Questions

1. Please provide information on the current situation of lesbians in China.

RESPONSE

Homosexuals can constitute a “particular social group” under the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Australia has accepted that sexual orientation can form the basis of a “particular social group” claim since 1994. The issues that affect female claimants are different to those that affect male claimants. While both male and female homosexuals may claim refugee status on the basis of their sexual orientation, the type of persecution experienced, ability to prove their claims and availability of country information differs between lesbians and gay men. For more information please see Issues Facing Lesbian Applicants for Protection Visas.

The Gay Resource Guide – China has been updated to 20 April 2006.

1. Please provide information on the current situation of lesbians in China.

Sources report that homosexuality was decriminalised in China ten years ago, however sporadic harassment and punishment still occur as well as official discrimination. Sources report that Chinese lesbians also experience societal discrimination and societal pressure to marry.

The information provided in response to this question has been organised into the following nine sections:

• Legal Situation;
Gay Marriage; 
Societal Discrimination; 
Marriage; 
Psychiatry; 
Lesbian Culture in China; 
Lesbian Scene in China; 
Internet; and 
Lesbian Organisations.

Legal Situation


In May 2006, a Chinese man was sentenced to one year in prison in Beijing for organising a party for gay men though the internet. Zou was charged with “promoting promiscuity”. According to Judge Song, “Although people today are gradually becoming more free to follow their sexual preferences, that doesn’t mean the law will indulge them. People should choose healthy and proper life styles” (Wei, Wang 2006, ‘One-year sentence for gay party organizer’, *China Daily*, 19 May [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-05/19/content_595666.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-05/19/content_595666.htm) – Accessed 18 July 2007 – Attachment 4).

In December 2005, the police shut down Beijing’s first ever gay and lesbian cultural festival. The festival was to include films, plays, exhibitions and seminars about homosexuality with academics, actors, film-makers, artists and activists expected to participate. The festival was to take place at the 798 Factory but two days before the opening the Beijing PSB banned the organisers from using the area. The organisers, some of whom reported police surveillance, decided to move the festival to the On/Off bar. Just before the start of the festival, around a dozen uniformed police accompanied by undercover police raided the bar and shut down the event. According to Scott Long, Director of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights Program at Human Rights Watch, “this police raid was an effort to drive China’s gay and lesbian communities underground and to silence open discussions about sexuality throughout the country” (Human Rights Watch 2007, ‘China: Police Shut Down Gay, Lesbian Event’, 20 December [http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/12/20/china12328.htm](http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/12/20/china12328.htm) – Accessed 18 July 2007 – Attachment 5).

According to the Asia-Europe Foundation, there are no laws protecting gays and lesbians from discrimination in China and “it is believed that the Chinese policy towards the gay issue remains the “Three nos”: no approval, no disapproval, and no promotion” (Asia-Europe
Gay Marriage

For 20 minutes at lunch-time on Valentines Day in 2007, gays and lesbians protested in Beijing calling for the legalisation of same-sex marriage in China. The protest came a few weeks before the annual meeting of China’s parliament where gays and lesbians had hoped that sexologist Li Yinhe would submit a fourth proposal to legalise same-sex marriage. Li’s three previous proposals were rejected. In a recent blog entry, Li said she was retiring from campaigning for sexual rights, “Gay marriage is not something that our country can accept at this stage of its cultural development” (‘China’s gays hold Valentine’s Day protest for same-sex marriage’ 2007, Advocate, 16 February http://www.advocate.com/news_detail_ektid42085.asp – Accessed 18 July 2007 – Attachment 7).

Societal Discrimination

According to the US Department of State, “Societal discrimination and strong pressure to conform to family expectations deterred most gay individuals from publicly discussing their sexual orientation” (US Department of State 2007, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2006 – China, 6 March, Section 5 Other Societal Abuses and Discrimination – Attachment 3).

According to Yaya Chen¹ and Yiqing Chen², Chinese lesbians are “generally speaking…regarded as eccentrics” and “live relatively restricted lives”. Chen and Chen continue:

Some lesbians are accepted by the public, but in return, they compromise to some popular values. This is extremely disadvantageous to those who are unwilling to give in.

…The mainstream society is dominated by heterosexuals and thus queers, especially lesbians, have no voice in public. Generally speaking, lesbians are regarded as eccentrics and common people often avoid keeping a relationship with them.

…Although lesbians live relatively restricted lives, the mainstream society seems to be increasingly tolerant towards them. Some participants in the Internet communities claim that they have never encountered discrimination (Chen, Yaya & Chen, Yiqing 2007, ‘Lesbians in China’s Mainland: A Brief Introduction’, Journal of Lesbian Studies, Vol. 10, No. 3-4, 2 January, pp.114& 118-119 – Attachment 8).

