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WWW.TO-GET-HER.ORG
A GLOBAL CYBER COMMUNITY FOR TAIWANESE LESBIANS

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Social Sciences

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Ping-Ying Chang

May 2004

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ABSTRACT

WWW.TO-GET-HER.ORG A GLOBAL CYBER COMMUNITY FOR TAIWANESE LESBIANS

by Ping-Ying Chang

This thesis addresses the importance of the To-Get-Her Lez Cyber Community in understanding Taiwanese lesbians' history and culture in the 1990s. It explores the influence of the lesbian movement and various Internet technologies, Taiwan Academic Network (TANet) and the World Wide Web in particular, on the formation of Taiwanese lesbian communities.

This research reveals that while the TANet lesbian community is mainly composed of university students in Taiwan, members of the To-Get-Her community are from a more diverse background in terms of residence, age, and profession. The To-Get-Her Web site has become a nexus that connects overseas lesbians to their cultural homeland, Taiwan.

This thesis also shows that building a credible pseudonym is crucial for a To-Get-Her user in forming a lesbian identity that links cyberspace to the real world. While To-Get-Her users constantly negotiate traditional behavioral norms, they tend to accept the necessity of gender role-playing.

To All My Cyber Friends

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ABBREVIATIONS

BM	Board Master (used on the To-Get-Her Web site)
CTS	Chinese Television System
ET	Editor Team (used on the To-Get-Her Web site)
KMT	<i>Kuomintang</i> , Nationalist Party
Lalainfo	Lalainfo Workshop
MOECC	Ministry of Education's Computer Center
MOTSS	Member of The Same Sex
NCTU	National Chiao Tung University
NTU	National Taiwan University
TANet	Taiwan Academic Network.
TTV	Taiwan Television Enterprise
WZJ	<i>Women Zhi Jian</i> , Between Us

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In November 1996, three years after the first World Wide Web (WWW) browser came into existence, a Taiwanese lesbian engineer set up a Web site called *Wode Lazi Hongpei* (My Lez Homepage) as a birthday gift to her partner.¹ This was a time when Taiwan's WWW was still like a desert. The Taiwanese version of the Yahoo! search engine, Yam.com, only had an accumulated number of fewer than ten million visitors.² Only a handful of Taiwanese lesbians had built personal Web sites, and no feminist or lesbian group in Taiwan was actively using the WWW.³ In that context, nobody expected that 20,000 users would visit My Lez Homepage during the first six-month period since its commencement.⁴ In order to accommodate the increasing number of visitors, the webmaster, dingo,⁵ acquired the domain name To-Get-Her.org and changed the name of My Lez Homepage to To-Get-Her Lez Cyber Pub in December 1997. The

¹ For a guide to all acronyms that appear in this thesis, see the glossary, p. xii. "*Lazi*," a translation for "lesbian," was coined by the most famous Taiwanese lesbian novelist of the early 1990s, Chiou Miaujin. As for the origin of My Lez Homepage, see Zoesum [pseud.], "Dingo de Yongxin, Women de Zhan; Dingo de Nuli, Women de Jia!" (Dingo's Passion, Our Site; Dingo's Contribution, Our Home!) *Wan Wan eZine*, 24 May 1997, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/eZine/Issue1/windows.htm>> (1 May 2002).

² "Historical Events of Yam.Com," 2002, <<http://company.yam.com/eventlist.html>> (6 November 2002).

³ According to Yam.com, the Taiwanese Women's Information Network was the first Web site devoted to women's issues. It was not set up until March 1997, four month after the establishment of My Lez Homepage. See "The Only Soul Mate of Hsu, Chih-Mo: The Online Special Issue of Lin, Hui-Yin," *About Us: Press Releases*, 6 April 2000, <<http://company.yam.com/news/2000/20000406160243.htm>> (6 November 2002), Historical Events of Yam.Com.

⁴ Zoesum, "Dingo's Passion, Our Site; Dingo's Contribution, Our Home!"

⁵ Because dingo always spells her pseudonym with lower case d, I follow her usage in this thesis.

popularity of the To-Get-Her Web site kept growing. In January 2002, the webmasters, then an Editor Team (ET) of six members, renamed the Web site again as To-Get-Her Lez Cyber Community to reflect the goal of establishing a lesbian community in the real world. By the end of 2002, the To-Get-Her Web site was getting 20,000 visitors every month.⁶

The popularity of the To-Get-Her Web site is not an isolated phenomenon but one piece of the whole picture of Taiwanese lesbians' use of the Internet. By the end of 1994, four Bulletin Board Systems (BBSs) on Taiwan Academic Network (TANet) already had Member of The Same Sex (MOTSS) boards that hosted discussions of gay and lesbian issues.⁷ In January 1996, the Bad Daughters BBS was built explicitly for lesbians.⁸ Before dingo built My Lez Homepage, TANet BBSs had already been an important medium for networking lesbians in Taiwan.

However, contemporary researchers on Taiwanese lesbians' cyber activities have focused on TANet BBSs and overlooked the WWW, such as the To-Get-Her Lez Cyber Community.⁹ Moreover, existing studies on lesbians and gays in Taiwan often fail to

⁶ According to the HotRank counter installed at the entrance page of To-Get-Her.Org. Hotrank is a company that provides the analyses of web traffic. The analyses for the To-Get-Her Web site is available at <http://h01.hotrank.com.tw/showstats.php?myid=h01-3481>.

⁷ Since the early 1980s, the acronym motss was popular among Internet users. Nina Wakeford, "Cyberqueer," in *Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Andy Medhurst, Sally R. Munt (Washington: Cassell, 1997), 23. Ke Fei [pseud.], "Zai Wanglu Jianzao Tongxinglian Banglian" (Building a Queer Nation on the Internet), *Pots Weekly*, 1995, 26.

⁸ Ming-Hui Cheng, "Zai Xunizhong Yujian Zhenshi: Taiwan Xueshuwanglu BBS Zhan zhong de Niutongzhi Shijian" (Facing Reality in Virtual Space: The Lesbian Practice in TANet BBS) (Master's Thesis, National Taiwan University, 1999), 90-91.

⁹ Ming-Hui Cheng, "Cong Guoneiwai Niutongzhi Wangzhan Kan Kuadiyu Rentong" (The Internal and Overseas Lesbian Web Sites and the Trans-Territorial Identity), *Cities and Design*, no. 5/6 (1998): 199-209; Jia-Shin Gian, "Jiuling Niandai Taiwan Niutongzhi de Rentong Jiangou yu Yundong Jijie: Zai Kanwu Wangluo Shang Xingcheng de Niutongzhi Xin Shequn" (Taiwanese Lesbian's Identification under the

distinguish between the Internet, TANet, BBS, and the WWW. For example, Ming-Hui Cheng's "The Internal and Oversea Lesbian Web Sites and the Trans-territorial Identity" was in fact a research project only on TANet BBSs but not the Web.¹⁰ In "The Roles of the Internet in the Tongzhi (Gay and Lesbian) Equal Rights' Movement," Jung-Yi Cheng also falls short in discussing whether the WWW has played a role in the movement.¹¹

In order to remap the geography of Taiwanese lesbians' cyber community, this research focuses on two major enquiries: Why has the To-Get-Her community been invisible to scholars researching Taiwanese lesbians, and what is the importance of To-Get-Her in understanding Taiwanese lesbians' culture and communities? This research explores the following research questions: What was the social and technological context that brought out Taiwan's lesbian cyber community in the 1990s? In particular, what was the origin of the To-Get-Her Lez Cyber Community? What are the similarities and differences between a TANet BBS for lesbians and the To-Get-Her Web site? What are the demographic characteristics of To-Get-Her users? In

Queer Politics since 1990: A New Lesbian Community on the Network of Periodicals), *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies*, no. 30 (1998): 63-115; Li-Jiun Li, "Wanglu zhong de Niuxing Jijie yu Dongyuan: Yi Niuquanshanglu Xinwenwang yu Niuxingzhuyi BBS Zhan Weili" (Women's Collection and Mobilization in Cyberspace: Case Studies of Womenet and the Feminist BBS) (Master's Thesis, National Taiwan University, 1998); Chun-Ling Yang, "Shuwei Dijing: Fankan, Rentong yu Chaijianguo" (Digital Geography: Resistance, Identities and Reconstruct) (paper presented at the Third International Conference on Sexuality Education, Sexology, (Trans)Gender Studies and LesBiGay Studies, Taipei, Taiwan, 24-26 April 1998); Jung-Yi Cheng, "Wanggiwanglu zai Tongzhi Pingquanyundong zhong de Jiaose Yangjiu: Yi Taipei Changdejie Shijian Weili" (The Roles of the Internet in the Tongzhi Equal Rights' Movement: A Case Study of the Taipei Changder Street Incident), *Gender and Space*, no. 5 (1998): 145-55; Jin-Hua Chen, "Wanglu Shehui Yundong: Yi Bentu Tongzhiyundong zhi Wangshun de Jijue yu Dongyuan Weili" (Net Activism: A Case Study of the Networking and Mobilization on the Internet in Taiwan's Gay and Lesbian Movement) (Master's Thesis, National Chengchi University, 2001); Ming-Hui Cheng, "Facing Reality in Virtual Space".

¹⁰ Ming-Hui Cheng, "The Internal and Overseas Lesbian Web Sites and the Trans-Territorial Identity."

¹¹ Jung-Yi Cheng published this essay in 1998, five years after the first browser was available. Therefore, it is problematic to give this essay the title "the roles of the Internet," rather than "the roles of TANet BBSs" or "the roles of TANet," when it does not contain any discussion on the role of the WWW.

additional to research on these complex interrelationships between various Internet technologies and the formation of lesbian communities, it also investigates the relationship between technology and personal identities. The next two sections discuss in detail the theoretical frameworks and analytic methodologies of this research.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF FEMINIST RESEARCH ON LESBIANS AND CYBERSPACE

Feminist research on technology has provided valuable analyses for understanding the strategic role of information technology in women's lives. As an action call to challenge the gendered power inequality in the digital domain, Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein write,

CyberFeminism is a philosophy which acknowledges, firstly, that there are differences in power between women and men specifically in the digital discourse; and secondly, that CyberFeminists want to change that situation. . . . CyberFeminism is political, it is not an excuse for inaction in the real world, and it is inclusive and respectful of the many cultures which women inhabit.¹²

While advocating creative actions in the real world, Hawthorne and Klein stress that the importance of feminism is its ability to critique social norms and constructs, including sexism, racism, and the injustices based upon class, sexuality or ableness.¹³ For instance, they criticize Sadie Plant's libertarian cyberfeminism, which claims that women are "better culturally and psychologically" than their male counterparts in the new

¹² Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein, eds., *CyberFeminism: Connectivity, Critique, and Creativity, and Creativity* (North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1999), 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

millennium, as an approach that “work[s] only for the privileged.”¹⁴

In addition to the privileged status of the Internet, CyberFeminism points out two critical and overlapping directions for a feminist analysis related to the Internet: gender inequality in cyberspace and the uses of information technology for women. The following discussion will use these two directions as the main guided trajectories of this analysis.

First, a major branch of feminist research analyzes the inequality between women and men in information technology or gendered cyber activities. For example, Schumacher and Morahan-Martin show that, in the comparison of computer and Internet usage between female and male college students in 1989/90 and 1997, the trend of gender differences has decreased.¹⁵ However, Jane Fountain points out that while women have been predominant users of information technology in the workplace, they are poorly represented in the sector primarily responsible for the development of an Information Society.¹⁶ Instead of looking at computer and information technology as a whole, some researchers focus on certain characteristics of the Internet. Gian Pagnucci and Nicholas Mauriello report a case study on college classes that use online postings to facilitate peer response critiquing. They find that the gendered perception among students turns out to

¹⁴ In contrast to Sadie Plant’s “cyberfeminism” (lower cases), Hawthorne and Klein spell “CyberFeminism” with upper cases C and F to emphasize the feminist standpoint in their philosophy. They claim that “cyberfeminism needs to take on all these challenges [of the critical aspects] in order to become CyberFeminism.” Hawthorne and Klein, eds. *CyberFeminism*, 3, 5; Sadie Plant, “On the Matrix: Cyberfeminist Simulations,” in *Cultures of Internet: Virtual Spaces Real Histories, Living Bodies*, ed. Rob Shiels (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 42-43.

¹⁵ P. Schumacher and J. Morahan-Martin, “Gender, Internet and Computer Attitudes and Experiences,” *Computer in Human Behavior* 17 (2001), 95.

¹⁶ Jane E. Fountain, “Constructing the Information Society: Women, Information Technology, and Design,” *Technology in Society* 22 (2000): 45, 47.

limit the possibility of anonymity to “protect students, encourage those students who were shy, and even offer some people a new voice.”¹⁷ In “Writing in the Body: Gender (Re)production in Online Interaction,” Jodi O’Brien reaches a similar conclusion. Although cyberspace, particularly the Multiple User Domain (MUD) that O’Brien focuses on, provides the possibility of shifting and changing gender identities, preformulated cultural scripts are the determinant factor in dictating how we “do gender.”¹⁸

The second branch of research investigates how feminist groups use information technology for mobilization and for constructing a women’s space in the cyberworld. While the first branch tends to compare two groups of people—men and women—the second emphasizes the uses of information technology by women and for women. Researchers of this branch often investigate women-only digital domains. For example, Jean Camp analyzes the Sisters Mailing List, a forum exclusively for women in computer science and related disciplines. Camp claims that Sisters is a powerful personal resource for women and that it organizes women to act together on public issues.¹⁹ Moreover, she underscores the need for women’s spaces because “even indomitable warriors need a place to rest.”²⁰

¹⁷ Gian S. Pagnucci and Nicholas Mauriello, “The Masquerade: Gender, Identity, and Writing for the Web,” *Computers and Composition* 16 (1999), 142.

¹⁸ Jodi O’Brien, “Writing in the Body: Gender (Re)Production in Online Interaction,” in *Communities in Cyberspace*, ed. Marc A. Smith and Peter Kollock (London: Routledge, 1999), 95.

¹⁹ L. Jean Camp, “We Are Geeks, and We Are Not Guys: The Sisters Mailing List,” in *Wired Women: Gender and New Realities in Cyberspace*, ed. Lynn Cherny and Elizabeth Reba Weise (Seattle: Seal Press, 1996), 120.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

In research on Taiwanese women's mobilization via the Internet, Li-Jiun Li reports her case studies on the Womenet Web site and Taiwan's Feminists' Room BBS.²¹ As a memorial to the long-time feminist Wan-Ru Peng, who was raped and killed in November 1996, a group of young feminists built the Womenet Web site to collect online endorsement to show solidarity in the fight for social, political, and legal reforms to achieve gender equality in Taiwan.²² In early 1997, the editors of Womenet e-News became the first feminist group in Taiwan to distribute bi-weekly news reviews on women's issues through mailing lists.²³ Li also analyzes the tight networking and strong mobilization built in Taiwan's Feminists' Room BBS. Named after Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own," Feminists' Room provides more than fifty forums for feminists groups, especially for student Women's Studies clubs.²⁴ Moreover, Li briefly introduces *Lala Zitui Gongzuoshi* (Lesbian Information Advocate Workshop, Lalainfo Workshop), a lesbian group that focuses on promoting the use of BBS among Taiwanese lesbians.²⁵ However, while Li acknowledges that the difficulties of using BBS have limited Lalainfo's achievements, she seems unaware that newer information technologies, such as the WWW, have become increasingly user-friendly.²⁶

Although the approaches of both branches are important, neither can be directly

²¹ Li, "Women's Collection and Mobilization in Cyberspace," 102-07.

²² Chang-Ling Huang et al., "In Memory of Peng Wan-Ru: A Proposal for the Women's Rights Day," November 1996, <<http://www.womenet.org.tw/peng/indexen.html>> (1 May 2002).

²³ The Womenet e-News mailing lists were closed in March 1999. The Womenet e-News are archived on the Womenet Web site at <http://www.womenet.org.tw>.

²⁴ Ibid., 91, 97.

²⁵ Ibid., 61-66.

²⁶ Ibid., 63.

applied to the research on the To-Get-Her Lez Cyber Community without some significant modifications. To begin, while the representation of lesbian genders in cyberspace is an interesting research topic, socially constructed heterosexist gender inequality is not a major concern in the investigation of To-Get-Her, because the absolute majority of its users are of the same sex.²⁷ Second, although To-Get-Her is a women's space constructed with information technology, there has been no direct connection between any feminist group and the origin and the on-going management of To-Get-Her. Even though this does not mean that To-Get-Her users and the ET do not support feminism, a research approach that assumes the existence of an activist group preceding the construction of such women's space is not appropriate to the case of To-Get-Her. Such an approach risks neglecting the transformation from a personal and impulsive action into a collective effort. Moreover, it risks overlooking those who contribute to the movement yet do not feel comfortable calling themselves activists, such as dingo, the founder of the To-Get-Her Web site.²⁸

Donna Haraway's cyborg feminism provides some helpful insight into the relationships between the feminist movement, identities and technology. The image of the cyborg—a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism—is central to

²⁷ For the discussion on the representation of lesbian genders on To-Get-Her, see Chapter 6. Although purposely built as a Web site for lesbians, To-Get-Her does not restrict or verify the identity of its users. In fact, at least one heterosexual man has been known to be a frequent and well-accepted user. For more details on To-Get-Her's access policy, see Chapter 4.

²⁸ In private conversations, dingo always referred to activists as "they" or "you" and never counted herself as one of the activists. In the article that she wrote for *When the Rainbow Flag Raises: My Experience in the Tongzhi Movement, 1990-2001*, dingo also referred to activists as "you." See dingo [Yi-Yi, Huang], "Wodui Taiwan Tongzhiyundong de Yixie Xinlihua" (Some Sincere Advices to Taiwan's Tongzhi Movement, in *Yangqi Caihongqi: Wode Tongzhiyundong Jinyan, 1990-2001* (When the Rainbow Flag Raises: My Experience in the Tongzhi Movement, 1990-2001), ed. Huei-chiou Chuang (Taipei: Psygarden, 2002), 187.

Haraway's arguments.²⁹ Against "dualisms of mind and body, animal and machine, idealism and materialism in the social practices, symbolic formulations, and physical artifacts associated with 'high technology' and scientific culture," Haraway declares that cyborg feminism is "about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work."³⁰ She believes that, "There is nothing about being 'female' that naturally binds women," and she criticizes that "much of the U.S. left and U.S. feminism has been . . . endless splitting and searches for a new essential unity."³¹ Haraway concludes:

[T]aking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology, and so means embracing the skillful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our parts.³²

While not every feminist agrees with Haraway that "[c]yborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves," how information technology has reconstructed the boundaries of daily life will be an important consideration in the analysis of the To-Get-Her cyber community.³³

Contemporary research on Taiwanese lesbians as related to the investigation of To-Get-Her focuses on three categories: (1) the lesbian movement in the 1990s, (2)

²⁹ Donna J. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 154.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

³² *Ibid.*, 181.

³³ For critique of cyborg feminism, see Renate Klein, "The Politics of Cyberfeminism: If I'm a Cyborg Rather Than a Goddess Will Patriarchy Go Away?" and Susan Hawthorne, "Cyborgs, Virtual Bodies and Organic Bodies: Theoretical Feminist Responses," in *Cyberfeminism: Connectivity, Critique, and Creativity*, ed. Renate Klein and Susan Hawthorne (North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1999), 185-249.

lesbian genders and the new community in the 1990s, and (3) the old lesbian bar community. In the first category, Jia-Chen Ni's "Discourse and Agency in Lesbian and Gay Movement in Taiwan" (1996) probably is the earliest study. Ni's analysis of the gay and lesbian movement in Taiwan concisely reflects on the events led by activist groups and the backlash they encountered.³⁴ In "The Dialectic Relationship between the Gay and Lesbian Movement and the Theory of Social Movements," Yu-Lin Lai proposes that a gay and lesbian movement cannot be adequately analyzed without considering the factors of economic, social and cultural transformation and the influences of other social movements.³⁵

It is also in the first category that we see some studies on Taiwanese lesbian's cyber activities. These studies tend to treat the Internet as a tool for mobilization in Taiwan's gay and lesbian movement. Ming-Hui Cheng's "Facing Reality in Virtual Space: The Lesbian Practice on TANet BBSs" and Jin-Hua Chen's "Net Activism: A Case Study of the Networking and Mobilization on the Internet in Taiwan's Gay and Lesbian Movement," are two such examples, and both confirm the potential of further advancing the movement by utilizing the Internet.³⁶

Nonetheless, researchers like Cheng and Chen fall short in two distinct but interrelated aspects. First of all, the focus on TANet BBSs often leads to neglectful or

³⁴ Jia-Chen Ni, "Tongxinglian Lunshu yu Yundong Zhuti zui" (Taiwan Discourse and Agency in Lesbian and Gay Movement in Taiwan) (paper presented at the First International Conference on Sex Education, Sexology, Gender Studies and Lesbian & Gay Studies, National Taiwan University, 1996).

³⁵ Yu-Lin Lai, "Tongzhiyundong yu Shehui yundong Lilun de Bianzhen Guanxi" (The Dialectic Relationship between the Gay and Lesbian Movement and the Theory of Social Movements) (paper presented at the Fifth International Conference on Sexuality Education, Sexology, Trans/Gender Studies and LesBiGay Studies, Taipei, Taiwan, 2000).

³⁶ Ming-Hui Cheng, "Facing Reality in Virtual Space"; Chen, "Net Activism."

inaccurate interpretation of the WWW. For instance, Cheng claims, "The WWW tends to be one-directional information distribution or discussion."³⁷ This certainly is not the case with the To-Get-Her Web site, which provides interactive forums and an online chat room.³⁸ Based on this inaccurate interpretation, Cheng further asserts that "BBS has the strengths of both the WWW and IRC [Internet Relay Chat]. . . . The diverse selections provided by BBS let *every* [emphasis mine] type of lesbian find a comfortable space here."³⁹ However, subsequent discuss will show in greater detail that the To-Get-Her Web site is popular precisely because it has some strengths that BBS does not provide and not every lesbian feels comfortable on BBS.

Second, existing research generally lacks an adequate analysis on the role of information technology in constructing a lesbian community. Cheng and Chen, for example, focus on how lesbians use TANet BBSs for mobilization and networking, but they do not go farther and investigate whether every Internet user shares the same privilege of access to TANet BBSs. Their focus tends to oversimplify cyberspace and see it as a libertarian imaginary. It also fails to provide a materialist analysis of information technology, at a time when the rapid development of information technology is continuously reshaping the geography of Taiwan's lesbian community. As a result, researchers cannot find an effective direction for the new wave of the movement because they do not have an adequate map of the community and enough understanding of their

³⁷ Ming-Hui Cheng, "Facing Reality in Virtual Space," 20.

³⁸ Cheng published her thesis in January 1999. By that time To-Get-Her was no longer the only lesbian Web site that provided online forums for Taiwanese lesbians.

³⁹ Ibid., 22.

tool—information technology.

Finally, some existing studies on Taiwan's lesbian culture and community have laid the foundation for the research on the To-Get-Her Lez Cyber Community. Mei-Li Cheng's *Daughters' Circle* (1997) is an anthropological study on Taiwanese lesbians' genders, families and lives and provides an overview of the whole Taiwanese lesbian culture and community in the mid-1990s.⁴⁰ Another anthropologist, Yengning Chao, focuses on the traditional lesbian bar community and analyzes relationships between gender, power and the state.⁴¹

Chiao-Ting Chang and Jia-Shin Gian, on the other hand, also research the same period as Cheng but they focus on more specific groups of Taiwanese lesbians. Chang analyzes lesbians' resistance against homophobic surveillance in high schools and on university campuses.⁴² Gian highlights the important role of young feminist groups and lesbian college students in the formation of the lesbian community in the 1990s.⁴³ Gian also makes a claim that paper publications from these feminist and lesbian groups are the major networking medium for Taiwan's lesbian community.

