and sexual health. The magazine also provided advertising information about different types of abortion operations in the hospital as well as of contraceptive products the hospital could offer. Important issues related to youth sexuality and public health were covered and delivered in the form of talks among friends—rather than in a didactic, doctor-to-patient manner. Despite the fact that the hospital's free provision of sex education to college students was commercially motivated, the magazines reach young women as well as young men as “sexual textbooks” that enable them to access proper sexual information and knowledge. More than that, in collaboration with some students' societies of the university such as the Students' Union, the hospital also organized a series of lectures given either by medical experts from the hospital or by researchers in sexology, youth sexual psychology, or other related fields in the university.

During my fieldwork I had a chance to attend an HIV-related lecture by a professor of biological medicine, who talked on the evolution and characteristics of the HI virus, its transmission mode, and the correct procedure of using condom and femidoms. The lecture was followed up by a speech made by a young woman named Julia, the first university student in China who dared to make public her tested identity of being HIV positive. The woman shared with the audience her stories of how she got infected through unprotected heterosexual practices with her boyfriend, an international student studying in China, her personal feelings and reflections, as well as her advice to the young people in presence. It was noticeable that the audience was predominately composed of young women, most of whom, I found later, were junior or senior college students or graduates. What was impressive was these young women's open and inviting attitudes towards knowledge of sex and sexuality—a rather limited number of them lowered their heads so to avoid the images of male and female reproductive organs the presenter used to show how to put on condoms and femidoms. Moreover, many of the attendants including

young women and men gave rounds of applause to Julia in her speech, approached her, shaking hands with her, and noted down her email and blog addresses for further contact. After this successful event promoting the awareness of safe sex and the use of condoms, I interviewed several participants, asking them about their feedback and expectations for HIV and AIDS prevention activities, based on which emerged some implications for college sexuality and HIV and AIDS education. First, an urgent need for systematic sexuality education is required by these young people who, like those involved in my project, have little experience of receiving sex education in school. Second, in terms of approaches to open and expansive talks on sexuality and HIV and AIDS, both advice of experts and educators and their peer's perspectives are highly appreciated by young people.

## Young people's expectation for sexuality education



许多保守的人认为，性是罪恶、羞耻和丑陋的象征。就像画中的树一样，人们将树不协调地栽到石头上，仅仅显示出了病态的美。因此我们应当客观科学地看待性，消除偏见。我们应当首先了解它是什么，这样我们才能正确地面对它。

Figure 27 Poor Plantation

*Many conservative people think that sex or sexuality is evil, shameful and ugly. These negative labels tied to sexuality are just like little trees or branches planted artificially and inappropriately onto the rocky hill. Such implantation brings the viewers nothing but an imposed-on sense of nature. Human sexuality is like the rock hill, simple but natural and essential. Without depreciation of or prejudice over sexuality, we then are able to acquire an objective perspective of sexuality, and then able to deal with it properly.*

This photo displays young people's expectation: the refiguring of sexuality in unbiased terms. The cluster of green branches that were artificially cultivated in the rocky hill for the purpose of beautification symbolically represents the biased effort to attach socially biased tags to sexuality. The young participants challenged the traditional sexual meanings defined and distorted in Chinese cultural norms, calling for new ways of seeing sex and sexuality. Young people's critical attitudes towards conventional meanings of sex and sexuality and their demand for the reconceptualization of sexuality demonstrate the emergence of the spirit among these youth of independence and autonomy in thinking of subjects and issues closely associated with their lives such as sexual matters. Youth in contemporary China are not a conventionally assumed category of "unquestioning and passive receivers"; instead, they have their independent thoughts, interests, and needs. These young people's voices need to be spread among the adults who privilege

themselves as “guiders and supporters” in the course of pre-adults’ learning and development. Young people’s call for the undistorted redefinition of sex and sexuality should reach educational sectors who either have sexuality education absent in the curriculum framework or have it practiced ineffectively, allowing it to exist exclusively in name. It also should reach educators who constrain themselves from open talks of sex and sexuality, pivotal subjects to be explored in children’s growing process.

In the age of technology and information, young people have no difficulty in accessing a rich range of discourses addressing sexuality via various channels of source as discussed earlier. However, knowledge provided by school sexuality education carries a kind of authority which is not easily rivaled by information gained through other informal avenues. School-offered sexuality education programs are thus urgently required by these youths.

I bet every one of us want to know about sex. The more and the longer it is kept in the dark from us, the more we feel interested and curious about it. I passed 18 and so did most of my classmates. Honestly, I sometimes experience sexual urges and desires but I have no idea how to handle them. I need someone who would like to help me out of the awkward situation of anxiety, shame, or helplessness that I have gone through. It is so important to me. I do not know what others think but I think many of them share my experience and feeling.... What I need most is a systematic sexuality education in the form of a formal course, the best way, through which various aspects and issues surrounding sexuality can be covered and discussed in class. Formally offered courses in school can not only draw our attention to the importance of sexual subject matter and sexual health among young people but also provide trustworthy information and knowledge about them. (female student)

Enrolling in one or more courses may be desirable for me. Since it is an officially sanctioned course, I do not have to feel embarrassed to learn about sex. Besides, the formal opening of this course requires the teacher to give a well-expanded discussion of sexual subjects other than a kind of touch-and-go mention of sexual matters that my former sex education teacher did. Enrolling in the formal course

also requires my active input of thinking and exploring in the study of the course. In effect, there is such kind of course, entitled “Overview of Sexual Science”, offered in this school year. My roommates and I could not get any spots as it was fully enrolled within a couple of days. We have to wait till next year if it remains in the curriculum. (male student)

The optimal way of carrying out sexuality education for us, I think, is through opening up courses that span, like a school year, or at least, a semester. This length could enable us to get a better understanding of sexual matter. I had got involved in certain short-term campaigns or activities related to sex and HIV/AIDS education. It does not work well. What I have gained is little more than some basic information of HIV transmission modes and public health. That is far from enough. (female student)

Among a variety of avenues to information and knowledge about sexuality, school-based sex education is the most trustworthy to young people.



Figure 28 and Figure 29 Public Lecture on Sexual Health

One afternoon during the middle term, after getting the permission to sit in the class from the professor instructing that course mentioned by participants, “Overview of Sexual Science”. I entered the classroom and noticed that the front area was packed with students, male and female. The enlarged images of male reproductive organs on the screen did not scare or shame women students present into averting their eyes or lowering

their heads as was my expectation. The professor introduced the origin and development of the sexological study in the West, particularly in Germany, and provided website links and book titles to the students for further reading. An after-class conversation with the professor shedded more light on this course: subjects of sex and sexuality are not only addressed from the biomedical perspective but also lectured on from other disciplines of psychology and social sciences. This cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary design of the course, the professor hoped, could provide students from science and from arts perspectives to see the sexual issue from other disciplines they are not familiar with and in so doing help them acquire a relatively comprehensive overview of sexuality. It was a kind of all-inclusive course addressing sexuality from various aspects. The goal of this course was to give a broad picture of the exploration or study of human sexuality, allowing students an overarching view of sexuality. This is more a course on sexuality studies intended for college students than a course particularly organized for sexuality and HIV and AIDS education. However, this course designed for college-level students can provide implications for sexuality and HIV and AIDS education programs in higher education in China. We see it possible and necessary to deconstruct the former conceptualization of sex education exclusively in the biomedical framework.

## **HIV AND AIDS INTERVENTION AND THE CULTURE OF CONDOMS**

I further discuss the idea of HIV intervention in the section by relating it with topics of condoms and condom use partially because condom use is emphasized as among the most effective measures to control the spread of HIV in AIDS prevention programs—including mutual monogamy, treatment for other STIs, and partner reduction. Young people's awareness of condom use as well as their understanding of risky and safe, as explored in this section, can provide important information to HIV and AIDS intervention programs and sex education for young people. Discussion is around condoms and condom use also because the concept of condoms came up in students' photographs and group discussions as interesting not only as being an effective HIV/STIs prevention strategy but, more significantly, as an artifact pregnant with rich cultural connotations.