¹ Yaya Chen graduated from Fudan University in China and received a Master’s degree in Applied Mathematics and a Doctoral degree in Modern and Contemporary Chinese literature. She is now an assistant researcher at the Shanghai Academy of Social Science. She has delivered several papers in the fields of Applied Mathematics, Chinese literature, Macroeconomics, Sociology of Sex and Internet Communication. However, she has a special interest in Queer and Gender Studies.

² Yiqing Chen spent four years studying Economics in Shanghai Normal University, China and got a bachelor’s degree there. After graduation, she joined Shanghai Garment Group Import Corporation. She is interested in English and does translation work in her spare time.
According to Gang Gang, the Producer of China’s first online gay chat show, “discrimination remains” in China:

“China is more and more open. In big cities, there are many gay groups participating in all sorts of activities,” Gang said.

“Of course, discrimination remains…The kind of pressure on gay people in China is different to the pressure in Western countries,” Gang said.

“In the West, it is usually pressure brought by religion. In China, it is usually family and neighbours and peers.”

Gang…said his parents would be “very angry” if they knew he was producing “Tongxing” (‘China’s first gay chat show goes live on the Internet’ 2007, Reuters, 5 April http://www.reuters.com/article/internetnews/iduspek27130720070405?sp=true – Accessed 18 July 2007 – Attachment 9).

On 7 and 8 January 2006, Yale Law School’s China Law Centre hosted the first major academic conference on sexual orientation in China. According to Jeffrey Prescott of the China Law Centre, “Public discussion of sexual orientation is new in China”. The article continues:

He [Prescott] says that one aim of the conference was to bring homosexual issues to the attention of “mainstream” scholars and officials in China.

…Openness became a theme of discussion at the conference. For instance, in one panel, participants discussed the tendency for workers in China to hide their sexuality at work and whether greater openness would ameliorate discrimination in the workplace.

…Participants in the conference discussed the benefits and drawbacks of the fact that the Chinese government has identified homosexuals as a “target group” for HIV/AIDS work. The risk is that this designation will further stigmatize homosexuals. On the other hand, it has created an opportunity for gay and lesbian organizations to operate in China and an umbrella under which to seek more government and international assistance and attention (‘China Law Center Holds Conference on Homosexuality in China’ 2006, Yale Law School, 26 January http://www.law.yale.edu/news/1699.htm – Accessed 18 July 2007 – Attachment 1).

**Marriage**

Ten years after China decriminalised homosexuality and six years after homosexuality was removed from the state list of mental disorders, gays and lesbians in China say one of their biggest obstacles is parental pressure to marry. As a result, some lesbians are seeking a marriage of convenience:

Coming out isn’t easy anywhere in the world, they say, but in a culture that still emphasizes Confucian family ideals, such as obeying one’s parents and bearing children, the pressure to conform is enormous. It is compounded by the fact that parents of younger gay Chinese came of age during the Cultural Revolution, from 1966 to 1976. During those years of social upheaval, failure to conform could mean death.

…Despite the advances, though, gay Chinese still face job discrimination and stigmatization, even by family members. Those fears can be glimpsed in online personal ads, which are dominated by appeals for “fake marriages,” or marriages of convenience.
...Many tradition-minded parents are so concerned about avoiding the shame of friends and neighbors that they threaten suicide.

Lucy Ma, who spoke on condition that her full Chinese name not be used, said she has known since middle school that she was attracted to women. But she has also been wary of upsetting her ailing mother, who does not know she is gay.

Like many lesbians in China, Ma said, she tried to date men over the years. One treated her well, bought her gifts and talked about their future. “But to me, he spoke too much, and I would disappear at the weekends, secretly traveling with my girlfriend,” she said.

After their breakup, her parents introduced her to a parade of men. It was then that she began considering a marriage of convenience. “You can appear to have a relationship to your friends and colleagues,” she said. “And it’s the most important thing for your parents.”

First, she searched online. She received three or four responses within two months. Eventually, she said, she connected with a gay man who was also looking for a marriage of convenience. “We e-mailed each other, then met, just like a normal meeting of a boy or a girl,” she said.

They registered as a married couple in January 2006 and had a ceremony in the groom’s home town.

…What her parents don’t know is that Ma still has a girlfriend -- and that they’ve been together for six years. The girlfriend lives in another city, is married and has an 11-year-old daughter.

“I’ve completed everything according to plan: I have a fake marriage, and my parents are happy and I’m still independent,” Ma added.

There’s just one small problem.