While all of these scholars do include some analyses of Taiwanese lesbians' gender identities, the most complete and updated investigation is Chuan-Fen Chang's *Lesbians*

⁴⁰ Mei-Li Cheng, *Niuer Quan: Taiwan Niutongzhi de Xingbie, Jiating yu Quenei Shenghuo* (Daughters' Circle: Taiwanese Lesbians' Genders, Families and Lives) (Taipei: Fembooks Publication, 1997).

⁴¹ For the collection of Yengning Chao's work, see *Daizhe Caomao Daochu Liushing: Xingbie, Quanli, Guojia* (Traveling with a Straw Hat: Gender, Power and the State) (Taipei: Juliu Publisher, 2001).

⁴² Chiao-Ting Chang, *Xunfu yu Dikang: Shiwei Xiaoyuan Niujingying Lazi de Qingyu Yayi* (Campus Memory, Identity and the Emerging of Lesbian Subjectivities in Taiwan) (Taipei: Tonsan Books, 2000).

⁴³ Gian, "Taiwanese Lesbian's Identification."

Like This and That (2001).⁴⁴ Chang's work provides a sophisticated analysis on the variety of styles, characteristics and desires of lesbian gender roles and relationships, and it has become the new foundation for future research on Taiwanese lesbians' genders and culture.⁴⁵

RESEARCH DESIGN

Since I have been a member of the Editor Team (ET) for the To-Get-Her Web since 1998, choosing To-Get-Her as a research topic seems natural to me. However, the process of determining a proper approach and a manageable project for this research was much more difficult than I ever expected. A few words on my role in the To-Get-Her community and its relationship to this research are necessary here.

I first found out about the existence of My Lez Homepage in early 1997, about three months after dingo built it. The thrill of finding a Web site with an online chat room and interactive forums designed for Taiwanese lesbians was overwhelming. Within days I read almost all the articles on My Lez Homepage and began to post some of my own writings. By the end of 1997, I had become the host, also called Board Master on To-Get-Her, for the Laws and Rights Board. When dingo organized the ET in August 1998 to share the managerial tasks of To-Get-Her, I became one of the ET members. Since then, I have been an active ET member for both the technical development and the non-technical management of the To-Get-Her Web site.

⁴⁴ Chuan-Fen Chang, *Ai de Ziyoushi: Niutongzhi Gushishu* (Lesbians Like This and That) (Taipei: Reading Times Publishing, 2001).

⁴⁵ Ibid., 279.

My involvement as an ET member provides both advantages and disadvantages for me as a researcher on the To-Get-Her Lez Cyber Community. On the one hand, my hands-on experiences of webmastering To-Get-Her has given me more inside understanding of the whole Web site than ordinary users and, possibly, most researchers. I also knew well where to look for necessary data and how to evaluate and interpret them. On the other hand, however, ethical concerns are unavoidable for me both as a researcher and a webmaster. In particular, besides my responsibility as an ET member, I was a frequent user of the site who often posted articles online and engaged in vigorous debates. I considered withdrawing from the online discussion and the ET during my research period. However, I found it difficult to find a suitable person to take over my webmastering tasks. As a result, I reduced my participation in the online discussion on To-Get-Her, but I did not suspend my position as an ET member.

This research, therefore, is also an effort of balancing between being a webmaster and a researcher, rather than simply choosing between these two roles. I integrated the demographic surveys of To-Get-Her users for this research with the monthly polls that the ET conducted on the To-Get-Her Web site. As an ET member, I was able to host these surveys as I would host other online activities on the To-Get-Her Web site. Users participated in those surveys as they joined other activities on To-Get-Her. The initial statistical results of these surveys did not become my research data until I had posted them to the To-Get-Her Historical Museum.⁴⁶

In addition to demographic surveys, this research bases on analyses of articles

⁴⁶ The URL of the To-Get-Her Historical Museum is <http://www.to-get-her.org/history.shtml>.

posted on the To-Get-Her Web site. This is a crucial aspect of my research design because most literature about Taiwanese lesbians' cyber activities is based on interviews. Reading and posting articles are the main reason that Taiwanese lesbians visit and utilize the To-Get-Her Web site. Over the years, To-Get-Her has accumulated a tremendous number of articles written by countless lesbian users.⁴⁷ This approach, therefore, is an attempt to demonstrate the richness of these contributions and is based on a careful examination of these primary sources.

This research also emphasizes historical analysis of Taiwan's Internet in the 1990s. Most studies on Taiwanese lesbians' activities in cyberspace only focus on the history of Taiwan's lesbian movement or community. However, cyberspace is not an ordinary space; it only exists and is useful because of the utilization of technology. This research supplies this missing axis to contemporary research on Taiwanese lesbian's cyber community.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a case study of the history and culture of the To-Get-Her Lez Cyber Community and it intends to bring out the complex interrelationships between various Internet technologies and the formations of lesbian communities. Its approach is ethnographic with multi-methods that, as Shulamit Reinharz defines in *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, "focus on interpretation, rely on the researcher's immersion in social settings, and aim for intersubjective understanding between researchers and the

⁴⁷ As of January 2003, the total size of the text files accumulated on the To-Get-Her Web site was more than 350 MB.

person(s) studied.”⁴⁸ This research is thus primarily based on my long-term participant observation of the To-Get-Her community. I have been a frequent user of the To-Get-Her Web site since early 1997 and one of its webmasters since August 1998. Such direct experiences enable me to conduct qualitative analysis on the archives of articles posted on To-Get-Her’s discussion boards between 1998 and early 2003. The focus in this part is on the cultural characteristics of the To-Get-Her cyber community.

As I have mentioned earlier, this research also relies on the demographic surveys that I have conducted on the To-Get-Her Web site. As an ET member, I conducted two surveys in July 2002, and four between November 2002 and February 2003. In order to keep these surveys consistent with the regular online activities held on To-Get-Her, I asked only one question in each survey and set the survey period to one month. After each online survey was closed, I posted its result to the To-Get-Her Historical Museum, where the major activities sponsored by To-Get-Her were publicly displayed. Because these surveys were conducted at different times, the numbers of responses varied, ranging from 328 to 454, with an average of 384. Rather than using raw figures, I relied on percentages when comparing the survey results.

The third focus of this research is to reconstruct the historical connection between Taiwan’s lesbian community and the development of Taiwan’s Internet. In order to trace the impact of the development of the state-sponsored Internet technology in Taiwan, I analyze government reports, mainly the meeting minutes of the TANet Technical Committee and the documents from Taiwan’s Ministry of Education Computer Center

⁴⁸ Shulamit Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 46.

(MOECC). During my fieldwork in Taiwan from January to July 2002, I observed the activities and cultural characteristics of the major lesbian groups based on TANet BBSs daily. This investigation is part of the foundation for the comparison between the To-Get-Her community and the BBS community.

MAJOR ARGUMENTS AND ORGANIZATION OF CHAPTERS

Chapter Two sketches a general historical and cultural landscape of Taiwan's lesbians in the 1990s. For Taiwan's lesbian and feminist movements in the 1990s, the university campus was an important location for lesbians. Publishing and distribution were important practices for lesbian activists, and they networked in what Jia-Shin Gian called a lesbian "publication community."⁴⁹

Chapter Three examines the rise of TANet and its influences on the development of Taiwan's lesbian community in the 1990s. In the early 1990s, the government-subsidized TANet in Taiwan successfully developed localized Internet user environments in Chinese language. The convenience of using TANet on campus soon turned TANet BBSs into a popular communication medium among university students. In particular, lesbian student groups have gradually transformed from a "publication community" to an "Internet community," or more precisely, a TANet BBS community. However, the popularity of TANet also leads scholars to neglect new WWW technology and, to certain extent, those lesbians who are not part of the TANet BBS community.

Chapter Four investigates the rise of the To-Get-Her community and its connection

⁴⁹ Gian, "Taiwanese Lesbian's Identification," 89-90.

with the powerful information technology, the WWW. While TANet BBSs are intimately affiliated with the state-owned educational Internet resources, the advantages of new WWW technology provide the possibility of building a *personal* Web site. With her expertise in WWW technology, To-Get-Her's founder was able to build a Web site that provides functionality similar to that of TANET BBSs and has its special features. As a result, the To-Get-Her Web site became a new cyber community center for Taiwanese lesbians.

Chapter Five presents the evidence to argue that To-Get-Her and TANet BBSs form two different communities. The analysis of the demographically in terms of To-Get-Her users shows that they are from a diverse demographical background in terms of residence, age, and profession. While the TANet BBS lesbian community is mainly composed of university students in Taiwan, To-Get-Her is a global community for Taiwanese lesbians.

Chapter Six explores the importance and characteristics of the culture and identities of the To-Get-Her cyber community. In this global community, a user ID is not just a convenient means to maintaining anonymity, it is also an identity formation process that links cyberspace to the real world. Moreover, the To-Get-Her Web site has become a nexus that connects overseas lesbians to their cultural homeland, Taiwan. With regards to the lesbian identities in Taiwan, the To-Get-Her community is more practical than theoretical. While To-Get-Her users constantly negotiate traditional behavioral norms, they tend to accept the necessity of gender role-playing.

Chapter Seven provides a summary and sets out the theoretical implications of this

study. This research complements existing studies on the history, movement, and community of Taiwan's lesbians, in particular, those of the TANet BBS lesbian community. This concluding chapter will also suggest some possible directions for future research on Taiwanese lesbian communities, cultures and movements.

CHAPTER 2

LESBIAN CULTURE AND MOVEMENT IN TAIWAN

Any careful research on Taiwanese lesbians must include considerations of the complicated historical and cultural context in Taiwan. This chapter begins with a brief account of the historical and cultural factors that have most affected Taiwanese lesbians since the early twentieth century. It then introduces the characteristics of the traditional lesbian culture shaped by those factors and of the lesbian movement in Taiwan. In the 1990s, the lesbian movement in Taiwan developed a unique coming-out strategy for expanding the lesbian community. It created a new gender culture among Taiwanese lesbians. The end of this chapter considers which parts of the lesbian community managed to gain the greatest visibility in this historical process.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Two major waves of immigrants have shaped contemporary Taiwanese culture. Of the 23 million people who live in Taiwan, less than 2 percent are aboriginal, whose descendants have inhabited Taiwan for thousands of years. The first wave of immigrants was mostly from Fukien and Kwangtung, two land-poor provinces on the east coast of China. They came to Taiwan between the early seventeenth century and 1895, the year when Taiwan became a Japanese colony. About 85 percent of today's Taiwanese are the descendants of the first-wave immigrants. The second wave began

when World War II ended and the *Kuomintang* (Nationalist Party, KMT) government took over Taiwan as part of the Republic of China. This immigration continued until the KMT lost the civil war to the Communist party and retreated to Taiwan in 1949. The second-wave immigrants and their descendants are called the mainlanders and make up 14 percent of the population in Taiwan.¹

Half a century of Japanese colonization left Taiwanese with mixed feelings. When WWII ended in 1945, the Taiwanese eagerly celebrated their freedom from colonial rule. In less than two years, however, the KMT governor had already disappointed the Taiwanese. On February 28, 1947, a small conflict between mainlander policemen and a saleswoman in Taipei quickly accelerated into an island-wide rebellion. This rebellion went on for several months until the KMT sent army from Mainland China and killed and arrested thousands of Taiwanese.² The February 28 incident sharply divided the Taiwanese from the mainlanders and forged a persistent distrust between these two groups. For the Taiwanese, the February 28 incident showed that the KMT was nothing more than a new outside ruler. Worse, the mainlanders were even more brutal than the Japanese. For the mainlanders, however, this incident meant that the Taiwanese had been badly influenced by Japan and had lost their Chinese identity.

When the KMT retreated to Taiwan in 1949, it declared Taiwan “the base for reclaiming China.” To achieve this goal, the KMT began to forge a new culture and

¹ Franklin Ng, *The Taiwanese Americans* (Westport, CT: Greenworld Press, 1998), 4.

² *Ibid.*, 10.

identity in Taiwan. More precisely, the KMT government wanted a new *Chinese* identity, not a Taiwanese one. Mandarin was the only official language used in school, and Taiwanese dialect was strictly prohibited. Textbooks covered Chinese literature, history and geography in detail, but mentioned Taiwan only briefly. In contrast to the Cultural Revolution in Communist China, the KMT utilized Confucianism, its filial obedience and family value in particular, to fortify its regime.

While the KMT implemented martial law in order to restrict the political rights of the Taiwanese, it adopted American capitalism for Taiwan's economic development. Before the lifting of martial law in 1986, those who participated in any social movement often put their lives at risk as well as their families' future. Whether by force or choice, the Taiwanese kept themselves away from politics. They were devoted to the pursuit of economic success. As a result, Taiwan's industrialization and economic development was rapid and successful. By the 1970s, Taiwan had already become one of the Newly Industrialized Countries (NIC) and was named one of the "Four Dragons in Asia."³ Moreover, American capitalism and culture had become a center of admiration and symbol of success. American influences have filled the cultural gap after Japanese colonialism was forced out of Taiwan.

These intertwining historical and cultural forces have shaped Taiwanese lesbian culture. For instance, a lesbian bar is called a T-bar in Taiwan, because a masculine lesbian is called "T" and "T" is the abbreviation for tomboy. The lesbian community seems comfortable with using an English term and does not feel a strong need to create

³ Thomas Gold. *State and Society in the Taiwan Miracle*. (New York and London: M. E. Sharpe, 1986).

another term in Chinese. Similarly, ever since the founding of To-Get-Her Lez Cyber Pub in 1996, none of its visitors has suggested that it should adopt a Chinese name. Just like many real-life T-bars in Taiwan, To-Get-Her only has an English name.

It is also in the context of these intertwining forces that Taiwanese activists have had to create their strategies to advance the lesbian and gay movement. Before a closer examination is presented in the next sections, a brief explanation of the term *Tongzhi* (comrade) will exemplify the creative strategies used. “Tongzhi” originally meant members of the same revolutionary party; in most cases, the party was either the Community Party or the KMT. Originating from Hong Kong, “Tongzhi” was first adopted in Taiwan in the 1992 queer film festival as a synonym for gay and lesbian.⁴ It also symbolizes the common will among Taiwanese gays and lesbians to fight for their rights and liberation. The appropriation of *Tongzhi* as a substitute for the stigmatized “homosexual” and “homosexuality” is now widely practiced, not only by gays and lesbians in Taiwan but also by the global Chinese community.

T-BARS AND LESBIAN CULTURE BEFORE THE 1990S

Despite the general prevailing hardship, Taiwanese lesbians had found ways of survival before the lesbian movement that began in 1990. After World War II, American military bases in Taiwan brought prosperity to entertainment and sex industries. In addition to the traditional sex districts established in the period of Japanese colonialism, western-style dance halls, cafes, bars and pubs appeared as so-called

⁴ Hsiao-Hung Chang, “Taiwan Queer Valentines,” in *Trajectories: Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, ed. Kuan-Hsing Chen (New York: Routledge, 1998), 284.

modernized social spaces. According to anthropologist Yengning Chao, these Americanized public social spaces became the earliest survival spaces for Taiwanese lesbians.⁵ In the 1950s and 1960s, before gay bars existed, a group of lesbians were socially active in the luxury, westernized dance halls and restaurants. By the late 1960s, gay bars were appearing in traditional and modernized social districts, and lesbians were known to visit these gay bars frequently. Chao and Mei-Li Cheng, another anthropologist who studied Taiwanese lesbians, both reported that Taiwan's first lesbian-specific bar, T-bar, opened in the mid-1980s.⁶ After that, lesbians gradually formed a community around those clearly identified T-bars.

Cheng and Chao provide, however, different interpretations of the above history. Cheng claims that lesbians took advantage of social ignorance of lesbianism and that, to some extent, they enjoyed the sexual freedom in the spaces developed by western colonial culture.⁷ In contrast, Chao's critical analysis claims that these spaces infantilized Taiwanese lesbian culture. Chao points out that labeling a Taiwanese butch as a tomboy was an implication of social immaturity.⁸ Chao argues that in those modernized public social spaces, a T was tolerated only as a boy but never treated as a "real man."

⁵ Chao, "U.S. Space Shuttles Going to the Moon," 59.

⁶ According to Cheng's informants, the first lesbian bar was probably opened in 1987. See Mei-Li Cheng, *Daughters' Circle*, 234. Yengning Chao, "Bufen Huojian Dau luelie: Shrluen Taiwan Niutongzhi Luenshu de Neitzaihua Jrmin Shianshiang (U.S. Space Shuttles Going to the Moon: Global Metaphors and Local Strategies in Building up Taiwanese Lesbian Identities)," in *Daizhe Caomao Daochu Liushing: Xingbie, Quanli, Guojia* (Traveling with a Straw Hat: Gender, Power and the State) (Taipei: Juliu Publisher, 2001), 57.

⁷ Mei-Li Cheng, *Daughter's Circle*, 189-90.

⁸ Chao, "U.S. Space Shuttles Going to the Moon," 60.

In Chao's opinion, the "American craze" of Cheng's informants creates an imaginary sexually liberated past. Chao identifies the socially enforced infantilization of T and points out the similarity between this infantilization and the cross-cultural phenomenon of treating adult women as immature boys. However, the American craze did not just happen only to some lesbians but also to the majority of Taiwanese people. In fact, Chao fails to analyze why her own informant also commented: "'Tomboy,' this English word sounds pretty good, doesn't it?"⁹

The origin of Taiwan's lesbian community calls for more investigation, but what is more important to our present discussion is how Taiwanese lesbians built up survival spaces in T-bars and created their T/*Po* culture. The traditional Taiwanese lesbians' T/*Po* culture was broadly similar to the American butch/femme culture before the 1970s.¹⁰ Since the 1960s, Taiwanese lesbians have been using the term "T," an abbreviation for tomboy, which corresponds to the English word "butch." A "T-bar" signals a lesbian bar. "*Po*," on the other hand, means "femme," because "T's *Lau-Po* (wife) should, of course, be called *Po*."¹¹

The T-bars of the 1980s strengthened the T/*Po* culture with the flavor of a secret society. As a protective mechanism, most T-bars accepted new customers only through a network of reliable customers. Once a lesbian entered a T-bar, she would be initiated into choosing a gender role as either T or *Po*, and she would learn to behave accordingly.

⁹ Ibid., 62-63.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Penguin Book, 1993).

¹¹ Mei-Li Cheng, *Daughters' Circle*, 131.

She would also choose a nickname to protect her real identity. These practices functioned as initiation rituals that one had to go through to become a member of the T-bar community. Moreover, because most of these rituals were unknown to outsiders, the lesbian community had been nicknamed *Quanzi* (“the circle”) to symbolize its secrecy.¹² Even to this day, some Taiwanese lesbians still call themselves *Quan Nei Ren* (“insiders of the circle”) and refer to the acceptance of their own lesbian identity as entering the circle.

Although T-bars did form a lesbian community and create a lesbian sub-culture at the time, how representative that was of Taiwanese lesbianism was problematic at best. According to the testimonies of Chao’s and Cheng’s informants, the number of T-bars was sparse and T-bar owners and customers were often the same group of people.¹³ It is unclear how many lesbians ever knew the locations of T-bars and had managed to join in before the early 1990s.

On the other hand, romantic friendship between women of all ages has been popular in Taiwan’s history and society. Unlike male homosexuality, lesbianism is more often overlooked or denied than stigmatized. *Tongxing Ai*, which literally means “same-sex love,” has been socially acceptable as long as it does not involve sexual activities, which are condemned as *Tongxing Lian* (homosexuality). Therefore, some lesbian couples manage to live together under the mask of *Tongxing Ai*, if they do not publicly display their *Tongxing Lian*. Girls’ schools, sexually segregated factories,

¹² Mei-Li Cheng, *Daughters’ Circle*, 119-20.

¹³ Chao, “U.S. Space Shuttles Going to the Moon,” 72.

women's prisons, and the middle-class women who adopted a Taiwanese-style "Boston marriage"—all exemplify the possibilities of Taiwanese lesbianism that contemporary researchers have overlooked.¹⁴

Despite that Taiwanese lesbianism consists of more than the T-bar community, it is undeniable that the T-bar was the only visible lesbian community before the Tongzhi movement of the 1990s. In fact, the Tongzhi movement had little effect on the old T-bar community. It was more about carving out new public space for lesbians and reinterpreting Taiwanese lesbianism and lesbian identity. The following sections will analyze the new Taiwanese lesbian community that emerged from the lesbian movement of the 1990s.

WZJ AND COLLECTIVELY COMING OUT

The first lesbian group in Taiwan, *Women Zhi Jian* (Between Us, WZJ), was founded in 1990. WZJ was an underground, lesbian-specific, semi-secret society. Although some gay-friendly publications, such as the leading feminist periodical, *Awakening*, introduced the existence of WZJ, its only published contact information was a post office box address.¹⁵

WZJ's first priority was to maintain a safe space for existing members. It was

¹⁴ For the suppression of lesbianism in girls' senior high schools, see Chiao-Ting Chang, *Campus Memory, Identity and the Emerging of Lesbian Subjectivities in Taiwan*. However, Chang's analyses focused only on the Taipei Municipal First Girls' Senior High School, and it only covered the period from the late 1980s to the early 1990s.

¹⁵ Women Zhi Jian, "Niutongxinglian yu Niuxingzhuyi de Guanxi: Cong Ruixu dao Women Zhi Jian (The Relationship between Lesbianism and Feminism: From Adrienne Rich to WZJ)," *Awakening* 7, no. 98 (1990): 24-25.

less concerned with the rapid recruitment of more members. In the early days of WZJ, new members had to go through a verification process that sometimes lasted for half a year.¹⁶ During this process, the “new friend” communicated with an assigned member by letters or phone calls.¹⁷ She would not be formally accepted into the WZJ family until her lesbian identity and personal reliability were established. Only then would the new friend be introduced to other members and allowed to take part freely in the activities of WZJ. This gate-keeping approach, indeed, was not much different from that of T-bars because both groups showed the same caution towards outsiders. This seemed to be a successful policy for WZJ. Although some members felt uncomfortable about the verification process, WZJ did not fall victim to journalists’ attention.¹⁸

Moreover, WZJ provided an alternative image and a new lifestyle for Taiwanese lesbians; “new friend” took the place of “new customer.” In addition to T-bars, Taiwanese lesbians could join support groups, social activities and reading clubs; all of these were hosted by WZJ, a well-protected community that its members could fully trust. To outside society, WZJ managed to present a new, positive image of lesbians, instead of immediately and vigilantly confronting its heterosexuality. This image also empowered many closeted lesbians who had internalized the stereotype of homosexuality as sickness and abnormality. With their persistent efforts to disseminate a positive image of lesbians, WZJ and a young group of lesbians who identified with that image

¹⁶ For example, Yengning Chao reported that she had to wait for more than a month until she passed several tests of her “real identity.” Chao, “U.S. Space Shuttles Going to the Moon,” 70, 80.

¹⁷ WZJ called their newly joined members as “new friends.” Mei-Li Cheng, *Daughters’ Circle*, 233.

¹⁸ See Chapter 3 for the analysis on the hacker attack on Taiwan’s Feminists’ Room BBS, and Chapter 6 for the CTS incident caused by journalists.

gradually formed a new lesbian community.