## Talking about condoms and condom use

A photograph representing their understanding of HIV and AIDS taken by a single-sex group of young women provoked heated and in-depth discussions among the participants. It was produced originally to signify the low awareness of condom use for HIV prevention among the general population in China. Prompted by this photo, students' social memories of condoms were recalled and mobilized in the dynamics of group discussion and led them and me to deep reflections and a further exploration of cultural meanings of condoms and condom use. Understanding of cultural connotations of this object helps us to look into cultural reasons why the condom is not appreciated or used as an effective measure against STIS/HIV.



机上的文字，政府主要宣传的是计划生育，中间的红丝带很多人并不知道其意义，也不是在突出的位置，而突出的主题是：避孕和意外怀孕。它并没有发挥到应有的作用。机下的裂缝，暗示它的作用的脆弱。人们的意识保守、无知，大部分人不愿当众走向它，或并不以此来控制爱滋病毒。

Figure 30 Condom-vending Machine

*The words figuring conspicuously in the cover of the condom-selling machine are: Contraception, Unexpected Pregnancy. Below the enlarged and highlighted characters were free-charge aid phone lines ready for 24 hours provided. The red ribbon is not widely recognized as the symbol for the HIV/AIDS awareness. Neither is it marked in an important – central for example – place on the machine. This machine does not function well. The cracks in the wall underneath the machine implicitly tell its weakness. People, mostly conservative and ignorant of knowledge related to sexuality and HIV and AIDS, would not approach the machine in public or regard the use of condoms as a measure to*

*ward off the HI virus.*

Condom-selling machines were installed in cities and some countryside areas in China. Walking in the street, I could recognize them either in corners or in open places. In keeping with what the students observed, most of them looked weather-beaten, rusty and worn-out. The dilapidated appearance might tell the history of its installation. But most of the machines failed to perform their duty—to provide condoms—as they were deliberately sabotaged. Who did this? Naughty kids? In group discussions generated by the photo presented above, a female participant, growing up in a metropolitan city, came up with an interesting and thoughts-provoking story.

When I was a middle school student a couple of years ago, everyday I took a convenient road that could direct me to school in a short while. But one day, I noticed that there was a condom-vending machine installed along that road. Then every time I passed by it, I felt uncomfortable and embarrassed especially in the presence of other passers-by. Even I dared not give a glance at the device for fear of being noticed. It seemed as if a glimpse at the machine showed that you had interest in the condoms in it and you would get some for sex. Sometime later, I decided to take another road which required a longer time to reach the school. What was surprising and interesting is that I was not alone in this case—I later found that many people including some of my classmates had the same response to the machine, trying to circumvent it on purpose as I did.

Another young woman shared a similar story. Once she accidentally approached the counter located in a corner selling contraceptive products while wandering in a department store. As a result of not wearing glasses that day, she took the glittering covers of condoms for other goods like candies. When she bent down in an effort to identify what those things were, she felt herself being watched by sidelong glances from customers away from the counter and even from the saleswoman. Realizing that she intruded into an area where she was not supposed to be, she got out of the store immediately, flushed.

Obviously, “condom” within Chinese culture is not just a rubber sheath for purposes of contraception and public health; rather, it is associated with sex, a notion with a negative and shameful spin, a culturally stigmatized subject in Chinese societies. Following from Chapter Five studying sexuality as social construction, this chapter continues and furthers the discussion through students’ social memory with regard to sex and sexuality, which is significantly constructed and transmitted by the object, condoms. The socio-historical exploration of sexual meanings carried by this object profoundly contributes to great insights into sexuality as a social construct and helps us better understand people’s conceptions of condoms and condom use. These understandings provide significant information to sexuality education and HIV prevention programs in China.

### **Addressing Chinese youth’s sexual constructions in the age of AIDS through social memory of condom and condom use**

The interactions between memory work and materiality contribute to reconstituting social life and cultural meanings in relation to sex and sexuality in the past; in the meantime, constructed sexual discourses residing in social memory inform and act upon bodily practices of present-day Chinese youth in light of the impact of social memory in referencing human action in time (Nielsen, 2008). The sexual knowledge historically constituted in social memories exerts impact on the formation and transformation of sexual subjectivities of young people in contemporary China. Moreover, the symbolic code of condom that invokes representations of culturally ingrained sexual conceptions also help to make the past into the present by bringing social conventions of sex and sexuality upon contemporary youth’s action through their interactions with the material thing.

#### ***Social memory and materiality***

Memory is “the foundation of self and society” (Cattell & Climo, 2002, p. 1) and interest in memory, both individual and social or collective memory, has been found in many

scholarly disciplines including literature, psychology, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, archaeology, to list a few (Olick & Robbins, 1998). In tandem with the renewal of the interdisciplinary interest in memory studies, a resurgence of interest in material culture has emerged among ethnographers and archaeologists ((Mills & Walker, 2008) who delve into social realities through seeking social memory in light of the significance of material culture in its transmission of memories. This section is also interested in ways that materially, the collaboration and interaction of subjects and objects, people and condoms, engages in the reconstruction and transmission of social memory related to sex and sexuality. I also investigate how knowledge of the interactions of memory work and materially can be used to explain people's sexual conceptualizations and sexual experiences in past societies in modern Chinese history and provide insights for sexual subjectivities and behaviors among, particularly, young people in contemporary Chinese society.

Halbwachs (1992) in his classics of memory studies, *On Collective Memory*, distinguished memory as autobiographic memory, historical memory, and collective memory. Autobiographic memory is memory of events that we have personally experienced while historical memory is memory of the past that can only be stimulated and recalled through institutionalized historical records and collective memory is a shared or collective understanding of a social reality arising from interactions among individuals as members of groups. Halbwachs gave prominence to a collective thought of the world constituted "through agreed upon versions of the past, versions constructed through communication, not private remembrance" (Cattell & Climo, 2002, p. 4). Recently, however, "collective memory" has been increasingly replaced by the term "social memory" to highlight the many different social contexts in which memories are made and the importance of individuals as members of social groups in memory work (Wills & Walker, 2008; Fentress & Wickham, 1992).

"Social memory" is also adopted in my study to mark the importance of individual participants involved in my project and their agency in remembering and narrating. The approach of seeking social memory privileges individual memories, or the personal

expression and interpretation, of the past, which are seen as constitutive and integral to collective, social memory given that individual memories are constituted and shaped by social, economic, and political circumstances as well as by collectively shared beliefs and values. As argued by Cattell and Climo (2002), the stories of individual lives are important dimensions of both personal and social identity and individual memories define our being and our humanities as individuals and in collectives. Individual memories are complicatedly intertwined and embedded in collective, social memory. In the meantime, I also value the significant role that group dynamics plays, as appreciated by Halbwachs (1992), in provoking and helping individuals to organize their memories of, especially if applied in my study, sexual subjects. Restraint on culturally stigmatized topics surrounding sexual matters can be undermined in a climate of round-table discussion which allows social memories related to the sensitive and private topics to be recalled, reshaped, and transmitted.

Social memories are constructed and reconstructed through social practices (Bourdieu, 1977) and these practices “link people and things through time in the process of shaping history” (Mills, 2008, p. 83). In other words, people construct social memories through their engagement with other people and through their interaction with varieties of material culture which includes different kinds of substances, buildings, artifacts, and objects alike (Mills & Walker, 2008). This growing recognition of the active intersection of people and materials in social practices as well as in memory work is marked in an important change within the literature on “things” from the use of the term “material culture” to that of “materiality” as observed by Mills and Walker (2008). The notion of materiality highlights memory work as a process through which materials and humans, objects and subjects are reciprocally constituted (Nielsen, 2008). Materiality is used in this paper as a window to understand the ways in which condoms and people interact in a range of social contexts in memory construction and transmission.

Given that objects contain different values and meanings depending on their cultural contexts (Mills & Walker, 2008), the sexual object, the condom, is put under examination through its intersections with people in different periods as an active medium conveying

social memory and a vehicle of cultural meanings of corporeality and sexuality in a variety of China's past social settings in which memories are made. Moreover, in light of the contributing role of objects in bringing the past to the present through their function of invoking representations of the past that inform people's action through symbolic codes (Hodder, 1992, as cited in Nielsen, 2008), condoms as the signifier of conventional conceptions of "sex" recalls sexual knowledge formed in previous Chinese societies to people nowadays in their interaction with condoms and in so doing, exerts impact on their sexual subjectivities and behavior. In addition, the ability of materials to turn the past into a shaping force of current practice makes more sense when objects are understood as endowed with agency (Nielsen, 2008). Despite the dispute regarding the extent of object agency in the material world, many scholars agree that material objects possess power to influence the lives of humans in interactions with the objects (Latour, 1994; Gell, 1998). Furthermore, the nature of the agency of objects as well as that of people varies cross-culturally and cross-socially (Stahl, 2008). The characteristics of the agency ascribed to the condom change across different social contexts. In Maoist time of 1960s and 1970s, the power of condom was abused to regulate and repress people's sexual lives; in the present context, nationwide and worldwide, of alarming rise in STIs/HIV infection among especially young people, condoms are endowed with the agency that empowers its users in self-protection, bodily autonomy, and gender equality.

