

SEX, CITY, AND THE BLOGGING OF DESIRE: A MULTI-LAYERED TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE MOTHER OF CHINESE BLOGS

Jianxin LIU

Faculty of Education

Charles Sturt University

rliu@csu.edu.au

Abstract

Desires are emitted from and realized by textual resources or performances. Personal blogs, as a sub-genre of the blog and a personal media create an intimate textual space for performing desires. The analysis reported in this article takes one of the earliest Chinese personal blogs, Muzi Mei's blog, which was infamously tooted as the Mother of Chinese blogs, as the case to explore how desires are enacted through the textual performance of personal blogging. The data were collected from the first three months of Muzi Mei's blog and were analysed drawn upon a discourse-analytic framework in relation to content, form, and voice. Findings from the analysis indicate that textual resources including content, organizations, and attitudinal representations are utilised and often manipulated for expressing identities, gender, relationships, and contentions. It is argued at the end of the article that, while voicing multiple desires in the text of blogging, the blogger reconstructs gender norms at the same time in forms of resignification, making her identification as a woman a constellation of gendered performance. What has been performed in Muzi Mei's blog is not a woman but a composite of women that could be recognized, regarded, criticized, or even declined in the name of normativity.

Keywords: Identity, Performance, Resignification, Sexuality, Gender

1. Introduction

On 23 August 2003, in response to a journalist's request for an interview, the blogger Muzi Mei posted:

[for an interview?], only if you agree to make love to me first... The length of the interview depends on how long you can last in bed (Mzm 23)

This response was truly embarrassing for a journalist at that time in China, when gender relations including discussions of sex were considered secret or were taboo in public (Farrer, 2002). The journalist had never anticipated that his request for an interview would turn out to be a media fuss. He hesitated and eventually chose to withdraw the request. That said, he was not the only man that was treated in this way in Muzi Mei's blog (Fang, 2003). The case of the request for an interview was one of many anecdotes instigated by Muzi Mei, notoriously known as the Mother of Chinese blogs.

It is not surprising that media reports have compiled contrasting opinions on Muzi Mei and her blog. One of the best examples of this is a media coverage prepared by Xinlang Web Portal's News Watch (Xinlang, 2003). In this coverage, some reports criticized Muzi Mei's blogging for undermining social norms and conventions. Some reports compared her blogging to a menace to the mainstream ideology that was operated on the propaganda mechanism of the State and the Chinese Communist Party. Others insisted that Muzi Mei be entitled to expose her secrets as long as she abided by Chinese laws and regulations. They praised her blogging as courageous and pioneering, lobbying for tolerance and compassion for her blog. Some even suggested accommodating her blog in the mainstream by remodelling it into an example of novel and non-traditional social emergences.

Adopting identity and desire performances as the lens, the analysis reported in this article is intended to offer a different take on Chinese personal blogs similar to Muzi Mei's. Identities, or rather, desires, as will be argued in the following section, are enacted in discursive and semiotic resources. Personal blogs that function as media and text provide a convenient space for understanding desire through textual performances. As such, the research question that the analysis seeks to unfold is: what kinds of desire are performed in the text of personal blogging and how? Answering this question is important to understand the critical place of the blog as a social media space in re/constructing identities and desires of its participants. It is

especially significant in the present analysis considering the critical role that Muzi Mei's blog has played in shaping the Chinese blogosphere and its trajectory.

The first section of the article is a literature review of identity and desire-based research, performativity, and personal blogs. It is then followed by an introduction to the data and the method used to analyse the data. Findings from the analysis are presented in relation to the discourse features of Muzi Mei's blog, namely, content, form, and voice. The article is concluded with an argument that, while voicing multiple desires in the text of blogging, the blogger reconstructs gender norms at the same time in forms of resignification, making her woman a constellation of gendered performance.

2. Desire, Performances, and Personal Blogs

Desire refers to momentary and particular wants (e.g., for food, affection, material objects), or to a more diffuse/continuous force, that gets channelled/displaced into the constitution and the expression of particular desires (Cameron & Kulick, 2003). For psychoanalysts like Lacan (1998), desire is the essence of human beings. The Lacanian concept of desire, unlike Freudian's concept of libido, which was a kind of energy or force that continually sought its own satisfaction, is associated with absence, loss, and lack and is mediated in language (or in a broader sense, semiotic resources). This gap between the need and its expression, or between a hope and its fulfilment, is where Lacan locates the origins and workings of desire, signifying that the demands through which desire is symbolized has not one, but two objects: one spoken and one unspoken (Cameron & Kulick, 2003).

