

A vertical rainbow bar with stripes of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple.

# Co-constructing ‘husband and wife’ relationships among Chinese gay couples in vlogs:

*feminine accent and variation of alveolo-palatal initials in Mandarin Chinese*

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# Gender & sexuality in variationist sociolinguistics

- Gender and sexual orientation as reflected in language use:
  - Gender paradox (Labov, 2001)
  - Women's language (Lakoff, 1973), and beyond ...
  - fronted /s/ and gay lisping (Smyth et al., 2003; Munson et al., 2006; Zimman, 2013)
- However, linguistic forms and gender/sexual identity do not form one-to-one mapping (Ochs, 1992; Cameron & Kulick, 2003)
- The third wave variationism: linguistic variants as semiotic resources for *gender performance* (Eckert, 2012)

# Gay men's intimate relationships in China

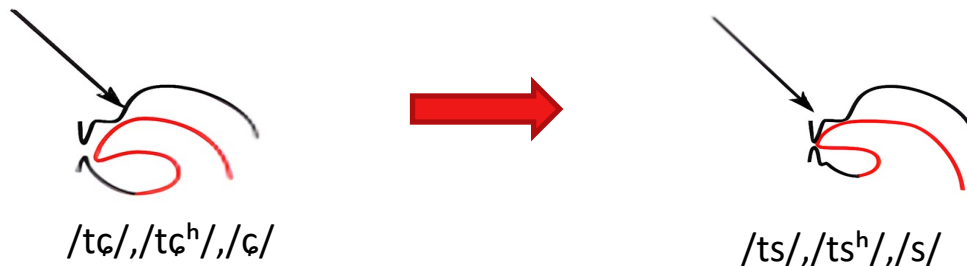
- Recreating traditional family structures: the opposition between *laogong* (husband) and *laopo* (wife)
- The opposition also extends to gendered roles in their daily life (division of household etc.)
- Representation of 'husband and wife' relationships are reflected in *danmei fiction/Boys' love (BL) genre* (耽美文学)



*jia ru gaomen de nanren*  
*A man married into the purple*

# Feminine accent as an enregistered style in Mandarin

- Feminine accent (*nüguoyin*) in Mandarin?
- Cao (1986) observed that female adolescents in Beijing fronted their alveolo-palatal onsets, or more extremely, alternated with the dental counterparts



- Conditioned by gender (female) and age (younger) (Cao, 1987)  
(Impressionistic, possible change in progress)

# Research gaps & this study

1. No study has explored the social meanings from homosexual males' variable usage of /tɕ/, /tɕʰ/, /ɕ/
2. Previous auditory phonemic coding might be influenced by researchers' expectations and obscured the *phonetic realizations in the continuum*
3. Less is known regarding *intra-group phonetic variation* in gay community

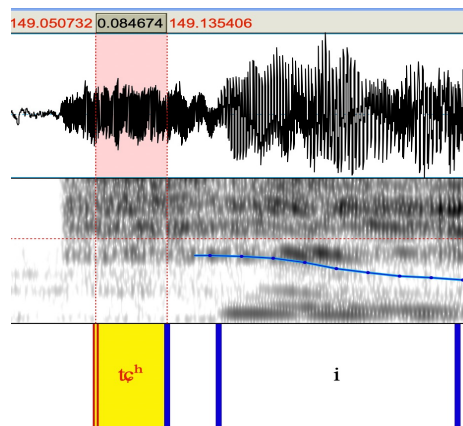
## 4. THIS STUDY:

Hypothesis: Chinese gay men who reproduce gendered roles in their relationships will reproduce the gendered pronunciation of these three alveolo-palatal onsets.

# Research gaps & this study

## 4. THIS STUDY:

- 20 pairs of gay couples' vlogs themed around dating and daily life
  - *laogong* (husband) vs. *laopo* (wife)
  - distinct dress and hairstyles
  - downloaded from a Chinese video-sharing site (Bilibili)
- Acoustic analysis: center of gravity (CoG) and spectral skewness in the middle of frication of /tɕ/, /tɕʰ/, /ɕ/ (tokens = 1083)  
(Lee et al., 2014; Li & Gu, 2015)



## • Linear mixed-effects models in R (Bates et al., 2015)

- Fixed effects:
  - role (husband vs. wife)
  - phonological conditioning of the following vowel (round vs. unround)