***Not just a sheath: a historical inquiry of condom within various social contexts of China***

The Chinese history related to the use and experimentations of various contraception strategies spans across two thousand years, among which the contraceptive ring remains the most ancient. Second to the ring, the condom, which was made of lambskin and stitched by highly skillful craftsmen, was utilized seven and eight hundred years ago. In the initial utilization of condoms, those lambskin sheaths needed to be soaked in hot water for a day prior to use due to the little elasticity of the material. An alternative material, fish bladders, was also recorded to be a component of condoms in ancient China. This is a good choice in terms of the softness and flexibility of the material, but

the difficulty of matching a bladder to a penis of a particular size undermines its utility. Alongside the contraceptives involving the use of condoms, there were other birth-control strategies which were effective but at the expense of women's health. For example, a fraction of arsenic or mercury taken by the woman was tested as effective in contraception but surely harmful to her procreative systems. Even so, women in that time risked weak health and even early death using it as the contraceptive to either avoid unwanted pregnancy or please their partners by releasing their anxiety of pregnancy.

In parallel to the Chinese history and use of condoms, an Egyptian drawing of a condom has been found to be three thousand years old; it is unknown if the device was intended for contraception or for ritual purposes. The first-known "published" description of the condom appeared in 1564 in Italy, in which a linen sheath was taken up as an effective strategy against syphilis by its author Gabriele Falloppio (*Condom*, n. d.). It is until the 1840s, as stated by Lipton (2005), that the vulcanization of rubber made possible the common use of condoms in the west. In the 1930s, the popularity of condom use was achieved by the employment of liquid latex as material that was comfortably flexible and effective in contraception for the users. At present, latex condoms have become the primary technique for the prevention of unwanted pregnancy and infections. The latex condoms as well as the industrial technology of production were later imported to China; the easy availability of condoms resulting from the wholesale use of the products has brought forth new sexual views and varying ethical and moral ideas among people in China as well as the similar occurrences of change in the West as observed by Lipton (2005).

However, prior to the easy availability of condoms in the Chinese market, the condom had been an object associated with a dark, stigmatized domain of sex, which was labeled as obscene, deviant, and dangerous to the stability of a family unit and, broadly, of a nation. The only legitimacy of sexual practices lies in procreation for the succession of the family, as formulated in Confucianism embedded in the Chinese culture for two thousand years. In such ideological context, condoms and other contraceptives as the preventive means of unwanted pregnancy resulting from "unnecessary" and obscene

sexual practices were derogatively signified and socially stigmatized to be shameful objects.

With time, condoms came to be permitted in public spheres, especially within some medical sectors, for the purpose of family planning. In Maoist times, for example, condoms were provided, in a limited number and on the basis of a family unit, to those in legitimate marriage by the medical institutions such as community clinics and hospitals. My mother recalled the monthly provision of condoms or pills to each married couple by her school clinic in the 1970s. Maoist ideologies, influential in China for decades, inherited the Confucianism, labeling sex with such terms as “degenerating”, “reactionary” to the communist course. People’s sexual lives were put under political control “for the good of our collective nation”. In that era, only people in legitimate marital status were entitled to the use of condoms and other contraceptives without shame; those beyond the confine of heterosexual marriage, for example, engaging in premarital and extramarital sex, were defined to be degenerate and corrupted by “poisonous weed” of the capitalist West and therefore deprived of the right to use condoms above board. Regarded as harmful to the stability and development of a family unit and the whole nation in traditional China, sexuality was similarly deemed as a barrier to the communist advancement in modern China as it was a thing or practice advocated and valued in the capitalist world. It can be suggested that sexuality, a natural instinct and a basic sensual pleasure innate in the human body, is politicized and ideologicalized in Mao’s time. Personal and private sexual life was regulated and monitored by the institutions through the monthly assignment of a certain number of condoms to each couple, the number of whose sexual practices needs to be no more than that of the condoms offered. For those outside of the plan of condom allocation but involved in sex, unwanted pregnancy would bring to them, especial females, not merely physical pain but shame and fear of others’ collective prejudice and discrimination. Cases of pregnant single women who committed suicide are not rare in that time. Although the shortage of the production and supply of condoms can be attributable to the planned provision of condoms to each family unit, it can be argued that condoms are used in the Maoist era to be a tool to control and discipline people’s (sexual) behaviors. Resistance and struggle are

always entwined with discipline and oppression (Foucault, 1979). Use of contraceptive rings stood as a kind of resistance to sexual discipline and control. Condoms, though being the most sanitary and convenient contraceptive, were not mostly adopted among Chinese females, but contraceptive rings. The dearth of resources or techniques for condom production may account for the choice of wearing rings among most women, but it cannot be denied that rings provide people much more freedom to practice their sexual life. At least, they do not have to strictly restrain their sexual activities within the times which should be no more than the number of condoms allocated to them.

Three decades have passed since the termination of the Maoist era in 1976, these past thirty years witnessing dramatic social and cultural transformations in China. In terms of social life in relation to sexuality, people have enjoyed more individual and sexual freedom. Sex, which was labeled with “fierce floods and savage beasts” (洪水猛兽)—a term used in Chinese culture to define behaviors and thoughts that run counter to the collective will and merits of the majority—is losing its exclusive sense of obscenity, new sexual meanings and understandings burgeoning and being created among, especially young generations in contemporary China. Condoms are available in sexual appliance stores scattered in urban regions of China. But has the negative and shameful spin attached to the rubber sheath been removed? How do old sexual ideologies act on the body of present-day young Chinese adults in their coping with the present? What are the mainstream attitudes of the general Chinese population nowadays towards condoms, especially those of young people about condom use in the age of AIDS? And how do those young people’s attitudes reflect the changing sexual subjectivities among them? The session that follows engages in generating and discovering the participants’ memories initiated by the subject of condom (use) in the attempts to explore the role and significance of the memories in their construction of corporeality and sexuality and in shaping and reshaping their sexual conceptualization and sexual practices in the present time.

***Condom as a site of memory: Addressing young people's sexual constructions through relating social memory to materiality***

Memories reside not only in the human brain but also in many different inanimate objects from ordinary household items, to art objects, monuments, and public buildings (Cattell & Climo, 2002). The condom, an object associated with and involved in sexual practices is treated as a site of memory in this research through which young people's social memory pertaining to sex and sexuality is mobilized, organized, and constituted. In the meantime, as argued by Lipton (2005), "the best way to initiate communication about sex with young people is to bring up the subject of condoms" (p. 103). In the common situation that students are provided with little space for talk of sex and sexuality either in school or at home, subjects of condom and condom use can function as a generator or catalyst to provoke and expand their sexual understandings. For the researcher, memories motivated by the topic of condoms offer a particular useful site for gaining great insights of my participants' conceptualizations of condom and condom use and of sexuality and STIs/HIV infection. Given that people necessarily use their memories to respond to questions and topics (Croyle & Loftus, 1993), my participants' memories are mobilized and organized in intensive group discussions as illustrated in the two female participants' stories of the condom presented above.