In 2005, Lucetta Yip Lo Kam3 interviewed 20 self-identified lesbians in Shanghai. Lo Kam found that “almost all of the women interviewed are experiencing the pressure of social conformity most severely from their immediate family, and the social expectation of marriage.” Lo Kam provides the following information on marriage in China:

Marriage is still a very secured and powerful institution in contemporary urban China. …In urban China, 25-29 is considered to be the most suitable age for marriage for both sexes. By that time, people will have finished their education and probably for many, will already have a stable job. Most people will experience the strongest and also most organized pressure of

3 Lucetta Yip Lo Kam is a doctoral candidate in Gender Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Her research interests include gender identities, queer identities, and lesbian community in China. She is the editor and illustrator of Lunar Desire: Her First Same-sex Love Story (Hong Kong Cultural Act Up 2001), and a member of the core working group of the “Oral History Project on Women Who Love Women in Hong Kong” since 2004. She has also been an editor of several women’s magazines and a freelance writer for the popular media in Hong Kong.
marriage during these few years before they turn thirty. The pressure is particularly felt by women. Parents, relatives, or even colleagues and friends will start to introduce possible mates to them and arrange meetings. Even in Shanghai, a city which is generally considered to be progressive in many social aspects, marriage is still the norm for most people.

...The reasons for the importance of marriage and the high involvement of parents in their adult son or daughter’s marriage can be cultural, social and political. While politically there is no law in China which states that everyone should get married, the punitive effects are obvious for people who choose not to marry.

...Besides economic benefits, married people enjoyed much higher social recognition than unmarried people. Marriage is the ticket to adulthood: one cannot be socially recognized adult until s/he has her/his own family and household. ...Therefore, if a person has reached the age of marriage but refuses to get married, then s/he is avoiding the responsibility s/he needs to fulfill for family and society, and hence s/he cannot be considered as a responsible adult. Marriage and then whether one can have a child are socially seen to be evidence of one’s value in society and one’s physical or psychological well-being. People over the suitable age for marriage but who are still single are socially stigmatised. In the past decades, Dating Qingnian (overage young people) has been identified as a social problem. Especially for overage unmarried women, the term Lao Gu’niangs are usually associated with physical unattractiveness, bad social skills, poor health, and personality defects. The status is therefore seen as closely linked to one’s “internal essence.” Parents will be also affected by this social stigma if they have an unmarried by “overage” daughter.

...With the power of political intervention fading away from people’s everyday life, contemporary Chinese parents, who have grown up in a uniform society in which any politically or socially deviant behaviours would affect their livelihoods severely, are now actively taking up the role of the guard to ensure that their children lead a normative heterosexual life and do not become deviant in any sense. Even though there is a growing population of younger urban dwellers who choose to remain single, to most parents of my informants, a life without marriage seems unthinkable. They believe that responsible parents should help their children find a good match and to establish a new family.

...An unmarried homosexual woman is therefore doubly stigmatized and marginalized by the normative heterosexual discourse. There is a hierarchy of social recognition concerning one’s marital status in China; in decreasing order, they are: married, single, divorced. And being a homosexual is even more stigmatized than being single or divorced. ...How to cope with family and marriage is the biggest challenge for women in China who are now struggling to pursue a life that is deviated from the heterosexual norms (Lo Kam, Lucetta Yip 2007, ‘Noras on the Road: Family and Marriage of Lesbian Women in Shanghai’, Journal of Lesbian Studies, Vol, 10, No. 3-4. 2 January, pp.91-94 – Attachment 10).

According to Lo Kam, the “biggest struggle for them was how to tell parents of their sexual orientation or same-sex relationship, or whether they should let them know at all.” Lo Kam continues:

Parents are usually the people my informants are most concerned about. The biggest struggle for them was how to tell parents of their sexual orientation or same-sex relationship, or whether they should let them know at all. Only one informant, in her early 20s, has “actively” confessed to her parents of her sexual orientation, and her parents finally accepted her same-sex relationship after a period of broken relationship, during which she moved out of her parents’ house. There are a few informants whose parents have “discovered” their sexualities by accident. Jenny was one of them. Her parents are now avoiding the topic after many bitter confrontations. It is quite common for parents to avoid the topic or even to deny the entire
matter. Lisa’s parents have been suspicious of her sexuality, but they never spoke about it or confronted their 30-year-old daughter directly. Instead, they have reverted to a tactic of actively arranging matchmaking dinners for Lisa. For others who did not tell their parents, two tactics were most frequently used. They first is, “to come out softly and gradually.” Flora, in her late 20s, told me she first showed a picture of her and her girlfriend to her parents casually and then occasionally brought her girlfriend to her parents’ home for dinner. She wanted to prepare her parents for the fact that sooner or later she would move out to live with her girlfriend and would confess to them of their relationship. The second and more popular coping strategy with parents is not to tell them at all. The discourses of filial piety and familial harmony govern the decision of many informants of whether they should let their parents know. Many of them choose to leave home after they decided to pursue a life that they thought would not be understood by their parents. Yan’s story is illustrative of this reasoning. As a married woman in her early 30s, she had a traumatic breakup with her second girlfriend. After that she decided to leave her parents and husband and headed south to Shanghai. Yan had a serious nervous last year before she left and she told me why she would never let her parents to know of her other life,

I felt bad when I looked at my parents.

…I might never come out of the closet on my own. It’s not because I don’t want to face it. I feel that if it is going to hurt people you love around you by doing this, then it’s not necessary. Avoid it while you can, right? It doesn’t matter with others but for your parents…you can never leave them behind just for the sake of yourself. I have done this before already. I will certainly try to avoid it from now on.