Nonetheless, the media's spying, peeping, outing, and fabricating of lesbianism have always been a terrible threat to the lesbian community. A TTV News and World Report incident in 1992 epitomized what the lesbian movement had to go through in the coming decade. In a special series on lesbianism, TTV News and World Report showed scenes taken with a hidden camera in a T-bar, Haven. It distorted sections of an interview with a popular singer with the reporter's subtitles to allude to her lesbianism. Such reports were not new, but this was the first time that a lesbian group stepped into the public domain to defend lesbians' rights of privacy. WZJ, feminist groups and many well-known writers and journalists endorsed a statement on the ethics of news reporting that demanded respect for homosexuals' privacy. This resulted in the resignation of the producer and the main reporter of TTV News Report.¹⁹

To demonstrate the existence of gays and lesbians without compromising the protection of personal security, Taiwan's Tongzhi movement developed a collective coming-out strategy. This strategy involved sending collective messages to the public in the name of the gay and lesbian groups, instead of coming out individually. In the TTV incident in 1992, for instance, WZJ sent their statement of protest to all major newspapers. In the first public hearing on homosexuality in 1993, gay-supportive activists, themselves not necessarily gay or lesbian, acted as the representatives of six lesbian and gay collectives.²⁰

¹⁹ For more details and analyses of this incident, see Chuan-Fen Chang, *Giemei "Xi" Chiang: Niutongzhi Yungdongxue* (Against the Wall: Lesbian Activism) (Taipei: Unitas Publishing, 1998), 55-62.

²⁰ Tongzhi Gongzoufang, ed., *Fanqishi Zhi Yue: Cujin Tungxing Lian Renquan Gongtinghui Jishi*

By the mid-1990s, the collective coming-out strategy evolved into its most developed form. Members of many Tongzhi groups wore masks when taking part in several feminist protests in 1996 and 1997. Wearing masks in front of the media and speaking for themselves thus became the most distinctive feature of the collective coming-out strategy. Wearing masks was not only a way for speaking up in public spaces; it also embodied the abstract concept of Tongzhi identity. The meaning of the mask had changed from hiding to *defining* the Tongzhi identity. It was such a success that some individuals reported how they felt compelled to wear masks in order to identify with the Tongzhi community.²¹

This “very Taiwanese style” of coming-out strategy was necessary and effective in creating a lesbian movement, but it had limitations.²² While collective coming-out enhanced Taiwanese lesbians’ space inside the heterosexist closet, it did not make the closet disappear. Various forms of voyeurism toward lesbians did not stop after the TTV incident. The Chinese Television System (CTS) incident in August 1998, for example, was almost identical to the TTV incident. In a special news series called “Lesbian Bar/Alternative Paradises,” the CTS aired scenes videotaped with hidden cameras in a T-bar. This caused some lesbians to be identified by their families and coworkers. The heterosexist closet will not disappear but have to be destroyed, either individually or collectively. Otherwise it will always be painful when the mask is

(Anti-Discrimination Bill: Report of the Public Hearing for Promoting Homosexual Human Rights) (Taipei: Tongxueguan, 2000), 6-9.

²¹ Chao, “U.S. Space Shuttles Going to the Moon,” 37-38.

²² Chitianxiaosheng [pseud.], “Shengli, Yinxiong, huo Zhanluanjia: ‘Xianshen’ yu Xianjieduan Taiwan Tongzhiyundong de Fazhan ji qi Yiyi” (Sacrifice, Hero, or Strategist: ‘Coming out’ in the Development of Taiwan’s Contemporary Tongzhi Movement and its Meanings) *Star Quarterly*, no. 3 (1997): 74.

violently peeled off before a lesbian is totally ready to step out her closet.

This section has examined two important factors in the rise of Taiwan's lesbian community and movement in the 1990s. First, activist groups like WZJ strived to build a new and positive image of lesbians and became new social centers for the lesbian community. Second, with the success of the collective coming-out strategy, Taiwanese lesbians found a way to present their collective image and voice to the public. The next section will discuss a different factor that was crucial to the success of the lesbian movement in Taiwan: its close connection to the feminist movement.

TAIWAN'S FEMINIST MOVEMENT AND THE LESBIAN PUBLICATION COMMUNITY

In 1980s, Taiwan had a lone gay rights activist, but no gay movement. Jia-Wei Chi devoted himself to preventing the spread of AIDS and tried to raise public understanding of homosexuality. However, he failed to remove the stigma attached to homosexuals and generated little support from the local gay community. A mass lesbian movement would also have to wait. The crucial opportunity did not come until the revival of the feminist movement in the mid-1980s when a generation of female college students and young professors passionately joined the feminist movement. Many of those activists came out as lesbians years later. This feminist movement provided fertile ground for young activists to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to mobilize a much larger-scale lesbian movement in the 1990s.

In feminist publications, we find evidence that these two movements were

interwoven. It was not a one-directional learning process for lesbian activists. In 1997, Mei-Li Cheng, published the first monograph on Taiwanese lesbians. From 1989 to 1990, Cheng served as chief editor of the periodical of Taiwan's oldest and leading feminist organization, the Awakening Foundation. During Cheng's editorship, the earliest introduction of the first lesbian group in Taiwan, WZJ, appeared in an article "The Relationship between Lesbianism and Feminism: From Adrienne Rich to Women Zhi Jian."²³ Some of the editors of the first lesbian magazine, *Ai Bao* (The Lovely Report), were also editors for *Awakening* in the early 1990s.²⁴ Y-Axis, a feminist discussion group originated from a monthly editorial meeting of *Awakening* in 1989, was another important example.²⁵ Motivated by a strong desire for learning, the young editors invited their friends to join them and then developed their meetings into conscious-raising sessions. Months later, Y-Axis grew into a study group and the name "Y-Axis" was adopted to indicate women's alternative viewpoint. The members of Y-Axis studied and translated the feminist and lesbian theories of Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Gayle Rubin, and Christine Delphy, and they published some of their writings in newspapers.²⁶

²³ Cheng seems to be the author of this introductory article. Mei-Li Cheng, *Daughters' Circle*, 5; Women Zhi Jian, "Niutongxinglian yu Niuxingzhuyi de Guanxi: Cong Ruixu dao Women Zhi Jian (The Relationship between Lesbianism and Feminism: From Adrienne Rich to WZJ)," *Awakening* 7, no. 98 (1990): 24-25.

²⁴ Ming-Chun Ku, for example, was the chief editor of *Awakening* briefly in 1992 and in the first half of 1994. The first issue of the *Lovely Report* was published in December 1993. See Ming-Chun Ku, "Wode Tongzhiyundong Shiqianshi (My Prehistory of the Tongzhi Movement)," in *Yangqi Caihongqi: Wode Tongzhiyundong Jinyan, 1990-2001* (When the Rainbow Raises: My Experience in the Tongzhi Movement, 1990-2001), ed. Huei-chiou Chuang (Taipei: Psygarden, 2002), 29-32.

²⁵ Y Sisters, "Yige Nui ren Zuzhi de Chengzhang: Huigu Wai Jiaodu" (The Growth of a Women's Group: Y-Axis Review), *Awakening* 7, no. 106 (1991): 9-10.

²⁶ It is beyond the scope of this study to scrutinize the impact of radical feminism and Y-Axis on Taiwan's

This interwoven relationship between young feminists and lesbian activists made the university campuses an important spot for the lesbian movement. Since the late 1980s, certain young scholars, such as Josephine Ho and Hsiao-Hung Chang, introduced western feminist theory and gender analysis into the university classrooms in Taiwan. Their teaching provided student activists with much-needed intellectual grounding. Moreover, as some activists recall today, those classrooms were the earliest available space for feminists and lesbians to network with other interested people, who later became members of lesbian student clubs.²⁷ By 1996, more than twenty-five Tongzhi student clubs were organized on different university campuses.²⁸

Among those Tongzhi student clubs, Gay Chat and Lambda were the best known and most active. Founded at the National Taiwan University (NTU) in 1993, Gay Chat was the first student club for gay men. In just two years, more than a hundred members joined. In late 1994, with the support of Gay Chat and the Women's Studies Club, about twenty lesbians started their own club, Lambda.²⁹ Less than a year after that, Lambda published a book, *We Are Lesbians*.³⁰ Combining a reputation for holding various open activities with the superior academic reputation of the NTU, Lambda expanded its influence from universities to society at large.

feminist and lesbian movements. Very few of the contemporary studies on Taiwan's feminist movement mention Y-Axis, but in my interviews I found that almost every feminist and lesbian activist was once a member of Y-Axis.

²⁷ See Chiao-Ting Chang, *Campus Memory, Identity and the Emerging of Lesbian Subjectivities in Taiwan*, 3-15, and Ku, "My Prehistory of the Tongzhi Movement," 29.

²⁸ Chiao-Ting Chang, *Campus Memory, Identity and the Emerging of Lesbian Subjectivities in Taiwan*, 3-2, 3-3.

²⁹ Ibid., 3-20-3-22.

³⁰ Taida Lambda, *Women Shi Niutongxinglian (We Are Lesbians)*, (Taipei: Shuoren Publishing, 1995), 8-9.

A new lesbian community composed of young and elite members was established on university campuses by the mid-1990s. Jia-Shin Gian, a young activist and scholar, describes most succinctly the pride they took in their lesbianism:

Lambda's publishing *We Are Lesbians* is the manifesto of coming-out of the Y-generations on campus and a new species of Tongzhi: Neither self-pitiful nor semantic, we care only about hard studying and much lovemaking. Taking advantage of the moment of a good and strong mind after a breakfast of milk and cereal, using this book to tell daddy and mommy that yesterday I won the tennis games and an A+, and last month I discovered that we are lesbians. Thus, everybody will feel embarrassed if she makes this a big deal.³¹

For university students who participated enthusiastically in the lesbian movement, this statement was an ideal that had been realized to some degree. Moreover, because publishing and distribution were important practices for lesbian activists in the first half of the 1990s, Gian claimed that Taiwan's lesbian community was networked by these practices in the following way:

Although these groups, WZJ, *Lovely Report* and Lambda, organized various events, such as support groups, reading clubs and social activities, the main channel for organizing was the production and distribution of publications. *A publication, in the process from production to distribution . . . constructed a tight yet open interactive network* [emphasis mine]. . . . Meanwhile, these publications were used to extend the cooperation and interaction among Tongzhis. They became important tokens for lesbians, who had been individually closeted in the heterosexual society, to recognize each other.³²

Compared to a lesbian group that held most of its activities within limited geographical areas, books and periodicals created a much farther-reaching network for circulating information. According to Gian's theory, we can compare lesbian populations in the

³¹ Jia-Shin Gian, "Shuxie zhong de Xianshen Zhengzhi: Jiuling Niandai Tongzhi Yanshuo Zhanchang de Liubian" (The Coming-out Politics in Writings: The Flux of the Tongzhi Discourse in the 1990s), *Unitas a Literary Monthly* 13, no. 4 (1997): 68.

³² Gian, "Taiwanese Lesbian's Identification," 86-87.

movement's network in different periods by measuring the sales of those publications.

In Table 2.1, the increasing sale over the years indicates that the population of the networked lesbian community grew rapidly as the movement proliferated between 1990 and 1996.

***BUFEN*—A NEW LESBIAN GENDER ROLE**

During the 1990s, the term “*Bufen*,” which corresponds to the English word “androgyny,” emerged in the lesbian movement. In 1994, in the very first issue of WZJ's influential lesbian magazine, *Niupengyou* (Girl Friends), Ms. Lace suggested *Bufen*, which literally means “not-to-be classified,” as an alternative to a reader's question: “What are the definitions of T and *Po*? I look like a *Po*, yet my heart is like a T. How do I classify myself?” To that Ms. Lace replied:

If you have such kind of appearance and heart, the proud term—*Bufen*—is your crown. You do not need to anxiously classify yourself at all, even just for catching the fashion. Let me tell you about some delightful information, though it might be common sense by now: the classification of T and *Po*, has long been regarded in the U.S. as something of the 1950s. (Ask your grandma, she might know as well!) So much time has passed between then and now that even the space shuttle managed to travel back and forth between the earth and moon several times now. So, of course, they have progressed to love each other without classification. Therefore, be happy and pursue your love with the mood of *Bufen*!³³

Ms. Lace did not clearly define what *Bufen* was; nor do we know if the members of WZJ created the concept of *Bufen* collectively. Nevertheless, the lesbian community of the 1990s quickly adopted *Bufen* as an additional gender role.

³³ Lesi Fuzen (Ms. Lace), “Lesi Fuzen Xinxiang (Ms. Lace's Mailbox),” *Niupengyou* (Girl Friends) August 1994, 20.

However, there are vigorous debates about the popularity of *Bufen* and its relationship to the lesbian and feminist movements. First, in discussing the gender rebelling culture of the new lesbian community of the 1990s, Jia-Shin Gian claims that,

The simple and binary division of the *T/Po* roles of the past has a new variety in the lesbian community of the 1990s. Diverse roles of *T/Po* have been created one by one, and these new names for *T/Po* roles frequently appear in lesbians' conversation.³⁴

Accordingly, Gian classifies her informants' *T/Po* identities into twenty-four categories with male and female celebrities as their models.³⁵ While Ms. Lace created a new category and Gian twenty-four, both had the same goal: deconstructing, even diminishing, the old *T/Po* culture rather than following it.

Yengning Chao represents another branch of theorists. Quoting Ms. Lace and Gian's dialog with one of her informants as an example, Chao strongly criticizes the tendency of Taiwanese feminists to represent *Bufen* as a progressive Western concept while regarding *T/Po* as ignorance or an outdated fashion.³⁶ Chao argues that, in identifying with the global queer identity, the "domestic colonialism" of Taiwanese feminists has caused the neglect of class differences among local lesbians.³⁷

In *Lesbians Like This and That*, a detailed account on Taiwan's *T/Po/Bufen* lesbian culture, Chuan-fen Chang gives a different interpretation against Chao's accusation of Taiwan's lesbian feminists. Chang has been actively involved in Taiwan's lesbian

³⁴ Jia-Shin Gian, "Huanchu Niutongzhi: Jiuling Niandai Taiwan Niutongzhi de Lunshu Xinggou yu Yundong Jijie" (Bring out Taiwanese Lesbians: Lesbian Discourses and Movements in Taiwan, 1990-1996) (Master's Thesis, National Taiwan University, 1997), 93.

³⁵ Ibid., 94-95.

³⁶ Chao, "U.S. Space Shuttles Going to the Moon," 58.

³⁷ Ibid., 71.

movement since the early 1990s and is one of the most productive young feminist theorists in Taiwan. She has also translated Cheshire Calhoun's "Separating Lesbian Theory from Feminist Theory" and introduced it to Taiwan.³⁸ Chang denies that there has ever been a serious conflict between Taiwanese lesbians' *T/Po* and *Bufen* styles.³⁹ She claims that Chao's analysis wrongly equates Gian's informants and Ms. Lace with the totality of contemporary feminists.⁴⁰ Moreover, she attributes the rise of the *Bufen* style to the influence of the feminist movement on lesbian activists, who were mostly university students. Chang writes,

[Lesbian student activists'] 'applications' [of feminist theory], originated from a strong tendency of self-realization; namely, merely worshiping the theory intellectually did not satisfy them. They wanted to put it thoroughly into practice in their daily lives, hence the various kinds of 'applications.' I think this was adorable and very honest, even when it sometimes went towards wrong directions.⁴¹

Despite their different emphases and standpoints, all these theorists point to the same fact: the lesbian movement of the 1990s enabled a large, young lesbian community to emerge.

However, what has not been directly pointed out is that this new lesbian community of young, elite, college students, in fact, has very little connection with the old T-bar community. T-bars are not the base of this younger generation's community but just one of the places to visit. Even though some younger lesbians label their

³⁸ "Separating Lesbian Theory from Feminist Theory" is one of four essays by Calhoun that Chang translated. Cheshire Calhoun, *Tongniu Chzhou (Leaving Home)*, trans. Chuan-Fen Chang (Taipei: Fembooks, 1997).

³⁹ Chang suggests that *T/Po/Bu-fen* are styles rather than roles, for there is never a definite way to classify lesbians into *T*, *Po*, or *Bu-fen*. Moreover, "roles can not be overlapped, but styles can be hybridized. You cannot simultaneously play two roles, at most interchanging between them; but you can melt two styles into one." Chuan-Fen Chang, *Lesbians Like This and That*, 22-23.

⁴⁰ Chuan-Fen Chang, *Lesbians Like This and That*, 271-74.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 246.

identities T or *Po*, they do not necessarily learn these roles from T-bars. *Girl Friends*, discussion on the Internet, and even contemporary images of men and women represented on the mass media, are more likely influence the younger generation when they appropriate the old T/*Po* terminology to formulate their new gender roles. For instance, the very first category in Gian's classification, the "New Good T," is associated more closely with the "New Good Man," a popular image of the feminist-conscious man in the 1990s, than the traditional T/*Po* lesbians.⁴²

On the other hand, the older T/*Po* lesbians' *Quan Zi* remained, relatively speaking, as close and tight as decades ago. While Chao criticizes that some feminists "exoticize" T-bars in order to legitimize the new lesbian identity of *Bufen*, she admits, "lesbian feminism does not 'penetrate' into the old T-bar community."⁴³ Outside the debates among theorists, there is indeed no report of confrontation between the old T-bar community and the young campus-based lesbians. Therefore, the debates on T/*Po* and *Bufen* cultures are located within the community of younger lesbians: they are not a symptom of a conflict between the new and old communities. If we understand Gian's analysis as a representation of the young lesbians who are proudly trying to create their new gender identities, Chao's argument can be regarded as a pledge to pay due respect to the traditional lesbian culture.

In any heated debate on Taiwanese lesbian T/*Po*/*Bufen* culture, the discussion could often become a nomination for lesbian identity. However, as Chang comments,

⁴² Gian, "Bing out Taiwanese Lesbians," 94.

⁴³ Chao, "U.S. Space Shuttles Going to the Moon," 78.

“T-bar history should be well remembered in the history of lesbians. At the same time, we have to admit, T/*Po* is not the only and canonical style of lesbianism. *Bufen* culture also grew a number of lesbians, and it nurtured the *Po* and *Bufen* identities.” Indeed, what has sometimes been overlooked is that it is the scholars who have the privilege to nominate; yet their conclusions inevitably reflect their class background and choice of informants. Chapter Six will further analyze Taiwanese lesbian’s T/*Po*/*Bufen* culture at a time when the WWW conveniently provides lesbians with more opportunities to speak for themselves.

WHO IS VISIBLE?

Gay Men vis-à-vis Lesbians

Before the 1990s, lesbians were largely invisible in Taiwan, although by some infamy, gay men were well known to occupy the Taipei New Park after dark.⁴⁴ Lesbians lacked a collective historical landmark. T-bars were unknown to the general public, inaccessible to most lesbians, and their locations changed frequently. Worse, compulsory heterosexual marriages constrained and separated the majority of lesbians into individual families. Gay men were infamous because their *homosexuality* was regarded as unethical sexual conduct. Lesbianism, however, was canonized as a temporary and asexual *Tungxing Ai* (same-sex love). If invisibility meant being

⁴⁴ Under the Capital’s Nucleus Project, the New Park is now renamed and redesigned as the 228 Park in memory of the February 28 event that massacred thousands of Taiwanese in 1947. In 1996, Tongzhi Space Action Network launched a campaign to protect the rights of gay men who used the Taipei New Park. The campaign drew great attention but the City’s Project went forward with little change. The 228 Park is no longer a large gathering spot for gay men. For more analysis on the history of New Park and this campaign, see Chuan-Fen Chang, *Against the Wall*, 23-27.

forbidden from appearing during daytime or in public for gay men, then it meant the denial of their sexuality to lesbians.

In the first half of the 1990s, lesbians enjoyed more visibility than gay men because of the Tongzhi movement in Taiwan. In 1990, WZJ was founded and lesbians took the lead to launch the movement. Lesbian activists closely allied themselves with the strong feminist movement; many of them actively participated in both movements. The population of the lesbian community boomed, particularly on the university campuses. Lesbian not only became a visible identity, it evolved into three different gender roles: T, Po, and Bufen.

In the late 1990s, gay men were more the focus of the public's attention than lesbians. For examples, gay activist You-Sheng Xu's marriage in 1996 attracted wide media coverage.⁴⁵ Mickey Chen's 1999 documentary, *Pretty Gay Kids*, was shown in many universities and theaters, including the Warner Brother Movies Theater in Taipei.⁴⁶ Lesbians remained important to the Tongzhi movement, but more gay men than lesbians emerged out of the closet during this period. These out gay activists greatly raised the visibility for Tongzhis, particularly for gay men.

The Visibility of Different Lesbian Subcommunities

Although Ts were still the most visible lesbians on the streets as well as within Taiwanese lesbian community, the development of lesbian theory and movement did not

⁴⁵ Same sex marriage is still not legalized in Taiwan. Therefore Xu's marriage ceremony has no legal effect.

⁴⁶ Yi-Yi Huang, "Watching *Pretty Gay Kids* Together!" April 1999, <<http://www.labrys.org/gaykid/tickets2.htm>> (2 May 2003).

focus solely on T. The formation of the new gender role *Bufen* resulted from the collective practices of feminist and lesbian theory. By the late 1990s, discussions on *Po* identity and transgenderism were frequent in conferences and on the Internet. On the Bad Daughter BBS, for instance, the *femme-Po* board was opened in December 1999 and has been very popular ever since. The International Super-Slim Conference on Sexual Politics, one of the most important conferences on queer studies in Taiwan, was held in November 1999. This conference featured scholars in the area of transgender studies from the U.S. and Taiwan. In the decade of the 1990s, Taiwanese scholarship had substantial production on gender and sexuality.

On the other hand, most lesbian theorists in Taiwan focused on young, middle-class, campus-based lesbians. Table 2.2 shows the backgrounds of informants who took part in the major contemporary studies of Taiwanese lesbians. Except for Chao, who studied the T-bar lesbians in the pre-movement period, most scholars often based their research on informants chosen from their own peers. These researchers and their informants had a similar background: they all had strong connections with the feminist and lesbian movements and the university campuses. In the studies of Gian and Chiao-Ting Chang in particular, most of the informants were young leaders of the lesbian movement. Researchers' passion for activism influenced their analysis and, sometimes, led them to treat the campus lesbian community as representing the totality of lesbians. This was also the cause of some debates between lesbian theorists in Taiwan.

It is not possible to include every sector of the lesbian community in a single research project. Being a crucial battleground and community base for Taiwan's lesbian

and feminist movement of the 1990s, without doubt, the university campuses deserved careful and thorough analysis. We should take the existing studies on Taiwanese lesbians not as faults but as stepping stones and should seek the pieces that were missing from these studies. What are the other sectors of Taiwanese lesbians and what are the best ways to analyze them? For instance, lesbian communities outside the capital area hardly received any research attention.

The following chapters will carry out a close analysis of a cyber lesbian community, To-Get-Her. Rather than implying that its community members conduct activities or identify with the community only in cyberspace, the choice of “cyber” for this thesis stresses the critical role of new Internet technology in shaping the community. Internet technology functions similarly to the paper publications that networked lesbians into a community in the first half of the 1990s. However, different technologies rise in different social and historical contexts. They attract different user groups and form communities with different characteristics. Thus, not every cyber community is the same or has similar visibility. The next chapter will examine the TANet BBS lesbian community, which has been a frequent subject of research by scholars studying Taiwanese lesbians because of its close connection with the lesbian community on university campuses and the development of Taiwan’s Internet in the early 1990s. This will be the foundation for the analysis of the major interest in this study: what has caused the invisibility of the To-Get-Her cyber community and what is the importance of studying To-Get-Her?

Table 2.1. Publishing and Distribution of Lesbian Periodicals and Books in Taiwan from 1990 to 1996

	Editors	Duration	Distributing Spots	Print and Distribution
<i>Lovely Report</i>	Lovely	1993.12 –	● Fembooks Bookstore	● Print 1,000 copies per
	Report	1995.3	● Ton-shan Bookstore	issue.
		(4 issues)	● subscription	● Retail: 300-500 copies.
<i>Girl Friends</i> Bi-monthly	WZJ	1994.8 – 1996	●	● Subscribers under 100.
			● Fembooks bookstore	● Print 1,200-1,500 copies
			● Ton-shan bookstore	per issue.
			● Elite bookstores	● Retail: sold 900 copies.
			● Some university bookstores in middle and southern Taiwan	● Subscribers: about 300.
<i>We Are Lesbians</i> (book)	LAMBDA	1995.8	●	●
			● Available at most bookstores	● Sold 6,000 copies.