However, Deleuze and Guattari argue that psychoanalysis has fundamentally misconstrued the nature of desire, because it sees desire as always linked to sexuality (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004). That psychoanalysis distils sexuality out of every desire is symptomatic of its relentless reductionism. The approach of Deleuze and Guattari conceives analytic tasks on desire as mapping the ways desire is enabled and charting the trajectories it operates on (for instances, see Valentine & Bell, 1995). Their view foregrounds desire as being desired or assembled in a continuum. Attention can thus focus on whether and how different kinds of relationships emit, fabricate, block, or exhaust desire. In a similar vein, Cameron and Kulick argue that the central concern between language and desire is how desire is communicated through semiotic practices, either intentionally or otherwise (Cameron & Kulick, 2003b). Also,

analysing desire inevitably relates to an analysis of the relations of power (particularly in Foucault's sense, e.g., Foucault & Gordon, 1980) that animate or inhibit that desire.

Since the 1990s, a number of writings on desire (e.g., Cameron, 2005; Cameron & Kulick, 2003, 2005, 2006; Campbell-Kibler, Podesva, Roberts, & Wong, 2002; Harvey & Shalom, 1997; Kulick, 2000, 2003) have ignited heated discussions among identity researchers (e.g., Bucholtz & Hall, 2004), whether such research should be identity-based or desire-based (in Cameron & Kulick's sense, sexuality-based). Regarding the relations between identity and desire, Kulick insists that the focus on identity categories distract the analysis of language and sexuality from sexuality itself, and then call for an avoidance of the category-bound pitfalls that he argues is typical of sociolinguistics, particularly the reduction of the social meaning of linguistic practice to an expression of membership in, or affiliation with, predetermined and fixed identity categories (Kulick, 2000).

Cameron and Kulick emphasize that desire in its own right is socially mediated: the personal and private form of desires are shaped and reshaped by social interaction (Cameron & Kulick, 2003b). The challenge is to adopt an approach that focuses on the social mediation of desire to construct a view of desire that is simultaneously internal and individual, and external and shared (Eckert, 2002). Desire-centred study, for example, sexuality, needs to move beyond an exclusive focus on identity to account for the ways in which sexuality is materialized and conveyed through language and others semiotic means.

This is not, however, to disavow the relevance of identity study to desire; rather, the question should be reformulated in relation to individual's social positionings; that is, not to ask whether those identities deserve academic scrutiny but what kinds of scrutiny are the most illuminating (Cameron & Kulick, 2003). Contrary to the misleading statement of Bucholtz and Hall (2004), such an initiative implies that, given the abundant findings and theories in identity research over the past three or more decades, identity-based desire research would be more productive and constructive rather than counterproductive or destructive.

Cameron and Kulick also point out that theorists engaged in debating the nature of desire and its linguistic instantiation seldom refer to empirical research that examines how desire is actually conveyed through language in social life (Cameron & Kulick, 2003a). According to Kelly:

[I]dentity may be understood as a cultural manifestation of the desire of the subject for coherent self and the reiteration of significance claimed and forged within language. (p. 106).

Such relations indicate that desire emanates discursively like waves in identities and discourse/s. Researchers in the identity paradigm so far have only discovered a tip of the iceberg, in which the identities are consciously claimed and the desires explicitly expressed. More research in this direction should be continued for in-depth explorations.

Performativity and indexicality are two useful concepts in understanding identity and desire, as well as developing methodological frameworks in line with discursive psychology for the purpose of disclosing desire and identity online. Butler's theorizing on performativity with a poststructuralist paradigm emphasises the performative nature of gender identity by arguing that gender identity is continually performed and enacted (Butler, 1990). Through iterativity (Butler, 1990) or recurrence (Lemke, 2002), a referent for particular identity categories is constructed both in the minds of speakers and in a large social discourse. Kulick contends that performance is not identical with performativity (Kulick, 2003). Performance is what a subject does; whereas, performativity is the process through which the subject emerges. Kulick further emphasizes that research framed as performative should concentrate more on identification.

Different from identity, identification is a psychoanalytic concept concerned with the operations or with the actions through which the subject is constructed, either consciously or unconsciously (Cameron & Kulick, 2003b; Kulick, 2003). A performative approach would examine the processes through which multitudes of identifications are "authorized, legitimate and unmarked, and others are unauthorized, illegitimate, and marked" (Kulick, 2003: 149), "undermining conscious attempts to produce and maintain subjective coherence and consistency" (Cameron & Kulick, 2003b: 139). Identifications as processes thus views identities as always becoming and never finalized; to study identification is to study the processes by which the relational activities occur. In addition to identification, in the course of resignification, as Butler would argue, some performances are privileged while others are marginalized in order to unveil new possibilities for identifications rather than simply relinquish them (Butler, 2004). In other words:

distinguishing among the norms and conventions that permit people to breathe, to desire, to love, and to live, and those norms and conventions that restrict or eviscerate the conditions of life itself is critical (Butler, 2004, p. 8).