Some informants also chose to leave their hometowns. Tong, in her late 20s, has actually fled to Shanghai to avoid an arranged marriage. Echo, in her late 20s, came to Shanghai to have amore anonymous social life that was impossible in her small town where she had grown up. Jenny is of local Shanhainese ethnicity. She and her girlfriend were planning to leave China. To Jenny, it is the fear of losing face that has led her parents to react so drastically to her same-relationship.

…Jenny’s parents can easily have a very good excuse to explain why their daughter is not married if she is living outside China. The physical distance relieves the pressure for both parties. Matty, in her mid 20s, has also decided to leave China. She has kept her three-year relationship in complete secrecy. Although she led a very well off and even affluent life in Shanghai, she decided to give up everything, including her career as a professional, and start a new and most probably much less comfortable life in a foreign country with her girlfriend (Lo Kam, Lucetta Yip 2007, ‘Noras on the Road: Family and Marriage of Lesbian Women in Shanghai’, Journal of Lesbian Studies, Vol, 10, No. 3-4. 2 January, pp.94-96 – Attachment 10).

Lo Kam provides the following information on how lesbians cope with the pressure to marry as well as marriage itself:

The social expectation to lead a “normal” life as everyone does is very strong in China. The force of social conformity is evidence from everyday language (such as the choice of many informants to use “normal” and “not normal” to describe different kinds of lifestyle or sexuality) to real life choices (such as marriage and childbearing). Most of my informants are within the age range which is considered to be suitable for marriage, and a few of them are already married and one of them has a young child. Therefore, almost all of them have experienced the pressure by parents, relatives, colleagues or friends. It seems that most of the have accepted that marriage is not something one can take full control of, either in fulfilling
or relinquishing marriage as a controlling social factor. It is more like fulfilling a responsibility to parents and to society.

…Informants also stressed responsibility to parents when talking about marriage. Especially for married informants, marriage is an individual’s duty to satisfy her/his family’s expectation and not to upset the social order. Yan has met her first girlfriend before her wedding and since then she has had a very difficult long-term extra-marital relationship. But even at that time, she had never though of not getting married:

…Apart from responsibility. Yan also mentioned the importance of role models. Although she knew there were single women in the country, she had never encountered any positive role models. Similarly, she did not have any idea of what a lesbian’s life would be like when she started her first same-sex relationship. Yan did not know if it is possible not to get married and have a family with a woman:

…For many younger informants who are now facing the pressure of marriage, they usually tell their parents they want to stay single. Although staying single is a less preferable and socially recognized lifestyle, it is easier for most parents to understand it than to accept or to gain an understanding of homosexuality. Matty has made it clear to her parents that she will be single for life. Flora also told her parents that she would not get married and also assured them it is a possible lifestyle. But economically dependent Lalas, it is more difficult to convince their parents that they can support themselves without the help of an economically better off man. It is evident from my research that the importance of economic self-sufficiency is often rated very high for Lalas who have decided not to get married.

For married informants, Mu, in her mid 30s, has a girlfriend living overseas. Her husband accepted her same-sex relationship partly because of the geographical barrier that exists between Mu and her girlfriend. Another two married informants, Yan and Coral, both in their early 30s, chose to leave their hometowns and husbands temporarily to stay in Shanghai. They have worked hard to get an opportunity to have a few years’ leave from their marriage. Physical distance seems to be very important for them to strike a balance between marriage and their extra-marital same-sex relationship.

All of them have told me of the difficulties of keeping a same-sex relationship outside marriage. Coral was staying temporarily in Shanghai and during these years she could live with her girlfriend. She told me how she was tortured everyday by this triangular relationship and how difficult it was to get divorced:

…Yan’s husband did not want to get a divorce even though their relationship had never been easy since the first day of marriage. They still pretend to be a normal couple in front of families and friends. It seems that the price of getting divorced is even higher than suffering in a bad marriage. That probably explains why divorce rates are consistently low in China over the years.

…The girlfriend of Mu, another married informant, is also married. Both of their husbands knew of their relationship and fortunately both of them have accepted it. Mu said it is because of the geographical distance and gender of her lover that have made it easier for her husband to accept it. When being asked whether she had considered getting a divorce, Mu named children and economic viability as factors that were of greatest importance to her (Lo Kam, Lucetta Yip 2007, ‘Noras on the Road: Family and Marriage of Lesbian Women in Shanghai’, Journal of Lesbian Studies, Vol, 10, No. 3-4. 2 January, pp.97-100 – Attachment 10).
According to Elisabeth Engebretsen, PhD student at the Department of Anthropology at the London School of Economics and Political Science, the “prevailing traditional ideals about filial piety (xiao) and kinship’s importance as social organising principle in society mean that marriage is seen as compulsory” in China. Engebretsen notes that “this pressure is keenly felt by the lesbians” Engebretsen encountered in Beijing:

In Mainland China, socio-economic change and modernisation have modified kinship structures and norms of social organisation, and enabled a certain degree of individualisation as well as spatial and economic independence from families, to emerge, as opposed to the collective ideology of the past. It has also enabled certain semi-public social spaces in cities to emerge, catering for gays and lesbians. However, prevailing traditional ideals about filial piety (xiao) and kinship’s importance as social organising principle in society mean that marriage is seen as compulsory, and often the natural progression for a young man or woman after graduating from university and securing a respectable job (Rofel 1999). This pressure is keenly felt by the lesbians I encounter in Beijing, and various coping strategies are employed in order to deal with this. Only for a very small minority is a complete refusal to marry and being out-lesbians to their parents, a realistic possibility. Very young women in their early twenties are usually the more vocal about refusing to marry, while women in their late twenties who experience the marriage pressure directly are pursuing ways to deal: Either by delaying marriage until they are past 30 years old by blaming work commitment and not finding a suitable partner, or by arranging a proforma marriage with a gay man, or by giving in to the pressure and get heterosexually married. Women in their thirties and up who participate on the lesbian scene, often have direct experience with marriage, as still married, divorced, and sometimes caretakers of children. Some juggle these realities with having love relationships with women. Common for all of these women whatever their age group and civil status at present, is a lived reality in which they are forced to deal with an immense social and cultural expectation to get married, as married life is pretty much seen as the only possible adult and socially and culturally mature way of life and social organisation in society. This ideology importantly also includes forceful ideals about normative femininity and female sexuality as well. Adding to this, is the guilt many express for not being able to be good daughters to their parents and be truthful about why they do not want to marry, and the difficulties the circumstances of living in heterosexual marriage pose for their ability to conduct love relationships with women and pursue a life of their own choosing (Engebretsen, Elisabeth 2005, ‘Lesbian identity and community projects in Beijing: Notes from the field on studying and theorising same-sex cultures in the age of globalisation’, Paper presented at Sexualities, Genders, and Rights in Asia, 1st International Conference of Asian Queer Studies held in Bangkok between 7-9 July 2005, 7-9 July http://bangkok2005.anu.edu.au/papers/Engbretsen.pdf – Accessed 18 July 2007 – Attachment 11).

Psychiatry

Chen and Chen report that while homosexuality is no longer considered a mental disorder in China, “lesbians are still regarded as patients in some recent medical papers”. Chen and Chen continue:

Although homosexuality is no longer considered as morbid in accordance with The Criterion of Psychopathic Classification and Diagnosing issued in 2001 in China, lesbians are still regarded as patients in some recent medical papers, for example, “On the Cause of Formation of Homosexuality” in Medicine and Philosophy (Wang and Wen 2002), “The Explanation of the Hindrance of Sexual Psychology: Homosexuality and Self-Maltreatment and Self-Abuse” in Chinese Community Physicians (Tang 2003) and so on.
Such discussion is not only theoretical because it has practical consequences, as can be seen in how lesbian criminals are subjected to unfair treatments. For example, a lesbian murderer was forced to have a medical inspection in order to make out whether she was a psychopath or not (Xing Shumei 2005). In another case, a lesbian murderer was subjected to an inspection of her sexual organs so as to determine if she was a female (Zhou 2004). By contrast, a heterosexual murderer will not be forced to have either a neuropathy inspection or a sex inspection (Chen, Yaya & Chen, Yiqing 2007, ‘Lesbians in China’s Mainland: A Brief Introduction’, *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3-4, 2 January, pp.117-118 – Attachment 8).

**Lesbian Culture in China**


The information provided on lesbian culture in China has been organised into the following four sections:

- **Online Gay Chat Show**;
- **Chinese Music**;
- **Chinese Films and Films in China**; and
- **Chinese Literature**.

**Online Gay Chat Show**

The first episode of *Tongxing Xinglian*, China’s first online gay chat show appeared online in April 2007. The weekly 12 episode show produced by PhoenixTV.com “aims to open minds” in China. In the first episode, Gang Gang (producer), Didier Zheng (host), Qiao Qiao (singer and bar-owner) and Shu Qi (cross-dressing social worker) “talk about sex, identity and discrimination.” Subsequent episodes will feature actors, lawyers, teachers and psychologists:

“Of course, it will not change some people’s attitudes toward homosexuality, but we hope that it might teach them not to take issue with their family members’ choices.” [Gang Gang]

In episode one, this meant confronting misconceptions, ignorance and, at times, ugly prejudice conveyed in Internet posts on discussion boards and text messages.

Qiao Qiao heatedly responded to an anonymous Internet poster who said gay people were “dirty” and “freaks.”

…While frank and open, the panelists were more polite than confronting, steering conversation toward relationships and identity, rather than sex.

…Zou Ming, PhoenixTV.com vice president, said the show’s content would remain mainstream and unlikely to shock.

