Same-Sex Attracted Men and Global and Local Discourses in Chengdu and Taipei

Phil Freestone: University of Reading, UK

My current project is a linguistic-ethnographic study of the identities and practices of same-sex-attracted men in Chengdu and Taipei. It entails an exploration of how histories, traditions, and global cultural flows have an impact on sexual identity and related social actions. Variation between Chengdu and Taiwan is of interest due to the distinct political and historical trajectories of these cities, in the context of their shared influence from traditional 'Chinese' Discourses, and from global trends in fashion and popular culture. Such issues are particularly interesting in the light of the recent legalisation of gay marriage in Taiwan. The study aims for a relativistic and dialogic interpretation of the relationship between sexual Discourses across the globe, and a rejection of a 'West to rest' theory of the development of 'gay' identities in Asia (Boellstorff & Leap, 2004; Erni, 2003; Plummer, 1995; Rofel, 2007; Seidman, 1997).

In investigating these themes, participant observation and semi-structured interviews were employed in order to examine the role of *Discourses* in the navigation of socio-cultural systems (Foucault, 1972, 1978). A 'Discourse', can be defined as a *system of knowledge* regarding norms, ethics, values, and epistemology (Scollon, Scollon, & Jones, 2012), and following Gee (1996, 2014, 2015), the term *Discourse* is used with a capital 'D' here in order to differentiate it from its reference to 'language in use', for which a small 'd' is used. The relationship between these two types of D/discourse is crucial in the current context, since 'big D' Discourses are seen as providing *cultural tools* to individuals in the form of bits of 'small d' discourses such as linguistic registers and genres. These cultural tools are used to carry out social actions which bring certain affordances and constraints to individuals in terms of their interaction with society. Through such social actions, the Discourses in question are appropriated by individuals, and this contributes to their continually emergent performance of identity, as in Butler's (1999 [1990]) model of gender 'performance'. Thus, I argue that what people say and do does not simply index their identity amongst a number of pre-formulated notions (such as 'gay', 'Chinese' or 'Westernised'), but allows them to construct their identity continually, spontaneously, and with nuance according to their situation.