Despite the significant role of the condom in contraception and public health, its close association with sexual intercourse leads to the equivalence of condoms to sex, especially to immoral sex when the advantage of portability of condoms that allows sexual activity to occur at any time or place seems to bring great convenience to people engaging in "immoral" sexual practices. People tend to consider condom users as those lacking ethics involved in, for example, pre-marital or extra-marital sex as illustrated in a shared thought by some middle-aged informants involved in my study: "If they are a legitimate couple, why bother using condoms?" Under the situation that condom use can be interpreted as endangering or challenging a steady monogamous relationship when the crisis of trust and fidelity emerges with the easy availability of condoms, (Holland et al., 1992, as cited in Hutchinson, 2005), condoms come to function as the technology that

judge or measure a man's morality (Lipton, 2005): the non-users behave themselves within the arena of ethics and morality while the users are corruptly involved in immoral sexual experiences; the more condoms one uses, the more debauched, the lower the morality. These negative social connotations associated with condom use lead to a collective phobia of the sexual object, condoms, as can be illustrated in people's common behavior of evading the condom-supplying device and the prejudice on customers purchasing condoms. The general phobia about sex and condom use can also be evidenced in another phenomenon: most condom-vending machines installed in the city where I conducted my fieldwork were deliberately damaged. In the Chinese context of sex supposed to be a dark domain of disgrace and obscenity, the public presence of the sexually suggestive signs, condoms and condom machines, incurred wrath from people.

When condom use is conceived as the signifier of immorality and disgrace, the condom tends to be seen as something incompatible to a loving relationship. A female participant who longed for an intense and pure romance expressed her expectation of the initial sex in which she would engage and reject the use of condom:

I do not deny the protective and preventative functions that condoms exert. On the contrary, I think the condom is quite useful and helpful. But it just makes me feel uncomfortable to have it involved in the process of love making with my boyfriend or husband – at least I will not use it for the first time....Why? cos love is noble and divine and to have sex with the guy you really love and loves you is pure and beautiful. The condom ruins that. Anyway, definitely I will not use it at least for the first time.

As shown in this passage, the condom is treated as a contaminator to the purity and divinity of physical love preconditioned by spiritual love. The stigmatized meanings associated with condom use and the conventional sexual notions attached to condoms lead some young people to loathing feelings about condoms and to not protect sexual engagement that puts their bodies at risk of infection although they have a good command of sexual knowledge as this young woman does. Cultural meanings associated

with sex and signified by the sexual object, condoms are brought to act on present-day young people in their interaction with the object, influencing their sexual behavior.

Traditional sexual knowledge residing in social memory that gives priority to male pleasure and male control in sexual relationships as well as in other life situations is brought to the present, functioning on present-day youth through their interaction with the material object, condoms, as to be illustrated in the expected role of males to initiate sex and provide condoms. A male participant expressed his repudiation of a woman's initiation of sex and provision of condoms.

I can't accept it if my girlfriend initiates sex. If she did it, I would give her a warning: the second chance is not allowed. It should be me who initiates sex and provides condoms. Man should be the master of a relationship, taking control of decisions.

Likewise, female participants agreed on the role of man as sex-initiator and condom-provider because it is shameful for women to want sex and women carrying condoms in their purse are categorized as "bad" women including those involved in immoral sex and prostitution. Biased gender relations are reproduced and sustained in the intersection between subject and object, young people and condom, in which the male is supposed to take the controlling role in sexual relationships and make decisions regarding the use of condoms. In such situations of persistently functioning of traditional gender order, women feel difficult to negotiate condom use when they do not expect to assert their own sexual needs and their own safety (Holland et al., 1998).

### **Young people's awareness of condom use**

In the context of striking social and cultural change in reform-era China, young people's perceptions of condoms are altering with the transformations of their sexual attitudes and beliefs. As illustrated in my study, all the male participants in my project took positive attitudes towards the use of condoms.

Sure. I used it every time I had sex with my girlfriend. It secures our sexual practices, relieves us of anxieties about unexpected pregnancy, and protects my girlfriend of pains abortion would bring.... Even if, for example, I did not want to use it, my girlfriend would insist on the use of it. ... We used the best brand I googled out in the internet....

Of course, I will use the condom if I have sex with a girl. Even if she does not want to use it, I will bring one with me. That is safe against the transmission of viruses and the possibility of pregnancy. I have known how to use a condom and what brands of condoms are good in the market although I do not have any sexual experience till now. My roommate, he is active in sex. He has shown us how to put on the condom ...what brands feel good.

Young males embraced the use of the condom in their (potential) sexual practices because it can provide security and enjoyment. All the female participants are also in favor of the involvement of condoms in sexual behaviors except one who rejected it in her future initial sex with her partner as mentioned earlier.

Yeah, I will definitely use the condom. It protects me from getting pregnancy, STIs, .... If he does not want to use it, then we will not have sex.

Certainly, we will use the condom and I will demand the use of it ...if my boyfriend would not. What if I get pregnant? If he insists ... his rejection of using the condom indicates he does not care about me.

A strong awareness of condom use and public health is also illustrated in the photo taken by a group of participants in our photovoice workshop.

Despite a growing awareness of the use of condoms among young people as illustrated in the caption presented earlier, the functions of condoms are limited to contraception, or at

most the defense of STIs. A rather limited number of participants named prevention of HIV among the purposes of use of condoms. It displays the low awareness of HIV and AIDS among these urban Chinese youths. But as compared to their elders, for example, their parents' generation, these young adults take fair and healthy attitudes towards condoms, which are an effective preventive strategy against unwanted pregnancy and infections, instead of condemning condoms only because of their association with sex. The evolution of people's views of condoms can also be embodied in the naming and renaming of condoms in Chinese. Condoms in Mao's times were named "contraceptive sheaths" (避孕套), highlighting the function of preventing pregnancy; they were then renamed "Safety sheaths" (安全套), showing people's increasing awareness of condoms as the preventive device of unwanted pregnancy as well as infections. Now, among young generations, aged 18 to 35, condoms were fondly termed "sheaths" or "*taotao*" (套套) in Chinese, which demonstrates intimacy and closeness people feel towards condoms. They are not any more dirty little things in these young people's eyes, but a close friend in life.

## CONCLUSION

Information on university students' knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors related to HIV/AIDS in China is limited; this makes it difficult to develop informed prevention strategies for this population (Huang et al., 2005). The discovery of students' own conceptualization of HIV and AIDS, condoms and condom use, and sexuality education as one task of this chapter helps offer significant information to the rethinking and reprogramming of sexuality education and HIV intervention. It also helps enhance our understanding and knowledge about youth sexuality constructed in Chinese cultures and about "youth" in reform era of China. A historical perspective at the interactions of people and condoms in different social contexts in China contributes to a further exploration of sexuality as a social construct from other entry areas. Social memories surrounding condom and condom use not only help to recreate meanings related to sexual conceptions and experiences in the past but bring the past-produced sexual knowledge as a shaping force upon bodily experiences of present-day young Chinese people. In this sense, the past, social memory bridges and blurs the gap between past and present.

I would be remiss if I did not say something in this chapter about the future of sexuality education amongst contemporary youth. I have tried to suggest throughout these two data analysis chapters that young Chinese women like young women worldwide remain a particularly vulnerable group as long as they are subordinated to males. While there were signs that this could be changing for young Chinese women in that they may be more willing to speak up, I can't help thinking that any intervention, if it is to have practicality, must address the gender imbalances.

In this chapter I have also devoted considerable attention to the condom itself as a symbol and as a material object which is critical to the prevention of HIV infections and unwanted pregnancy. The visual images of the condom machine which present it as unused and in disrepair suggest that there is a need for renewed attention to dispensing condoms, to raising awareness about their use, and to making young people and the adults around them more savvy about the use of condoms. This of course is far from being an uncontentious issue as has been made apparent by the visit of Pope Benedict to Africa in March, 2009. However for China, with a strong ethos for moving with the times, the use of the condom should perhaps be less contentious than in other social and cultural context.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY, CONTRIBUTIONS TO NEW KNOWLEDGE, LIMITATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

### **SUMMARY**

In this final chapter, I look back at the study as a whole. As demonstrated in Chapters Five and Six, young people produce diverse sexual expressions ranging from the most liberal and revolutionary to the most conservative. Some show a keenness for a personal realization of sexual freedom and bodily autonomy as is advocated in Western notions of sexuality and body knowledge, while at the same time, expressing a concern about the chaotic consequences that free sex would likely bring to Chinese society. Some, especially young women, appreciate the decline of the conventional ideologies that impose stringent restrictions on female sexuality and bodies, while at the same time, hoping for the maintenance of the traditional norms that play a positive role in regulating social stability and safe interpersonal relations, although at the expense of severe bodily restriction. With such contradictory attitudes toward the traditional and the Western modern discourses of sex and sexuality, young Chinese people today are caught in a state of tension between embracing Western ideas of sexual liberalism and holding to traditional sexual values, between adhering to traditional sexual morals and practicing sexual liberation. While I had anticipated this outcome, after performing my literature review (see Chapter Two), it was fascinating to see this tension close-up. Under the influence of these conflicting ways of seeing physicality and sexuality, a number of young people make critical reflections on both kinds of sexual views, and seek a position somewhere between the Chinese and Western ways of seeing and practicing sexuality, which, by absorbing the merits of both cultures, allows for a better development of Chinese society and culture.