“Online we can be a bit freer than on television,” Zhou said. “But we don’t want our viewers to think gay people are abnormal. This would cause a backlash and we don’t want that” (‘China’s first gay chat show goes live on the Internet’ 2007, *Reuters*, 5 April)
Chinese Music

Qiao Qiao, China’s first lesbian pop star, quit her original record label because they wanted her to hide her sexual orientation. In August 2006, under her new record label NMG, Qiao Qiao launched her first lesbian hit, Ai Bufen (Love Does Not Discriminate):

But the track has significance beyond its pop hit credentials: it’s a mark of how far China’s come in terms of its acceptance of homosexuals.

…Now Qiao Qiao is pushing boundaries further still. She’s trying to have a baby with her girlfriend of three years, Liu. ‘We’re using the sperm of Liu’s gay husband, my eggs and Liu’s womb,’ Qiao Qiao explains. ‘We’re the first couple I’ve heard of trying to do this here.’

China’s official line is tough on single mothers – it’s often difficult to get official identity papers for illegitimate children – so Liu married a close gay friend, who remains anonymous. After the birth, Qiao Qiao says she hopes to adopt the child with her 30-year-old partner.

…Being a lesbian in China isn’t easy. Women are expected to marry, and there’s no anti-discrimination law to protect homosexuals in the workplace. In this context, Qiao Qiao’s success is no mean feat. And while the support and protection of her fairly powerful family has surely played a big part in helping her, it’s clear that she also owes a lot to her own determination (Gardner, Dinah 2007, ‘Maid in China – China’s First Out Lesbian Pop Star’, Diva, March http://www.divamag.co.uk/diva/features.asp?AID=2457 – Accessed 18 July 2007 – Attachment 12).

Chinese Films and Films in China

According to Chen and Chen most Chinese films related to lesbians are produced for foreign film festivals rather than to be shown in China:

Most films related to lesbians are produced to participate in foreign film festivals rather than shown to the public in China.

…While aesthetically valuable, all these films [Fish and Elephant & The Box] discussed above do not show enough courage to address important problems, such as conflicts between lesbians’ value and popular value. I can think of two main explanations of this situation. On the one hand, the mainstream society looks at lesbians as eccentrics rather than common people, and so lesbians cannot but conceal their sexual orientation and hide their sexual orientation. On the other hand, directors fail to fathom the drastic conflicts because they are heterosexual and do not have a good grasp of the concerns and experiences of lesbians (Chen, Yaya & Chen, Yiqing 2007, ‘Lesbians in China’s Mainland: A Brief Introduction’, Journal of Lesbian Studies, Vol. 10, No. 3-4, 2 January, pp.116-117 – Attachment 8).

The King and the Clown, a South Korean film, has been banned from cinemas in China because of its homosexual subtext. Censors also deemed Brokeback Mountain too controversial to be shown in China (‘China bans film over gay themes’ 2006, BBC News, 5 July http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/5149440.stm – Accessed 6 July 2006 – Attachment 13).
Chinese Literature

According to Chen and Chen, while lesbians are represented in books “they mainly express women’s narcissism and repulsion against sexism.” Chen and Chen continue:

In the present age, since almost no lesbian novels can be published in accordance with the unwritten rule, only some female writers who have already become famous are in a position to write something concerning lesbians in some chapters of their books, such as The Private Life by Chen Ran (1996) and The War of One Person by Lin Bai (1997). Even though lesbians are represented in these books, they mainly express women’s narcissism and repulsion against sexism. Therefore, they cannot be considered as lesbian novels.

While lesbian novels are seldom seen on bookshelves, they are available in lesbian websites. These novels are usually written on the basis of the experience of the authors themselves. Hai Lan’s My Angel, My Love (2005) is a good example. Novels like that also convey women’s narcissism and loneliness, quite different from their counterparts in another Chinese society, Taiwan, which are created to condemn social discrimination and inequality (Chen, Yaya & Chen, Yiqing 2007, ‘Lesbians in China’s Mainland: A Brief Introduction’, Journal of Lesbian Studies, Vol. 10, No. 3-4, 2 January, pp.115-116 – Attachment 8).

Lesbian Scene in China

The information provided on the lesbian scene in China has been organised into the following two sections:
- Beijing
- Shanghai

Beijing

According to Engebretsen, “Beijing now has a flourishing lesbian scene, counting numerous bars, regular events such as parties and a weekly culture salon, telephone hotlines, two organisations, and, on a national level, tenfold websites.” Engebretsen continues:

Prior to last year, however, the organising and possibilities for socialising were scattered and short-term. A lesbian network in Beijing existed in the late nineties for a few years, until an incident with police during a lesbian culture festival brought the network to its close in 2001. The Internet with its promise of relative anonymity, has in recent years (since its general introduction to China around 1998) become the main arena for women to find friends, lovers, knowledge and support, and poses a far lesser risk of being found-out by parents, classmates and friends, husbands, and society in general (Engebretsen, Elisabeth 2005, ‘Lesbian identity and community projects in Beijing: Notes from the field on studying and theorising same-sex cultures in the age of globalisation’, Paper presented at Sexualities, Genders, and Rights in Asia, 1st International Conference of Asian Queer Studies held in Bangkok between 7-9 July 2005, 7-9 July http://bangkok2005.anu.edu.au/papers/Engbretsen.pdf – Accessed 18 July 2007 – Attachment 11).