Source: Jia-Shin Gian, "Taiwanese Lesbian's Identification under the Queer Politics since 1990" *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies*, no. 30 (1998): 111.

TABLE 2.2 Informants in Contemporary Research on Taiwanese Lesbians

Authors	Interview Periods	Informants		Research Focus (Publication/Source)
		Ages	Backgrounds	
Mei-Li Cheng	1994 - 1996	25-45	Introduced by friends at WZJ and Asian Lesbian Network at Taiwan.	Lesbian genders, families and lives (<i>Daughters' Circle</i>)
Jia-Shin Gian	1994.12 - 1996.7	21-34	Editors of lesbian periodicals, members of lesbian community, or actively participating leaders of the Tongzhi movement.	Lesbian community, network of lesbian publications, and identity of the 1990s ("Taiwanese Lesbian's Identification under the Queer Politics since 1990")
Chiao-Ting Chang	1996.3 - 1999.1	19-26	Members of lesbian community, active participants of the Tongzhi movement, and the friends introduced by them.	Lesbians at the NTU and Taipei First Girls' High School (<i>Campus Memory, Identity and the Emerging of Lesbian Subjectivities in Taiwan</i>)
Chuan-Fen Chang	1999.3 - 2000	23-40*	Audiences volunteered at author's speeches. Snow-balled network of friends and informants.	Lesbians' gender styles in the 1990s (<i>Lesbian Like This and That</i>)
Yengning Chao	1993.5-? 45*	above	Old T-bar lesbians.	T-bar culture, older lesbians (<i>Traveling with a Straw Hat</i>)

*My estimations deduced from the contents in researchers' publications.

Figure 2.3. *Lovely Report*, which published four issues between 1993 and 1995, was the earliest Taiwanese lesbian periodical. The bottom portion of this cover was a popular song in 1994, *The Female Dragon of the Sea of Bitterness*:

Dislike dating men. Welcome girl friends.
Sinking in the alien place, the female dragon of the
sea of bitterness.

I am not a little lady. I am an alluring woman.
The heartless environment forced me falling to the
dark abyss.

The editors of *Lovely Report* claimed that Taiwanese lesbians loved to sing this song in T-bars. They appropriated this song since its words reflected their feelings and states.

Reprinted from *Lovely Report* 2 (1994).

CHAPTER 3

(E)MIGRATE TO CYBERSPACE

In July 1990, Taiwan's Ministry of Education sponsored major national universities in Taiwan to start building TANet.¹ This network became the first Internet infrastructure in Taiwan. In the same year, the first Taiwanese lesbian group, WZJ, was founded. During the decade of the 1990s, WZJ would play the leading role in Taiwan's lesbian movement, while the Internet found its way into one-third of the households in Taiwan.²

This chapter will first sketch out the history of Taiwan's Internet in the 1990s. It will then argue that the proliferation of the government-subsidized TANet is due to its success in localization and to its unique BBSs. It will also analyze the complex relationships between Taiwanese lesbians, TANet, and the state during the period in the 1990s when the new Taiwanese lesbian community gradually adopted the Internet as its networking medium.

TANET AND THE LOCALIZATION OF TAIWAN'S INTERNET

In Taiwan, government-subsidized technological research and development plays

¹ MOECC, "Taiwan Xueshuwanglu (TANet) Gaishu" (A Brief of TANet), *Taiwan Xueshuwanglu Huanjing Jieshao* (An Introduction to the Environment of TANet), 19 February 2001, <<http://www.edu.tw/moecc/tanet/environ/introduction.html>> (24 June 2002), Introduction.

² Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Executive Yuan, R.O.C.. "Internet Accounts Reached 6.26 millions in November 2001," *National Statistics Bulletin*, 5 January 2002.

an important in industrial development. As one of the “Four Dragons in Asia,” Taiwan’s industrialization was so successful that electronics products became the largest export category in 1983.³ In the mid-1980s, Taiwan had some fragmental local area networks (LANs) in some national universities and research institutions. These early networks in Taiwan were first connected to the international network BITNET (Because It’s Time Network) in April 1987.⁴

When planning the future development of Taiwan’s network in the late 1980s, the Ministry of Education’s Computer Center (MOECC) foresaw the limitations of BITNET.⁵ It proposed to integrate all existing campus networks into a new, universal, and standardized network based on the open structure of the Internet protocols. History proves that MOECC has made the right decision. BITNET was started in 1981 as a network between the City University of New York and Yale University.⁶ At its peak in 1991-92, BITNET connected some 1,400 organizations in 49 countries in support of research and education. However, the Internet has gradually replaced BITNET and few use BITNET now.

The progress of TANet, on the other hand, moved rapidly. In July 1990, Taiwan’s Ministry of Education and some selected universities began to implement TANet. The TANet Technical Committee was formed to coordinate development

³ Ministry of Economic Affairs, *Luise Xidao* (Green Silicon Island) [Video CD] (Ziyi Movies, 2001 [cited 15 December 2002]).

⁴ Fei-Li Tu, “Taiwan Xueshuwanglu (TANet) yu Internet zhi Xiankuang yu Zhanwang” (The Present and the Future of TANet and the Internet), *National Central Library Bulletin* 24, no. (1991):31.

⁵ MOECC, “A Brief of TANet,” *An Introduction to The Environment of TANet*, 19 February 2001.

⁶ Corporation for Research & Educational Networking, “CREN History and Future,” June 1997, <<http://www.cren.net/cren/cren-hist-fut.html>> (11 November 2002).

across different campuses. In less than two years, TANet was successfully connected to the U.S. Internet.⁷

The success of TANet was due not so much to its replacement of BITNET as to its clear focus on localization. In computer engineering terminology, “localization” means making minimal modification to the original English-based program so that its user interface can be rendered in one or several “local” languages. Instead of an invention from scratch, the technical development of TANet was precisely a localization of existing Internet technology; that is, the TANet committee succeeded not by developing a brand-new Internet technology but by incorporating the Chinese encoding method into existing Internet technology.⁸ The goal of TANet was to promote research and educational activities among all levels of academic institutions through cooperative sharing of resources and information. A computer system in English alone simply would not be of much use for elementary-school or high-school students. The task of developing Internet user environments in Chinese language was on the agenda of every one of the Technical Committee’s quarterly meetings until as late as early 1993.⁹ By 1994, the Committee had solved most of the difficulties related to Chinese encoding.

Once the language problems were solved, the TANet Technical Committee shifted its focus to developing an information sharing system, which remains the most important

⁷ MOECC, “Taiwan Xueshuwanglu (TANet) Dashiji” (Chronology of TANet), *Taiwan Xueshuwanglu Huanjing Jieshao* (An Introduction to the Environment of TANet), 19 February 2001, <<http://www.edu.tw/moecc/tanet/environ/outline.html>> (24 June 2002).

⁸ English and other European languages mostly use 8-bit encoding methods for storing and displaying their characters. Chinese, however, needs 16-bit. Moreover, Taiwan adopted the Big5 codes for the traditional Chinese characters, while Mainland China uses GB or HZ for the simplified Chinese characters.

⁹ MOECC, *Taiwan Xueshuwanglu Jishuxiaozu Huiyijilu* (TANet Technical Committee Meeting Minutes), 1992-2002, <<http://www.edu.tw/moecc/tanet/tanet-tech/tech-meeting/>> (8 November 2002).

component of TANet to this day. In January 1994, the Technical Committee proposed an integral multi-functional electronic BBS. Developing a BBS took much less time than it had taken to overcome the difficulties of localizing Internet technology. Within two years, TANet had more than one hundred BBSs installed. By the end of 1997, it had six hundred.¹⁰

TANet retained its strong share in Taiwan's Internet throughout the 1990s and well into the new millennium. In the first half of the 1990s, the only access to the Internet was through the computer terminals scattered on different campuses. Only students and those associated with the universities were able to access these terminals. It was not until 1995 that Taiwan's first commercial Internet Service Provider (ISP), SeedNet, was founded.¹¹ From that point on, people who were not affiliated to academic institutions could obtain commercial Internet service.

Even with commercial ISPs available, there are several significant reasons for university students to stay with TANet. First, the commercial Internet service is too costly for most students while TANet, in contrast, continues to provide a free service to students. Secondly, some dormitories do not allow students to own private phone lines. This makes dial-up services provided by commercial ISPs impractical. Again by

¹⁰ Shu-Chien Wu, "Diannao Zhongui Chuanbo Renjiqinggan Qinniguanxi zhi Yanjiu: Caifang Dianzibugaolan (BBS) de 'Xuni Renjiguanxi'" (Computer Mediated Intimacy: Interviewing the 'Cyber Relationship' on BBSs) (Master's Thesis, National Chengchi University, 1996); Jung-Yi Cheng, "The Roles of the Internet," 147.

¹¹ The Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Institute for Information Industry (III) started the Project SEED (Software Engineering Environment Development) in July 1990. In July 1995, the SEED project became a business division of the III to provide the first commercial Internet service in Taiwan. In 1998, this division spun off the III and established the Digital United Inc. with the brand name "Seednet." Seednet is still one of the leading ISPs in Taiwan. See Digital United, "Company History & Chronology," 2002, <<http://www.digitalunited.com/ea2.htm>> (10 January 2003).

comparison, TANet terminals are easily accessible on campus. Thirdly, students who connect to TANet BBSs through commercial ISPs need additional configuration on their local machines. Very often the configuration process is complicated and it is not well documented by TANet and the commercial ISPs. Furthermore, there is no guarantee how well it will work. Fourthly, although TANet is based on the open structure of Internet technology, its success as a communication medium on campus has made it somewhat of a closed system. Students pay more attention to the news and activities distributed through and within TANet than those outside. There is no real motivation for students to push TANet toward newer information technology, such as the WWW and IRC, which are more globalized and open to a much wider range of users.

This section has shown the important role that the state played in the technological development of TANet and the reasons why the commercial ISPs did not replace TANet in students' uses of the Internet. The next section will further analyze the relationships between the state, TANet, and university students in Taiwan.

THE STATE , TANET BBS, AND CAMPUS LIFE

TANet BBSs grew to be a representation of campus life. Since the mid-1990s, TANet's terminals connected directly and speedily to BBSs have spread into every department and dormitory on university campuses. Because of the heavy and frequent usage, messages on a BBS board reflect the activities and even public opinions taking place in its corresponding group. Figure 3.1, for example, shows the board for the NTU Lambda, the first lesbian student club in Taiwan. Lambda was planning a barbeque and

a member meeting at the end of the semester. By tracing the members' responses on this screen, we can see their available time slots, their suggestions for the barbeque and the meeting, and, significantly, what were happening in their lives. Although this is a board destined for Lambda's members, access to their discussions is not restricted to membership only. A different student club can advertise its activity to Lambda members by posting an announcement on this board. Such practices, aptly called crossposting, show how various groups, clubs and individual students are closely interconnected with one another.¹²

However, under the surface of colorful representation of campus life on TANet BBSs and much less scrutinized, is how Taiwan's school authorities have exerted paternalist control over this newly founded cyberspace. According to the "BBS management and usage guidelines" set up by MOCEE, school authorities have the power to moderate and regulate their BBSs.¹³ Each school determines the number of BBSs it will supports, according to its resources, and makes up the rules that will govern those systems. If it falls within the rules, departments, programs, classes, student clubs, or simply a group of students interested in a certain topic, can ask a BBS to set up a discussion "board" (see Figure 3.2). After registering with the BBS, a user is then given access to view and post on different boards, hold a poll, vote, e-mail, and chat with other

¹² I am not aware of the existence of research on the practice of crossposting in TANet BBSs. For the analysis on the relationship between crossposting and the social structure of the Usenet, see Marc A. Smith, "Invisible crowds in cyberspace: Mapping the social structure of the Usenet," in *Communities in Cyberspace*, ed. Marc A. Smith and Peter Kollock (London: Routledge, 1999), 195-219.

¹³ MOECC, "BBS Zhan Guanli Shiyong Gongyue" (BBS Management and Usage Guidelines), *TANet Xiangguan Guanli Yuanze* (The Principles of TANet Management), 22 April 1997, <<http://www.edu.tw/moecc/tanet/tan-intro/6-4.htm>> (15 November 2002).

[看板列表]				壞女兒站		看板 (SVSOP)
[主]主選單 [→]閱讀 [↑↓]選擇 [v]加入 [s]排序 [c]搜尋 [TAB]文檔 [h]幫助						
編號	看板	說明	作者	標題	作者	作者
1	0921	遺跡☆	揮平安報報台及區需要		SVSOP	
2	adulteress	關係☆	森女控		show	
3	announce	好萊☆	宣稱不會讓妳更酷或更不酷		SVSOP	
4	astrology	悠樂☆	酷於基爾奇		falcon	
5	nu	沙園☆	拉拉真理		bruce2001	
6	Band	藝術☆	妳玩音樂玩錢		dingo	
7	Beaver	沙園☆	與編相惜		wall	
8	bodyhealth	保健☆	要身養生		jafer	
9	bodysex	保健☆	聚欲俗		Loon	
10	BooksTalk	寫書☆	妳來我往 有事有氣		nifasa/mafios	
11	breakup	情況☆	不理會，妳已經被out了		徵求中	
12	Budapest	另類☆	睡人碼頭		flarance	
13	caprices	藝術☆	幻想古典樂		oascar	
14	CCU-club	沙園☆	中正打鐵社		superant	
15	Chameleon	身分☆	愛就別問分不分		tuanne	
16	Channelu	娛樂☆	音樂天堂		lulu238	
17	Circle	沙園☆	中部同心圓		LesCircle	
18	classmates	沙園☆	同協同學		bigfeet/MOR	
19	claustral	遺跡☆	魔界修道院		SVSOP	
20	club-club	沙園☆	沙園轉板		hero	
選擇看板 (c)新文章模式 (v/u)標記已讀/未讀 (y)聯選全部 (x)切換選擇						

Figure 3.1. Bad Daughters BBS, June 2002. This screenshot shows the first 20 boards in Bad Daughters. The second column is the name of each board. The following columns explain the feature of that board. The first two and the last rows are brief explanations of the available commands for this screen.

[板主: pandora/bassss]				台大狼達社		看板 (Lambda)
[←]離開 [→]閱讀 [P]發表文章 [b]備忘錄 [d]刪除 [z]精華區 [TAB]文檔 [h]help						
編號	日期	作者	標題	作者	作者	
3025	6/23	potex	R: 跟各位學姐打招呼			
3026	6/24	deadcat	R: 期末社員大會			
3027	6/24	deadcat	R: 期末社員大會			
3028	6/24	potex	□ 烤肉人數統計			
3029	6/24	sours	R: 烤肉人數統計			
3030	6/24	potex	R: 烤肉人數統計			
3031	6/24	naked	□ 上面那篇			
3032	6/24	chrisan	R: 跟各位學姐打招呼			
3033	6/24	mrk	R: 烤肉人數統計			
3034	6/24	Skysky	R: 烤肉人數統計			
3035	6/24	sours	R: 跟各位學姐打招呼			
3036	6/24	senorita	R: 烤肉人數統計			
3037	6/24	littlefive	R: 烤肉人數統計			
3038	6/24	littlefive	R: 期末社員大會			
3039	6/24	ziv	R: 烤肉人數統計			
3040	6/24	ziv	R: 烤肉人數統計			
3041	6/24	llamas	R: 烤肉人數統計			
3042	6/24	llamas	R: 期末社員大會			
3043	6/24	pandora	R: 烤肉人數統計			
3044	6/24	pandora	R: 烤肉人數統計			
文章選讀 (y)回信 (=)[]<>相關主題 (f)搜尋標題 (aa)搜尋作者 (x)轉錄 (u)投票						

Figure 3.2. The Lambda Board on Bad Daughters BBS, June 2002. This screenshot shows the articles numbered from 3025 to 3044. The fourth column is the author's ID, and the fifth the subject of the article. The subjects of these articles show that Lambda's members are planning a BBQ and meeting.

users. A BBS administrator is seldom involved in managing the posts on the boards. That task belongs to the member-elected host, the “board master.” The board master has the power and responsibility to delete any article that he or she deems inappropriate or offensive.

From the state agent MOECC at the very top to the individual user at the bottom, this hierarchical power structure renders the term “BBS” as having different technical and social meanings from those it might have for a U.S. Internet user. In the most general sense, any electronic bulletin board system can be called a BBS. In the U.S., some BBSs are provided by large commercial ISPs such as America Online, but there are numerous other small BBSs run by amateurs “for fun” from their home computers.¹⁴ These discrete, private BBSs are important for sharing information and resources. In some extreme cases, they can even become local districts for hackers.¹⁵

Such is not the case with the TANet BBSs in Taiwan; they are not private but sponsored by the state. While the owner of a private BBS has all the control of the rules, resources and information in his or her system, the ultimate regulation of a TANet BBS is in the hands of school authorities. Seen in this light, the meanings of the power hierarchy vis-à-vis the popularity of TANet BBS are two-fold. On the one hand, it is wrong to deny the liberal potential of TANet BBSs as a medium or space simply based on the descriptions of its structural hierarchy. In fact, cases where administrators involved themselves in management were rarely heard of and, more often than not, users

¹⁴ Wakeford, “Cyberqueer,” 23. Eric S. Raymond, *The New Hacker's Dictionary*. 3d ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1999), 60.

¹⁵ Raymond, *The New Hacker's Dictionary*, 60.

would quickly abandon an unpopular board master and migrate to another BBS.

Without this degree of freedom and flexibility to switch between different BBSs, TANet would not have grown to be so popular among students. On the other hand, although Taiwan's school authorities and the state do not always make themselves visible in the daily activities taking place on TANet BBSs, it is precisely when they decide to emerge from this seemingly invisible hierarchy and how they exercise (or do not exercise) their power that need further analysis.

The case of the hacker attack on the Feminists' Room BBS serves to illustrate the crucial role of the state in TANet BBSs. In May 1997, a student at the National Chiao Tung University (NCTU) hacked into the Feminists' Room BBS.¹⁶ He obtained the database of users' personal information and threatened to out some of them as lesbians. Although there was no report of further damage, this incident caused great fear and anxiety within the TANet BBS lesbian community. Despite protests from feminist groups, the TANet Technical Committee paid surprisingly little attention to this incident. In the minutes of the TANet Technical Committee in May 1997, only a brief suggestion was recorded: "Urge the Ministry of Education and the NCTU to contact the [local] Prosecutorial Agency to understand the legal conflicts on the Internet and the details of this incident, and assist the board master to deal with related issues." There was no further mention of this incident in subsequent meetings, nor any discussion about how to improve the security of BBSs. No criminal charge was ever pressed against this hacker.

This is a case where school and TANet authorities were not interested in providing

¹⁶ Li, "Women's Collection and Mobilization in Cyberspace," 102-07.

assistance to minority groups. At best, lesbian and feminist groups were left to struggle on their own on TANet. In the next section, we will see how lesbians have fought to build their own space on TANet against the resistance of some BBS administrators.

MOVING TO CYBERSPACE

Although a lesbian publication community did not emerge until the early 1990s in Taiwan, Taiwanese gays and lesbians found a new space and networking medium by the mid-1990s.¹⁷ In 1994, four TANet BBSs had MOTSS boards. By 1996, more than forty BBSs had homosexuality-related boards and the number of MOTSS boards grew to seventy-two.¹⁸ However, the presence of gay men and lesbians was not balanced on MOTSS boards. To counter gay men's domination, lesbians began to set up their own boards in 1995.¹⁹ In January 1996, the Bad Daughters BBS was built explicitly to provide a comfortable space for lesbians.²⁰ By July 2002, Bad Daughters BBS had grown so popular in the lesbian community that it hosted boards for forty-two lesbian student clubs.

For those student clubs that cannot obtain resources from their schools, BBS

¹⁷ Gian, "Taiwanese Lesbian's Identification," 89-90.

¹⁸ Ke Fei, "Building a Queer Nation on the Internet," 26; Ming-Hui Cheng, "Facing Reality in Virtual Space," 34-35.

¹⁹ Indeed, to have a board separated from the MOTSS board, lesbians had to struggle against not only the heterosexist BBS administrators but also their male gay schoolmates. See Ming-Hui Cheng, "Facing Reality in Virtual Space," 35-40.

²⁰ The Bad Daughters BBS is implemented with more user protection than other BBSs. For example, it does not permit "guest" ID, which allows anonymous users to view but not post articles; new users have to register and pass the verification process before obtaining advanced privileges. Compared with those of other BBSs, its administrators are stricter in screening discriminatory language toward women and lesbians. See Ming-Hui Cheng, "Facing Reality in Virtual Space," 90-91.

boards become their cyber offices and gathering spots.²¹ Being located side by side with other lesbian clubs on the same BBS also helps build inter-campus alliances. Distributing news among different campuses is simply one command away. Mail exchange and online chatting take place before group activities and extend friendships afterward. In short, the Internet has grown from a communication medium to a tool for mobilization for Taiwan's lesbians.

An important question, however, is why did Taiwanese lesbians choose the Internet over traditional paper publications? To answer this question, it is necessary to understand the social and technological context of the Taiwanese lesbian community in the mid-1990s. The following discussion will begin by refining Jia-Shin Gian's theory of the lesbian publication community in order to analyze its decline, on the one hand, and the growing popularity of the Internet community since the mid-1990s, on the other.

In her analysis of the publication community, Gian fails to distinguish the network among editors of lesbian publications from that of the whole lesbian community. Gian claims, "A publication, in the process from production to distribution . . . constructs a tight yet open, interactive network."²² However, Gian overstates the level of interaction in the publication community, because the majority of this community consists of silent readers, who pick up the lesbian publications from bookstores but seldom voice their opinions. The so-called "tight yet open and interactive network" more likely exists among the editors of publications rather than among the whole community. Even if the

²¹ While the population of lesbian student clubs from all the universities grows, the NTU remains the only university that recognizes its lesbian student club, Lambda. The lesbian clubs on other campuses either choose to stay unregistered or their registrations are denied.

²² Gain, "Taiwanese Lesbian's Identification," 86-87.

network exists for the publication community, it is mainly one-directional—from the editors and authors to the readers—instead of fully interactive among members of the community.

In contrast, what the Internet provides for lesbians is precisely a fully interactive networking medium with great flexibility of adjustment. On a BBS board, anyone can freely and frequently switch between being a reader and an author. Users can broadcast their opinions to the whole community by posting articles, or they can choose to communicate just with certain members through private e-mail or online chatting. The flexibility and interactivity embedded in Internet technology are more suitable for community building. By the new millennium, Internet technology had become more important than paper publications in networking Taiwanese lesbians. During my fieldwork in Taiwan in 2002, I did not find any lesbian group that still published on paper regularly. Moreover, I am not aware of the existence of any lesbian paper publication in Taiwan since WZJ stopped publishing *Girl Friends* in late 2002.

While both publications and the Internet provide protection for the anonymity crucial for most lesbians, Gian's descriptions do not accurately reflect the reality of either community, particularly the Internet community. Gian describes anonymity and coming-out in the publication community as being "partially out" to the lesbian community and "aggressively" collective coming-out to outsiders (see Table 3.1). In contrast, in the Internet community, members are "completely anonymous" and "passively" out. Again, this research claims that being partially out appears an option for editors and authors, but not for general readers. Almost all the editors and authors of

the lesbian publications used pseudonyms. While they were partially out inside their interactive network, they remained completely anonymous within the community at large. Moreover, the following examples will show that, while lesbians have passionately strived to carve out their own space on the Internet, anonymity on TANet is not a complete protection for lesbians' need for anonymity.