These findings are a challenge to the prevailing idea projected by most Western media and academic texts that China's young generation simply and completely accepts Western values and abandons traditional Chinese values. Aggleton et al. (1999) argue that

traditional forms of and assumptions about sexuality are not simply swept away by the forces of modernization and globalization; rather, they are actively transformed by their interaction with new forms and assumptions of sexuality, “establishing new forms of sexual hybridity that speak both to the past and to the present” (p. 1).

In recognition of the important changes identified in the sexual behaviours and attitudes of the Chinese people over the last twenty to thirty years (Higgins et al., 2002), and of the occurrence of a sexual revolution among the younger population in current Chinese society (Pan, 1996, 2004; Sigley, 2006), the present study shows that the sexual revolution, as it is often called, remains limited in contemporary Chinese culture: Chinese youth’s sexuality is persistently restricted within the disciplinary confines of traditional Chinese norms and rules. As is shown by my findings, young people, especially females, feel pressure to guard their pre-marital virginity, and thus, self-regulate to conform to this traditional sexual code, despite holding fairly liberated sexual ideas. In an echo of Pan’s (2006) claim that personal sexual scripts play a limited role in influencing the actual sexual behaviours and relationships of young Chinese women, the present study demonstrates that many young Chinese women practice a kind of restrained female unmarried sexuality, which is limited by cultural attitudes about female morality. Young women’s liberated attitudes toward sex, as manifested in this research, are not sufficient to free them from the constraints of repressive gendered mores that articulate what female morality and virtue mean—for example, what premarital chastity and virginity mean. This conflict is illustrated by the prevailing phenomenon that young women approve of the premarital sex that occurs among their peers, but do not allow themselves to lose their virginity before marriage and thus their reputation as “good girls.” Moreover, the lack of the sexual experience of the young participants involved in this study is a strong indicator of the limited nature of the sexual revolution in present-day China. Two out of the ten young male participants had lost their virginity to their female partners, but most had no experience of having a girlfriend. Likewise, for the female participants, the majority had never experienced a boyfriend relationship with a young man. Four out of the fifteen women participants had boyfriends at the time of their interviews, but none of them admitted to having sexual intercourse with their partners.

Regardless of the growing influence of liberal Western values on the sexual life of the Chinese, traditional sexual values and norms continue to act upon the bodies of young people, especially of females, exercising significant restrictions on female sexuality. Even though in the situation where former rules of restriction and control are diminished and dissolved in new social contexts, new forms and rules of discipline and repression emerge to replace the older ones. As Foucault (1977) contends, the form and nature of social discipline change, subject to social transformation and revolution. As applied to the contemporary reform-era Chinese context, the current economic and socio-cultural changes go hand-in-hand with the creation of new forms of political control and new ways of resistance by the oppressed, which include marginalized groups such as young people and women. In other words, the sexuality and identity of Chinese youth is shaped and constructed by a complex and contradictory social and physical environment that preserves conventional norms in tandem with the emergence of new forms of social control and resistance.

As discussed earlier, Chinese youths shape their sexuality and identity in a complex cultural terrain where conflicting sexual and body discourses converge, interact, and contest the primacy in contemporary Chinese context. These multiple sexual views are roughly classified into two: one derives from pre-modern Chinese traditions of restrictive sexual norms and gendered rules while the other derives from Western notions of sexual liberation and sexual freedom, which have been allowed into China from the West since the early 1980s starting the reform era. Since then sex in China has been a contested terrain upon which sexual discourses are being continually rewritten. Drawing on the work of Foucault (1977; 1980) and others (Bordo, 1997; Heinrich & Martin, 2006) which gives prominence to the determining impact of (discourse) representations of corporeality and sexuality upon people's embodied experiences, it is shown in the findings how competing representations and discourses of female sexuality act upon and produce the very bodies that young women experience in everyday life. Young females' bodies are persistently restricted within the boundaries of Chinese sexual norms; further, many women discipline themselves to be docile in conformity to traditional sexual values

despite holding rather liberated sexual ideas. The inconsistency between their expressed attitudes and their actual behaviour indicates the situation of tension and contradiction in which young people, especially females, find themselves. Their sexual identities are also observed as unstably constructed as a result of the plurality of sexual and body discourses working upon their bodies. As Johansson (2007) comments on Western youths, their sexuality, under the influence of multiple, competing discourses of sexuality, tends to be in fluid, unstable and constant motion. It is, therefore, not strange that this investigation of the sexuality and embodiment of present-day Chinese youths does not yield a coherent, stable, and unified meaning. The instability and inconsistency is demonstrated in various aspects of youth sexuality as mentioned above: young people's sexual attitudes ranging from the most liberal to the most conventional, their sexual expression as antithetic to their actual behaviour, and their identities manifested to be fractal. Further complicating the situation, the surge and alarming transmission of HIV and AIDS among young people in China and beyond lead to alternation individual and public sexual conceptions and embodied experiences. All these intertwined dynamics interact to undermine conventional formulations of male and female sexuality as well as of masculinity and femininity, engender new discourses of sexuality and body knowledge, and motivate the reconceptualization of youth sexuality, gender, and embodiment in contemporary Chinese society.

A key finding, then, in this study reveals that present-day Chinese youths actively engage in redefining youth sexuality and creating new moral standards in favor of their interests and needs. The reconceptualization of sex and sexuality and construction of new sexual morals among young people can be understood as a consequence and embodiment of socio-political change in reform era. It can also be read as a sign of resistance against the repression and control from institutional regimes and the manifestation of the increasing awareness of sexual citizenship and sexual agency among young people. In seeking for a strong identity of social actors and sexual subjects, young people actively form sexual meanings and create new permissive sexual moral standards in their own right. Young people's redefinition and creation of sexual meanings and moralities are resistant and subversive in nature to conventional sexual values and gender patterns entrenched in

Chinese society. In pursuit of the legitimacy of sexual discourses and morals in favour of their right, young people have found recourse to, mainly, three sources: officially-sanctioned medical discourse, popular literature, and rights discourse, with regard to human sexuality. In defining “sex” and sexuality, for example, all my interviewees utilized medical terms—such as “intrinsic”, “innate”, “inborn” to highlight sex as a fundamentally natural, biological phenomenon to humans in attempt to verify the appropriateness of their sexual ideas and their (potential) engagement in pre-marital sexual activities. It is also identified that the Chinese state tends to constitute official discourses of sexuality in medical terms (Farrer, 2006), defining human sexuality in essentialist light. Thus, the medicalization of young people’s meanings of sex and sexuality can help to legitimize these meanings by drawing on both “authoritative” medical and official discourses.

Moreover, young people appropriate a salient story-telling pattern of romance popularized in a considerable readership in China, which celebrates the divinity of spiritual love between the heterosexual partners and use it as the frame to project their conceptions of sex and sexuality. The mainstream romantic story-telling, which calls for a relationship grounded exclusively on emotional attachment between man and woman, is popularly appreciated by women readers and audience in various age groups. Consuming these romantic stories puts them in the experience of emotional realization and satisfaction of the romance that is unattainable to them in real life. This kind of romance narration recurrent in television, film, and popular literature largely influences the sexual conceptualization of, especially, young Chinese women. As discussed earlier, the excessive credit given to the emotional association of the couple leads to the divinization of spiritual love and of a relationship upon emotional basis. In the meantime, this socially appreciated, though problematic, romance storytelling offers itself as a supporting evidence contributing to the social acceptance of young people’s premarital sex in a love-grounded relationship. Young people seek to establish and proffer their concepts of love and sexuality with reference to this generally embraced assumption of spiritual and sacred love in attempts to justify bodily intimacy involved in such loving relationships. They appropriate the mainstream romance storytelling that divinizes

spiritual love to constitute a kind of logic that physical love as a natural development of spiritual love is also justifiable. Even further, they come to a view that a relationship on emotional basis should entail bodily intimacy which serves to promote spiritual communication between the partners, as illustrated in their remarks in interviews defining physical intimacy as “the highest embodiment of love” and “the communication of souls.” The common appreciation of spiritual love is used, despite its problematicness, by young people to proffer the idea that physical love is permissive and even sacred under the condition of its company with divine spiritual love.