22 year old student Mei Bin provides information on the lesbian scene in Beijing. Bin has not come out to her parents and “used to get really depressed when I’d think about my family and my future.” Since entering the lesbian community in Beijing, Bin has “gotten to know a lot of people, both online and in the bars.” Bin provides the following information on the lesbian scene in Beijing:
The first lesbian bar in Beijing was “Diqiu” (earth bar). I used to go there all the time. There was also a lala bar in Xidan -- even the owner was a lala. That place wasn’t open for long, only six months, before it was closed down by the police. I still remember that night. We were dancing at the time, and when the police came, the lights and the music were turned off. We felt like criminals. The police looked around for a while, took down some names and left.

Later, there was a bar in the Sanlitun area called “Lanyueliang” (Blue Moon), and another called “Hudie” (Butterfly), where we would hang out. But afterwards, the meeting place was the On-Off bar.

On-Off was opened by a gay man, but back in the day, Thursdays and Saturdays were open to lesbians. We all went there.

…Feng bar was the major hot spot for lalas until a few months ago, when it was closed by the police. I don’t know why. The bars here are closely connected to the police. The owner has to know how to handle them. Maybe the shows were the problem, because there were often transsexuals performing there, as well as gays.

Now Yesu is the only lala bar in Beijing. How sad! It’s a lonely little place, but there’s nowhere else to go anymore. I think this generation is already lost. It’s up to the next generation of lalas. There have been lots of great ideas, but none of them have worked out.

One example, there was a lala conference that was organized two years ago in Beijing, open to the public. It was amazing! A lot of lalas from Hong Kong and Taiwan were there. They held classes inside a school and had a big party. There was a kind of lala film festival, but the police came and closed it down. They arrested all those who attended, and from that time onwards, many of them were closely watched and monitored by the police. Their phones were tapped, too. So it was really hard for them and they all left the city. Some went to Shanghai and some went to Guangzhou (Ji Jong Goossen, Carolyn 2005, ‘Beijing’s ‘Lala’ Scene – A Chinese Lesbian Speaks Out’, Pacific News Service, 21 June http://news.pacificnews.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=6e81ad04d8330315bc84d1befc65d002 – Accessed 18 July 2007 – Attachment 14).


Shanghai

According to Lo Kam, Shanghai “has long been a vibrant site for both gay men and lesbian women” Lo Kam continues:

According to one local community leader in Shanghai Lala circle, the city has long been a vibrant site for both gay men and lesbian women. In the recent decade, Lalas have become increasingly visible, first in chatrooms and bulletin boards on the Internet, later in some gay or mixed bars, and more recently in social gatherings organized by lesbian groups in the city. The cyberspace continues to be the most popular meeting place for Lalas in the country. The founder of one Shanghai-based local Chinese lesbian website told me that her website has more than 45,000 registered members since its inception four years ago. They started to organize offline gatherings in 2004 and a community working group has been established by volunteers to carry out different community projects and regular monthly gatherings in 2005.
In my own observation, it is not difficult to spot Lala couples or more easily recognisable Ts in shopping areas or subway stations in downtown Shanghai.

…For non-natives, the city can provide them a kind of anonymity that they can never enjoy in their hometowns, and this is crucial to people who want to live alternative lifestyles. …The availability of information and relatively safe meeting spaces for lesbian and gay people are other reasons why the city has become one of the most active queer centres in the country. For some of my non-native informants, Shanghai is where they first put their desires into practice, so to speak.

The anonymity in a big city, the relative freedom to adopt different lifestyles, and the vibrancy of the lesbian and gay community in Shanghai notwithstanding, one recurring theme that always came up in the interviews is the conflicts between family and marriage, and my informants’ desire to be true to themselves. (Lo Kam, Lucetta Yip 2007, ‘Noras on the Road: Family and Marriage of Lesbian Women in Shanghai’, Journal of Lesbian Studies, Vol. 10, No. 3-4. 2 January, pp.90-91 – Attachment 10).

The China Daily reports that the first help line specifically for lesbians has been “busy” since it opened in October 2006. The Shanghai toll-free hotline offers advice and counselling between 2pm and 4pm on Saturdays. According to female volunteers the hotline generally receives seven or eight calls. The hotline is sponsored by the Hong Kong based Chi Heng Foundation and is an extension of a hotline for gay men and lesbians that opened in May 2006:

“The society pays much less attention to lesbians because they are not a high-risk population for AIDS,” Chung To, who heads the foundation, said. “But they do have a lot of psychological problems.”