As a participatory media and social networking space (Jenkins, 2006), personal blogs construct an emergence of effective and powerful writing (or composing, to be accurate) of

performance and desire that enables users (bloggers and their various types of readers) of the blog to make direct and immediate contributions to social practices (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). Owners of personal blogs are able to make use of the global form of the blog, culture-specific rhetorical patterns, while at the same time incorporate their individual literary preferences in such a kind of ‘writing’. Moreover, in personal blogs, texts and norms are often intermingled in terms of dynamicity and evolve constantly across modalities, space, location, and time. Personal blogs in this regard constitute an ideal textual space, where desire and identity can be explored in relation to performance, identification, and (re)signification.

3. The Data and the Method of Analysis

Muzi Mei was the blogger’s Internet blog name. She was reported to be *Li Li* (李丽) in real life, working as a journalist for a metropolitan magazine in Guangzhou. *Mu Zi* are two characters that form the blogger’s surname *Li* (李) in which *Mu* is the upper part and *Zi* the lower part. *Mei* (美) is the first character of the Chinese phrase *Mei-Li* (美丽) meaning ‘beautiful’ or ‘beauty’. Though both *Mei* (美) and *Li* (丽) index beauty, *Mei* collocates with *Muzi* better both phonetically and grammatically. The choice of *Li*’s (丽) synonym *Mei* (美) demonstrates the blogger’s literary mastery. She skilfully avoided lexical repetitions and scrambled words for aesthetic purposes. The combination of *Mu-Zi* is also another name for kiwifruit or Chinese gooseberry (*Qiyiguo*; 奇异果). It involves cultural images of being special, exotic, and rare. The blog’s name, then, was deliberately designed as a textual avatar to conjure up an image of the blog and its author *Muzi Mei* amongst its audiences.

In mid-2003, *Muzi Mei* published a number of entries on her blog (*Muzi Mei De Boke*) describing her sexual encounters with a number of male celebrities. In only a few days, her entries had captured enormous public attention and visits to her blog surged. Blog China (*Boke zhongguo* at www.bokee.com), the BSP (blog service provider) that hosted her blog, broke down as the unprecedented traffic triggered by *Muzi Mei*’s blog had topped its designed volume. As her blog was visited and continuously reported, *Muzi Mei*’s popularity shot up and the new technology she used for her writing was soon recognized by Chinese Internet users. *Boke*, a Chinese term for the blog, gained instant media currency both online and offline. *Muzi Mei* was then nicknamed ‘the mother of Chinese blogs’ (*zhongguo boke zhimu*) on many occasions in acknowledgement of her influence upon Chinese blogs (Fang, 2003; Xinlang, 2003).

The analysis described in this article was based on data collected from Muzi Mei's blog between June and September 2003. The data are composed of Muzi Mei's blogsite at Sohu BSP and her blog entries. Figure 1 is a snapshot of Muzi Mei's blogsite (<http://muzimei.blog.sohu.com>), with English translations added. A total of 32 blog entries written during Muzi Mei's early blogging was collected. The entries were used for content analysis as well as being part of the analysis of the form of her blogs. From these, ten entries were closely analyzed in terms of content, form, and voice. These entries were translated and segmented according to the goal of the analysis.

Figure 1: Muzi Mei's Blog at <http://muzimei.blog.sohu.com>.

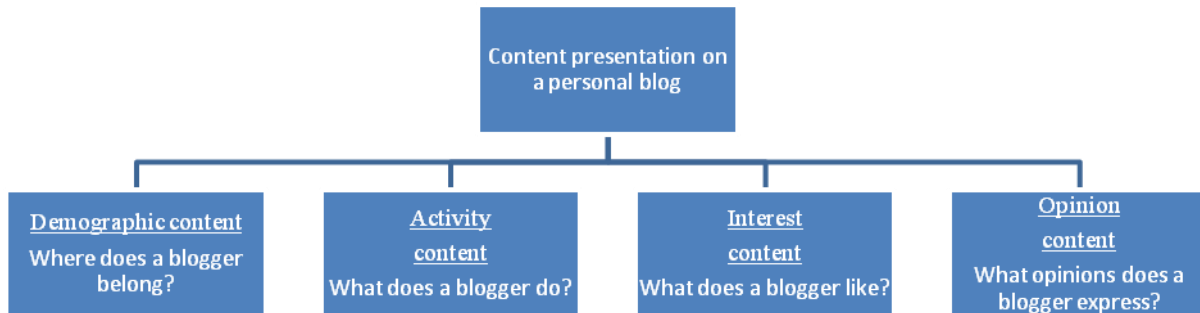


Note: in brackets are translations of the Chinese text.