Chinese youth also seek to create their own sexual understandings and new sexual moral standards through a direct use of rights discourses such as “sex is a kind of basic human right or personal choice” as claimed by participants. WHO articulates sexual rights as among human rights which include

the right of all persons, free of coercion, discrimination and violence, to: the highest attainable standard of sexual health, including access to sexual and reproductive health care services; seek, receive and impart information related to sexuality; sexuality education; respect for bodily integrity; choose their partner; decide to be sexually active or not; consensual sexual relations; consensual marriage; decide whether or not, and when, to have children; and pursue a satisfying, safe and pleasurable sexual life (WHO, 2002).

With sexual rights being recognized in international human rights documents and national laws, some leading sexologists in China such as Li Yinhe (2006) and Pan Suiming (2006) are appealing to social concerns over marginal groups in Chinese society—for example, migrant workers and gay people—who should be entitled to having sexual drives satisfied through avenues of buying sexual services and sexual partner choices. Young people being among the marginalized also join in the struggle for the right to “decide to be sexually active or not” as one of sexual rights, seeking for the legitimacy of pre-marital sexual behaviour of persons over 18. Young people also base their claims to sexual rights on a natural human propensity to sexual and romantic engagements as discussed above. The formation of such naturalistic views among young people can be seen as a result of “a natural-science bias in Chinese education and a fondness for

positivistic or essentialist arguments in Chinese sexology” (Evans 1997, p.53). In another view, Farrer (2006) also points out that “basing rights on biological nature is a powerful rhetorical device” in Chinese society that still holds science in high regard (Farrer, 2006, p. 121).

Young people’s efforts to construct and legitimize their own meanings of sex and sexuality and new sexual morals which permit premarital sex draw them on various authoritative discourses which reveal the emergence of their awareness of being social actors seeking for a recognized position and independent identity in society. Their definition of sex as “a personal choice,” “an emotional issue,” and “basic human rights” marks an emerging sense of sexual autonomy and a growing awareness of citizenship in China. Moreover, young people’s conceptualization of HIV and AIDS as demonstrated in this study reveals a strong sense of individual and social responsibility for this social problem. Their eager expectations for gaining more knowledge of AIDS and engaging in HIV intervention leads us to believe that Chinese youth have sufficient agency and activism to triumph in the fight against the pandemic if sexuality education and HIV intervention programs are effectively designed and implemented. A historical review of young people in modern China shows youths in varied periods taking the role of pioneers in the chaotic, or relatively stable but constantly changing social situations. They are a key force to societal changes, playing a powerful, positive part in the process of social advancement. Many of the current changes, as stated by Moore (2005) and Marr and Rosen (1998), are being driven by China’s younger generation. Young people, therefore, tend to gain the title of tide-shaper, which refers to in Chinese a youthful social group who can determine the direction of a nation’s development. This same group, nonetheless, is among the most fragile and vulnerable in the context of STIs/HIV and AIDS epidemic in China and beyond, due to the interaction of physiological, social, cultural, and economic factors as discussed above. Abundance in agency and initiative, an identifying quality of China’s youth in previous times, is overridden by the threat of the viruses and diseases.

Given the nature of this youthful group, their agency of power as identified in social movements and change in Chinese history, and an increasing awareness of social citizens with strong social commitment to social problems and issues, however, we have reason to believe that young people can survive and win the combat against the HIV epidemic if they are facilitated and empowered through active engagement of HIV prevention. The positive role of young people in community-based HIV prevention has been illuminated by a variety of projects in South Africa and other areas (Wang, 2001; Mitchell et al., 2005; Mitchell, Walsh, & Moletsane, 2006). Activating young people's agency and activism in HIV intervention is a key solution to the curb of the pandemic among young people as well as other social groups. In light of the mobilizing nature of youth, impact of HIV and AIDS intervention campaigns can radiate beyond the youth community to other age communities in China and over to the global community.

## **CONTRIBUTIONS TO NEW KNOWLEDGE**

The systematic research of Chinese sexuality has a relatively short history as compared with that undertaken in the West. The publication in 1951 of R.H. van Gulick's essay, *Chinese Sex Life From the Han to the Ch'ing Dynasty, BC 206-AD 1644*, marks the onset of the academic enterprise of research on Chinese sexuality (Ruan, 1998). In mainland China, sex and related issues have become research topics beyond the arena of biomedical studies since the late 1980s; more currently, over the last two decades sexuality of new research subjects such as women, college students, and adolescents is emerging to gain academic as well as social concern, as argued by Pei, Ho and Ng (2007) with reference to a review of sexuality research published in contemporary China. Limited studies on the sexuality of women (Pei, Ho & Ng, 2007) and young people have been, until recently, mostly medical in their orientation while research of youth sexuality is framed on a general assumption that sees young people's behaviours—for example, sexual practices before marriage—as problematic. A morally judgmental brand has been stamped on such kind of sexual behaviours as well as their sexual ideas supporting the behaviours before they are put under investigation. Research grounded in such a frame with bias and other disturbing preconceptions impairs the adequacy and integrity of

studies, qualitative or quantitative, of these subjects, making it difficult to have a full understanding of what the sexuality and bodies of young people (as a group and individuals) mean in their social milieux. In such a context, this qualitative study addressing youth sexuality and female sexuality and engaging young people as research subjects and research partners gives priority to their visions and perceptions of physicality and sexuality, valuing their interpretations of lived experiences in relation to sexuality. Thus, my study adds new perspectives and contributions to the developing and productive enterprise of youth sexuality study in Chinese context.

Besides, locating the sexuality of Chinese youth and women in social, historical, economic, and political frames as I have done in this study, the research also helps to give a better understanding of the complexity of human sexuality as a social construct embedded within the social, political, and economic structures (Correa, Petchesky & Parker, 2008). “Sex” or sexuality, thus, is understood not simply as a biomedical variable or an empirical entity as in most existing research in China, but rather is reconceptualized as “a complex construct of multiple discursive framings and political struggles” (Correa, Petchesky & Parker, 2008, p. 1). Moreover, this socio-historical approach to youth sexuality within and across a range of Chinese societies, alongside a study of “youth” as a social and historical construct, helps to refigure youth as a complex, unstable, mercurial signifier of differentiated social and political contexts they reside in. It also provides a developmental perspective to look into young people and women, marginal groups in Chinese societies, emerging as social subjects and actors asking for strong and distinguishable social and sexual identities in present-day Chinese society. There has been a growing interest in the ways in which sexuality, socio-economic status, age and gender interact to constitute and position people as sexual subjects (Aggleton et al., 1999). In recognition of the vital importance of understanding the relationship between these different variables in special cultural contexts both for the development of understanding and for the development of policies and programmes (Aggleton et al., 1999), this study addressing youth sexuality by looking at it as a social construct interacting with other social elements as listed earlier in Chinese contexts would help to enhance understanding of Chinese sexuality and contribute to the design and

implementation of sexuality education programs and HIV policies.

This study also contributes to the body of literature on methodologies for getting at the voices of young people, adopting a visual participatory research methodology, photovoice, which engages young people in the project not only as research subjects but as research partners and privileges their understandings and visions of corporeality and sexuality, and their perceptions of realities they have lived. While there are a number of such studies elsewhere in the world, this is one of the first in China. It enables the researcher to gain greater insights into young people's sexuality, body, gender, and other issues from the lenses of these youths. In addition, in following up with Heinrich and Martin's (2006) call for the efforts of ethnographies of everyday bodily practices which are crucial to a full understanding of what bodies mean in Chinese contexts, I set up the six-month project in a college setting in order to explore a more ethnographically grounded study of the sexuality and embodiment of young people. The ethnographic accounts of youth sexuality and embodied experiences, as documented in this study, would be a valuable contribution to body studies contextualized in China.