First, lesbians have to struggle against not only heterosexual users but also TANet BBS administrators.²³ For instance, it took supporters of the Les (Lesbian) board of Eggroll BBS four months of struggle to have the application approved. The application was twice denied and delayed for various reasons, including "wasting system resources because it is too similar to the MOTSS board," "no new board accepted temporarily because the system is under testing during summer vacation," and "the Les board has to wait until the MOTSS board is renamed as the gay board."²⁴ It took much passion, persistence, and collective effort to fight with the system—the homophobic administrators and the majority of heterosexual users—to establish a lesbian space on the Internet.

Second, anonymity on the Internet is but an advantage, not a guaranteed protection. Two technical issues have to be addressed here: the ID registration procedure and the risk of hacker attack. Although a user participates in the activities on a BBS with a pseudonymous ID, she or he still has to submit personal information in order to pass the

²³ For a brief account of the early history of founding MOTSS boards, see Ke Fei, "Building a Queer Nation on the Internet."

²⁴ Ming-Hui Cheng, "Facing Reality in Virtual Space," 39.

verification process.²⁵ To lesbians, this is a difficulty because of the lack of reliability of school authorities. Moreover, the previous section has already shown that there is always the risk of hacker attack and, if that happens, there is no guarantee that the TANet administrators, the school authorities, or the state will provide any assistance to lesbians.

The impact of introducing the WWW to the Taiwan's Internet in the second half of the 1990s deserves close attention because of its different social and technical context. Chapter Four will introduce the first and one of the largest Taiwanese lesbian communities on the Web, the To-Get-Her Lez Cyber Community. It will then analyze a core feature of To-Get-Her—the free access policy—which provides a different choice of user management for a cyber lesbian community.

MISSING FROM THE NEW RAINBOW MAP

In October 2000, six Tongzhi organizations and gay-friendly businesses published a small flyer: the Rainbow Map (Figure 3.3). After a decade of struggle, Taiwan's gays and lesbians finally could claim an area—the neighborhood near the National Taiwan University—as the Rainbow Community. On the map, there were more than thirty stores, including saunas, boutiques, restaurants, pubs, and bookstores. One particularly notable site on this map is the Tongzhi Hotline Association, an organization that has held its annual fundraising party in a conference room in the City Council Hall beginning in 2001.²⁶ With activities from consuming for pleasure to organizing for equal rights,

²⁵ The requirement of registration and verification varies among BBSs and universities.

²⁶ Hsun-Heng Huang, "Beishi Zhichi Tongzhi, Lianban Sannian 'Tong'-Wan-Jie" (Taipei Municipal Government Supports Tongzhi, Three Consecutive Years of the Gay Festival), *China Times*, 5 October

Taiwan's gay men and lesbians have stepped into the open and public domains and shattered the long-imposed stigma of being represented by the state as promoting abnormality.

However, this rainbow map represents just a small portion of the lives of today's Taiwanese lesbians. The closure of *Girl Friends* in 2002 marks the end of the lesbian publication community and the growing monopolistic role of Internet technology in networking Taiwanese lesbians. A better way to look for Taiwan's lesbian groups, for example, is to log on the Bad Daughters BBS, where one can easily find more than forty lesbian student clubs.

TANet BBSs, like any other networking medium, have their limitations. Built in the first half of the 1990s, TANet is part of the state's educational resources, not a network for the general public. TANet is inadequate as a networking medium for lesbians who are not closely affiliated with Taiwan's higher educational institutions. By the end of the 1990s, some Taiwanese lesbians had already begun to build new communities with the more advanced Web technology.

My examination of the formation of the TANet BBS lesbian community in this chapter has sought to explain why Taiwanese scholars have not attended to lesbians' activities on the Web. The lesbian movement in the 1990s brought out a campus-based lesbian community with its collective coming-out strategy. This community needed a medium that could provide effective communication as well as the protection of anonymity. TANet BBS, an academic network designed for university campuses,

became available exactly at the right moment. **On-campus lesbian community** quickly adopted TANet BBS as its networking medium. Moreover, because researchers were closely affiliated with university campuses, they tended to conflate the Internet with TANet BBS. As a result, the differences between lesbians on and off campus become invisible to many researchers.

The next chapters will continue to **examine the social and technical impacts** of the formation of the TANet BBS lesbian community and the **Web-based To-Get-Her** cyber community. To-Get-Her is not just another cyber community using another Internet technology. Through a close examinations of the uses of Internet technology and its users, we can come to a better understanding of the complex historical and social context of a cyber community.

Table 3.1. The Formation Models of Taiwanese Lesbian Communities and the Conditions of Coming Out

	Medium	Anonymity and Coming out	Time Period	Community Members
Lesbian Bar Community	lesbian bars	An individual is completely out to other community members. The community is collectively closeted to outsiders.	Started in the late 1990s	Taipei metropolitan area. Workers and students in junior highs and professional schools.
Publication Community (Movement Community)	publication network and incidents of the movement	An individual can willingly choose to be partially out in the community. The community aggressively and collectively comes out to outsiders.	Started in the early 1990s	Taipei metropolitan area. Students in the colleges or senior highs in north and central Taiwan.
Internet Community	computer network	Mostly an individual is completely anonymous in the community, but she could possibly be partially out. The community passively comes out collectively.	Started in the mid-1990s	University students, particularly those who are outside of the Taipei metropolitan area and majoring in science and engineering.

Source: Jia-Shin Gian, "Taiwanese Lesbian's Identification under the Queer Politics since 1990" *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies*, no. 30 (1998): 88.

Figure 3.3. Rainbow Map. Some Tongzhi organizations and businesses published this flyer in October, 2000. On the left side it listed the organizations and gay friendly stores in the neighborhood of the NTU campus.

CHAPTER 4

TO-GET-HER LEZ CYBER COMMUNITY

On June 23, 1994, the World Wide Web (WWW) was mentioned for the first time in the TANet Technical Committee meeting.¹ By the time the meeting took place, the successfully localized TANet BBSs had become so popular that the Technical Committee had to discuss the necessity of setting up management and usage guidelines for TANet BBSs.² The Technical Committee was not to be blamed for neglecting Web technology before 1994, because the WWW was just about to become a household word.³ However, in the following years, the TANet Technical Committee did not play the same leading role in promoting Taiwanese Web sites as it did in promoting TANet BBSs. There is no evidence that the TANet Technical Committee ever encouraged the use or development of the WWW. At a meeting in April 1999, the Committee even proposed to “restrict users’ direct access to the information in foreign countries” during TANet’s rush hours of international data transferring.⁴

Compared with TANet BBSs, which are part of the state-owned educational Internet resources, the advantage of WWW technology is precisely that it provides the

¹ MOECC, “Meeting Thirteen,” *TANet Technical Committee Meeting Minutes*, 23 June 1994, <<http://www.edu.tw/moecc/tanet/tanet-tech/tech-meeting/13.html>> (1 June 2002).

² The “BBS Management and Usage Guidelines” was finalized and announced on 6 March 1995.

³ Stephen Segaller, *Nerds 2.0.1: A Brief History of the Internet* (New York: TV Books, L.L.C., 1999), 293.

⁴ MOECC, *Taiwan Xueshuwanglu Jishuxiaozu Huiyijilu* (TANet Technical Committee Meeting Minutes), 1992-2002, <<http://www.edu.tw/moecc/tanet/tanet-tech/tech-meeting/>> (8 November 2002).

possibility of building a “personal” Web site. The proliferation of Taiwanese Web sites is thus more closely related to the growth of commercial Internet Service Providers and individual efforts at building a virtual home—a *homepage*—in cyberspace, rather than being promoted by the government-subsidized industrial development. This is true even when, without the foundation of Taiwan’s industrial development, the individuals could not have afforded the luxury of building homepage.

This chapter will investigate how some individuals’ expertise in this powerful WWW technology has brought into being a new lesbian cyber community, To-Get-Her. It will explore how the ET of To-Get-Her uses the Internet to coordinate activities in the real world, and how To-Get-Her users utilize the Web site as a safe and meaningful social space.

MY LEZ HOMEPAGE: THE BIRTH OF TO-GET-HER

On November 24, 1996, a talented lesbian engineer, dingo, utilized free Internet resources to build a Web site as a birthday gift to her partner.⁵ Never deeply involved in any social movement, dingo did not consult or organize an activist group before setting up the Web site, *Wode Lazi Hongpeiji* (My Lez Homepage). Neither did dingo expect her personal homepage would grow to be the basis for the huge To-Get-Her Lez Cyber Community, with more than 20,000 visitors per month by the end of 2002.⁶

On more than one occasion, dingo attributed the birth of To-Get-Her to her

⁵ Zoesum, “Dingo’s Passion, Our Site; Dingo’s Contribution, Our Home!”

⁶ Dingo, “Some Sincere Advices,” 184.

personal impulse, instead of a definite goal for the lesbian community or its movement.

In one of the earliest interviews by *Wan Wan eZine*, the community newspaper of

To-Get-Her, the editor asked dingo, "How did dingo build My Lez Home Page?" She

answered,

Frankly speaking, I'm that kind of person who likes to give a hand even when nobody asked! Because I found that there were already many *Lazi* (lesbian) BBSs on the Internet but no *Lazi* Web site, and because my specialties are mainly in the WWW, *I know that I can do it* [emphasis mine]. So after some thoughts, I did it.

This site was constructed in one day. Why that fast? Because I am very restless. Once I decide to do something I do it right away. . . . So I put aside my own job at work and did My Lez Homepage first.⁷

In a more recent article, dingo again expressed that the popularity of My Lez Homepage surprised her,

Building a Web site with some interesting features simply is a way of earning my living. I did not expect my sudden impulse of setting up this personal homepage would result in such a huge Web site.⁸

The impulsive and unexpected success of My Lez Homepage was a sharp contrast to the origin of the Bad Daughters TANet BBS in three aspects. First, the founders of the Bad Daughters BBS began with a clear goal in advancing activism: "to build a comfortable environment for lesbians in cyberspace."⁹ They felt that lesbians needed their own BBS because a MOTSS board was not enough to accommodate the variety of Tongzhi issues and because homophobic users tended to confine Tongzhis to the MOTSS board. Second, the founders of the Bad Daughters BBS did not know much about computer

⁷ Zoesum, "Dingo's Passion, Our Site; Dingo's Contribution, Our Home!"

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ming-Hui Cheng, "Facing Reality in Virtual Space," 90.

engineering before they set up their goal. As a result, they had to spend more than half a year learning the necessary technology for building and maintaining a BBS. Third, the Bad Daughter BBS implemented a strict user registration process with the aim of creating a comfortable space for lesbians. Discussion related to this third aspect will be in a separate section on the access policy of the To-Get-Her Web site, because it is one of the most important characteristics of To-Get-Her. The rest of this section will focus on the first two aspects and analyze why the founding of To-Get-Her took only one day but the Bad Daughter BBS more than half a year, and why this difference was important.

Certainly, dingo's expertise in Web technology is the first and the most crucial factor here. My Lez Homepage was quite a technically complicated Web site even by today's standards. It took a very proficient engineer to seamlessly transform ideals into an effective product in such a short period. In fact, timely support from engineers was decisive in some incidents in Taiwan's Tongzhi movements, which have been heavily dependent on collecting endorsements and mobilization via the Internet.¹⁰

Moreover, while the main features of My Lez Homepage and the Bad Daughters BBS were similar, dingo's knowledge of engineering enabled her to locate cost-free resources for My Lez Homepage. The founders of the Bad Daughters BBS, on the other hand, had to spend about \$1,000 merely to have the system set up.¹¹ Knowledge and utilization of proper technology, therefore, can be solutions to activists' concerns about time, energy and money.

¹⁰ For more details on the first online endorsement in Taiwan's lesbian movement, the CTS incident, see Chapter 6. For a general discussion on the uses of TANet BBSs for mobilization, see Jung-Yi Cheng, "The Roles of the Internet," 145-55.

¹¹ Ming-Hui Cheng, "Facing Reality in Virtual Space," 90.

The benefits of dingo's expertise in technology were more than saving time and money. It was the know-how of her own expertise that allowed dingo to try out her personal impulse. For dingo, it was also reasonable not to plan much or to have special expectations of her one-day task. On the other hand, without familiarity with the technology needed for building a BBS, a project such as the Bad Daughters BBS could not be impulsive. It had to be carefully planned before being carried out.

The impulsive origin of To-Get-Her does not lessen its importance in the history of Taiwanese lesbians. Instead, it shows a different possibility for initiating a new community. After all, a talented engineer could build a Web site in one day but she could not force people to visit it. Once dingo gave birth to To-Get-Her, its fate became a collective effort. In the first six months, My Lez Homepage received almost 20,000 visitors.¹² The growth of visitors was so fast that, in the following one and a half years, dingo had to recruit a team of webmasters called the Editor Team (ET) to share the management tasks. The next section is a careful examination of the special features of To-Get-Her that attract Taiwanese lesbians to come, stay, and form a cyber community.

THE FEATURES OF TO-GET-HER

Instead of designing a Web site from scratch, dingo reengineered the functionalities of BBSs into My Lez Homepage. Reengineering is a common practice whenever a major new technology is developed. It aims to provide a user-friendly interface and to broaden the range of potential users with new technology without

¹² Zoesum, "Dingo's Passion, Our Site; Dingo's Contribution, Our Home!"

TO-GET-HER
Lez Cyberpub
Since 1996

TO-GET-HER Lez Cyberpub is a place where the Chinese lesbian community can find information, support, and a place to share their experiences. We are a place where you can find information, support, and a place to share your experiences. We are a place where you can find information, support, and a place to share your experiences.

SOS! TO-GET-HER needs your help!
click here to help

我們之間
拉拉生活圈
拉拉生活圈
華人
拉拉生活圈

歡迎光臨TO-GET-HER 拉子堡(Lez Cyberpub)

本網站目前的網頁設計，希望能提供了一個輕鬆的氛圍，讓志同道合的朋友能夠在此相識相知。本網站並提供拉子資訊、討論區、聊天室等，讓拉子能與世界各地的拉子對話交流。

自1996年11月開始創立以來，TO-GET-HER 一直是一個非營利性的公益網站。目前TO-GET-HER 由義工組成的 Lez Cyberpub 負責設計維持。我們們都是因為支持TO-GET-HER 而認識，「促進臺灣化拉拉社群」的成立，讓我們共同運動的力量，是目前的目標方向。

目前在此社群的拉子遍佈全球各地，已漸漸形成了一個鬆散的拉子社區，我們在此歡迎您的加入。

Welcome to TO-GET-HER Lez Cyberpub

TO-GET-HER Lez Cyberpub is a place where the Chinese lesbian community can find information, support, and a place to share their experiences. We are a place where you can find information, support, and a place to share your experiences. We are a place where you can find information, support, and a place to share your experiences.

The TO-GET-HER Lez Cyberpub is a place where the Chinese lesbian community can find information, support, and a place to share their experiences. We are a place where you can find information, support, and a place to share your experiences. We are a place where you can find information, support, and a place to share your experiences.

There are Chinese lesbians coming from all over the world, we have become a large Lez Community. Welcome aboard!

To view the history and current situation of the Lez Cyberpub

If you can't read Chinese, please download [English version](#) for your browser. Welcome to "Lez" world!

This Site Features
active server
1998/11/11

本站由拉拉組成的 Lez Cyberpub 負責設計維持
Our site is brought to you by Lez Cyberpub Lez Cyberpub
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好社
FJULC
童女之舞
拉拉生活圈

Icons that link to other Taiwanese lesbian Web sites

Figure 4.1. The Homepage of To-Get-Her, November 1998.

[| 本pub簡介 | What's New? | 拉子新聞台 | 同女問講 |](#)
[| 汪汪電子報 | Get-A-Life | 瞎掰吹牛 | 拉子資料庫 | 拉網大連結 |](#)
[| 社團訊息 | 留言板萬歲 | 海外拉子 | 家長值同志區 | 回到吧台 |](#)

正宗瞎掰吹牛區 (Lez Talk)

歡迎來到本站人氣最旺的“瞎掰吹牛區”，如果你是第一次來到這裏，請為自己取一個暱稱，然後再到“拉子自介板”自我介紹，讓大家歡迎妳！

本區討論板雖採用匿名方式，讓大家自由發言，但仍有一些基本的規定，以防止言論的濫用侵犯她人之情形發生，請大家詳讀瞎掰吹牛的遊戲規則並配合。

本區板主採用投票制選出，每個人都有參選的權利，有興趣者，請詳閱遊戲規則中的板主申請與其職責規條。

過去二年來，咱拉子姊妹們所貼的文章都暫存在MO中，將找義工一同整理製作1996-7精華區與1998上半年精華區。

有任何疑問嗎？請來信給區隊員。

Introduction to the Lez Talk section, including hyperlinks to the usage rules of this section. It suggests the first-time visitor adopt a pseudonym and post a self-introduction.

※ To-Get-Her 網站變動說明

板主申請處
(版主: ET)	開板申請處
(版主: ET)	拉子自介板
(版主: 雷老凡)	徵婚徵友版
(版主: 雲雲)
老饕美食板
(版主: Maxine)	音樂交流版
(版主: IMAB)	藝術美學板
(版主: Ming)	好攝之徒板
(版主: 從缺)
旅遊經驗板
(版主: 從缺)	視聽電影板
(版主: Momo)	宗教信仰板
(版主: 從缺)	書籍討論板
(版主: Wave)
歐雷板
(版主: Van)	心情故事板
(版主: MEETING)	課外活動板
(版主: 善加)	買賣租屋糾紛板
(版主: 從缺)
小品創作板
(版主: 阿)	金賽拉拉板
(版主: 阿)	Lesbianism板
(版主: EGG)	健康長壽板
(版主: 從缺)
電腦討論板
(版主: 從缺)	Chat Room板
(版主: 4-eye (st))		
		笑話/心理測驗/鬼故事板
(版主: 幸福)	
		汪汪電子報讀者迴響板
(版主: ET)	

Discussion boards

Figure 4.2. The “Lez Talk” section of To-Get-Her, October 1998.

Advertisement banner

Hyperlinks to the articles from previous years

歐蕾版

1998精華區 | 1999精華區 | 2000精華區 | 2000 保存區 | 2001 保存區 | 2002 保存區

發表文章 | 正宗曙附區 | 曙附吹牛規則

所有文章

Topic (and the link to an article), Author, and the Time that the article was posted

A person started a new topic on July 4.

She got a response in two hours.

The original author replied on July 5.

Another person joined the discussion on July 6.

- 這是我的謠言????? -- Orange -- 7/6/02 23:54
- 黑與白 -- Oracle -- 7/5/02 14:19
 - 白遮三醜 -- 阿紅仔 -- 7/5/02 18:25
 - 自然就是美 -- 愛騙的人 -- 7/5/02 23:59
 - Re: 黑與白 -- joyce -- 7/6/02 02:41
- 誰來救救我 -- 我想我瘋了 -- 7/5/02 13:58
 - Re: 誰來救救我 -- joyce -- 7/6/02 02:49
 - 希望你好 -- W -- 7/6/02 04:30
 - Re: 我想多事 -- 是因為妳有更好的人選吧! *NM* -- green -- 7/6/02 23:15
 - Re: 誰來救救我 -- 想開點 -- 7/6/02 23:20
- 女人有六品 -- 6 -- 7/5/02 11:11
 - 成品+上品+精品 (cc... *NM* -- 不好意思打名字 -- 7/5/02 16:38
- 歡迎新舊朋友踴躍參與【幸運草】活動 -- 幸運草 -- 7/5/02 10:15
- 五六年級隨堂考 -- 痞子 -- 7/4/02 20:47
 - 不好意思 -- amo -- 7/5/02 00:14
 - Re: 不好意思? -- ^ ^ -- 7/5/02 09:01
 - Re: 五六年級隨堂考 -- hamster -- 7/5/02 02:23
 - Re: 五六年級隨堂考 -- antu -- 7/5/02 07:48
 - 九十分一旗 -- 794 -- 7/5/02 10:13
 - 才平天國皇囉 -- 痞子 -- 7/7/02 02:18
 - Re: 五六年級隨堂考 -- 番茄 -- 7/5/02 18:15
 - Re: 五六年級隨堂考 -- River大路 -- 7/6/02 03:24
 - 有點疑惑 -- River大路 -- 7/6/02 03:35
- 你..... -- 哀悼 -- 7/4/02 19:19
 - Re: 你..... -- 別再來找我 -- 7/4/02 20:57
 - Re: 你..... -- 哀悼 -- 7/5/02 11:20
 - 保重 -- 多事 -- 7/5/02 17:57
- 轉載/求人工知未已 -- klaver -- 7/4/02 17:23
- 六福村說"取消異性情侶限制" -- (o_o)轉貼自拉拉主義版 -- 7/4/02 15:29
 - Re: 給超人 -- 不想留 -- 7/5/02 04:43
 - 給不要留 -- sweach -- 7/5/02 10:23
 - 對不起!更正!是給不想留(inc) -- sweach -- 7/5/02 10:25
- 文朋友 -- 阿放 -- 7/4/02 15:23
- 感情二維選 -- 朋友、好朋友、情人、伴 -- Breeze -- 7/4/02 13:28
- 關於六福存那個該視同志的關字規定 -- 法德倫 -- 7/4/02 12:57
- 呼叫獨行俠 -- 另一個獨行俠 -- 7/4/02 08:32
 - 該打就該打! 另一個獨行俠 呼叫獨行俠 -- 在旁么嗎的 -- 7/4/02 08:54
 - 你又知道了..... -- 另一個獨行俠 -- 7/5/02 09:42
 - Re: 又知道了..... -- 在旁跟著 -- 7/5/02 14:03
 - Re: 又知道了..... -- 獨行俠 -- 7/5/02 15:30
 - 知道了..... 獨行俠! *NM* -- 在旁跟著 -- 7/6/02 09:19
 - Re: 是快給你回應 -- 獨行俠 -- 7/4/02 18:59
 - 你快快給的回應...謝了! -- 在旁么嗎的 -- 7/5/02 01:31
 - 我很感激嗎? -- 另一個獨行俠 -- 7/5/02 13:07
 - Re: 好說,好說 -- 獨行俠 -- 7/5/02 15:23

Figure 4.3. The Old Lesbians Board, one of the busiest board on To-Get-Her, June 2002.

請將要貼的文章填於下表：

大名

(Name)

Email

(Email)

主題

(Subject)

內容

(Contents)

你的 HomePage URL

(Your HomePage URL)

該 HomePage 的主題名稱

(The Title of your HomePage)

你應貼上的圖片網址

(The URL of your image file)

Preview

(Preview)

Submit

(Submit)

發表文章 | 正字通 | 論壇 | 關於 | 牛欄街

Figure 4.4. The input form at the bottom of the Old Lesbians Board, May 2002. A user does not need to memorize any command. She fills out the form, presses the “submit” button, and her posting is added to the database and displayed on the board instantly.

Dynamic Ad Banner for Rent!
TO-GET-HER 廣告出租
check for details

拉拉留言板萬歲

[本站簡介] [本站新聞] [熱門留言板] [廣告出租] [徵求大學生] [徵求學生]
[海外站主] [徵求站主] [徵求子站] [徵求站主] [徵求子站] [徵求站主]

歡迎留言

(Leave a message)

(Total: 3,513 messages, 352 pages.)