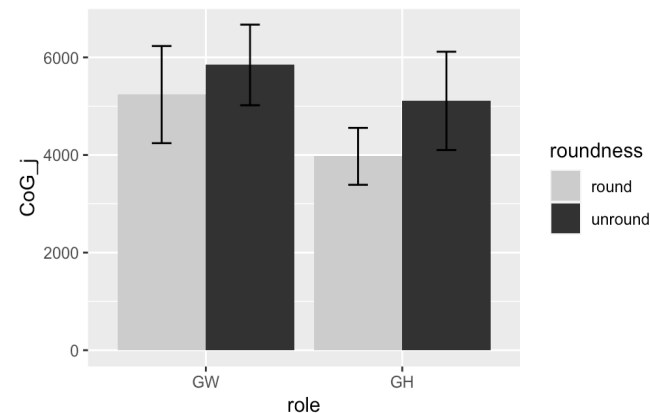
	Following segments
<b><i>Round</i></b>	/y/, /yɛ/, /yan/, /yn/
<b><i>Unround</i></b>	/i/, /in/, /ia/, /ian/, /ianɲ/

- Random effects: individual speaker

# Results : variation of /tɕ/

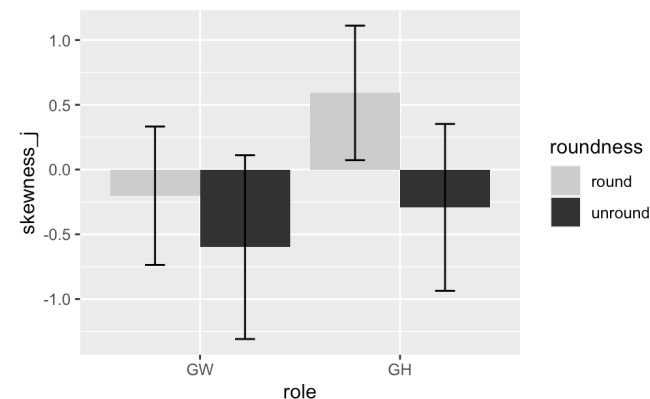
## 1. CoG of /tɕ/ between gay wife (GW) and gay husband (GH)

	Estimate	P value
intercept	4045.97	< .001 ***
role (wife)	826.56	< .001 ***
roundness (unround)	974.93	< .001 ***



## 2. Skewness of /tɕ/

	Estimate	P value
intercept	0.41	.008 **
role (wife)	-0.36	.02 *
roundness (unround)	-0.66	< .001 ***



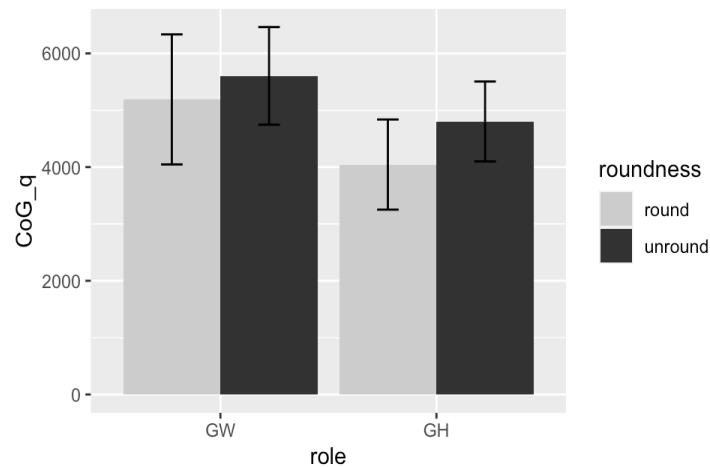


# Results : variation of /tɕʰ/

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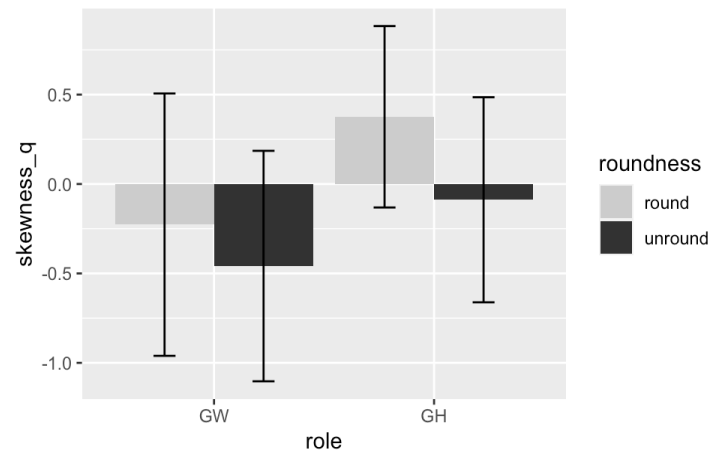
## 1. CoG of /tɕʰ/