3.1. Content analysis

Content analysis, adapted from Wei's framework (Wei, 2006: 993), examines four content dimensions of Muzi Mei's blog, namely, 1) activities, 2) interests, 3) opinions, and 4) demographics as Figure 2 demonstrates:

Figure 2: Dimensions of Lifestyle Content on the Blogs (Adapted from Wei, 2006)



Activity content focuses on activities that a blog may present about the blogger and others. The analysis focuses on deeds, experiences, and actions. Activities such as going shopping, participating in charity groups, or doing sports for leisure are all taken into account. Opinion content focuses on views and attitudes a blogger expresses regarding social, economic, political, and cultural issues, events, phenomena, institutions, and people. Interest content refers to the blogger's preference for particular phenomena, institutions, relations, events, and people. Demographic content, which differs in definition from that used by Wei in her research, relates to spatial and institutional aspects that bloggers or other people were involved with or were affiliated with geographically, culturally, and institutionally. Where bloggers were born, raised, have worked, or have travelled helps construct and represent bloggers' course of being, becoming, and belonging, persistently contributing to their identification and position in the blogosphere.

3.2. Form analysis

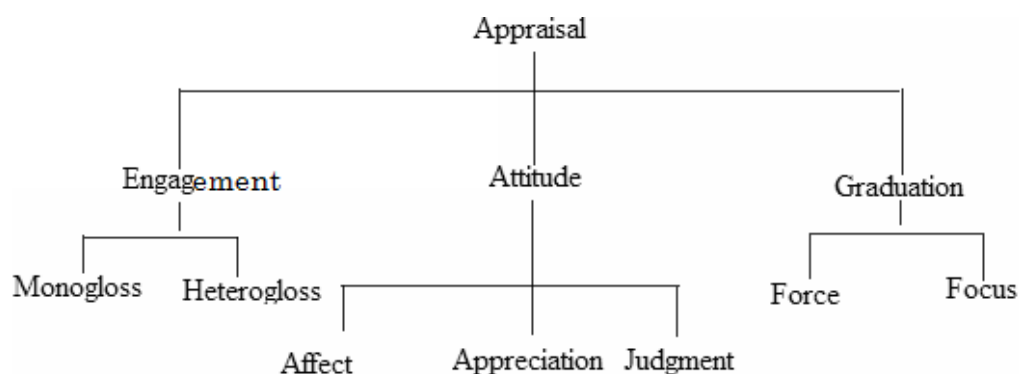
The analysis of the formal structure of the blogs was carried out through an examination of two features of the blogs: through the notions of macro-units and micro-units. In this study, a macro-unit refers to the dominant or overarching genre of a blog entry or sections of a blogsite and a micro-unit refers to smaller level textual units that are embedded in

the macro-unit. Identifying a macro-unit depends largely on the content and on the intention of a text (Martin, 1992; Miller, 1984; Swales, 1990); that is, what a text is ‘about’ and the social purpose of the genre. Identifying a micro-unit, apart from that feature, requires identifying key structural components other than the overall segments or moves that contribute to the structure of the text. A micro-unit may be composed of segments such as photos, hyperlinks, background music, and written textual segments. The configurations of both macro-units and micro-genres of a blog may not necessarily follow a linear or sequential order; rather, they may be dispersedly arranged. In personal blogs, the blogsite can be assumed to be constituted by several macro-units, which are also composed of micro-units such as entry, blogroll, logo, etc.. In the blogsite, a micro-unit can be constituted by a composite of segments such as the name of the blog, the web address of the blog, and the head image of the blog.

3.3. Voice Analysis

The analysis of voice in the blog entries draws upon the appraisal theory. Appraisal theory was developed by Martin and White as a particular approach to explore, describe and explain the ways language is used to evaluate, to adopt stances, to construct textual personas, and to manage interpersonal positioning and relationships (Martin & White, 2005). It explores how the authors of texts express attitudes and pass judgements on people, other writers, or speakers and their utterances, material objects, happenings, and states of affairs. The notion of appraisal involves resources for moralizing, amplifying, reacting emotionally (affect), judging morally (judgment) and evaluating aesthetically (appreciation) the constituted texts by using these three semantic categories: attitude, engagement, and graduation, with further subdivisions as Figure 3 illustrates.

Figure 3: The Appraisal System (adapted from Martin & White, 2005, p. 38)



According to Martin and White, attitude is concerned with feelings, judgment of behaviour, and evaluation of things (Martin & White, 2005). Engagement deals with sources of attitude in dialogical interaction with other texts, genres and discourses. Graduation relates to the fact that feelings can be amplified or downplayed. Considering the purpose and nature of this study, a large part of the analysis will focus on examining attitude and graduation resources.