07/08/2002 11:29:13 AM
結束了三年的感情
當時的我正期待你的回信
但你的態度卻轉了我
終止了我的企圖
現在的我重心都在工作
偶爾無意中夢中遇見你
夢境全是我們的點點
結束一切前一切
讓我找到替代你的愛
阿ken (來自地獄的:角品) 我不知道我是作啥的 心惘惘呀

07/08/2002 11:27:54 AM
To~凡~
不管未來如何~
至少我們擁有過現在~
我們一定會幸福滴~
好愛好愛你~小小
小 (來自台灣) 我是上班族 不告訴你~~

Some messages blocks omitted

07/07/2002 11:09:08 AM
有房間要出租
高雄楠梓加工區旁
二樓套房約八坪左右,通風良好,有陽台,有全自動洗衣機,瓦斯爐等等...租金4000元..環境單純,請洽
0913-697-225,阿小姐,個女生
阿小姐 (來自高雄) 我是上班族 沒啥心情

07/07/2002 4:41:11 AM
隨時發信~~~~~@.@
Cloud (來自USA) 我是米虫 好無聊囉..

07/06/2002 3:30:01 AM
有人住L.A.嗎? 想認識住在L.A.的les.....
Cloud (來自USA) 我是米虫 沒啥覺~

07/06/2002 7:13:45 PM
我知道有加爾福尼亞(T-PUB)
在林生北路與州街36號2樓
見且它還有在徵公關
電話是23496157找副經理
少童 (來自台北市) 我不知道我是作啥的 瞎待中..

A message block:
date and time
message

name (from) emotion URL

(Next page)

Figure 4.5. LaLa guestbook, July 8, 2002.

More than 3,500 messages were accumulated between July 1999 and July 2002.

changing or sacrificing the essential features of the old technology. When dingo claimed, "I know that I can do it," she meant that she could reengineer the attractive functionalities of a TANet BBS into her Web site, such as online chatting and discussion boards. In this way, My Lez Homepage inherited the key characteristics of TANet BBSs and helped a new group of Taiwanese lesbians migrate to a new digital domain, the Web.

GUI and Hyperlinks: The Differences between a Web Site and a TANet BBS

In comparison with the user's experience of navigating within a TANet BBS, what distinguishes the To-Get-Her Web site the most are the user-friendly graphical user interface (GUI) and hyperlinks embedded in WWW technology. They allow a user to navigate on To-Get-Her more easily than on a TANet BBS, almost without any learning process. Figure 4.1 shows To-Get-Her's homepage in November 1998, which remained almost the same to this day. Navigating inside a Web site does not require memorizing any keyboard or mouse command. Taking this homepage and the Lez Talk section as an example, the hyperlinks on the top of homepage indicate all the available sections for users. Users only need to pick one link that looks interesting, point the mouse to that link and click; the browser will display the contents of that section of choice. If the user clicks and enters the Lez Talk section, for example, all the discussion boards are displayed on one page (see Figure 4.2). Again, selecting a board is a simple click away, and the on-going discussion on that board is shown simultaneously (see Figure 4.3). If the user decides to start a new discussion topic, all she needs to do is fill out the table at

the bottom and click the submit button (see Figure 4.4). Her new posting will immediately be added to the board and, within seconds, other users can start responding to it.

Navigating inside a BBS is, by comparison, far more cumbersome. TANet BBSs use a text-based technology so a mouse is not functional there. A user can only make selections by moving the up and down arrows or by typing the corresponding number, and she has to memorize a different command for every action. For instance, in the board menu shown in Figure 3.1, the right arrow key means going to the article section of the highlighted board, and “/” means searching for a particular board. In the article section showed in Figure 3.2, “/” means searching for a subject and “a” an author. The commands are numerous and not always consistent from one BBS to another. For a newcomer to TANet BBSs, pressing “h”—the help command, which shows all the available commands—on every page is an unavoidable and painful learning process.

For a user who can spend a week or two familiarizing herself with the commands and conventions of a new environment, the differences between a TANet BBS and the To-Get-Her Web site may seem trivial. However, the reality is that not everyone is willing to learn some new and complicated ways of navigation if she or he has been fairly accustomed to a specific system. Especially for To-Get-Her users who are used to the point-and-click navigation and the GUI, moving to the TANet BBS environment seems a technical regression. As a result, these technical differences widen the social and cultural gaps between members of the TANet BBSs and the To-Get-Her Web communities.

Interactivity: The Differences between To-Get-Her and other Web Sites

From the founder, dingo, to the later Editor Team, the key developers of the To-Get-Her Web site have always been very conscious of the advantages and disadvantages of various Internet technologies. Right from the start, dingo was mindful of the interaction between technology and human beings and its influence. In an interview by *Wan Wan eZine*, dingo spoke of designing *My Lez Homepage*,

To build a Web site is not easy and to maintain it is even harder. Relying on a single person cannot keep its information up to date. Therefore, I figured out a swindling method. I designed this Web site so that everyone can come and post information. In this way, I don't need to put any information myself! Moreover, a Web site that everyone can participate in, exchange opinions, and nourish its growth is indeed the spirit of the "Internet!"¹³

The result of dingo's work is a highly *interactive* Web site. On most Web sites, webmasters do not separate the information that they want to provide from the programs that sustain the structure of the Web sites. This approach requires fewer technical skills from webmasters, but it means they need to deal with updating every piece of information. On an interactive Web site like *My Lez Homepage* or *To-Get-Her*, the Web site can update its own contents from users' inputs without the webmaster's technical participation.

The advantage of an interactive Web site is not simply that it saves the webmaster's time and energy but that it makes the existence of the webmaster transparent. Because everybody can participate in the information sharing, the interaction between humans and machines becomes nothing but a medium to facilitate the interaction

¹³ Zoesum, "Dingo's Passion, Our Site; Dingo's Contribution, Our Home!"

Figure 4.6. Comparison between non-interactive and interactive Web sites. In a non-interactive Web site, information only flows from webmaster to users. In an interactive Web site, the webmaster provides the necessary programs but do not need to directly provide information to users. Therefore, Information flows interactively among users.

among all users (Figure 4.6). In fact, dingo founded the To-Get-Her Web site but she rarely posted articles on it. When explaining her role in the To-Get-Her community, dingo said,

To-Get-Her is not just a medium. It is an information center as well as a community. I will not engage in the direction and the style of this Web site. What it represents shall be the culture that is formed and contributed to by all users. What will this culture be? Where will it head? I am most interested in these questions. What I need to do is to build the necessary public facilities so that everyone in this community can think about the diversity of lesbian culture, build their identities, learn to accept others' differences, and find their own groups and friends.¹⁴

The job of building and maintaining "the public facilities" also became the most important task of the ET when they took up the role of webmaster for the To-Get-Her Web site.

In addition to the TANet BBS community, To-Get-Her is yet another example of the importance of interactive media in the formation of a community. In a community such as To-Get-Her that does not have an office or any paper publication in the real world, the interactive mediating function it performs is irreplaceable for binding its members together.

The Structure

The To-Get-Her Web site has expanded over the years, but the feature of interactive information exchange remains the most important to this day. During the period of My Lez Homepage, the Web site had six sections:

1. Lez Talk: the most popular section, divided into many discussion boards

¹⁴ Dingo, "Some Sincere Advices," 185.

focusing on more than twenty different topics;

2. LaLa Guestbook: sequentially displaying the short messages left by visitors (see Figure 4.5);
3. Online Chat Room;
4. *Wan Wan eZine*: the community newspaper;
5. Online Resource: links to the Web sites of Tongzhi or feminist groups or useful online information for lesbians;
6. Personal Web sites: links to other Taiwanese lesbians' personal Web sites.

Except for *Wan Wan eZine* and the Online Resource, My Lez Homepage thoroughly depended on users to build the information database. Whenever a user saw fit, she could simply key in a piece of information in a related section through the Web site's interactive interface. The webmaster, dingo, only needed to intervene in this process when a technical mistake occurred. She was in charge of updating the Online Resource list, but that was not a tedious task because there were only a handful of lesbian and feminist Web sites at that time. *Wan Wan eZine* did not burden dingo too much, either, because she entrusted most of the work to some volunteer editors.

In short, dingo provided the technology for users to share information, but she herself hardly was the sole information provider. And this was the fundamental concept in the information provision of My Lez Homepage: *there was not one but thousands of information providers*. Every user could contribute to topics familiar to her while getting answers to her questions on another topic. Furthermore, with these back and forth processes of contribution and inquiry, the sense of belonging to a community

quickly deepened. That was why the visitors came back over and over again and, eventually, form a cyber community.

The non-interactive Web sections added during the growth of the To-Get-Her Web site function as knowledge and news distribution channels from the ET to the members of the To-Get-Her community. *Lez Columns*, for example, has introductory articles on the history and culture of lesbians. *Historical Museum* is used to record and archive activities sponsored by To-Get-Her, including panels, contests, and protests. Sometimes a temporary discussion board is set up in one of these sections to promote an event or book reading. For the rest of the time, the non-interactive sections function as conventional print media, such as magazines or publications. The information provided in these sections is mostly one-directional—flowing from the ET to the readers, and seldom the reverse. The members of the ET have better control over the quality of the information they provide, but they also have to do all the work, from collecting information to organizing and publishing the Web pages.

Free Access

Compared to the use of technology in the features that I have covered so far, the free access policy is a conscious decision by the ET *not* to use certain available technology. The free access policy means, plainly and simply, that To-Get-Her does not require any membership registration or usage fee. Whoever reaches the To-Get-Her Web site can immediately and freely browse through the whole site, and join the discussion at any time. There is no requirement to leave any personal information. A

user can post her message with any pseudonym she makes up.¹⁵

TANet BBSs, however, requires registration, and users are granted different levels of privileges. Since the registration process often requires personal information, it is not always a comfortable one for lesbians. The registration process also causes delay in joining the cyber community, because a new user is not allowed to enter some restricted boards and to post articles until the application for membership is approved. In the case of the Bad Daughter BBS, for example, the registration process is even stricter than what other TANet BBSs would normally require in an effort to protect the privacy of lesbians.

Why, then, does the To-Get-Her Web site not mandate such protective mechanisms? To be sure, the ET has the technology to implement a registration process. However, the members of the ET have been the strongest supporters of the free access policy. Moreover, To-Get-Her's polls in 1997 and 1998 indicated that the community was in agreement with the free access policy.¹⁶ What is the philosophy behind the free access policy that attracts members of the To-Get-Her community? I will examine this policy from two related perspectives: cost and security for a non-profit lesbian Web site.

Financially, members of the To-Get-Her community have shown by their actions that they prefer to support the To-Get-Her Web site by donation-at-will rather than a paid membership. Both polls in 1997 and 1998 were held when To-Get-Her had financial needs. In the poll of 1997, dingo gave the users two options: either to stay with the free resources or to hold a fundraiser for acquiring a domain name and expanding the Web

¹⁵ For more discussion on To-Get-Her users' usage of pseudonyms, see Chapter 6.

¹⁶ ET, "Introduction to Our Web Site," January 2002, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/intro.shtml>> (25 June 2003), Chronology.

site.¹⁷ The users of My Lez Homepage at that time voted for the latter. Accordingly, dingo threw a fundraising Christmas party at the end of 1997. With the donations collected at that party, dingo was able to acquire the domain name, to-get-her.org, move My Lez Homepage to a commercial ISP, and expand the site into the To-Get-Her Lez Cyber Pub. With its newly improved functionality, the Cyber Pub attracted even more visitors.

In June 1998, dingo held the second poll in preparation for another fundraising.¹⁸ Dingo again provided the same two options, and the community again voted for fundraising. In two months, dingo coordinated with the ET and began organizing a fundraising drive. By the time the fundraising started in October 1998, the number of visitors had grown so rapidly that the cost of ISP had increased from \$20 to \$135 per month. However, within a month the To-Get-Her community responded with donations totaling more than five thousand dollars, which was sufficient to support the Web site for at least three years. In the following years, the ET continued to receive occasional donations without needing to hold more fundraising events.

In the preliminary discussion for the fundraising of 1998, the ET became aware of the financial needs to sustain the Web site but they remained strongly against implementing a membership system for at least four reasons. First of all, the ET believed that the cyberspace should be as free and unrestricted as possible.¹⁹ Second,

¹⁷ ET, "The Second Lez Poll on Net Issue," 11 June 1998, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/history/vote/lalavote.htm>> (2 July 2003).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ For a brief history of this trend of engineering tradition, see, for example, Segaller, *Nerds 2.0.1*.

the ET believed that a lesbian community would be meaningless if it was gated and segregated.²⁰ In the case of unfriendly gay-bashing visitors, the ET encouraged To-Get-Her users' collective efforts to debate with them and to chase them away. Third, the ET was concerned that a registration requirement would discourage people from joining in online discussion, especially those who were not yet sure about their lesbian identity.²¹

Last but not the least important, the ET was concerned that a registration system could turn out to be not a protection but a security risk. The method of security protection for an online environment that administrators adopt is often to implement a stricter registration process. For instance, the Bad Daughter BBS has a stricter registration process than other TANet BBSs. However, administrators seldom carefully evaluate whether a registration that collects personal information is indeed necessary. The ET does not think the To-Get-Her Web site needs to collect visitors' personal information because the Web site is just an information center. Instead, the ET advises users only to reveal their personal information during online discussion according to their comfort levels. In this way, the ET does not record any user's personal information on the Web site and thus reduces possible risk of hacker attack.

²⁰ For ET's vision of the community, see ET, "To-Get-Her Fazhan Qihuashu (The Proposal for the Development of To-Get-Her)," 24 April 2000, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/account.shtml>> (8 June 2003), The Future of To-Get-Her, the Ideal of the ET.

²¹ Many people did come to To-Get-Her in order to be lesbians. It is not unusual to see someone start her self-introduction with "I have been observing [the articles on the discussion boards] for a period, now I want to join you." or "Could someone tell me how do I know if I am lesbian?"

THE EDITOR TEAM

When dingo organized the ET in 1998, engineering expertise and the participation in To-Get-Her's online activities were the criteria. Most of the ET members have similar backgrounds to dingo's. Except the treasurer, all of the six original ET members were engineers or students majoring in science or engineering. No other Taiwanese lesbian or feminist group has such a high documented number of engineers working for its Web site, not to mention as its group leaders. Moreover, while all of the earliest ET members had been active participants since the period of My Lez Homepage, none of them had experience in any social movement before they found out about the existence of such a Web site.²² The difference in the background of the ET and other Taiwanese lesbian and feminist groups were important. Compared to most other lesbian and feminist groups in Taiwan, the To-Get-Her ET faced a different mission since the date it was founded. Rather than recruiting more supporters for a definite goal of advancing activism, the first task for the ET was to figure out how to serve an existing, highly populated community and what activism in cyberspace was possible. This section will analyze how the experience of participation in online activities and, most importantly, the engineering expertise have enabled the ET not only to serve its own community but also to contribute to Taiwan's lesbian movement at large.

From late 1998 to 2000, with their expertise in Internet technology, the ET of the To-Get-Her Web site sponsored many real-life activities for the To-Get-Her community

²² Pi Zi [Ping-Ying Chang], "To-Get-Her de Sihaiqingyi (The Global Friendship in the To-Get-Her Community)" in *Yangqi Caihongqi: Wode Tongzhiyundong Jinyan, 1990-2001* (When the Rainbow Raises: My Experience in the Tongzhi Movement, 1990-2001), ed. Hwei-chiou Chuang (Taipei: Psygarden, 2002), 193-94.

and cooperated with several other Tongzhi activist groups. Table 4.1 shows a comparison of the different Internet tools that the ET has utilized. E-mail is the most convenient tool for conducting frequent discussions within a small group like the ET. The private discussion board and guestbook give the ET a virtual office space, where they leave messages for one another and coordinate the work. When initial thoughts have been exchanged and preliminary preparation has been done, the ET can then settle any remaining details of the planning by meeting in an online chat room.

The extended use of the Internet for communication among members of the ET is because of their personal engineering specialty, but it is also a necessity to overcome the barriers of physical distance. When the ET was first formed in August 1998, only two of its members were located in Taiwan. Of the rest of the members, one lived in Hong Kong and three in different areas in the United States. In my experiences of working with other ET members, it was always an exciting moment when we found creative methods to overcome the barriers of physical distance via the Internet. The activities organized by the ET, in fact, are examples of how technology can stretch the possibility of real-life activism. Two exceedingly successful examples were the fundraising event in 1998 and the T-shirt design contest in 1999. Because the financial necessity of holding fundraising to maintain the To-Get-Her Web site has already been analyzed, the following will examine how the ET made it a success.

Being frequent users of the Web site themselves, the ET knew that the members of the To-Get-Her community came from many different areas of the world. The ET did not target the fundraising only to the lesbians in Taiwan. Instead, the ET had different

Table 4.1. Comparison of the Internet Tools that the Editor Team Utilized.

Type of Tools	Users	Information Flow	Usage	Responding Time	Information Preservation
Email	Between two or more people.	From sender to one or multiple receivers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Private discussion ● Casual Chatting 	Depend on the receivers' frequency of checking emails	In individual mailbox
Discussion Email List	Subscribers	Every member can send message to the list.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Public discussion among subscribers 	Depend on the receivers' frequency of checking emails	In individual mailbox
News Email List	Subscribers	From the list owner to subscribers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Announcement 	Depend on the receivers' frequency of checking emails	In individual mailbox
Instant Messenger	Between two peoples	Mutual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Private discussion ● Casual Chatting 	Instant response and discussion	No

Table 4.1.—Continued.

Type of Tools	Users	Information Flow	Usage	Responding Time	Information Preservation
Chat room	Participants	Broadcast to everyone in the room or private chatting between two participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meeting and conference ● Not good for long speeches 	Instant response and discussion	No
Discussion Board	Anyone	Publicly among all users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Public discussion among the whole community or a topic group ● Non-sequential discussion 	Depend on users' frequency of surfing the board	On the Web site
Guestbook	Anyone	Publicly among all users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Short note or discussion 	Depend on users' frequency of checking out the guestbook	On the Web site

bank accounts set up for collecting donations in Taiwan, the U.S., and Hong Kong. Each ET member was in charge of the area where she lived. For instance, because I was one of the ET members, my personal contact information became the temporary contact information for To-Get-Her. Any To-Get-Her user in the North America could send her donation to me or contact me for more details about the fundraising. A user could also contact the other two ET members, who lived on the east coast, should she feel that to be more convenient. As a result, the ET collected donations from Taiwanese lesbians in Taiwan, Hong Kong, the United States, Canada, and Australia without much trouble. Moreover, this international support network clearly shows that the To-Get-Her community was, indeed, already a global community for Taiwanese lesbians at that time.

Again, Web technology was the crucial communication medium for the ET and the whole community. In order to trace the progress of the fundraising, the ET programmed an online accounting system that could be updated simultaneously from any place at any time. Not only the ET but also every visitor to the To-Get-Her Web site could instantly see the list of donors and the amount of donations. In the meantime, the ET installed a bulletin board to discuss related issues. This bulletin board was a place not only for the ET to answer users' questions but also for users to voice their support for the To-Get-Her Web site and brainstormed about achieving a better future for the community.

The T-shirt design contest in 1999 further exemplified how the ET managed the To-Get-Her community both on the Internet and in the real world.²³ After internal discussion sessions held on the Internet, the ET advertised the T-shirt design contest on

²³ For the details of the T-shirt Design Contest, see "To-Get-Her Lez T-shirt," 1 June 1999, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/history/tshirt/t-shirt.shtml>> (25 June 2003).

the To-Get-Her Web site, and sent the announcement out via the To-Get-Her news mailing list. After all the designs had been collected and displayed online, the ET hosted the voting for best T-shirt. It then turned the winning design into products simultaneously in Taiwan and in the United States. As in the case of fundraising, the ET used the online accounting system. The ET members also used their personal bank accounts and residences as collecting points in Taiwan, Hong Kong and the United States for subsequent T-shirt sales. By the time the T-shirt contest and sales ended, about three hundred T-shirts had been sold in Taiwan and other countries.

Besides these large-scale activities, the ET held various hybrid activities in both cyberspace and the real world. For example, being both a member of the ET and a panelist for The Overseas Lez Panel held in January 1999, I was in charge of contacting other panelists who lived in the San Francisco Bay area. The ET members in Taiwan were responsible for arranging panel schedules with the feminist bookstore, Fembooks, in Taipei, while the rest of the ET members put the event announcement on the To-Get-Her Web site. In the preparatory process, the ET heavily relied on the Internet, and often we did not meet face to face until the last minute. In fact, because the ET members were scattered around the world, I did not meet the Hong Kong member in person until December 2000, and all the members of the ET have still never had a chance to get together.

Although most of the ET members do not live in Taiwan, they are able to contribute to the Tongzhi movement in Taiwan via the Internet. As soon as the ET was formed, it cooperated with WZJ to launch the first online endorsement campaign in

Taiwan's Tongzhi movement as a response to the CTS News Report Incident. In the following years, the ET sponsored many Tongzhi events, including designing Web sites for several Tongzhi films and for the Tongzhi Rescue Alliance for the September 21 Earthquake.

The effective teamwork of the ET would not be possible without expertise in Internet technology that its members have. The To-Get-Her ET never hesitates to use technology to benefit community building and activism. On the other hand, its support for the free access policy shows that the ET is not willing to use technology without careful consideration. After all, the ET well understands that the purpose of the To-Get-Her Web site is to provide a space for Taiwanese lesbians, not for the ET members to demonstrate their personal expertise. The next section will examine the more important part of the To-Get-Her community: the social activities among To-Get-Her users.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

More important than the events initiated by the ET are the social activities conducted through the To-Get-Her Web site. The Lez Talk section has more than twenty discussion boards on different topics. When To-Get-Her users exchange their thoughts and stories on these boards, frequently they become good friends, lovers, or partners in real life. Very few restrict their activities to cyberspace. Discussion on the Web is often followed by e-mails and phone calls. Before long, users arrange to meet new friends face to face. Moreover, there is always someone who will volunteer to

sponsor a picnic, a potluck dinner party, or a book-reading club.

The reading club held by Oracle [pseud.] in June 2002 exemplified how a To-Get-Her community member can weave cyber and real-life activities together. Having been a long time user of the To-Get-Her Web site, Oracle volunteered to be the board master (BM) of the *Ole* (Old Lesbians, Old Lez) Board sometime in 2001.²⁴ The responsibilities of a BM include removing outdated articles, promoting discussions, and mediating when there are arguments. Compared with the members of the ET, who were in charge of the technical aspects of maintaining the To-Get-Her Web site, a BM has more influence on the style and atmosphere of the board she is responsible for. In mid-May 2002, Oracle posted a message on the Old Lesbians Board to inquire about people's interests in organizing a reading club in Taichung, the largest city in central Taiwan.²⁵ Oracle asked anyone who wanted to join to send her an e-mail. Through e-mailing, Oracle verified the participants' ages (since this was an activity for lesbians over thirty years old), picked the best date for most participants, and sent out instructions and directions to the gathering place. After this successful activity, more than a dozen participants posted messages on the board to express their appreciation of Oracle's contribution.²⁶ They were pleased that this activity had helped them make new friends. Many expressed the desire that another similar gathering would be held soon.

²⁴ In Taiwan's lesbian community, it is commonly acknowledged that "*O-le*" means lesbians over thirty years old. See Chapter 5 for more discussion on *O-le* and To-Get-Her.

²⁵ Oracle [pseud.], "Old Lesbian Reading Club in Taichung: Information," 17 May 2002, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/cgi-bin/oldlez2002.pl?read=14318>> (2 June 2003).

²⁶ See the thread of articles began with Football Fish [pseud.], "Wish You Are Well: After Thoughts after the Reading Club," 24 June 2002, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/cgi-bin/oldlez2002.pl?read=14955>> (12 June 2003), and Oracle [pseud.], "Old Lez Reading Club in Taichung: Appreciation," 24 June 2002, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/cgi-bin/oldlez2002.pl?read=14963>> (12 June 2003).