…For the estimated millions of lesbians in China, the situation is even more obscure. Interacting with local lesbian society is difficult because they are further underground than men (Ying, Wang 2007, ‘Hotline helps lalas find acceptance’, China Daily, 2 February http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-02/02/content_799248.htm – Accessed 18 July 2007 – Attachment 16).

Internet

In August 2006 Forums for Comrades (www.cystd.com.cn) was launched. Forum for Comrades is a new internet forum for homosexuals and the first to be sponsored by a government agency, Disease Prevention and Control Centre of Chaoyang District of Beijing. According to Xinhua, “Although the public’s understanding of homosexuality has increased in more enlightened centres of the country in recent years, gays remain very much stigmatised in China” (‘China: Web forum promotes mutual support, AIDS awareness for China’s gay community’ 2006, BBC Monitoring Alert, source: Xinhua, 21 August – Attachment 17).

During 2006, the Chinese authorities blocked gaychinese.net, an overseas website, for three months in a campaign against pornography. The US Department of State reports that “other Internet sites on gay issues that were not sexually explicit were also blocked during the year” (US Department of State 2007, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2006 – China, 6 March – Attachment 3). The Advocate reports that at least three gay forums have been closed down and several others have begun filtering gay content under pressure from police in a crackdown on “illegal content” (‘Chinese police force crackdown on gay Web sites’ 2006,
Lesbian Organisations

According to Chen and Chen, most lesbian organisations in China “operate in secret and are no strong.” Chen and Chen continue:

Most lesbian organizations founded on the strength of Internet communication lack experience and resources and have little influence on the masses.

…Since it is mainly with the help of the Internet – a recent development itself – that lesbian organizations developed, all lesbian organizations today only have a short history.

…Most lesbian organizations operate in secret and are not strong. Due to dispersed members and defective systems, these organizations share common shortcomings. They are short-lived and lack sufficient capital and relevant experience. Their function depends more on the core members than an efficient system, and so once core members leave the organization, important plans will be aborted.

Further, Lesbian organisations are still highly dependent on the Internet. Famous lesbian websites include “Lalachat”, “Lescn” and Aladao”, and among them, “Lalachat” has the largest membership of 158,283 people. “Lescn” ranks second with 60,134 and “Aladao” third with 31,009. Each lesbian website has its own organization and activities, but none has a great influence on the larger society.

In 2005, Xiao Xian founded a lesbian organization “Tongyu Group” in Beijing. Its members have operated a lesbian telephone hotline and organized “salons” to organise discussions about Chinese lesbians and provide related knowledge for them. They have also promulgated knowledge about lesbians on campus and taken part in academic conferences as well. In the same year, another lesbian organization, “Shanghai Lesbians,” was established to strive for more public benefits for lesbians through a lesbian website (lescn.net) in Shanghai.

When more and more common people begin to know and understand lesbians, some organizations begin to put effort into building a healthy image for lesbians (Chen, Yaya & Chen, Yiqing 2007, ‘Lesbians in China’s Mainland: A Brief Introduction’, Journal of Lesbian Studies, Vol. 10, No. 3-4, 2 January, pp.114 & 122-123 – Attachment 8).

In November 2006, Sun Yat Sen University, Zhuhai allowed students to officially register a LGBT group on campus:

“They are a group of students who would like to study and learn more about gay and lesbian issues,” said Chung To, an activist who is also director of a foundation that administers projects for children affected by AIDS in China. “I think the significance of the group mainly is that it is the first time the university officially approves the existence of such a groups” (‘Chinese university approves first LGBT campus group in the country’ 2006, Advocate, 16 November http://www.advocate.com/news_detail_ektid39440.asp – Accessed 18 July 2007 – Attachment 19).

List of Sources Consulted
Internet Sources:

**Government Information & Reports**
- Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada: [http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/cgi-bin/foliocgi.exe/refinfo_e](http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/cgi-bin/foliocgi.exe/refinfo_e)
- US Department of State: [http://www.state.gov/](http://www.state.gov/)

**United Nations (UN)**
- UNHCR: [http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home](http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home)

**Non-Government Organisations**

**International News & Politics**
- Danwei: [http://www.danwei.org/](http://www.danwei.org/)

**Topic Specific Links**
- Diva: [http://www.divamag.co.uk/](http://www.divamag.co.uk/)

**University Sites**
- University of Sydney, Australia: [http://www.usyd.edu.au/](http://www.usyd.edu.au/)
- Yale Law School: [http://www.law.yale.edu/](http://www.law.yale.edu/)

**Search Engines**

**Databases:**
- FACTIVA (news database)
- BACIS (DIMA Country Information database)
- REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)
- ISYS (RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)
- RRT Library Catalogue

**List of Attachments**


15. ‘China Daily plagiarises Beijing lesbian article’ 2005, *Danwei*, 23 June