The analysis of the blog data in terms of content, form, and voice helps to examine the kinds of performances represented in these personal blogs and understand how these performances are enacted by their genre features and semiotic resources.

4. Constructing Blogging Performances in terms of Content, Form, and Voice

The data analysis has revealed that, as an instance of personal blogs, Muzi Mei's blog is characterized by the following five distinctive discourse features in terms of content, form, and voice.

4.1. Noticeable Genre Transference and Fusion in Muzi Mei's Blog

Unlike claims about blog's immediacy in generating content (Blood, 2002, 2004; Lyons, 2005), the content in Muzi Mei's blogging might not have been spontaneously improvised but carefully planned and then published, when blogs were introduced to Chinese Internet users. A large part of Muzi Mei's blogging was made up of her writing that had not been published in other media. In Muzi Mei's case, her blog was used as a new medium to publish her old writing. Content alone, then, is not adequate to isolate the personal blog as an instance of a particular genre in that it resembles other traditional genres such as diary writing.

However, there was other content that illustrated particular changes. For example, Muzi Mei's career in journalism, her previous Internet experience, and her early contact with blogging might have helped her realize the importance of content concentration. Compared with drifting topics that personal diaries were typical of, content concentration (or focused topics) that had been translated into her blogging was a useful way to expand readership.

Organizational transference from other genres to Muzi Mei's blog is a particular feature of her blogging. Some of her blog entries were manually produced offline and then typed onto her blogs. For instance, in Mzm e10, Muzi Mei recounted that she had to write her entry on paper because of her computer's keyboard failure. Some of her entries were rewritten based on

manually written notes such as Mzm e07, which consists of five smaller entries. A great number of Muzi Mei's blog entries are her creative writing that was written long before her contact with the Internet and the blog; others originated from her previous diaries and writings offline. Such blogging practice makes generic transference from the traditional to the personal blog an inevitable feature. It also shows that organizational transference from one genre or genres to a new one is not one-off but individualized and continuous.

Muzi Mei's blog is indeed a mixed product of her personal diary joined by several different micro-units such as argument and exposition. Different from the looseness of personal diaries in term of organization (Sjoblad, 1998), Muzi Mei's blog entries are well staged, phased, and organized. In most of the entries that were examined, a topic is introduced and addressed as a thesis or as an orientation: the thesis is elaborated in some detail, and the thesis is then readdressed in several different ways.

Genre fusion in Muzi Mei blogging occurs first in her blogsite. Her blogsite, as its layout and rhetorical patterns illustrate, is composed of features of the blog in one respect. In another respect, the three structures are inserted with features that the BSP entailed such as channels and popular tags available to the BSPs portal and compulsory commercials. In respect of the blog entries, though mostly personal narrative, each blog entry represents a distinctive macro-unit. These macro-units in turn consist of several different types of micro-unit. It should be noted that Muzi Mei's blog entries concentrated on macro-units that express personal issues in relation to their content. In addition, types of micro-unit turn out not as diverse as it might have been presupposed; rather, merely five major types of micro-unit are identified: recount, explanation, exposition, description, and commentary.

Technology is a crucial influence in the formation of Muzi Mei's blog. The form of her blog at the level of blogsite and blog entry was influenced by Web 2.0 technology such as the blogging software used by the blog and its hosting service. In the course of her blogging, Muzi Mei was obliged to follow Sohu BSP's arrangement in maintaining her blog. Her submission to the BSP and the blogging technology indicates that the early interfaces of blogging might not have been as user-friendly as they are today, preventing Muzi Mei from bricolaging with new tools and functions such as adding personalized features, revisions or innovations with ease (c.f. Chandler, 1998). Because of the time constraint in blogging, it is unlikely that Muzi Mei was willing or able to invest much time and energy in designing and refining the form of her blogging. In Muzi Mei's blogging, blog technology was not only rendered as enablement of her blogging; it had to put up with the resistance from Muzi Mei due to her lack of technological literacy or simply clinging to the traditional way of writing.

4.2. Muzi Mei's Blog as an Instrumental Space for Personal Expression and Interaction

A personal blog for Muzi Mei was equivalent to an online space, where she would explore her potential for writing. Her blogsite concentrated on entry 'writing'; little attention was given to optional content sections such as blog title, profile, archives, and tags that have become important for later bloggers. Those optional functions would not only enrich the modality of a blog, but also help expand its readership. In a number of places in her blog entries, she emphasized that she had uploaded or was uploading some of her early offline creative writing to her blogsite. In two entries (Mzm e07 and Mzm e09), Muzi Mei mentioned her handwritten diaries prior to her blogging.