	Estimate	P value
intercept	4130.91	< .001 ***
role (wife)	779.91	< .001 ***
roundness (unround)	712.52	< .001 ***



## 2. Skewness of /tɕʰ/

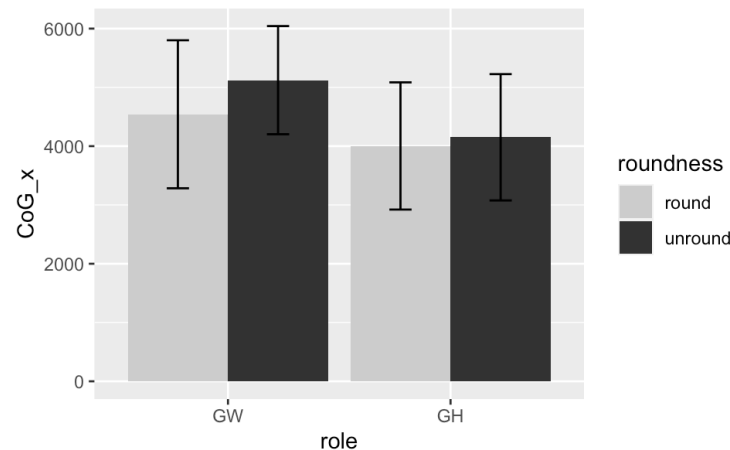
	Estimate	P value
intercept	0.33	.01 *
role (wife)	-0.3	.04 *
roundness (unround)	-0.43	< .001 ***



# Results : variation of /ɕ/

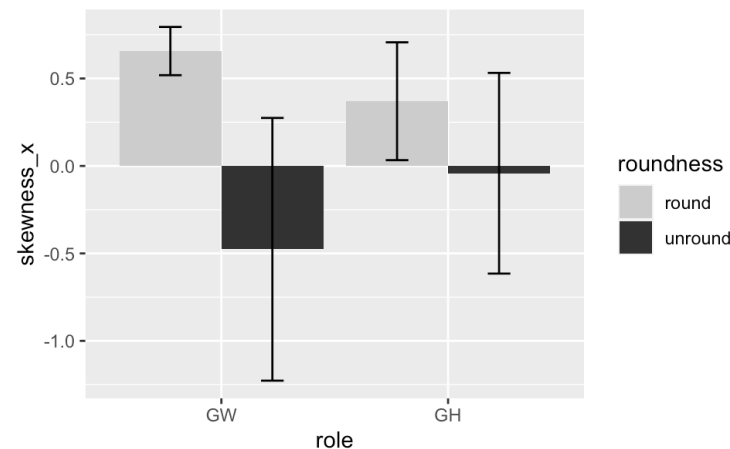
## 1. CoG of /ɕ/

	Estimate	P value
intercept	4184.03	< .001 ***
role (wife)	604.35	.03 *
roundness (unround)	183.21	.52



## 2. Skewness of /ɕ/

	Estimate	P value
intercept	0.48	.02 *
role (wife)	-0.3	.14
roundness (unround)	-0.43	.002 **



# Discussion: fractal recursivity and indexicality

- Chinese gay man with 'wife' persona produced more fronted alveolo-palatals



*feminine accent among Chinese young females*

- Fractal recursivity:** 'the projection of an opposition, salient at one level of relationship, onto some other level' (Irvine 2001: 33)

*n-th indexical order*

Male vs. Female



*n+1st indexical order*

Gay husband vs. Gay wife

# Discussion: fan discourse and listening subjects

- Apart from speaking subjects, the listening subjects also play a role in the interpretation of meanings (Inoue, 2003)
- Rearticulation and circulation of heteroerotic values in the fan discourse:



你把我追的那些耽美文同人了，啊啊啊啊

You have turned Boys' love fiction into reality, ah ah



真的好好看，真有福气有这么好看的老婆 🐱

👍 125 🗨️ ➡️ 💬

The wife is really so good-looking. The husband is so blessed to have such a pretty wife



俊男美女 (bushi) 两人怎么能都这么好看！  
我币没了，下次一定补上 🤔 🐱，问他  
喜欢什么颜色的麻袋 🐱

👍 1 🗨️ ➡️ 💬

Handsome man and beautiful lady. Both are very good-looking

# Conclusion

- gay couples *co-constructed 'husband' and 'wife' identity types*, which includes the reappropriation of gender-based variation of palatal initials
- The co-construction process indicates the persistence of *heteronormative ideologies in China*
- Fractal recursivity reinforced by *fan discourse*
- Variation in fricatives *linked to sexuality* outside of western contexts

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Thank you!!!

谢谢!!!

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