Provoked by an increasing recognition in the international academic community that approaches to the study of sexuality and health based within one single discipline are unlikely to be paid rich rewards (Aggleton et al., 1999), this qualitative study bringing insights from across a range of academic perspectives, including sociological, historical, and cultural, would attain the understanding of the multi-faceted nature of sexuality and sexual life of young people. Locally, there has been a trend in sexuality studies in mainland China that invites an increasing input from non-medical domains, such as sociology, humanities, and law in China since the 1990s as observed by Pei, Ho and Ng (2007). Following this call for contributions which adopt a multi- or inter-disciplinary approach, I employed sociological, historical, cultural inquiry approaches and adopted a visual arts-based methodology involving semiotic and literary reading and analysis of visual and verbal texts in hopes of grasping the complexity of human sexuality. In the context that "sexuality theory, research, and political activism have been sustained, renewed, and diversified across national and cultural boundaries in the course of the past

three decades” (Correa, Petchesky & Parker, 2008, p. 29), study of sexuality in Chinese contexts as undertaken in this research can develop to be part of this academic enterprise, joining in a kind of dialogic conversation with sexuality studies in other areas and cultures.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

There are several limitations to this study. One limitation of this study is the sample itself. This study aiming to address Chinese college students’ sexuality was set up in Central China Normal University (CCNU) and recruited participants predominately from two classes of students in the English Department of CCNU. This recruitment of participants limited to one university and one department clearly does not provide a full picture of the plurality of present-day Chinese college students’ sexual conceptions and behaviours. CCNU is a key university in China, categorized as one of the first-class universities. Universities in China are generally classified into four classes according to students’ grades in the yearly entrance examination for middle school graduates. Those who have gained outstanding marks in the examined courses can be accepted into higher-class universities. The grade is not equivalent to one’s ability, but it can reflect one’s attitudes towards learning and life. Compared with students in other universities, first-class university students are more committed to their studies, more ambitious about their future, and then less inclined to get involved in a relationship at the expense of academic pursuit. In order to capture the variety and complexity of youth sexuality among college students, I needed to invite more young people from second-class, third-class, and fourth-class universities. They would have provided different and multiple information about their understandings and experiences related to sexuality and HIV and AIDS.

The second limitation is related to the method of photo elicitation (Harper, 1984) that I used to organize and present my findings. In Chapters five and six, I primarily used participants’ photographs as a site of discussion in which thematic subjects or concepts arising from the photographs (e.g., love and sexuality, beauty and female sexuality, etc.) were further explored in my analysis of verbal data in which the same concepts emerged and of data from my participant observation. This way of presenting findings is

significant in letting data of various forms referring to one another as intertexts, joining in a dialogue on shared topics, and having them all contribute to the conversation. However, such a way of organizing data gained from various methods and presenting them as in relation to certain common concepts potentially excludes some interesting information, and hence potentially impairs the richness of what I have gained from this qualitative inquiry. Some valuable knowledge arose from data but were not fully expanded or even presented in this study: for example, other aspects with regard to sexuality among Chinese youth such as their attitudes towards sexual pleasure and towards homosexuality, and homosexual behaviours among a number of students, and issues concerning sex education such as influences of parents and peers upon young people's sexual conceptualization.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION**

As found in this study, the awareness of sexual agency and sexual autonomy is emerging among well-educated young people and women predominantly in urban areas. These socially marginal groups are striving to claim stronger and more distinguished social (and sexual) identities through efforts to constitute and legitimize sexual discourses and new moral standards in favor of their own rights, needs, and interests, as noted earlier. They pursue sexual autonomy in deciding whether to be sexually active or not and whether to engage in premarital sex or not while premarital sex and frequent sex are discouraged and forbidden in existing social morals and school regulations. In such a situation, they make claims to sexual rights or human rights in efforts to liberate themselves from the oppressive state. It marks an emergence of awareness of sexual subjects among present-day Chinese youths and an immense step forward for them in history. What is interesting is that all this is occurring in a country under control of a conservative party-state government although this government has realized the necessity and importance of political reforms in accordance with striking social changes. Many questions are left unanswered in relation to the nexus between sex and politics in contemporary China, the tensions and intersections between how governmental authorities in China seek to shape the sexual conceptions and conduct of Chinese citizens, of young people, and the ways in which liberated ideas and conduct are enacted and practiced. Central to the understanding

of Marxist attitudes toward sexuality, “the important comprehension that sexuality, class, and politics cannot easily be disengaged from one another must serve as the basis of a materialist view of sexuality in historical perspective as well” (Padgug, 1999, p. 16). A further exploration of youth sexuality and female sexuality in the current Chinese contexts calls attention to questions and issues surrounding the emergence and governance of new sexual behaviours and mores among young people.

In light of a sexual revolution that has been identified as taking place in present-day China (Pan, 1994; 2006), perceivable signs of sexual liberalization can be read as a sign of the occurrence of political liberalization (Sigley, 2006). Despite the fact that the Chinese state has never suspended its aim to police youth sexuality through prohibitive rules and threats of expulsion from schools (Farrer, 2006), it needs to admit that the state also engages in reconstituting new ways of governance in response to the new and complex social and cultural landscape brought by the economic reform. A former perspective on the relationship between sexuality and governance in terms of struggles between resistance and oppression should give way to a more comprehensive notion that the relationship between China’s governmental authorities and new specifications of governance and the appropriate range of individual rights and obligations is not always conflictual but instead is an ongoing process of negotiation and contestation (Jeffreys, 2006). Jeffreys proposes to direct future research on the nexus between sex and governance in the China toward “tracking the continued imbrication between the operations of Chinese government and the formation of new sexual subjectivities, rather than focusing primarily on perceived sites of resistance to official discourses” (p. 4). My future research on youth sexuality in present-day China, thus, attends to the complex process of “negotiation and contestation” between the constitution and practice of new governance in the regime of politics and power and the construction and conduct of new sexual subjectivities of young people.

In parallel with the occurrence of a sexual revolution in Chinese society, it is observed that a new “digital sexual revolution” brought forth by the easy use of communications technologies and the community platforms they provide is taking place in a virtual realm,

the Internet, accessible to people from various cultures in the global community. While this is not an area that I have explored extensively in my fieldwork, I can see it potential and fruitful for my future research, given that this digital sexual revolution shapes the way people understand, experience, and live their sexuality in the twenty-first century (Herdt & Howe, 2007). With sex expanding exponentially on commercial, educational, and personal websites and blogs, it would incur no opposition that sexuality has become a critical element in motivating the emergence of the Internet and the new cultural forms we find online (Herdt & Home, 2007). The intersection between sexuality online and the Internet contributes to a radical transformation in cultural and individual meanings of sexuality as well as change to the formation of sexual subjectivities and sexual cultures.

In China, as revealed earlier, media portrayal of sexuality has become the crucial source for Chinese youth to gain information and knowledge surrounding sex and sexuality. The growing ease of accessibility of the Internet has turned itself into a frequented site for them to acquire sexual information, post and share personal questions and problems related to sexuality and sexual health, and seek for romantic and sexual relationships. Stories and cases are increasingly reported in media of China and beyond which reveal a rise in dating behaviour and sexual services via the Internet among young people or younger minors and a consequent growth in incidents of crimes of sexual exploitation and victimization. The profound engagement of the Internet in young people's (sexual) life highlights the importance of an exploration of the impact of online sexual communities, these virtual social contexts, on the formation of young people's sexual subjectivities and on their sexual behaviour, as well as on the way they make choices about their sexual health. However, given that the study of sexuality and reproductive health remains far behind the massive increase in sexual information online as pointed out by Herdt and Howe (2007) about the western research realm, I also see a significant need for new conceptual frameworks and innovative methodological approaches to the study of online sexual cultures and their impact upon young people's sexual life (for example, new sexual relations and interactions among them in the Internet) and the construction of their sexual identity. Apparently, this is an emerging site of prevention and awareness, a source of new values and visions of sexuality, and a site for alternative

sex “education” (e.g., sex as pleasure, sex as natural/normal, etc.). When “a new world of sexual identity formation, sexual health information, and sexual rights advocacy and debate has been born in this medium” of the Internet (Herdt & Howe, 2007, p. 4), both challenges and new possibilities arise for research, education, and political and social change.

Finally, the study raises further questions about the workshop praxis as HIV and AIDS pedagogy. Following from the work of Stuart (2007) who also used workshops with youth in addressing HIV and AIDS I see this as a rich area for further exploration, particularly as a way to further contextualize participatory methodologies.