Indeed, in Muzi Mei's view, her blog was a place for relocating, storing, and publishing her personal writings. Blogging was reconfigured in Muzi Mei's mind as a space, where her epistemological and ontological experiences converge and were reformulated under the close scrutiny of public gaze, which is quite different from personal diaries in their traditional sense. It therefore became a convenient extension of her personal diary writing, rather than a replacement, an emergent new instrument, or a new media, as viewed by many bloggers (e.g., Blood, 2002) and researchers (e.g., Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2005).

Contrary to the presumption that the blog is increasingly more multimodal than other forms of online or traditional genres (Thurlow, Lengel, & Tomic, 2004), Muzi Mei's blogging is largely mono-modal except for the embedded multimedia features enabled by the BSPs or the software her blogs used. No images of her own are found in her early entries to accompany the written texts for generic or rhetorical variety. For Muzi Mei, blogging was synonymous with writing and a blog a place for refining her writing technique. This opinion was echoed by many early Chinese bloggers and theorists such as Isaac Mao, who views blogging as writing online (*wangluo shuxie*) and as diaries online (*wangzhi*) (Feng, 2004). For them, the mode of "writing" or written text should be always placed at the centre of the personal blogs.

4.3. Contentious Topics in Muzi Mei's Blog

A key feature of Muzi Mei's blogging is the concentration of contentious topics. Her early blogging centred mainly on sexual relationships and issues such as sexual intercourse, contraception, and dating, which even earned a name for the collection as *Posthumous sex diaries* (Xinlang, 2003). Blogging continually with distinctive themes and topics is a strategic positioning considering how web searching service, blog tags, and permalinks work (Drezner,

2007). Sex-themed content on Muzi Mei's blog was not a coincidence but rather a timely occurrence. Around the early years of the 21st century, it was common to find Chinese female young writers (nüxing zuojiao/xieshou) such as Weihui, Mianmian, and Anni Baobei doing experimental writings both online and offline. One of their primary interests is in sex and sex-related issues (Ruan, 2007) . Their works were widely consumed by the younger generation who were born in the 1970s and the 1980s (Cao, 2002; Jiang, 2006). Muzi Mei's blog followed this literary trend but is even more exceptional. For one thing, her writings were delivered entirely through blogging. Unlike a handful of Internet pioneers and veterans, who envisioned the blog as a new business opportunity, Muzi Mei explored the blog as a new space and instrument for writing online. Her blog offered her audiences novel reading experiences and enticed them to continue visiting her blog.

4.4. Muzi Mei's Blog as a Manipulation of Privacy for Obtaining Publicity

The content in terms of what is included and how it is included helps to classify a blog in terms of genre. In this regard, Muzi Mei's blog was undisputedly an instance of personal blogs as it was replete with personal experiences, events, narratives, feelings, and opinions. Her lifestyle is concerned with her growth pains and struggles, people she had connections with, and her membership categories such as being a daughter, student, career woman, writer, and young cosmopolitan. This is similar to what personal diaries may contain, which draws on personal details to explore one's being, becoming, and belonging in terms of time and space (van Dijck, 2004).

However, Muzi Mei's blogging seemed to have a broad scope of readership. Unlike personal diaries, which usually take the author or a particular person as the reader (McNeill, 2003), Muzi Mei's restrained voice shows her awareness of the potential reader of her online 'diary'. Blogging for Muzi Mei is designated to utilize certain personal privacy to trigger the public's attention or voyeuristic desire. Privacy was then purposely publicized and exploited for acquiring attention and ultimately, publicity.

4.5. Voice Construction in Muzi Mei's Blogging

The macro-unit each blog entry entails played an indispensable role in shaping the voice of the entry, especially regarding the status of the three attitudinal meanings (affect, appreciation, and judgment). The dominance of one attitudinal resource over the others is likely a result of differences between macro-units, where content and form variations enable one type of attitudinal resources to recur more frequently than the other two (Martin & Rose, 2007; White, 2002).

For example, in Mzm e03, judgment resource dominates, as the macro-unit of the entry is "Discussion", in which Muzi Mei recollected and downplayed her personality and moral criteria in socializing. Affect prevails in Mzm e08 as the entry recounted the blogger's relationship with a net friend prior to her contact with blogging. Mzm e10 is featured by appreciation as Muzi Mei shared her views in a biographical account of a male figure whose sexuality may appeal to women of different ages. Therefore, macro-unit differences among the blog entries seem to have influenced the distribution of the attitudinal resources, although they were not the only factor.

Affect is a major resource for identifying emotions and feelings in personal blogs (Martin & White, 2005). Muzi Mei exploited more resources explicitly rather than implicitly in expressing her feelings. In this respect, outspokenness of emotion and feelings is a generic feature blogs have inherited from diary writing. In both inscribed and invoked resources, the appraised or the referent of the affect is Muzi Mei herself, without other people or entities involved. This is in line with the function of the personal diary, where the author is the sole owner and creator of the diary (McNeill, 2003; van Dijck, 2004).