Despite the fact that the ET made an effort to promote discussion on lesbian activism, members of the To-Get-Her community were more interested in making new friends, finding partners, and sharing life experiences. Figure 4.7 illustrates the popularity of the various discussion boards on the To-Get-Her Web site. In the first half of 2002, all six of the most popular boards—Sex, Overseas Lesbians, Old Lesbians, Politics, Mood, Making Friends—had more than 1,900 articles. In contrast, all of the rest of the boards accumulated fewer than 750 articles each. Mood, Making Friends, and Sex were the three most popular boards over the years. While To-Get-Her users often write sad and moody stories about breakups on the Mood Board, they eagerly look for a new friendship or romance on the Making Friends Board. However, users do not hesitate to refine their sexual skills through the discussion on the Sex Board. Instead of focusing on one specific topic, the Old Lesbians Board has become an important gathering spot for older lesbians to make friends and share experiences. Similarly, the Overseas Lesbians Board has the same social function for the Taiwanese lesbians who do not live in Taiwan. Its reputation among overseas Taiwanese lesbians has also distinguished the To-Get-Her community from the TANet BBS lesbian communities.

The rapid growth of the Politics Board contrasts sharply with the closure of the Lesbian Theory Board. Due to a lack of usage, the Lesbian Theory board was closed down in June 2001. On the Politics Board, the discussions based on the daily political news and the newspaper columns were so fiercely debated that they often turned into personal attacks. Tongzhi issues, however, hardly attracted any attention there. For instance, of the 230 articles posted on the Politics Board in May 2002, only three related

Figure 4.7. Number of articles posted on the boards of the Lez Talk section between January 2001 and June 2002. *Cellular Phone Board was opened in February 2001. The articles on Rental and Friend Boards previous to February 2001 were missing. The numbers of these three Boards were adjusted for comparison. Religion and Lesbian Theory Boards were closed in June 2001, and Chatroom July 2001. Source: The 2001 and 2002 Article Archive on To-Get-Her.

to the protest over gay men in the military at that time. Most of the rest of the articles reflected the enthusiasm for political issues of contemporary Taiwanese: the independence of Taiwan vis-à-vis its reunion with China, and the competition among political parties. For the frequent users of the Politics board, Tongzhi issues did not seem to be a central concern.

The importance of the To-Get-Her Web site is precisely in its focus on lesbians' daily and social lives. As long as coming out still means considerable risk, a free and safe social space is crucial for a Taiwanese lesbian to be a lesbian. Instead of focusing on whether such space should be in the real world or cyberspace, this research claim that the existence of such a space itself is far more important than where it is, cyberspace or otherwise. Moreover, not only has the ET never restricted its activities to cyberspace, but also To-Get-Her users have always used the To-Get-Her Web site to organize real-life activities. Although this might not seem an immediate achievement of the lesbian movement, To-Get-Her has indeed built a community base for Taiwanese lesbians.

CONCLUSION

To-Get-Her is a grass-roots cyber community for Taiwanese lesbians. My Lez Homepage is the product of an individual's brilliance in information technology. That it even developed and grew to become the To-Get-Her Lez Community was due largely to the efforts of dingo, the ET, BMs, and most importantly, the countless users who shared their stories, opinions, and information on the To-Get-Her Web site. In this boundless

cyberspace, there is not any particular way to oblige a Taiwanese lesbian to visit and use To-Get-Her. Nonetheless, visitors not only came but stayed. Some of them even volunteered their time and energy to serve the community. Others have provided generous financial support for the To-Get-Her Web site, which receives more than 20,000 visits every month.

The To-Get-Her Lez Community would not be possible without information technology. The variety of this technology becomes different building materials for the community. With the proper combination of technologies, the Editor Team has built and maintained an interactive and comfortable space that provides various features and information. Moreover, To-Get-Her users connect this space with the real world by conducting their social activities beyond the boundaries of cyberspace. To them, the Internet is a tool, a medium, and most importantly, an inseparable part of their personal lives.

This chapter has analyzed how WWW technology has brought out the To-Get-Her community for Taiwanese lesbians. After close examinations of both the TANet BBSs and WWW technology used on To-Get-Her, this thesis will turn to the social and cultural aspects of the To-Get-Her Web site. Chapter Five will present demographic evidence and argue that To-Get-Her is indeed a different community from the TANet BBS lesbian community. Following that, Chapter Six provides analysis of To-Get-Her's distinct culture and identity representations.

CHAPTER 5

THE DEMOGRAPHY OF TO-GET-HER USERS

The previous chapter has shown that the To-Get-Her Lez Cyber Community has a different historical origin from that of the TANet BBS lesbian community. TANet BBS was a state-sponsored Internet technology developed in the early 1990s. In contrast, the building of Taiwanese Web sites was more of a discrete, individual effort that became popular only in the late 1990s. However, is there any evidence to show that To-Get-Her is, indeed, different from the TANet BBS community? This chapter will present evidence and analyze this question in detail. Before proceeding, however, it is important to note that the answer to this question is not self-evident. Both TANet BBS and the WWW are technologies derived from the Internet protocol, and they both provide interactive discussion boards and attract users to form communities of their own. Despite that this thesis has pointed out the technical characteristics of the To-Get-Her Web site, to prove that the differences between To-Get Her and the TANet BBS lesbian communities are not just technical, but social, needs further investigation.

To show that To-Get-Her is different from the TANet BBS lesbian community, this chapter will compare the latest available results from the census of *Lala Zitui Gongzuoshi* (Lalainfo Workshop) with those of the demographic surveys conducted on the To-Get-Her Web site. A brief introduction to Lalainfo is necessary here. *Lala Zitui Gongzuoshi*, which literally means “lesbian workshop for promoting information

technology,” was formed in February 1997. Lalainfo has conducted the annual Online Lesbian Census since 1998.¹ According to the introduction on its Web site, Lalainfo is “the only lesbian group in Taiwan that actively uses the Internet for the Tongzhi movement,” “Taiwan’s only Tongzhi group originating from the Internet,” and it has “built the first lesbian information Web site.”² Lalainfo’s overemphasis on TANet BBSs probably causes its obvious neglect of the To-Get-Her Web site, which was founded in November 1996, three months earlier than Lalainfo. Nonetheless, such neglect leads to an underlying important factor when we compare the results of the demographic surveys from Lalainfo and To-Get-Her.³ When Lalainfo intensively recruited informants from the BBS community during its survey period, its advertisement was hardly visible on the To-Get-Her Web site. Therefore, Lalainfo’s survey tended to reflect only the background of lesbians associated with TANet BBSs. The following comparisons will further validate this assertion.

RESIDENCE

Ever since its founding, To-Get-Her has been not only a place for lesbians in

¹ XiaoYuan [pseud.], “Pucha Jingshen” (The Essential Meanings of the General Survey), 2002, <http://www.taconet.com.tw/AdTaconet/-78fc791b4c2b6e56708d02e14f7624c9|1047250508-/dynamic_frame.htm?sid=lalainfo/survey/2001/index.htm&TACO=78fc791b4c2b6e56708d02e14f7624c9|1047250508> (20 February 2003).

² Wei Wei [pseud.], “Taiwan Zuiyou Huodongli de Lazi Tuanti: Lala Zitui Gongzuoshi” (Taiwan’s Most Active Lesbian Organization: Lalainfo Workshop), 2002, <http://www.taconet.com.tw/AdTaconet/-3e91809bd56116c29685f6690560a38f|1045967409-/dynamic_frame.htm?sid=lalainfo/lalainfo.htm&TACO=3e91809bd56116c29685f6690560a38f|1045967409> (20 February 2003).

³ All the survey results used here are the latest available ones. Namely, the Online Lesbian Census conducted by Lalainfo in November and December 2001, and the series of “Simple Surveys” by To-Get-Her in 2002.

Taiwan, but also a community for Taiwanese lesbians around the globe. According to the survey conducted by To-Get-Her's *Wan Wan eZine* in July 1998, 31 percent of To-Get-Her users did not live in Taiwan.⁴ The proportion of To-Get-Her's overseas users continued to grow over the years. By the end of 2002, only 38 percent identified themselves as from Taiwan (see Figure 5.1). In contrast, Lalainfo's census of 2001 found that only 8 percent of its informants were from overseas. The comparison of the residence distributions in Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2 further shows that To-Get-Her users are from a more diverse geographical pool than Lalainfo's informants.

Moreover, while 241 (out of 395) informants of To-Get-Her's survey are overseas Taiwanese lesbians, in Lalainfo's census the number is only 137 (out of 1,711). It can be deduced that Lalainfo's census did not cover all, or even the majority of, lesbians of the To-Get-Her community. Although there is certainly some overlap between the populations of the To-Get-Her and the TANet BBS lesbian communities, Lalainfo's Online Lesbian Census is a census more of the TANet BBS lesbian community than of the Taiwanese lesbian cyber community or the whole lesbian community in Taiwan. A quick comparison between these two sample sizes shows that To-Get-Her is, indeed, a large community. The population of the To-Get-Her community is more than a fifth of the whole lesbian population represented in Lalainfo's census. This further shows that Lalainfo has overlooked not just some Taiwanese lesbians but a large population in its Lesbian Census.

The result of this residence survey reflects, nevertheless, the geographical

⁴ ET, "The Survey Results from *Wan Wan eZine Issue Two*," *Wan Wan eZine*, 24 November 1998, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/eZine/Issue3/survey1.html>> (1 May 2002).

The Taiwanese Lesbian Community Surveyed by LaLainfo Workshop
(sample size: 1711)

Figure 5.1. Comparison of the residence between the survey results from To-Get-Her and LaLainfo.

Sources: LaLainfo Group, *The Fourth Online Lesbian Census*, 18 March 2002 <<http://98.to/lalasurvey/>> (18 January 2003), and "Simple Survey of Residency," *To-Get-Her Historical Museum*, February 2003, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/history..shtml>> (22 June 2003).

distribution of overseas Taiwanese lesbians rather than the distribution of Chinese culture or the global Chinese community. While 31 percent of To-Get-Her users are from the U.S. or Canada and 8 percent from Hong Kong or Macao, only 8 percent are from mainland China. Singapore, a country strongly influenced by the Chinese culture, occupies 1.3 percent in this survey. Australia, which attracts many Taiwanese immigrants and students, has 3 percent. The next chapter will further analyze the importance of being able to use traditional Chinese characters, the written language in Taiwan, as a crucial factor of To-Get-Her users' Taiwanese identity in cyberspace.

AGE

Similar to the residence distribution, the age distribution of To-Get-Her's survey is more diverse than that of Lalainfo's census (see Figure 5.2). In Lalainfo's census, about three-quarters of the population are between 16 and 26 years old. Its largest age group is the one between 19 and 22 (33 percent), and less than 7 percent of the population is above 30 years old. Again, with an average age of 22.6, Lalainfo's census reflects the background of the TANet BBS lesbian community as one closely associated with the universities.⁵ Meanwhile, the average age of To-Get-Her users is 26.8. The largest age group in this survey falls between the ages of 27 and 30 (24 percent). This shows that To-Get-Her users are significantly older than and different from members of the BBS community.

A more important phenomenon that calls for further analysis is that 30 percent

⁵ I calculated the average ages from the age groups and corresponding population percentages from Lalainfo's census and To-Get-Her's survey.

Figure 5.2. Comparison of the age distributions between the survey results of To-Get-Her and Lalainfo.

Sources: Lalainfo Workgroup, *The Fourth Online Lesbian Census*, 18 March 2002 <<http://98.to/lalasurvey/>> (18 January 2003), and "Simple Survey of Age Distribution," *To-Get-Her Historical Museum*, February 2003, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/history.shtml>> (22 June 2003).

of To-Get-Her users are over 30 years old, namely, they are *Ole*. Since the mid-1990s, Taiwan's lesbian community has used *Ole* as a synonym and abbreviation for "old lesbians."⁶ It is adopted also because of the popular Olay skin care products to signal "the older the prettier." The meanings of the adoption of *Ole* are two-fold. On the one hand, it shows respect for the older members of the lesbian community. On the other hand, *Ole* is meant to replace the traditional term—uncle—in the T-bar community. In the December 1994 issue of *Girl Friends*, an anonymous author questioned the legitimacy of "uncle" right after she explained the meaning of *Ole*. She wrote:

The term "uncle" has been used to this day as a respect for some senior dykes. . . . However, after hearing this appellation for some time, we women have to question: Why do women want to use a male appellation? In this regard, *Ole*—old lesbian—is a more legitimate candidate and, as we expect, it wins!⁷

Similar to Tongzhi and *Bufen*, *Ole* was a term that originated from Taiwan's lesbian movement of the 1990s. However, *Ole* has not become a visible sub-community in the lesbian movement, which was mostly based on university campuses. The result of To-Get-Her's age survey, therefore, shows the social significance of To-Get-Her because it is becoming a large *Ole* community for Taiwanese lesbians. For future studies which focus on *Ole* in Taiwanese lesbian community, the To-Get-Her Web site will be a valuable source.

Last but not the least important, in comparison to TANet BBSs, the To-Get-Her Web site not only attracts visitors but also makes them stay. Although the TANet BBS community proliferated earlier than the To-Get-Her Web site, it remains a community

⁶ JM, "O Le' Xinjie" (New Definition of O-Le), *Niupengyou* (Girl Friends) December, 1994, 5.

⁷ Ibid.

mainly for college students. A TANet BBS user might soon lose her connection to students' activities once she leaves the university campus, and therefore, lose the connection to the TANet BBS lesbian community. This is the reason why the average age calculated from Lala's Online Lesbian Census is so low. Moreover, while the Internet serves as the communication medium for the TANet BBS lesbian community, this community is, indeed, mainly connected by the real-life activities on university campuses. In contrast, the To-Get-Her community is solely based on cyberspace. As long as a user can access the computer and the Internet, physical relocation or career change only slightly affect her connection to the To-Get-Her community. In fact, the To-Get-Her Web site helps its users adjust to new locations because meeting new friends is always an important part in To-Get-Her's social activities. While a user might change from one physical location to another, she can always stay with To-Get-Her.

PROFESSION

In To-Get-Her's survey, about 35 percent of the informants identify themselves as students, while in Lalainfo's census it is higher than 62 percent (see Table 5.1). With such a high proportion of students, the lesbian community represented by Lalainfo's census does not leave much possibility for meeting people from other various professions. In the To-Get-Her community, however, running into a student is only half as likely as meeting a professional, and each profession is also more visibly represented here.

Life in the workplace, however, does not appear to be the focus of online

Table 5.1. The Professional Distribution of the To-Get-Her Community and Taiwanese Lesbians.

	To-Get-Her	Lalainfo Workshop
	December 2002	November 2001
<i>sample size</i>	328	1,711
student	34.5%	62.8%
education/research	5.2%	5.2%
finance/insurance	4.9%	2.2%
computer/electronic engineering	10.7%	4.7%
medical professions	3.4%	2.4%
media	3.7%	1.8%
government	3.0%	1.4%
service	4.6%	0.8%
manufacturing	2.7%	3.3%
others	27.4%	15.4%

Source: Lalainfo Workshop, *The Fourth Online Lesbian Census*, 18 March 2002 <<http://98.to/lalasurvey/>> (18 January 2003), and ET, "Simple Survey of Career Distribution," *To-Get-Her Historical Museum*, December 2002, <<http://vote.sparklit.com/poll?ID=706850>> (15 January 2003).

discussion on the To-Get-Her Web site. For instance, Table 5.1 shows that about 10 percent of To-Get-Her users are in the professions of computer or electronic engineering. While this is quite a significant proportion, the Computer Board has not been particularly popular on the To-Get-Her Web site. Moreover, while all the discussion boards on To-Get-Her are topic-oriented, none is designated for discussions about careers or the workplace.⁸

CONCLUSION

My investigation of the demography of To-Get-Her users shows that the majority of To-Get-Her users are between 25 and 35 years old, about two-thirds of them do not live in Taiwan, and only one-third are students. This demographic distribution is very different from that of the TANet BBS lesbian community. On the other hand, the Lalainfo's Online Lesbian Census, which mainly targets the TANet BBS lesbian community, shows that an average user is about 22.6 years old who lives in Taiwan, and is very likely to be a student. These results further demonstrate my earlier analysis that the different historical and technical origins of TANet BBS lesbian community and To-Get-Her have brought out two different communities. To summarize, while the key characteristic of the TANet BBS lesbian community is its close connection to university campuses in Taiwan, the To-Get-Her community is centered on the Taiwanese culture but is a global community for Taiwanese lesbians.

⁸ There is no restriction that a discussion board has to be topic oriented. In 1999, the ET designed a special section to promote group-oriented discussion boards. However, due to lack of usage, the ET closed that section half a year later.

In the Information Age, the differences of Internet technologies play major roles in determining the demography of their corresponding cyber communities. With the diverse demography of residence, age, and profession, the To-Get-Her community forms its own unique lesbian culture. The next chapter will examine the characteristics of the lesbian culture of the To-Get-Her community. It will also investigate how this diverse demography affects To-Get-Her users' identity formation and the identity representation in cyberspace.

CHAPTER 6

CYBER CULTURE AND IDENTITIES ON TO-GET-HER

In August 1998, To-Get-Her's ET cooperated with WZJ to launch an online endorsement campaign to protest a program broadcast on Chinese Television System (CTS).¹ CTS had aired a news series, "Lesbian Bar/Alternative Paradises," which included scenes videotaped with hidden cameras in a T-bar, Alivia Musical Inn. This caused some lesbians to be identified by their families and coworkers. As a result, Alivia Musical Inn was closed down immediately afterwards. As one of the leading lesbian groups at that time, WZJ mobilized the community to demand that CTS apologize and discipline its reporters. Meanwhile, the ET of the largest and most technically advanced Taiwanese lesbian Web site, To-Get-Her, volunteered their expertise to organize an online endorsement campaign. Numerous protesting phone calls, faxes, and e-mails flooded CTS. At the end of the campaign, more than a thousand signatures had been collected online.²

A couple of days after I, as a member of the ET, helped construct the Web pages for the online campaign, some friends approached me in To-Get-Her's chat room. They asked why I had not signed the endorsement. After a moment of being puzzled by their questions, I realized that they did not recognize my name because I did not sign with my

¹ Women Zhi Jian, "Protest CTS News Violated Lesbian Privacy and Human Rights," 12 August 1998, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/history/protest/protestEN.htm>> (12 December 2002).

² "Kangyi Huashi Zhuanji" (Special Issue for Protesting to the CTS Incident), *Niupengyou* (Girl Friends), 20 September 1998, 37.

usual online pseudonym, *Pi zi*, but with my real name, Ping-Ying Chang. Knowing that “*Pi zi*” was one of the ET but not seeing it on the endorser list, my friends were suspicious about the legitimacy of the protect. I clarified my friends’ doubts by pointing out the e-mail address I used for the endorsement and gave them some update about the protest. By the time I left the chat room about an hour later, I had collected more signatures for the campaign.

The important status of pseudonyms is but one example that shows the unique cyber culture of the To-Get-Her community. This chapter will analyze the use of pseudonyms in the To-Get-Her community and its relationship to the formation of lesbian identity. It will then investigate the importance of the To-Get-Her Web site to its users’ Taiwanese identity. Finally, it will examine the representation of the most characteristic culture in Taiwanese lesbians, the *T/Pol/Bufen* gender roles, on the To-Get-Her Web site. From these discussions, we will see how the research on To-Get-Her can deepen the understanding of the whole community and culture of Taiwanese lesbians.

THE CREDIBILITY OF PSEUDONYMS

The easiest way to identify a person on the To-Get-Her Web site is by her ID, the user handle, or pseudonym. Unlike TANet BBS, To-Get-Her does not require a user to set up a unique ID before joining in an online discussion. On the entry page of the Lez Talk section, a visitor is encouraged to choose a pseudonym and to post an introduction of herself on the Self-Intro Board (see Figure 4.2). While the To-Get-Her Web site does not enforce this introduction process and a user can start posting on discussion boards at

any time, many follow this suggestion. Some users even post announcements when they change to new pseudonyms.³ When a user finds her pseudonym happens to duplicate someone else's, she will often post a clarification notice and negotiate to have either or both parties make minor modifications to their pseudonyms to avoid further confusion.⁴

There is, furthermore, consistency between the online pseudonym and the one used in the real world. For example, every member of the ET is known to use the same pseudonym consistently in both the real world and cyberspace. This not only helps to establish the credibility of their pseudonyms in the To-Get-Her community, but it also makes them the unique owners of these names. This is, of course, related to the ET's privileged status as webmasters, but the rest of To-Get-Her users do also tend to unify the pseudonyms used in different occasions. Navigating between the lesbian communities in cyberspace and the real world, a To-Get-Her user tends to adopt the same or related pseudonyms for convenience's sake. It is not unusual to see the online pseudonym used as the daily-life nickname when her connection to the To-Get-Her community grows into a local lesbian network in the real world.

Even more interesting are the pseudonyms used on the Politics and Sex Boards. The Sex Board is one of the most popular boards on To-Get-Her. While the atmosphere of its discussion gives the impression that everyone is eager to refine her sexual

³ For examples, see the two articles from the Self-Intro Board: 6 September 2002, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/cgi-bin/intro2002.pl?read=6607>>, and 12 November 2002, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/cgi-bin/intro2002.pl?read=6762>>.

⁴ For example, in an article posted on 31 July 2002, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/cgi-bin/friend2002.pl?read=15350>>, the author named herself as "Orange, different from the Orange of the Leisure Board."

techniques, most users post their messages with pseudonyms different from those used in other boards. Growing up within Taiwanese culture that seldom allows talk about sex in public, the lesbians in To-Get-Her seem too embarrassed to post to the Sex Board with their “real” pseudonyms. In contrast, the vigorous discussions on the Politics Board have prompted many users to post with different pseudonyms so that quarrels happening there will not damage the credibility associated with their primary pseudonyms. When the discussion on the Politics Board evolved into personal attacks in the second half of 2002, certain users advocated setting up a special “fixed pseudonym” rule and this was hotly debated.⁵ By the end of October 2002, the online quarrels intensified so much that a user informed the ET that she had initiated legal actions to protect the credibility associated with her pseudonym.⁶

The usage of pseudonym in the To-Get-Her community suggests that the convenience of anonymity cannot be the only consideration when researchers analyze the issue of crossing the boundaries between cyberspace and the real world.⁷ Particularly, research on Taiwanese lesbians has to include the following three considerations. First of all, instead of using the online anonymity as a leisure exploration of sexuality or sex, Taiwanese lesbians have to keep themselves anonymous for safety. For the majority of Taiwanese lesbians, concealing identity in the real world is a protection that is far more important than just some basic respect of privacy, and certainly not simply a convenience

⁵ For example, Cosmos [pseud.], “to ‘curiosity,’ ‘forward,’ ‘copy from,’ and other anonymous friends,” 22 July 2002, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/cgi-bin/politics2002.pl?read=6532>> (10 June 2003).

⁶ Maomao [pseud.], “Sorry for Disturbing You,” 25 October 2002, personal e-mail, (10 January 2003).

⁷ For the liberal view on boundary-crossing in cyberspace, see, for example, Doctress Neutopian, “The Feminization of Cyberspace,” 31 January 1994, <http://www.eff.org/Net_culture/Gender_issues/feminization_of_cyberspace.paper> (10 January 2003).

for leisure activities.

Second, altruism alone cannot explain the enormous amounts of energy that To-Get-Her users spend in their online activities, particularly, with their attention on pseudonyms. As Judith S. Donath points out in her research on Usenet newsgroups, it is the desire for “building reputation and establishing one’s online identity” that affects a user’s management of her online ID on the To-Get-Her Web site.⁸ Therefore, the highly emphasized credibility of a To-Get-Her user’s pseudonym is precisely a representation of how the difficulties of being out in the real world precipitates a channeling of frustrated energy into a desire to construct a lesbian identity in cyberspace.