## **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

When I first decided to “go home” in order to conduct this research I wasn’t quite certain what I would find. I had been gone from China and from the university where I conducted this research for close to 5 years. Doing the actual fieldwork was exhilarating and the opportunity to hear (and see) what young people born 15 years or so after me had to say about sexuality in contemporary China was a privilege in itself. And despite the tensions that I observed, and despite the fact that this generation will experience risks that I myself did not in relation to the dramatic increase in rates of HIV infection, I am nonetheless hopeful. Their willingness to take risks (in a positive way) as evidenced by their enthusiastic participation in this study is critical. And since completing the fieldwork, I have stayed in touch through the Internet with many of these students who remain curious and interested about the outcomes of the study.

In terms of change and action, there is surely a great deal more that could be done to follow this study, but even when I was in the research site I saw some social change in action. A number of young people involved in this study volunteered their services of distributing pamphlets introducing HIV and sexual information and providing explanations if necessary to passers-by in the street for a short-term HIV and AIDS intervention campaign that were organized by the school. Two young women asked me

for assistance in giving feedback to their proposals on young people and HIV and AIDS for the application for funding from the school. They would continue and further our project because they would be taking on the role of researchers and activists themselves in a project. I am not sure if they have got the funding, but this is an example of what I need do more follow up work. Another young woman wrote to me after my departure, saying that she had applied for the membership of an AIDS-related NGO and would engage in social worker as a volunteer. Although I have not been about to carry out any systematic follow up except through some informal email contact with some of my participants, I realize that there are many rich entry points that would have been useful to explore.

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## APPENDIX A: Certificate of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Humans



**Faculty of Education – Ethics Review Board**  
McGill University  
Faculty of Education  
3700 McTavish; Room 230  
Montreal H3A 1Y2

Tel: (514) 398-7039  
Fax: (514) 398-1527  
Ethics website: [www.mcgill.ca/rgo/ethics/human](http://www.mcgill.ca/rgo/ethics/human)

### **Faculty of Education – Review Ethics Board Certificate of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Humans**

**REB File #:** 771-0207

**Project Title :** *Using visual ethnography to address Chinese youth, sexuality and HIV and AIDS*

**Applicant's Name:** Ran Tao

**Department:** DISE

**Status:** PhD student

**Supervisor's Name:** Claudia Mitchell

**Granting Agency and Title (if applicable):** SSHRC, FQRSC

**Type of Review:** Expedited ☒ Full ☐

This project was reviewed by: Shariff/Stapley/Bracewell

**Approved by**

  
Signature/Date

Robert Bracewell, Ph.D.

Chair, Education Ethics Review Board

**Approval Period:** *March 1/07* to *March 1/08*

All research involving human subjects requires review on an annual basis. An Annual Report/Request for Renewal form should be submitted at least one month before the above expiry date. If a project has been completed or terminated for any reason before the expiry date, a Final Report form must be submitted. Should any modification or other unanticipated development occur before the next required review, the REB must be informed and any modification can't be initiated until approval is received. This project was reviewed and approved in accordance with the requirements of the McGill University Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Subjects and with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on the Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Human Subjects.

3/1/07

## **APPENDIX B: Letter of Request**

### **LETTER OF REQUEST**

Central China Normal University  
Wuhan, Hubei  
China

January 20, 2007

Dear sir/madam,

I am writing to request for permission to conduct research entitled “Using Visual Ethnography to Address Chinese Youth, Sexuality, and HIV and AIDS.” The objective of the study is to address HIV and AIDS related to sexuality and gender issues among Chinese youth, to document and explain those youth’s life experiences in the context of HIV and AIDS aiming at seeking an in-depth understanding of sexual attitudes, values, and behaviors among them, and to inform sex education programs in response to the rapid spread of STDs/HIV among youth. In the course of the project I hope to conduct ethnographic interviews and focus group discussions with participants, which will be audio-taped and later transcribed. Additionally, participants will be involved in taking photographs on issues of HIV and AIDS, youth sexuality, and gender. The PAR study I will be undertaking is expected to be a learning and transforming act for participants, who would improve HIV awareness and learn new information and skills about self-protection from the STIs/HIV infection, can take advantage of networking and support opportunities, can develop self-confidence in learning and acting, and can improve power in making appropriate choices in sexual behavior and take control over their own life situations.

All sessions of my study will take place after regular school hours and each is estimated to last 2 hours. I hope to be able to take pictures, audio and video tape all the sessions for further use as references. I am looking forward to your reply.

Sincerely

Researcher: Ran Tao  
Ph.D candidate, Faculty of Education  
McGill University  
Montreal, Quebec  
Canada

## **APPENDIX C: Letter of Invitation**

### **LETTER OF INVITATION**

**Researcher: Ran Tao**

**Supervisor: Dr. Claudia Mitchell**

**Graduate student, Department of Integrated Studies in Education, McGill University**

**Tel: (514) 398-5302**

**Email: [ran.tao@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:ran.tao@mail.mcgill.ca)**

Dear participant,

I am a Ph. D student from McGill University interested in understanding more about Chinese college students' lived experiences in relation to sexuality in the context of HIV and AIDS. The purpose of the study is to address HIV and AIDS related to sexuality and gender issues among Chinese youth, to document and explain those youth's life experiences in the context of HIV and AIDS aiming at seeking an in-depth understanding of sexual attitudes, values, and behaviors among them, and to inform sex education programs in response to the rapid spread of STDs/HIV among youth.

We would like to invite you to participate in this study entitled "Using Visual Ethnography to Address Chinese Youth, Sexuality, and HIV and AIDS." In the course of the project you will be involved in taking photographs on issues of HIV and AIDS, youth sexuality, and gender. In the course of the project you may be exhibiting some of your work. We will also be interviewing you about your sexual attitudes, beliefs, and values, your understanding of HIV and AIDS, what you learned in the project, your reflections, and so on. All interviews will be audio-taped and later transcribed.

For research purposes your visual work will be analyzed. We may want to use some of the images in follow-up from the study (conference presentations or posters) but these we would request at a later point and you are free to withhold permission.

Please know that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any point, and as noted above are free to withhold the use of any images that you produce. Every attempt will be made to keep your participation confidential and anonymous particularly in any writings that emerge from the study. We recognize however that because of the group interviews and the visual nature of the work this may not always be possible.

I thank you for your cooperation and look forward to our work together.

Yours sincerely,

Ran Tao

## APPENDIX D: Consent Form

### CONSENT FORM

**Researcher: Ran Tao**

**Graduate student, Department of Integrated Studies in Education, McGill University**

**Tel: (514) 398-5302**

**Supervisor: Dr. Claudia Mitchell**

**Email: [ran.tao@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:ran.tao@mail.mcgill.ca)**

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in the study “Using Visual Ethnography to Address Chinese Youth, Sexuality, and HIV and AIDS” conducted by Ran Tao from McGill University. The purpose of the study is to address HIV and AIDS related to sexuality and gender issues among Chinese youth, and to document and explain those youth’s life experiences in the context of HIV and AIDS aiming at seeking an in-depth understanding of sexual attitudes, values, and behaviors among them. I will be required to take part in interviews and focus groups concerning topics such as sexual attitudes, beliefs, and understanding. I am aware that I will be involved in taking photographs on issues of HIV and AIDS, youth sexuality, and gender and using these photographs to develop posters, photo narratives and photo exhibitions in the process of research. I have been informed that to ensure my privacy and confidentiality, my identity and other identifying information will be disguised and may be removed from record.

- I understand the purpose of this study and know about the risks, benefits and inconveniences that this research project entails.
- I understand that I am not obliged to participate in this project, that I am free to not answer certain questions, and that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any point.
- I understand how confidentiality will be maintained during this research project.
- I understand the anticipated uses of data, especially with respect to publication, communication and dissemination of results.
- I also understand that all interviews will be audio-taped and the tapes will only be accessible to Ran Tao and will be kept by Ran Tao under locked conditions. This material will be used for research and educational purposes only.
- I agree to allow the use of my voice in audio recording. Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

I have carefully studied the above and understand my participation in this agreement. I freely consent and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Participant’s signature \_\_\_\_\_ Researcher’s signature \_\_\_\_\_

Participant’s printed name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_