Apart from generic transference from personal diaries, lifestyle change is a key influence. For instance, Chinese young women have become articulate in expressing their needs and wants (Farrer, 2002) as China's modernization and globalization over the past three decades have amassed material and cultural assets, which they can capitalize on (Giddens, 1991, 2006; Goodman, 2007). Yet, their awareness of the public gaze, either authorized or non-authorized, is intense in evaluating persons and things, as the public may tend to marginalize these young women in accordance with their aesthetic and ethical stances.

In contrast to emotion and feeling, the referents (the appraised) of aesthetic and ethical evaluation mostly point to others, that is, other people, other things, and other issues. Appraising others in one way represents the bloggers' own tastes, education, and moral standings and affiliates Muzi Mei with a certain social group or community. In another way, it

could disconnect her from social groups, where the blogger's viewpoints were not welcomed. In other words, emphasizing otherness should consider the diversity and fluidity of others, which are multiple and different from the self in sheer numbers. This may explain the high distribution of positive appreciation as well as the blogger's reluctance to judge others.

The invisibility of judgment may also connect to the niche of the Chinese blogosphere, where censorship relating to sensitive social issues is operating at sophisticated and tacit levels and scales. Open criticism of social issues was neither a secure strategy in terms of censorship, nor a magnet to the audience (especially Muzi Mei's generation) and to the blogger. However, even this caution could not save the blog from being eventually cleansed in the so-called "Internet purification initiative against pornography and violence" conjoined by seven state departments in January 2009 (Renminwang, 2009).

Voice was presented in Muzi Mei's blog in a particular fashion. Muzi Mei did not overtly express her emotions, appreciations, and moral evaluations; rather, in most cases, her voice was implied. Such moderateness in establishing a voice is likely a result of change of readership. As audiences are either absent or restricted in traditional diaries (van Dijck, 2004), attitudinal resources for establishing voice, especially affect and appreciation, could be explicitly accounted for. The presence of an audience or readership in various forms, however, urges Muzi Mei to moderate her voice. Such moderation may also be indicative of the blogger's writing expertise. Similar to its predecessor diary writing, blogging is dominantly composed of narratives. Good narratives, as many writing experts point out, should allow readers to discover from details rather than unveil, the author's intended voice (e.g., Goodall, 2008).

5. Personal Blogging as Performance of Desire

Although Butler argues that a stable and unitary identity of women is unattainable as sex, gender, and desire are all performative effects (Butler, 1990), it is useful to locate gender identifications through the semiotic resources in Muzi Mei's blog. Semiotic resources have then not only enacted Muzi Mei's blog as an instance of personal blogs but also of performances of a particular kind of woman. Given that a woman is not a monolithic entity but a constellation of identifications (Butler, 1990; Deleuze & Guattari, 2004), the woman in Muzi Mei's blog is performed as young, unmarried, urban, hedonistic, de-traditional, aggressive, alienated, and yet resilient. Those conspicuously contradictory modifiers of Muzi Mei's woman

may also indicate that a constellation of identifications in Muzi Mei's woman are neither coherent nor consistent but are contentious, contradictory, and shifting.

For example, Muzi Mei's woman is performed in terms of demographics as an unmarried young urban woman. Age, marital status, and material location are drawn together to create the social spaces for the woman she performed. Her activities and interests associated with sex, writing, party going, and smoking conjure up images of a woman who is hedonistic yet alienated from other groups of women. Her employment as a journalist and her educational qualifications further identify her as a professional woman. More importantly, the frontier city Guangzhou, where Muzi Mei was living and working, helps to position her as a representative of metropolitan women in China. The image in Figure 4 is a lucid articulation of Muzi Mei's lifestyle performances as a woman. The Chinese characters in bold on the image are literally read as *Muzi Mei: city, sex, and privacy writing*, which explicates the social space, activities and communities that Muzi Mei's performances represent.

Figure 4: Muzi Mei: Sex, City, and Privacy Writing



In constructing the voice of her blog, Muzi Mei performs her woman as atypical of Chinese women and as being alienated from the public, from men, and from other women. She described her antagonists as "good men and women", "morally-correct men and women" and

herself as "frivolous", "ill-mannered", "shameless"; but her living condition was deplored as a lack of belonging and attachment, aloof, discriminated, and even sinful (as ascribed to the mafia or an assassin). She seems to contend that, in a society where conformity and solidarity are norms (Zhan, 2006), dissociating with certain gender norms may end up with her being alienated or estranged.