More importantly still, for a member of the To-Get-Her community, the lesbian identity started in cyberspace does not confine her lesbianism to virtuality. The support network associated with the online pseudonym strengthens the lesbian identity in the real world, and the online pseudonym becomes the daily-life nickname. In this way, To-Get-Her users gradually blur the boundaries between cyberspace and the real world. They are not lesbians only in cyberspace because technology is an inseparable component in their lives and in forming their lesbian identities.

BEING TAIWANESE IN CYBERSPACE

To-Get-Her is a global community for Taiwanese lesbians. According to a To-Get-Her’s survey, about two-thirds of To-Get-Her users live outside Taiwan (Figure 5.1), and these overseas lesbians are from highly diverse geographical locations. Indeed,

⁸ Judith S. Donath, “Identity and Deception in the Virtual Community,” in *Communities in Cyberspace*, ed. Marc A. Smith and Peter Kollock (London: Routledge, 1999), 31.

since I first came to My Lez Homepage in early 1997, I have met Taiwanese lesbians from the U.S., Canada, Hong Kong, Macao, mainland China, Japan, England, Germany, Australia, and Russia in various To-Get-Her's online activities. For Taiwanese lesbians around the globe, the To-Get-Her Web site is the place where they keep their connection with Taiwan.

The physical distance is not a concern to the geographically diverse users of the To-Get-Her Web site. While most of the discussions in the Lez Talk section relate to Taiwan, an article that introduces a good restaurant in San Francisco is more likely to be posted on the Leisure Board of the Lez Talk than on the Overseas Lesbians Board. Such a mixture of information from different areas or categories never causes complaints. Quite the contrary, it greatly increases the possibility of making new friends who are hundreds, or, even thousands, of miles away. On the To-Get-Her Web site, overseas Taiwanese lesbians can talk about what is happening in Taiwan as if they never left this island. Off the site, e-mail exchanges, the IRC chat room, and ICQ, all strengthen a user's connection with people in Taiwan. If overseas lesbians are unable to go back to Taiwan during holidays, at least they can visit nearby Taiwanese lesbians that they have met on To-Get-Her. Just like going to Chinatown for a Chinese person living overseas, visiting To-Get-Her renews the feeling of being Taiwanese for overseas Taiwanese lesbians.

However, with regards to maintaining Taiwanese identity, why do overseas lesbians come to the To-Get-Her Web site? For instance, why don't they go to TANet BBSs in cyberspace, or the nearby Chinese lesbian groups in the real world? There are

several reasons. First of all, the connecting speed: for an overseas Taiwanese lesbian, the network connecting speed to a TANet BBS is often intolerably slow. Although TANet BBSs are an option, few overseas lesbians choose it. Access to the To-Get-Her Web site is, however, quite different. Because the WWW is a newer technology than TANet, users' physical locations do not affect their individual access speed in any significant way. In fact, because the server of the To-Get-Her Web site is located in the U.S., it is slightly faster for users in North America than those in Taiwan.

Second, differences in interests: while overseas To-Get-Her users probably go back to Taiwan occasionally, or even regularly, they seldom can maintain the necessary connection with Taiwan's universities in order to engage themselves in well-informed and fruitful discussions on TANet BBSs. Unlike recommending a good restaurant in Taipei, a detailed planning for a small student activity, such as the barbeque party shown in Figure 2.2, is simply of no great interest to an overseas lesbian, particularly if she has left Taiwan for some years.

Third, and the most important, language: the primary language used plays a crucial role in an overseas Taiwanese lesbian's choice among different groups because it reflects a person's cultural roots. Many overseas lesbians come to the To-Get-Her Web site because they want to read and write in the traditional Chinese, the language used in Taiwan. Some of my personal experiences support this point. Over the years, I found it difficult to persuade my local friends that I knew via To-Get-Her to join an English mailing list for a San Francisco based Chinese American lesbian group. According to my friends, they preferred To-Get-Her because there they could use the language most

familiar to them and, therefore, find friends from the most closely related backgrounds. They desire the feeling of being Taiwanese more than what can be found in an English-speaking Taiwanese-American group, even when the latter is a real-life group.

More interestingly, the overall choice of the language used on the To-Get-Her Web site seems to reflect Taiwan's political affiliation with the U.S. and, in contrast, hostility toward mainland China. To-Get-Her does not restrict a user's choice of language when posting messages, and the Overseas Lesbian Board does have a higher proportion of articles in English than other boards. Posting an article in English rarely causes complaints, unless it is part of a hot debate.⁹ While English is tolerated, and even respected, however, simplified Chinese is not. A message encoded in simplified Chinese often immediately incites harsh criticism. For instance, when Taichung Zen (a person from Taichung) accidentally forwarded an article in simplified Chinese, she got the following response within three hours:

Subject: Simplified Chinese Goes Nowhere in This Nation

Author: Kaohsiung Zen (a person from Kaohsiung)

Time: 8/5/02 22:59

Taichung Zen, since you love China's simplified characters so much, why don't you move to the mainland China?¹⁰

⁹ Such complains are rare, and many protesters also apologized for not being able to read complicated English. The only incident that evolved into a protest of English (white) -supremacy in 2002 was when the English writer insisted that "I will keep writing in English coz I can gain some benefit by doing so. And my suggestion to those who don't like it is that Take or Leave it; choice is yours!! (sic)." See the thread of discussion started with Somebody [pseud.], "The Burden of Bananas," 23 January 2002, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/cgi-bin/politics2002.pl?read=3852>> (12 June 2003), and Guest [pseud.], "Language," 23 January 2002, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/cgi-bin/politics2002.pl?read=3855>> (12 June 2003).

¹⁰ See the thread of discussion starting with Committee for Promoting Traditional Chinese [pseud.], "Simplified Chinese Goes Nowhere in This Nation," 5 August 2002, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/cgi-bin/>

Although switching between traditional and simplified Chinese is just one click away for most of today's WWW browsers, and Taichung Zen did apologize for her technical mistake, nobody responded to her apology or offered forgiveness.

In cyberspace, although image and sound gradually become technically available and financially affordable, text-based messages are still the primary means of communication. It is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis to conduct in-depth investigation on the relation between the online usage of the traditional Chinese characters and the forging and formation of Taiwanese identity, particularly, in the context of To-Get-Her's global lesbian community. Suffice it to cite but one instance here that shows the complexity of this question. Within the last decade, a certain online writing style has been developed in Taiwan. Has that style appeared on the To-Get-Her Web site, because one-third of its users are from Taiwan? Are To-Get-Her's overseas lesbians influenced by that? How does the global To-Get-Her community deal with the various Chinese writing styles from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China, even when they have been correctly displayed in traditional Chinese? These topics require further research to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between Internet technology and the cultures of different communities. The next section will move to another important topic—lesbian genders—in Taiwanese lesbian community.

LESBIAN GENDERS

Chapter Two has examined Taiwanese lesbians' traditional *T/Po* culture and the

new gender role, *Bufen*. It also analyzed the debates about the *T/Po/Bufen* gender roles, their corresponding sub-communities, and their relationships to the lesbian and feminist movements. This section will analyze the representation of the *T/Po/Bufen* culture on the To-Get-Her Web site.

First, Gian's description and categorization are not applicable to the To-Get-Her community. For example, among the self-introductions posted on the To-Get-Her Web site in the first half of 2002, users always used simple statements, such as "I am T," or "a twenty-four-year-old *Po*," to identify their gender roles.¹¹ If *T/Po/Bufen* seemed too rigid for them, "*Bufen* toward *Po*" or "*Bufen* toward T" would be used. *T/Po* are used both as adjective and norms, but To-Get-Her users almost never use Gian's rebelling gender qualifiers—"baby" T, "grassroot" T, "fighting" *Po*, etc. Particularly, those categories that attempt to counter stereotypical *T/Po* images with oppositional qualifiers, such as sister T and male *Po*, were never adopted in the expression of To-Get-Her users.

The differentiation between Gian's description and the gender culture represented on the To-Get-Her Web site needs further explanation here. As what has been shown in Chapter Two, Gian's categorization is an effort to deconstruct, if not diminish, the traditional *T/Po* culture. Moreover, a close examination of Gian's informants shows their strong connection to the campus-based lesbian movement of the 1990s. Among Gian's nineteen informants, nine were editors of feminist or lesbian publications, one was the officer of the newly established lesbian club in NTU, and six out of the other nine

¹¹ My conclusion here is based on the 40 messages, which were long enough to possibly contain any lesbian gender mark. The rest out of the total 74 messages posted in this period had no more than a simple sentence containing a pseudonym and an e-mail address, thus rarely generated responses on the Self Introduction Board.

informants were graduate students living in the metropolitan Taipei.¹² Therefore, Gian's categorization probably better represented activism engaged in by her select informants rather than the gender identities practiced and explored in the larger lesbian community.

Nonetheless, this does not mean the gender identities represented on the To-Get-Her Web site are more similar to the traditional *T/Po* than the new *T/Po/Bufen* culture. Instead of theoretical deconstruction, To-Get-Her users tend to ask directly: "Why does a T have to endure so many unfair treatments?"¹³ When a user has some doubts about gender identity, she is often met with words of encouragement, such as "Just be yourself."¹⁴ While adopting the identities of *T/Po/Bufen*, To-Get-Her users do not shy away from challenging their behavioral norms, if there are any.

Indeed, whether the *T/Po* roles have or will become something of the past is questionable. In To-Get-Her's surveys in 1998, half of the informants identified with T or *Po* (Table 6.1). It is, therefore, problematic to assert that the new generation of 1990s lesbians have rejected the *T/Po* culture. Moreover, a comparison of To-Get-Her's surveys in 1998 and 2002 shows that the latter has a significant drop of 10 percent in the *Bufen* population, while the T population stays relatively the same and *Po* increases 5 percent. In the To-Get-Her community, the *Bufen* identity seems to be declining in the new millennium.

¹² Gian, "Bring out Taiwanese Lesbians," 11.

¹³ See the thread of discussion began with Don't Want to Endure Any More [pseud.], "Why Does a T Has to Endure So Many Unfair Treatments?" 20 December 2002, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/cgi-bin/butch2002.pl?read=899>> (10 June 2003).

¹⁴ For example, see the thread of discussion began with Sunny Day [pseud.], "I Am Not a T" 28 October 2002, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/cgi-bin/bufen2002.pl?read=618>> (10 June 2003).

The gender roles of Taiwanese lesbians will continue to be an interesting topic for future research, particularly, in a community like To-Get-Her where lesbians tend to accept the necessity of gender role-playing while remain vigilant in negotiating the behavioral norm they may entail. The decrease in the *Bufen* population in the To-Get-Her community is significant, but by no means is it final. Also interestingly, while *Bufen* has often been regarded as rebellious against the dichotomous T/*Po* culture, To-Get-Her's Survey of 2002 found that 18 percent of the informants would rather choose "don't want to be categorized" than "*Bufen*." Has the category *Bufen* been so firmly established that it itself also becomes another dogma? Future researchers will need more investigation to find possible answers to this question.

Table 6.1. To-Get-Her Users' Gender Identities, 1998 and 2002

	July 1998	July 2002
sample size	144	261
<i>I think I am</i>		
<i>Bufen</i>	34%	23%
T	34%	33%
<i>Po</i>	15%	19%
Don't Know	2%	4%
Don't Want to Be Categorized	15%	18%

Source: "Results of Our First Census " and "Simple Survey of Lesbian Gender Identities," *To-Get-Her Museum*, December 2002, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/history.shtml>> (15 June 2003).

CONCLUSION

Between eagerness to embrace lesbian identity and pressure from a heterosexist society, a pseudonym is the crucial bridge for a Taiwanese lesbian. For Taiwanese lesbians, coming out to families, friends, and colleagues, albeit not absolutely impossible, is still a difficult task. Moreover, because there are only a handful of safe public spaces for them to partake in social activities, a virtual space like To-Get-Her becomes a significant place for them to start building and realizing their lesbian identities. In the To-Get-Her community, Taiwanese lesbians are not merely anonymous, they have credible pseudonyms. More importantly, when the connection between a member and the community increases, her pseudonym works in effect to replace her real-life nickname or even becomes her “real” name in the community. For To-Get-Her users, lesbian identities are not restricted to cyberspace.

Through the online communication on the To-Get-Her Web site, the global Taiwanese lesbian community connects to its cultural homeland, Taiwan. The access speed in cyberspace replaces the distance in reality in keeping with the sense of connection with the homeland. Compared to the lesbian boards on TANet BBSs, the To-Get-Her Web site is faster and easier to access for the overseas Taiwanese lesbians. Compared to other lesbian Web sites in the world, furthermore, being able to read and post articles in traditional Chinese characters on To-Get-Her becomes a way for users to preserve and represent their Taiwanese identity. The choice of Web technology and the implementation of the traditional Chinese are essential in bringing out this global cyber

community for Taiwanese lesbians.

Since To-Get-Her users are from a more diverse demography of ages, residences, and professions than those of the TANet lesbian community, the To-Get-Her community has created its own distinct culture. For example, To-Get-Her users' discussions of the lesbian genders roles, *T/Pol/Bufen*, are more practical than theoretical. They focus on negotiating, or even learning, the behavioral norms, rather than simply opposing them.

Based on the case study of the To-Get-Her Lez Community presented in this and previous chapters, the next chapter will propose some possible directions for future research and activism. For a cyber community as popular and complicated as To-Get-Her, research of this scale is just a beginning. The next and final chapter is an analysis of some necessary future investigations for To-Get-Her and beyond To-Get-Her.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Even without a concrete office or building in the real world, the To-Get-Her Lez Community does not limit its activities to cyberspace only. Instead, To-Get-Her users have been enthusiastic about real-life activities, and they have turned their private space into discrete meeting rooms for their community. Meeting with online friends face to face is always the most exciting part of participating in cyber activities in the first place. In fact, it is *part* of the cyber activities. From welcome parties for local newcomers, to karaoke parties and reading clubs, events are often held in certain members' living rooms, or even in public places such as cafés and restaurants. While these events take place not at one but many physical locations, they all connect to a center—the To-Get-Her Web site. The To-Get-Her Web site, located at www.to-get-her.org, has taken the place of a concrete building in the real world and become the center for the global To-Get-Her Lez Cyber Community.

Despite the success of the To-Get-Her Web site, however, there has been no research focusing on To-Get-Her or Taiwanese lesbians' activities on the Web. The dominant role of TANet BBSs for Taiwanese lesbians has misled researchers to neglect the existence of the To-Get-Her community or to assume the sameness between a BBS and a Web community. My study has shown how the To-Get-Her Web site succeeds in attracting users with a more diverse demography than the TANet BBS lesbian community.

The members of the To-Get-Her cyber community have formed a distinct culture and identity. The To-Get-Her cyber community, indeed, is a distinct sub-community of Taiwanese lesbians that can be compared with but not simply included in or implied by the research on the TANet BBS community. Based on these findings, this thesis will conclude with discussion of further theoretical implications of this study.

First, there are still more issues related to To-Get-Her than have been covered here within the scope of this thesis. For example, To-Get-Her has stimulated the formation of several local sub-communities, such as the South Bay Girls' Club in San Jose, La Club in Los Angeles, and the NY mailing list in New York City. While some of these sub-communities are short-lived and loosely organized, they often developed distinctive characteristics, favorite activities, and methods of recruiting new members—in other words, they have formed their own subcultures. Future analysis on the interrelations between To-Get-Her and its local sub-communities will provide even more insight into the formation of communities in the Information Age.

To-Get-Her's cultural characteristics also need further analysis. For instance, the To-Get-Her community as a whole seems to have developed its own writing style, which could have represented certain characteristics of the community's culture. On the other hand, there were several cases showing that To-Get-Her users already knew how to verify the credibility of pseudonyms based on the individual writing styles presented in articles; some verifications, amazingly, were based on the different punctuation marks induced by various software applications that implemented different Chinese input methods. It will be interesting for future studies to investigate not only how Taiwanese lesbians migrate

between cyberspace and the real world, but also how they develop new techniques for living on the cyber frontier.

While this study shows that the rise of the new Internet technology, the WWW, has brought out the To-Get-Her cyber community, there certainly are Taiwanese lesbians whose favorite digital domains are neither TANet BBSs nor the Web. For instance, I am not aware of any research that focuses on the popular #lesbian and #lala channels on the IRC server irc.hinet.net, which are often packed with dozens of users during evening peak hours.¹ Of course, surfing the Web and chatting on IRC are not mutually exclusive activities, and many users may even enjoy both equally. It is, however, problematic to assume that the IRC community is similar to the Web or the TANet BBS communities.

Furthermore, while various information technologies are capable of bringing out different lesbian communities, it is important not to forget those who are not privileged enough to be networked by the Internet. Contemporary researchers rarely address the differences among lesbians in Taiwan. Working class lesbians, older lesbians and lesbians who do not live in the Taipei metropolitan area, in particular, have long been underrepresented in Taiwan's Tongzhi research and movement. Although the To-Get-Her community is more diverse in terms of its members' ages, professions, and residence distributions than the TANet BBS community, To-Get-Her clearly is a middle-class and relatively young community which still has relatively few middle-aged or older members. In future studies on Taiwanese lesbians, we have to ask where the

¹ These two chat rooms originated from the Web chat room on To-Get-Her. For more details, see "Lazi Liaotian Wenhua Tieji (The Special Issue on the Lesbian Chatting Culture)" *Wan Wan eZine*, 17 July 1998, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/eZine/Issue2/chatroom.html>> (20 January 2003).

teenage and middle-aged lesbians are. Moreover, in future lesbian movement, we have to consider those who cannot join the queer event held in Taipei, and most importantly, we have to reach out to lesbians who do not have Internet access.

This study of the To-Get-Her Lez Cyber Community should be, in short, a beginning and not an end. Born as an engineer's birthday gift, To-Get-Her had a humble origin. Countless Taiwanese lesbians have ventured to this Web site for a common yet modest goal—to be happy lesbians. Many have succeeded, and many more will come for this goal. This thesis is a footnote to the history of the To-Get-Her community, a history that we wrote and are still writing together.

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APPENDIX

TIMETABLE OF THE TO-GET-HER WEB SITE¹

Date	Event
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1996.11.24	Dingo built My Lez Homepage with free resources from the Geocities. Dingo dedicated this Web site to Taiwanese lesbians.
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1997.4	Because of the increase of users, dingo organized the first net-gathering so that cyber friends could meet face-to-face. The gathering was held in a MTV club in Taipei. About 70 people joined this event.
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1997.9	Dingo held the second net-gathering, a BBQ in the National Chengchi University in Taipei. Although it was rainy, about 30 people joined this event and had a pleasant time.
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1997.11	The population of users increased rapidly. Dingo felt that the limited Web space, connecting speed, and programming capabilities provided by Geocities were not sufficient for further Web development. She conducted the first online survey asking user' opinions on collecting donation for moving My Lez Homepage to a commercial ISP. The majority of To-Get-Her users agreed with dingo's plan.
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1997.12.24	Dingo organized volunteers to host the first To-Get-Her Christmas Party in Taipei. About 80 people joined this event. The income from the party was used for moving the Web site to a new ISP and domain name registration.
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1997.12.25	Dingo acquired the domain name: to-get-her.org and renamed My Lez Homepage as To-Get-Her Lez Cyber Pub.
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1998.2	During the lunar year vacation, dingo moved My Lez Homepage to a new ISP and redesigned the whole Web site.
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1998.6	Because To-Get-Her needs to pay the commercial ISP an annual usage fee, dingo held the second online survey on the financial source of To-Get-Her. Available options included paid membership or donation. 118 people responded to this survey and the majority of respondents preferred donation.
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¹ Translated from ET, "Introduction to Our Web Site," January 2002, <<http://www.to-get-her.org/intro.shtml>> (25 June 2003), Chronology.

- 1998.8 Dingo organized a six-member Editor Team to manage To-Get-Her. They were Hamster, Ping, Woodstock, Wave, Brooke and dingo.
- 1998.8.12 To-Get-Her launched the online endorsement campaign with WZJ to protest the CTV News Report Incident.
- 1998.10.9 Because of the rapid and unexpected growth of the number of visitors, the cost of ISP increased from \$20 to \$135 per month. The ET held the second fundraising drive. With a month the To-Get-Her community responded with donations which was sufficient to support the Web site for more than three years.
- 1998.12.24 The second To-Get-Her Christmas Party in Taipei. More than 100 people joined.
- 1999.1 To-Get-Her hosted the Overseas Lez Panel in Taipei's feminist bookstore, Fembooks. The speakers were Ping, Koko, Hanna and Jenny.
- 1999.2-6 To-Get-Her held the T-shirt design contest. After the most popular design was chosen by an online poll, the ET turned the winning design into products and sold more than 300 T-shirts.
- 1999.9 The ET built a Web Page for the Tongzhi Rescue Alliance for the September 21 Earthquake.
- 1999.12 To-Get-Her sponsored Millennium Greeting event with the radio program "We are a G family" and Speed Pub.
- 2000.6 The third online survey on publishing articles collected from the Lez Talk section.
- 2000.12 The ET held a special net-gathering for retired and current BMs and the ET in T-bar [Z]oom. About one hundred people came.
- 2001.2 The ET installed new article posting and management system for the Lez Talk section.
- 2001.7 To-Get-Her sponsored the panel Transgender 101 with feminist group Taiwan Women.
- 2002.1 The ET renamed To-Get-Her Lez Cyber Pub as To-Get-Her Lez Community.

GLOSSARY

Computer Technical Terms

- BBS.** Bulletin Board System is a software system designed for hosting electronic message boards. Some BBSs provide members with additional services such as e-mail, live chat, and file exchange. Both free and commercial BBS programs are available for most computer operating systems.
- BITNET.** Because It's Time Network. An international network started in 1981 by the City University of New York and Yale University. At its peak in 1991 to 1992, BITNET connected some 1,400 organizations in 49 countries in support of research and education.
- Browser.** A software for displaying Web pages.
- GUI.** Pronounced as "gooey," graphical user interface is the software layer that provides the functions of windows, menus, icons, and the use of the mouse. Most users find a GUI operating system easier to use than its text-based counterpart, such as Windows vis-à-vis DOS.
- HTTP.** Hyper Text Transfer Protocol is the protocol that defines the format and the methods of transmitting data between Web servers and browsers.
- ICQ.** Pronounced as "I-Seek-You," ICQ is an online instant messaging program developed by Mirabilis LTD in 1996. An ICQ user can create his or her own list of friends and send messages to them when they are online.
- Internet.** The "Internet (upper case I)" is the vast collection of all the inter-connected, TCP/IP-based networks. It evolved from the ARPANET of the late 1960s. The "internet (lower case i)," as used in "inter-national," means the network resulting from connecting two or three networks.
- IRC.** Internet Relay Chat is an online chat system developed in the later 1980s. An IRC user joins the chat by going to an IRC server, which hosts various "channels" according to the discussion topics. The user then joins the channel of his or her choice.
- ISP.** Internet Service Provider is a company that provides access to the Internet.

MOTSS. The acronym MOTSS can be traced back to the first cyberqueer usenet newsgroup net.motss in 1983 (later known as soc.motss). It stands for Members of The Same Sex.

Protocol. A set of agreed-upon rules for transferring data between two devices.

TCP/IP. Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol. A standard protocol for network addresses and communication

WWW. Using the HTTP protocol, the World Wide Web is an information-sharing model built on the Internet. With a Web browser, such as Internet Explorer or Netscape, a user can access Web documents called Web pages.

Chinese Terms

Ai Bao	愛報
Bufen	不分
Kuomintung	國民黨
Lala Zitui Gongzuoshi	拉拉資推工作室
Lazi	拉子
Niupengyou	女朋友
Ole	歐蕾
Po	婆
Quanzi	圈子
Quan Nei Ren	圈內人
Tongxing Ai	同性愛
Tongxing Lian	同性戀

Tongzhi

同志

Wode Lazi Hongpeiji

我的拉子烘焙機

Women Zhi Jian

我們之間