City as a physical and social space may index dynamicity and fluidity engendering drastic lifestyle changes, relation alternatives, and social transformations. In urban practice, social divisions are intensified and accelerated as far as daily living, work, entertainment, and relations are concerned as the following instances from Muzi Mei's blog illustrate:

- 1) urbanized sex: beauty salon (*falang*); red lights area (*hongdeng qu*); sex concentration camp (*xing'ai jizhongying*);
- 2) violence: mafia (*hei shehui*); dominant group (*qiangshi qunti*);
- 3) colonization: places invaded by foreigners (*bei yangren qinzhān de difang*);
- 4) entertainment: poet party (*shiren juhui*); comfortable zone (*zizai de chang*); discomfort zone (*bu zizai de chang*); prairie (*da caoyuan*).

In comparison with developed countries, most Chinese cities have emerged from agrarian communities over the past 30 years (Sun, 2008). It would be more appropriate, then, to consider the city in Muzi Mei's blogging as a process (urbanization) rather than as a static structure or entity. Relegating the social space in Muzi Mei's blogging to urbanization foregrounds the reception of her unconventional gendered identities as a result of change and fluidity. The urbanized social space represented by Muzi Mei, in turn, may help normalize (at least not demonize) her identifications.

Resilience is reconnected to underline the characteristics of the woman performed in Muzi Mei's blogging. Resilience in Muzi Mei's blogging is reflected in two ways. The first is close to resistance: she is engaged in her actions against the social norms. The second is indifference that she employed as a strategy to downplay pressure from social norms. Different from resistance, indifference is implied. For instance, chatting with her mother on the phone about matchmaking, she asked her mother to discourage future pursuers by saying that she was "a pornographer" (*xie huangse xiaoshuo de*). By simply narrating many of her life incidents (such as learning smoking, failed contraception, abortion, having sex, alcohol drinking, and street fighting) as facts without negative judgment but positive appreciation, Muzi Mei marks out her strong resilience in the face of confrontation.

Clearly, Muzi Mei's woman is not a mono-dimensional subject but rather has a trajectory and a history. The woman she performs is an effect of a process or a life course. The woman in Muzi Mei's blog has been lived up with accounts of different phases of her living as a young girl, a student, an undergraduate, an early career woman, which explores details of her life history. The fact that her early blog was titled *Posthumous Sex Diaries* also shows the performance has its stages.

In terms of group or community membership, Muzi Mei affiliates herself with several different social groups such as aliens (*yilei*), the cartoon-loving new generation (*katong yidai xin renlei*), the bold and bluffing young (*nianshao qingkuang de jiahuo*), the screaming poet (*yong jianjiao faxie shige de wo*), and anti-intellectual, uncultured people (*wei wenhua ye haipa wenhua de ren*). Her life situations under different circumstances or through different phases were described as being deprived of affiliation and recognition, lonely, discrepant, tragic, ominous, and socially alienated. By contrast, her sex life was portrayed as promiscuous, self-contained and satisfactory. In this way, Muzi Mei provides a collage of her woman as being different, non-traditional, and, to some extent, asocial.

Understanding this constellation in terms of performativity needs to call on Butler's view on normativity. Identity formation in this regard is the repeated inculcation of norms. Butler conceptualizes such reiterated appropriations of norms mainly in the light of rejection and resignification. She does not elaborate on the ways that norms or normative conventions are iterated, reiterated, or repeated as she thought any kind of categorization may be viewed as compromises with norms in one way or another and therefore should be avoided in the course of resignification (Lloyd, 2007).

However, categorization for studies of this kind is to an extent inevitable. First of all, relations of gendered performance to normativity that agree with Butler's view may have their own variations and characteristics, which may produce aspirations for researchers and readers. Also, there is the likelihood that some relations may not be in agreement with Butler's observation. New relations may be detected and treated as additions or enrichment to the performativity conceptualization as long as categorization is not rendered as finite and fixed. It is then a desirable choice in Muzi Mei's case to uncover her performance of the woman and understand how gendered norms are appropriated in relation to reiterability.

6. Conclusion

To conclude from this perspective, what has been performed in Muzi Mei's blog is not a woman but a composite of women that could be recognized, regarded, criticized, or even declined in the name of normativity. Muzi Mei's recourse to normativity in representing her woman as a constellation of identifications, then, is not single-dimensional but rather multifaceted. Norms are relegated, challenged, dissociated, and reconnected. It highlights how reiteration in terms of performativity involves not only refusal and resignification (Butler, 1990) but also a complex network of various different kinds of repeating of gendered norms.

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The author

Jianxin Liu lectures at Charles Sturt University in ESL and new literacy. He is interested in multimodality, digitisation, social media, and their implications for learning and production.